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Foreign and European Policy Report 2021

Report by the Federal Minister for
European and International Affairs



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European and International Affairs

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Foreword

Dear Readers,

We look back on 2021 as an eventful year – not only in Austria, but also in Europe and the world at large. The fight against the pandemic again topped the agenda at the Foreign Ministry, involving the provision of support to Austrians stranded abroad, the development of feasible and practicable solutions for commuters in times of border closures as well as coordinating and contributing to vaccine sharing with the countries of the Western Balkans, to name but a few. All of this presented us with difficult and sometimes unprecedented challenges.

In addressing the related issues, our close relations with our neighbours were truly valuable, the proverbial ace up our sleeve, so to speak. Especially in times of the pandemic, regional cooperation fora thus again proved to be a genuine safety net. In this respect, the trilateral Slavkov format, composed of Austria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and the Central 5 Group (involving the addition of Hungary and Slovenia) stood out, having evolved into the central platform for exchange in Central Europe, and reaching far beyond topics related to the pandemic. This year has indeed made one thing very clear: our neighbours are not just fair-weather friends, but partners who stand shoulder to shoulder with us in times of crisis.

2021 was also a year in which Austria once again stood firm and showed solidarity when it came to the Western Balkans by undertaking sustained efforts aimed at committedly promoting the countries' progress on their path towards the European Union. Another important topic for Austria were relations with our partners under the Eastern Partnership. In this spirit, we took the initiative in November and hosted a high-level international conference on Belarus, thus sending out a clear signal highlighting our commitment to not letting the country's civil society down. With respect to Ukraine and in the face of the troop movements along the country's borders with Russia, alarm bells already began ringing towards the end of the year.

Regarding Afghanistan, Austria responded to the Taliban's assumption of power and the ensuing humanitarian and security crisis by putting together the largest emergency aid package since the founding of the Second Republic, amounting to 20 million euros. Engaging in intensified contact with the neighbouring Central Asian states, we have worked towards containing the impacts triggered by this crisis, such as terrorism and extremism, organised crime including drug smuggling and human trafficking, as well as large-scale migration movements.

While in 2020 our activities had focused on the largest repatriation operation, returning Austrians who had been stranded abroad to their home country, the year 2021 was marked by our efforts aimed at promoting the Austrian export industry, seeking to sustainably support the Austrian economy in emerging successfully from the crisis, thus contributing to securing jobs and prosperity in Aus-

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tria. To this end, September saw the launch of the ReFocus Austria initiative under which the Austrian representation authorities have stepped-up their efforts aimed at promoting Austrian business and industry on a global scale. Involving more than 100 events by the end of the year, this global business outreach has developed into a model of success. Joining forces with the Ministry of Economy, the Austrian Federal Economic Chambers, the Austrian National Tourist Office and other stakeholders, we have sent a strong and, above all, visible signal, putting the spotlight on the comeback of Austria as a location for business and innovation.

This Foreign and European Policy Report 2021 provides you with a concise overview of the entire range of topics dealt with in the field of Austrian diplomacy. Looking back on 2021, I can only stress how proud I am of my staff at the Ministry for having mastered the challenges posed by this difficult year so well and would like to thank them for the great dedication and huge commitment they have demonstrated as ‘Team Foreign Ministry’, both in Austria and at our more than 100 diplomatic representations.

Likewise, I would also like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation and sincere thanks to Michael Linhart. In autumn 2021, he took the helm at the Ministry, keeping the Republic’s foreign policy securely on course for two months with his wealth of experience and absolute professionalism.

Alexander Schallenberg
Federal Minister for European
and International Affairs

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List of Abbreviations

A4P	Action for Peacekeeping
ADA	Austrian Development Agency
ADC	Austrian Development Cooperation
ADL	Anti-Defamation League
AG	Australia Group
AIES	Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy
AIT	Austrian Institute of Technology
AJC	American Jewish Committee
ALMA	Atacama Large Millimeter Array
ALPS	Austrian Leadership Programs
AMISOM	African Union Mission to Somalia
ANC	African National Congress
AÖWB	Auslandsösterreicher-Weltbund (World Federation of Austrians Abroad)
APPEAR	Austrian Partnership Programme in Higher Education and Research for Development
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEM	Asia-Europe Meeting
ASP	Assembly of States Parties (ICC)
ASPR	Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution
ATT	Arms Trade Treaty
AU	African Union
AUKUS	Australia, United Kingdom, United States (trilateral security pact)
AWS	Autonomous Weapon Systems
BEPS	Base Erosion and Profit Shifting
BRI	Belt & Road Initiative
BTWK	Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention
CAAC	Children and Armed Conflict
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CBM	Confidence Building Measures
CCPCJ	Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice
CCW	Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons
CD	Conference on Disarmament
CERD	Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
CERN	European Organization for Nuclear Research
CETA	Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

List of Abbreviations

CJEU	Court of Justice of the European Union
CLRAE	Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe
CoE	Council of Europe
CND	Commission on Narcotic Drugs
COP26	26th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
CoR	European Committee of the Regions
Coreper	Permanent Representatives Committee
COVAX	COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access
COVID-19	Corona virus disease 2019
CPC	Communist Party of China
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
CSocD	Commission for Social Development
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
CTBT	Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty
CTBTO	Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization
CTBTO-PrepCom	Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization
CWK	Chemical Weapons Convention
DA	Diplomatische Akademie (Vienna School of International Studies)
DAC	OECD Development Assistance Committee
DPO	Department of Peace Operations
EAC	East African Community
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EAPC	Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Community
ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (GD ECHO)
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
ECML	European Centre for Modern Languages
ECMWF	European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECRI	European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
ECSR	European Committee for Social Rights
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
EDF	European Development Fund
EEA	European Economic Area
EEAS	European External Action Service

List of Abbreviations

EEC	Economic and Environmental Committee
EEDIM	Economic and Environmental Dimension
EEP	Energy and Environment Partnership
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EGC	European General Court
EGD	European Green Deal
EIB	European Investment Bank
EIDHR	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
EMBC	European Molecular Biology Conference
EMWP	Working Party on External Aspects of Asylum and Migration
ENSREG	European Nuclear Safety Regulators Group
EPF	European Peace Facility
EPO	European Patent Office
ERC	External Relations Committee
ERCC	Emergency Response Coordination Centre
ESA	European Space Agency
ESO	European Organisation for Astronomical Research in the Southern Hemisphere (European Southern Observatory)
ESPI	European Space Policy Institute
ETIA	Master of Science in Environmental Technology and International Affairs
EU	European Union
EUAM	European Union Advisory Mission
EUBAM	European Union Border Assistance Mission
EUCAP	European Union Capacity Building Mission
EUFOR	European Union Force
EUGS	Global Strategy for the Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union (European Union Global Strategy)
EULEX	European Union Rule of Law Mission
EUMETSAT	European Organisation for the Exploitation of Meteorological Satellites
EUMM	European Union Monitoring Mission
EUNAVFOR	European Union Naval Force
EUNIC	European Union National Institutes for Culture
EUPOL COPPS	EU Coordinating Office for Palestinian Police Support or European Union Police and Rule of Law Mission for the Palestinian Territory
EUSR	European Union Special Representative
EUTF	EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa
EUTM	European Union Training Mission
EWIPA	Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas
EXPO	Exposition Universelle Internationale (World's Fair)
FAC	Food Assistance Convention

List of Abbreviations

FAC	Foreign Affairs Council
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FARC	The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia)
FCNM	Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities
FDF	Foreign Disaster Fund
FDI	Foreign Direct Investments
FMA	Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs
FMSTAN	Foreign Ministry Science and Technology Advice Network
FOC	Freedom Online Coalition
FPÖ	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Freedom Party of Austria)
FRA	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
FREMP	Working Party on Fundamental Rights, Citizens' Rights and Free Movement of Persons
FTS	Foreign Trade Strategy
G-77	Group of 77
GAC	General Affairs Council
GBON	Global Basic Observation Network
GCTS	Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEF	Generation Equality Forum
GGE	Group of Governmental Experts
GMAS	Global Multi-Hazard Alert System
GNI	Gross National Income
GNU	Government of National Unity
GNWP	Global Network of Women Peacebuilders
GRECO	Group of States against Corruption
GRETA	Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings
GREVIO	Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence
GRULAC	Group of Latin America and the Caribbean
GRÜNE	Die Grünen – die grüne Alternative (The Greens – the Green Alternative)
HCCA	Hague Convention on Child Abduction
HCNM	High Commissioner on National Minorities
HCoC	The Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation
HLDE	High Level Dialogue on Energy
HR/VP	High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission
IAA	Intercultural Achievement Award

List of Abbreviations

IACA	International Anti-Corruption Academy
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICCM	International Conference on Chemicals Management
ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
ICPDR	International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDB	Industry Development Board (UNIDO)
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IEDs	Improvised Explosive Devices
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IFDT	International Forum on Diplomatic Training
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IHFFC	International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission
IHRA	International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance
IIASA	International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis
IIIM	International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism
ILC	International Labour Conference
ILC	International Law Commission
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMO	International Maritime Organization
IMO	International Monitoring Operation
INEW	International Network on Explosive Weapons
INGSA	International Network for Government Science Advice
INTCEN	EU Intelligence and Situation Centre
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
IPAC	International Programme for Action on Climate
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPPSHAR	IGAD Promoting Peace and Stability in the Horn of Africa Region
IS	Islamic State
ISKP	Islamic State – Khorasan Province
ISWAP	Islamic State West Africa Province

List of Abbreviations

ITU	International Telecommunication Union
IWC	International Whaling Commission
JCPoA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
KAICIID	King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue
KAIPTC	Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre
KKA	KulturKontakt Austria
KP	Kimberley Process
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
LAWS	Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems
LDCs	Least Developed Countries
LEAD4SHIRAK	Local Empowerment of Actors for Development
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex
LLDCS	Landlocked Developing Countries
LPDF	Libyan Political Dialogue Forum
MAIS	Master of Advanced International Studies
MDC	Ministers' Deputies Committee
MERCOSUR	Southern Common Market (Mercado Común del Sur)
MICs	Middle-Income Countries
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (Multidimensionnelle Intégrée des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation au Mali)
MPTF	UN COVID-19 Response & Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund
MTCR	Missile Technology Control Regime
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NASOM	The New Austrian Sound of Music
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCSEJ	National Coalition Supporting Eurasian Jewry
NDF	Nordic Development Fund
NDICI-GE	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe
NEOS	Das Neue Österreich und Liberales Forum (The New Austria and Liberal Forum)
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NPP	Nuclear power plant
NPT	Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
NUTEC Plastics	NUclear TEChnology for Controlling Plastic Pollution
OACPS	African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States
OAS	Organization of American States
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODA	Official Development Assistance

List of Abbreviations

ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OeAD	Agency for Education and Internationalisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OEWG	Open Ended Working Group
OFID	OPEC Fund for International Development
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
OPCW	Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
ÖSD	Österreichisches Sprachdiplom Deutsch (Austrian German Language Diploma)
OSTA	Office of Science and Technology Austria
ÖVP	Österreichische Volkspartei (Austrian People's Party)
PA	Parliamentary Assembly
PASS	Portal für Auslandsservice und Sicherheit
PBC	Program and Budget Committee (UNIDO)
PCA	Permanent Court of Arbitration
PCCE	Platform Culture Central Europe
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation
PfP	Partnership for Peace
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
PIC	Peace Implementation Council
PIC	Prior Informed Consent
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PKO	Peacekeeping Operation
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
POP	Persistent Organic Pollutants
PSAC	Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention
PSC	Political and Security Committee
PSOTC	Peace Support Operations Training Centre
QUAD	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
RAS	Rapid Alert System
REEEP	Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership
ReNuAL	Renovation of the Nuclear Applications Laboratories
RFoM	Representative on Freedom of the Media (OSCE)
RINA	Research and Innovation Network Austria
RS	Rome Statute
RSM	Resolute Support Mission
RTI	Research, Technology & Innovation
SADC	South African Development Community

List of Abbreviations

SAICM	Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEforAll	Sustainable Energy for All
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SMM	Special Monitoring Mission
SMR	Small Modular Reactors
SOFF	Systematic Observation Funding Facility
SOLTRAIN	Southern African Solar Thermal Training and Demonstration Initiative
SPÖ	Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs (Social Democratic Party of Austria)
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
TAIEX	Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Instrument
TCG	Trilateral Contact Group
TEIs	Team Europe Initiatives
TeST	CTBTO Technology Support and Training
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
TPNRD	Transatlantic Policy Network on Religion and Diplomacy
TPNW	Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNCITRAL	United Nations Commission on International Trade Law
UNEA	United Nations Environment Assembly
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNGA	UN General Assembly
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNMIK	United Nations Mission in Kosovo (short for United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo)
UNOCT	United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism
UNODA	UN Office for Disarmament Affairs
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNOOSA	United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNOV	United Nations Office at Vienna

List of Abbreviations

UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNWTO	World Tourism Organization
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
USA	United States of America
VEF	Vienna Energy Forum
VIC	Vienna International Center
VMC	Vienna Migration Conference
VNR	Voluntary National Review (VNR) on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
WA	Wassenaar Arrangement
WANEP	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding
WEOG	Western European and Others Group
WFP	UN World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WHP	Working Holiday Programme
WISE	Centre on Well-being, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equality
WJC	World Jewish Congress
WKÖ	Austrian Economic Chamber(s)
WMO	World Meteorological Organization
WPHF	Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund
WPRBC	Working Party on Responsible Business Conduct
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WTO	World Trade Organization
ZAMG	Central Institution for Meteorology and Geodynamics
ZC	Zangger Committee
ZODIAC	Zoonotic Disease Integrated Action

1. Europe and the European Union

1.1 European Union

1.1.1 Austria in the Institutions of the European Union and the Permanent Representation of Austria to the European Union

The Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs (**MFA**) and the Federal Chancellery hold joint responsibility for handling substantive matters relating to the European Union (**EU**), including in particular topics of a fundamental and institutional nature.

The Permanent Representation of Austria to the European Union

The Permanent Representation of Austria to the EU, a subordinate agency of the MFA, serves as Austria's central point of contact with the institutions of the Union and the Council Presidency. The Permanent Representation comprises experts from all federal ministries, the Liaison Office of the Federal Provinces, the Austrian National Bank, the social partners and interest groups (the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, the Federal Chamber of Labour, the Chamber of Agriculture, the Austrian Trade Union Federation, the Association of Municipalities, the Association of Towns and Cities, and the Federation of Austrian Industries).

The Permanent Representation's central task is representing Austria during preparations for the political and legislative decisions to be taken by the EU and to inform the Austrian Federal Government, the competent authorities and the Austrian Parliament about projects at European level in accordance with the relevant legal framework. Negotiations on EU political and legislative decisions take place in the competent Council working groups and committees, which in total meet about 4,500 times a year and in which staff from the Permanent Representation or the federal ministries participate. Before being formally adopted at ministers' level, negotiation results generally have to pass the ambassadorial level, and as required, also be approved by the **Political and Security Committee (PSC)** as well as the **Permanent Representatives Committee (COREPER)**. Due to the restrictions on in-person contacts in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, much of the Council's work was organised in the form of informal video conferences and consensus was reached through written procedures. The Permanent Representation's tasks also include providing interested citizens with insights into its activities and the work of the European institutions, as well as raising the public's awareness of both the functioning and the significant role played by the European Union. Due to the special situation related to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person visits continued to be limited. In total, the Permanent Representation's Visitor and Information Service hosted 74 groups of visitors (3,326 individuals

in total) this year. The Permanent Representation also assists Austrians wishing to apply for jobs advertised by EU institutions in Brussels. The related services range from providing information about jobs and vacancies that are advertised by the European Commission for delegated national experts to internship opportunities in ministries, country offices or at universities.

The European Parliament

Austria is represented in the European Parliament by 19 MEPs that are distributed as follows: ÖVP 7 seats, SPÖ 5, FPÖ 3, GRÜNE 3 and NEOS one seat. Currently, 144 Austrians work in the European Parliament, which corresponds to 1.4% of its total headcount.

The European Council

In the European Council, Austria was represented by the Federal Chancellors Sebastian Kurz, Alexander Schallenberg and Karl Nehammer. A total of eight meetings were held by the European Council, taking place both in-person and virtually. On 21 January, 25 and 26 February, 25 March and 20 October, the members of the European Council met by video conference. An extraordinary meeting was held on 24 and 25 May. Ordinary meetings took place on 24 and 25 June, 21 and 22 October, and 16 December. In addition, an informal meeting was convened on 7 and 8 May.

The Council of the European Union

In the Council of the EU, Austria is represented by the relevant members of the Federal Government. In the first six months of the year 2021, the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU was held by Portugal and in the second half of the year by Slovenia.

A process of reflection on the Council's working methods, launched at COREPER level at the beginning of the new European legislative cycle, was completed in February. Aimed at fulfilling its role under the Treaties in the best possible manner, the Council performed technical analyses and conducted extensive consultations on its preparatory bodies. In this context, it agreed on adapting the list of Council working parties and/or their mandates, which became effective on 1 July.

In the **Foreign Affairs Council (FAC)**, which is composed of the EU Member States' foreign ministers, Austria was represented by Federal Ministers Alexander Schallenberg and Michael Linhart. This Council configuration is chaired by the **High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy**, who is also one of the six Vice-Presidents of the European Commission (**HR/VP**). The foreign ministers convened for a total of 14 meetings and/or video conferences (including an informal meeting in the Gymnich format). In addition, three

meetings and/or video conferences each were held in the Development Cooperation and Trade formats, as well as five meetings and/or video conferences in the Defence format. A total of 29 Austrians work in the General Secretariat of the Council, which corresponds to 0.9% of its total headcount.

The European Commission

In office since 10 February 2010, the Austrian EU Commissioner and former Federal Minister Johannes Hahn, has since 1 December 2019 held the position of EU Commissioner for Budget and Administration in the Commission headed by President Ursula von der Leyen.

A total of 481 Austrians work in the European Commission, which corresponds to 1.5% of its total headcount.

The European External Action Service

The European External Action Service (**EEAS**) was established at the end of 2010 by merging the Commission's and the Council's foreign policy services and by also involving diplomats from the national diplomatic services. As at 1 December, 394 members of the EU Member States' diplomatic services worked in the EEAS. Of this staff, 210 were active at headquarters and 184 in the delegations. The EEAS' total headcount amounts to 2,740 individuals, of whom 66.4% work at headquarters in Brussels and 33.6% in the Union's global network of 140 delegations and offices. Taking into account all employment groups covered by the EEAS budget (including permanent posts, contract staff and delegated national experts), 54 Austrians currently work in the EEAS. This corresponds to an average share of 2% in the categories mentioned.

The Court of Justice of the European Union

The Republic of Austria is represented before the **Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU)** in Luxembourg, which consists of the Court and the **General Court (EGC)**, by agents from the Constitutional Service of the Federal Chancellery.

Since March 2019, Andreas Kumin has been the Austrian judge at the CJEU. Following the increase in the number of its judges to a total of 54, Viktor Kreuzschitz (since September 2013) and Gerhard Hesse (since September 2019) have been the Austrian judges at the EGC.

Austrian courts have initiated 29 new preliminary ruling proceedings (i.e. proceedings in which a national court refers a question relating to the interpretation or validity of Union law to the CJEU).

At the end of the year, one infringement proceeding was pending against Austria for alleged violations of Union law. This concerned breaches of obligations under Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 on the coordination of social security systems and Regulation (EU) No 492/2011 on freedom of movement for workers within the Union. In the infringement proceedings regarding the common system of value added tax relating to the special scheme for travel agents, the CJEU ruled that Austria had failed to fulfil its obligations under Directive 2006/112/EC. The CJEU dismissed the action for infringement brought by the European Commission for failure to launch a competitive tendering procedure in connection with the construction of an office building (Wiener Wohnen). With regard to the Austrian action for annulment against the European Commission's decision on granting state aid for the Hungarian **Paks II nuclear power plant (NPP)**, the Court's decision is still pending.

The Committee of the Regions

As a consultative body and forum for the representation of regional and local interests relating to European integration, the Committee of the Regions (**CoR**) takes part in the debate about Europe and contributes to its shaping. Austria is represented by twelve members in the CoR. In this body, each of the nine federal provinces has one seat, while towns, cities and municipalities together have a total of three seats.

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 the organisational level, the EESC's members are divided 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 of the social partners and the Austrian Consumer Protection Association.

1.1.2 The Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union

1.1.2.1 The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)

Under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (**CFSP**), relevant foreign policy issues and developments are dealt with by all EU Member States. Decisions on CFSP matters are generally taken unanimously (constructive abstention is possible) in the monthly Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) meetings. The relevant strategic guidelines used as a basis for decision-making are set by the European Council. A very important element of the CFSP is the **Common Security and Defence**

Policy (CSDP). The body responsible for ongoing consultations on international foreign and security policy developments is the PSC. Composed of representatives of all EU Member States, it usually meets twice a week in Brussels. Apart from facilitating foreign and security policy discussions, the PSC supervises the implementation of agreed policies and provides strategic direction for CSDP missions and operations.

The office of HR/VP is held by Josep Borrell i Fontelles (hereafter Josep Borrell) from Spain. In this capacity, he not only chairs the FAC, but may also issue statements on day-to-day political events on behalf of the EU Member States.

Furthermore, based on a proposal from the HR/VP, the Council may appoint EU **Special Representatives (EUSRs)** for specific policy issues. In 2021, mandates for a total of nine EUSRs were in place: for the Sahel region, the Horn of Africa, Central Asia, Kosovo, the South Caucasus and the conflict in Georgia, the Middle East Peace Process and for Human Rights. The office of EU Special Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina is held by the Austrian Johann Sattler. In May, Sven Koopmans from the Netherlands was entrusted with the position of Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process. On 1 July, Finnish diplomat Terhi Hakala was appointed as Special Representative for Central Asia, and German political scientist Annette Weber as Special Representative for the Horn of Africa. Likewise, since 1 July, the Italian politician Emanuela Del Re has been serving as Special Representative for the Sahel Region.

1.1.2.2 The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)

Strengthened and reshaped by the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the CSDP forms an integral part of the CFSP. Adopted in 2016, the **Global Strategy for EU Foreign and Security Policy (EU Global Strategy, EUGS)** inter alia led to the definition of a new EU level of ambition in the area of security and defence, building on the following three strategic priorities: (I) responding to external conflicts and crises; (II) building the capacities of partner countries affected by fragility/instability; and (III) protecting the Union and its citizens. Austria advocates further developing and strengthening the CSDP based on the EUGS, and in this context pursues a comprehensive approach to security, placing the focus on prevention and resilience. This also involves better addressing the nexus between internal and external security as well as between civil and military security aspects.

In March, the **European Peace Facility (EPF)** was created as a new off-budget EU funding instrument, thus replacing the Athena mechanism (for financing military CSDP missions and operations) and the African Peace Facility. May saw the adoption of Council conclusions on security and defence in which the Council reaffirmed its determination to move forward on implementing the EU's security and defence agenda, enabling the EU to take more responsibility for its own security.

Implementing the Council conclusions on security and defence of June 2020, HR/VP Josep Borrell presented the first draft of the **Strategic Compass for Security and Defence** in November. This policy document aims at putting the level of ambition set out in the EUGS into practice as well as at defining clear targets and deadlines for implementation. In this context, the focus is placed on crisis management, developing civilian and military capabilities, strengthening resilience, and fostering partnerships between the EU and other international organisations as well as partner countries.

Within the framework of the **Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)**, set up in 2017, Austria currently contributes as project coordinator to one project in the field of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) protection and defence, as participant to six projects, and acts as an observer in two projects.

In November, the third review conference on the **Civilian Common Security and Defence Policy Compact (Civilian CSDP Compact)** was held. In December, the FAC again adopted conclusions on this topic, providing guidance for the relevant work to be undertaken by the EEAS, the European Commission and the Member States in the year to come. Since February, Austria (the MFA in cooperation with the Austrian Institute of Technology) has chaired the implementation cluster **“Research, Technology, Innovation (RTI) and Civilian CSDP”**. The cluster, to which 17 Member States as well as the EEAS and the European Commission contribute, seeks to promote cooperation between CSDP and RTI actors with a view to facilitating better use of technological innovation in civilian CSDP missions.

The following missions/operations were conducted under the CSDP:

Civilian CSDP missions:

- EUAM Ukraine (with Austrian contribution)
- EUBAM Libya (with Austrian contribution)
- EULEX Kosovo (with Austrian contribution)
- EUMM Georgia (with Austrian contribution)
- EUAM Iraq
- EUAM RCA (Central African Republic)
- EUBAM Rafah (Palestinian territories)
- EUCAP Sahel Mali
- EUCAP Sahel Niger
- EUCAP Somalia
- EUPOL COPPS (Palestinian territories)

Military CSDP missions and operations:

- EUFOR Althea, Bosnia and Herzegovina (with Austrian contribution)
- EUNAVFOR MED Irini, Southern Mediterranean (with Austrian contribution)
- EUTM Mali (with Austrian contribution)

- EUTM Mozambique (with Austrian contribution)
- EUNAVFOR Somalia Operation Atalanta, Horn of Africa
- EUTM RCA, Central African Republic
- EUTM Somalia

1.1.2.3 The Enlargement of the European Union

At its meeting in Thessaloniki in 2003, the European Council agreed to reiterate its unequivocal support for the European perspective of the countries of South East Europe, also known as the Western Balkans. Building on this fundamental commitment, the Heads of State and Government reaffirmed in December 2006 that the future of the Western Balkans lies in the European Union and endorsed the “renewed consensus on enlargement”, which has guided and defined the EU’s enlargement policy to this day. These principles adopted by the European Council are based on the premise that the Union’s capacity to integrate new members must be taken into account and emphasise, alongside 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 achieved if these objectives have been fulfilled. In the accession negotiations, priority is given to “fundamentals”, i.e. the key areas of rule of law, fundamental rights, improvement of economic policy governance and reform of public administration (“fundamentals first” principle). For the Western Balkans, the Stabilisation and Association Agreements, which the EU has concluded with each of the six countries of the region, provide a broad contractual basis for governing and further developing the EU’s relations with these countries prior to accession.

Introduced last year, the **revised enlargement methodology for the Western Balkans** has been further implemented. Although it was primarily intended for future accession or candidate countries with whom accession negotiations have not yet been launched, the new methodology is already being largely applied to both Montenegro and Serbia. Core elements include enhancing credibility through confidence-building measures, stronger political steer, a more dynamic process by grouping chapters into six thematic clusters (“fundamentals”; internal market; competition and inclusive growth; Green Agenda and sustainable connectivity; resources, agriculture and cohesion; external relations) and better predictability through more rigorous conditionality, both in positive and negative terms. An even stronger focus will be placed on fundamentals, whose implementation will from now on also determine the pace of progress in the other areas. In the event of stagnation or regression, the EU may now resort to a broader range of sanctions. At the same time, new incentives are being created by the possibility of accelerated integration, provided corresponding progress is being made.

The annual **enlargement package including the individual country reports** on the six South East European candidate countries and Turkey was presented on 19 October. The reports show a mixed picture. They are positive with regard to Albania and North Macedonia, as both states have continued on their reform path and continue to meet the conditions for opening accession negotiations. Moderate progress was noted for Serbia, where the pace of reform has visibly increased, although the relevant measures have only just been initiated in many areas, having – as yet – generated only limited results either. In Montenegro, where the 2020 change of government and the subsequent developments have also had a noticeable impact on parliament and administration, moderate progress towards reform was noted. In contrast to last year's very critical report, the current report on Kosovo paints a more positive picture. Under the new government at least some progress has been made in almost all areas. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the commitment towards the goal of EU membership expressed by all levels of government has not yet translated into progress on reforms. The European Commission again recommended opening accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania. Due to open bilateral issues between Bulgaria and North Macedonia, it was, however, not possible to reach consensus on the start of accession negotiations – despite intensive efforts undertaken by both the Portuguese and the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU. Since most EU Member States still advocate launching negotiations with both countries at the same time, negotiations could also not be started with Albania. Without the Western Balkans, however, European integration would remain incomplete. Bringing the countries of this region closer to the EU thus remains a central priority of Austrian foreign policy, which is therefore strongly committed to ensuring that the Western Balkans do not remain a blank spot on the EU map.

In this spirit, the **summit**, organised on **6 October** by the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU in **Brdo** (Slovenia), sought to promote cooperation between the EU and the Western Balkan countries on a wide range of issues that also went beyond the accession process and included topics related to foreign and security policy, migration, the implementation of the economic and investment plan as well as measures aimed at countering COVID-19. In the summit declaration, the EU Member States reaffirmed their support for the enlargement process.

A new initiative aimed at **intensifying cooperation with the Western Balkan states** was also launched in the context of the FAC. Under this approach, the EU Member States were invited to submit proposals for expanding cooperation opportunities. In the context of the Slavkov/Austerlitz format, Austria, in cooperation with its partners, Czech Republic and Slovakia, prepared a comprehensive catalogue of proposals, focusing on youth/education/research as well as improvement of EU communication and security. Together with those put forward by other Member States, these proposals as well as their implementation will be discussed in the respective Council bodies.

Aware of the central and indispensable role a credible EU perspective plays for the peaceful and stable development of South East Europe, Austria has actively supported advancing the six South East European candidate countries' EU accession process within the EU. In order to ensure the necessary credibility of their accession process, the EU needs to acknowledge the candidates' performance and appreciate progress made by tangibly advancing their respective accession processes.

Austria strongly supported the overdue and swift opening of accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania and regrets that it was not possible for the Council of the EU to take a decision to this effect. In Austria's view, this renewed delay is an omission that has not only damaged confidence in the EU's reliability among the states of South East Europe but has also led to considerable uncertainty in the region. The **Vienna Western Balkans Summit**, hosted by Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz on 18 June, was an important indication of Austria's support for the European perspective of this region.

Austria also advocated involving the Western Balkan states in the **conference on the future of Europe** and, together with some EU partners, succeeded in having representatives from this region invited to the second plenary session in October. Another important contribution in this context was a series of conferences, initiated by the Austrian Parliament, on the future of Europe from the perspective of the Western Balkans' youth under the heading of "Die Zukunft Europas aus der Sicht der Jugend des Westbalkans". In cooperation with the EU affairs committee of the French National Assembly, the Austrian National Council's Standing Sub-Committee on matters of the European Union hosted meetings in Vienna and Paris to facilitate joint discussions with young people from the Western Balkans.

Austria also provided tangible support in the pre-accession process via **EU-funded administrative partnerships** (twinning), as well as short-term expert assistance and online events aimed at supporting candidate countries in strengthening their public administration within the framework of the **Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Instrument (TAIEX)**. In the context of its twinning activities, Austria inter alia supported Montenegro in setting up an EU-compatible inventory of pollutant emissions, Albania in the area of personal data protection and strengthening the country's customs administration, as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina in reorganising its veterinary sector in accordance with EU standards and in tax issues. Support was provided to North Macedonia under the EU 4 Fight Against Cybercrime project as well as in tax and customs policy issues, and to Serbia in introducing climate-friendly forest management and fighting high-tech crime. In the context of TAIEX, Austrian authorities seconded experts to the countries of the region to share relevant specialist know-how on matters relating to the environment, justice and home affairs, finance, health, taxation, customs and excise.

The **EU Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA)** is the funding mechanism in place for preparing both candidate countries and potential accession candidates for their future EU membership, and for supporting these countries' accession process. Covering the period from 2021–2027, the current IPA III Regulation entered into force on 15 September and provides for funding of 14.2 billion euros. A major part of these IPA funds (up to 9 billion euros) is to be mobilised for financing the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans. Under this plan, sustainable investments in the areas of transport networks, energy, climate, environment, digitalisation, private sector development and human capital are to contribute to long-term economic growth in the Western Balkans. The plan also holds out the prospect of guarantees for loans of up to 20 billion euros. Allocation of IPA funds depends on the progress of reforms in the beneficiary countries and their needs as ascertained in the evaluations and annual country reports prepared by the European Commission. The thematic focus will be placed on the implementation of the Green Agenda and the Economic and Investment Plan on the one hand, and on urgent reforms relating to the “fundamentals” on the other.

Ongoing Accession Negotiations

Accession negotiations with **Montenegro** were launched in June 2012 with a special focus on the rule of law, the judiciary, human rights, as well as the fight against corruption and organised crime. By June 2020, all 33 negotiation chapters had been opened, and a total of three chapters have already been provisionally closed. Based on the new methodology, progress in the rule of law area will have a significant impact on the pace of negotiations in the other areas as well. Montenegro now needs to first of all meet the interim benchmarks under the rule of law chapters 23 and 24, and only then will it be possible to consider closing any further chapters.

Accession negotiations with **Serbia** were formally launched in January 2014. In December, it was possible to open a cluster, i.e. a thematic block of four negotiation chapters relating to the Green Agenda and sustainable connectivity (cluster 4, which covers the chapters on transport, energy, trans-European networks, the environment and climate change). In total, 22 of a total of 35 negotiation chapters have thus been opened, and two chapters have already been provisionally closed. As in the case of Montenegro, the pace of negotiations is highly dependent on progress made in the rule of law area; another important benchmark is normalisation of relations with Kosovo.

EU-Turkey Relations

Following its official application for accession in 1987, accession negotiations with **Turkey** were opened on 3 October 2005. So far, 16 negotiating chapters have been opened (most recently financial and budgetary provisions in 2016) and one

chapter has been provisionally closed. Turkey has been in a customs union with the EU since 1995. The enlargement rounds 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 1963 Association Agreement (the Ankara Agreement) was signed in July 2005. Turkey, however, issued a declaration in which it stated that it continued to not recognise the Republic of Cyprus and that the customs union did not apply to Cyprus. Having repeatedly criticized this breach of contract, the Council of the EU decided in December 2006 to partially suspend accession negotiations. Until full implementation of the Ankara Protocol by Turkey, eight related negotiation chapters will thus remain unopened and it will also not be possible to close any of the previously opened chapters.

The country report is again very critical and notes that Turkey continues to move steadily away from the EU. Further deterioration was recorded in the areas of the rule of law and democratic institutions, fundamental rights, civil society and freedom of the media. At the same time, the report stated that Turkey remains an important partner in key areas such as migration, counter-terrorism, economy, trade, energy and transport. The Council Conclusions of December reiterate that accession negotiations have effectively come to a standstill and that no further chapters can be considered for opening or closing. However, an open and honest dialogue on important areas of common interest is to be maintained.

Austria is in favour of breaking-off EU accession negotiations with Turkey as the country has over the years continued to move increasingly further away from the EU, including with respect to upholding minimum democratic standards. In view of the central role Turkey plays *inter alia* in the field of the economy, regional development, security and migration, Austria suggests developing an EU-Turkish neighbourhood concept.

1.1.2.4 Measures to Counter Extremism and Terrorism

In response to the Vienna terrorist attack of 2 November 2020, legislative initiatives were launched at the national level in the first half of the year. Under the “counter-terrorism package”, amendments were made to the Criminal Code, the Penitentiary System Act, the Police State Protection Act and the Security Police Act. At the foreign policy level, these measures were accompanied by an intensified international exchange of information. The attack had made it painfully clear that collaboration and networking with European and international partners are essential to fighting extremist tendencies and terrorism. Cooperation in this field has thus been expanded under the Slavkov/Austerlitz format with Austria’s partners the Czech Republic and Slovakia, as well as with Belgium, Germany, France, the Netherlands and Switzerland.

Although the number of terrorist attacks in Europe has decreased compared to 2020, **ISIS** and other terrorist groups continue to pose a threat. In this context,

such issues as radicalisation in prisons, radicalisation of “lone wolves”, the links between organised crime and terrorist networks as well as terrorist financing pose a particular challenge. The COVID-19 pandemic increased the potential for radicalisation, simultaneously leading to a certain reduction of the threat level of extremist attacks. With respect to counterterrorism, the Taliban’s seizure of power in Afghanistan was the main focus of attention in the second half of the year. Attacks by the offshoot of ISIS in Afghanistan (**IS-Khorasan Province, ISKP**) further contributed to destabilising the situation on the ground. The main challenge now is to prevent Afghanistan from developing into a safe haven for international terrorism and organised crime, as had been the case during the first period of Taliban rule between 1996 to 2001. Since the caliphate was crushed in 2019, ISIS has moved to intensifying its activities in other regions, including the Sahel and East Africa. These developments are further exacerbated by economic problems and poverty as well as weak state structures, corruption and conflicts between different ethnic groups, a negative trend that has resulted in corresponding repercussions for Europe.

As a member of the **Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh/ISIS**, which comprises 84 states and international organisations, Austria contributes towards supporting the development of state structures in Syria and Iraq and is particularly involved in the areas of “stabilisation” and “foreign terrorist fighters”. At its ministerial conference in Rome on 28 June, the Global Coalition admitted the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mauritania and Yemen as new members. It was agreed that the focus of future activities is to be increasingly directed towards threats on the African continent, especially in Mozambique and Central Africa.

As **headquarters and host** to international organisations, Austria, and especially the **Vienna-based entities** are important partners not only in promoting peace and security but also in combating crime and terrorism. In this context, the **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)** and the **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)** in Vienna, alongside the **United Nations Office on Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT)** in New York, play a particularly relevant role.

At the Second United Nations High-Level Conference (HLC) of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States, held in New York from 28 to 30 June, the importance of cooperation in prevention was emphasised, and the resolution on the Seventh Review of the **United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (GCTS)** was adopted by consensus. In this context, Austria highlighted the importance of strengthening the rule of law, human rights and gender as well as the role of civil society in the fight against terrorism.

1.1.2.5 Cyber Security and Hybrid Threats

More often than before, geopolitical tensions have also manifested themselves in **cyberspace**. As cyberattacks are inexpensive and their authorship is often difficult to determine, they are generally used in the context of attacks that remain below the threshold of “armed attack” or “use of force”. The EU Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox provides for diplomatic measures on how to respond to violations of international law in cyberspace. It has been used to disclose and publicly name state actors behind serious cyberattacks. In 2020, restrictive measures under the cyber sanctions regime were imposed for the first time against individuals and companies/organisations. Implementing the EU Cybersecurity Strategy of December 2020, activities are currently focused on improving cyber situational awareness, and on network and information security.

The misuse of information and communication technologies poses a threat to international security. The norm-setting processes on conflict prevention in cyberspace at the United Nations (UN) level have been pursued both within the **Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on cybersecurity**, which is open to all, and the **Group of Governmental Experts (GGE)** that involves 25 members. The recommendations prepared by these groups and presented in March and July, contribute to deepening the common understanding of norms on responsible state behaviour in cyberspace and serve as a basis for the work performed by the new OEWG from 2021 to 2025. In May, agreement was reached on the modalities for the drafting of a **UN Cybercrime Convention**, with the negotiations to be held alternately in New York and Vienna. In this context, the EU Member States attach importance to ensuring an open, secure and free cyberspace in which international law, human rights and fundamental freedoms apply. The **OSCE** has continued work on the implementation of the 16 Confidence Building Measures on Cyber Security (**CBMs**), which make it an international role model in this context. Under the “Adopt a CBM” initiative, Austria contributes to the topic of cooperation between the public and the private sectors, in which context it presented the Austrian Cybersecurity Platform in November as a model for such partnerships.

With a view to further strengthening Austria’s contribution and cooperation on cyber diplomacy matters at international level, the MFA appointed a **special representative for cyber foreign policy and cyber security**. Having taken up office in May, the special representative’s tasks include heading delegations in multilateral negotiations, conducting bilateral cyber dialogues, and participating in the EU Network of Cyber and Digital Ambassadors.

Most of today’s conflicts are increasingly being waged as hybrid activities, launched by state and non-state actors. By employing a combination of various methods aimed at exercising illegitimate influence, while remaining still under the threshold of armed attack, **hybrid threats** have a destabilising effect. Examples include influencing elections and public opinion through disinformation cam-

paigns, radicalising parts of society, instrumentalising migration or deliberately creating economic dependencies through investment. In responding to hybrid threats, the EU focuses on raising awareness, strengthening resilience, prevention and crisis response, alongside international cooperation. In addition to the Hybrid Fusion Cell that forms part of the **EU Intelligence and Situation Centre (INTCEN)** at the EEAS, the Helsinki-based European Centre of Excellence on Countering Hybrid Threats, which Austria joined in 2018, plays an important role. Related efforts are currently aimed at improving the EU's ability to respond to hybrid threats.

In the course of 2021, the impact of disinformation through manipulation of information and interference on the part of foreign actors became increasingly manifest also in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The **EU Action Plan against Disinformation**, adopted in 2018, not only contains measures aimed at raising awareness in society and strengthening media literacy, but also places an emphasis on further strengthening the three EEAS Task Forces on Strategic Communication. Austria contributes actively to the **EU Rapid Alert System (RAS)** on tackling disinformation.

1.1.3 Rule of Law in the EU Member States

Under the Rule of Law Mechanism applied since 2020, the European Commission on 20 July presented its second annual EU Rule of Law Report, including 27 country chapters. By preparing and publishing these annual reports on the status of the rule of law in the EU, the Union has added an important preventive tool to its rule of law toolbox. The European Commission presents an overall assessment of the rule of law situation in the EU, and all Member States are examined with respect to their performance in four areas: independence of the judicial system, anti-corruption framework, media pluralism and media freedom, as well as separation of powers. In the General Affairs Council Meeting of 13 October, members held a discussion on the horizontal report prepared by the European Commission and on 23 November, the country reports on Italy, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania and Cyprus were dealt with as scheduled.

The **procedures under Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union (Art. 7 procedures)** initiated against Hungary and Poland continued throughout the year, and also featured on the agenda of the General Affairs Council meetings on 22 June, 21 September and 16 December.

1.1.4 Communication on EU and European Affairs

The goal of active communication on EU and European affairs is enshrined in the Austrian Government Programme. In close cooperation with the Federal Chancel-

lery, the MFA makes an important contribution towards this goal by informing the public about current European and EU affairs and the related positions held by Austria. The range of topics covered by the MFA's communication activities on EU and European affairs includes in particular current developments within the framework of the CFSP, bilateral and regional foreign policy initiatives, activities carried out by the Federal Minister and the MFA, as well as the provision of service-oriented information. Meeting its responsibilities under this mandate, the MFA has launched numerous initiatives, organises events, issues press releases and mailings, cooperates with the media, and implements related activities also in cooperation with partner institutions such as the Austrian Society for European Politics.

In addition to numerous occasion-related information initiatives, Europe Day on 9 May, Austrian National Day on 26 October, the start of presidencies of the Council of the European Union or important meetings and conferences are made active use of to provide information on the importance and functioning of European organisations and institutions. In this context, the focus is placed on current central EU projects, including the Strategic Agenda or the Conference on the Future of Europe. Other important topics addressed include central Austrian foreign and European policy matters, such as Austria's neighbourhood and enlargement policy. In addition, the initiative "Europa fängt in der Gemeinde an" (Europe starts at local level) continues to play a very relevant role in the context of EU and European communication activities. Launched in 2010 by the MFA and the European Commission Representation in Austria in cooperation with the Austrian Association of Municipalities and the European Parliament, this initiative is now being continued under the auspices of the Federal Chancellery, with the MFA contributing actively within its areas of responsibility. This includes contributions to webinars, articles and information on current developments for the Federal Chancellery's newsletter as well as for the magazine "Unser Europa. Unsere Gemeinde" (Our Europe. Our community), created by the Federal Chancellery for the initiative. The Federal Chancellery also set up a dedicated website with a members-only section for "Municipal Councillors for European Affairs". The travelling exhibition "EUROPA #wasistjetzt" (Europe, what now), which was developed in cooperation with the Austrian Society for European Politics, was shown at 32 Austrian schools despite COVID-19-related restrictions.

Due to the pandemic, only a few in-person events were held. The MFA was, nevertheless, able to organise a total of 87 events, held mostly online and involving more than 13,000 attendants, and also participated in events organised by partner institutions. More than 40 publications issued by the MFA providing information on current European policy developments and related services provided by MFA staff to citizens reached some 405,000 readers throughout Austria.

1.1.5 The Conference on the Future of Europe

On the initiative of the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, the EU launched a large-scale dialogue project with civil society – the Conference on the Future of Europe, to which all citizens and civil society actors from all EU Member States are invited to participate.

In a Joint Declaration signed on 10 March, the three legislative bodies of the EU – the Council of the EU, the European Parliament, and the European Commission – agreed on the institutional framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Alongside the Executive Committee, central elements are the four European Citizens' Panels, the multilingual digital platform futureu.europa.eu and the Conference Plenary.

On 9 May, the Conference was officially launched across Europe. The results as well as the outcome generated by the two Plenary meetings, held on 19 June and 23 October, are being summarised in a final report that is to be implemented by the EU institutions.

As early as June 2020, the Federal Chancellery launched a series of events related to the Conference on the Future of Europe, in the context of which numerous experts and citizens were invited to comment on the proposals. Starting with the official conference kick-off, the Federal Chancellery went online with a dedicated website providing information on related events.

An important thematic area addressed by the conference is the debate on the EU's future role at international level. In **cooperation with the MFA, the Federal Chancellery pays particular attention to the contributions, ideas and suggestions put forward by citizens on the further development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy** and is closely involved in the related reflection process.

1.2 Austria's Neighbourhood and Regional Priorities

1.2.1 Austria's Neighbours

Germany

Combating the COVID-19 pandemic and mitigating its **economic and social impacts** continued to dominate Germany's political agenda in 2021. Seeking to stabilise the economy, the German government put together the largest aid package in the history of the Federal Republic and mobilised massive financial resources totalling 130 billion euros. As at November, the total amount of assistance approved/disbursed amounted to 126.06 billion euros.

After German economic output had suffered another decline at the beginning of the year due to supply chain bottlenecks affecting both raw materials and pre-

liminary products, which slowed down industrial production, the country's **gross domestic product (GDP)** recovered in the second and third quarters, strongly supported also by higher levels of private consumption. At the same time, however, price increases for raw materials and energy translated into a rise in inflation, which amounted to 5.2% in November 2021, reaching the highest level in 28 years.

The elections in the states of Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate in March, which confirmed the incumbents, Winfried Kretschmann and Malu Dreyer, and their governing coalitions, Green-CDU and SPD-FDP-Greens respectively, marked the beginning of the super election year in Germany: in June, Saxony-Anhalt elected a new Landtag (state parliament), followed by Berlin and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania in September. In Magdeburg and Schwerin, the incumbent heads of the local government, Reiner Haseloff and Manuela Schwesig, won with high approval ratings and formed new alliances – CDU-SPD-FDP and SPD-Left respectively. In Berlin, Franziska Giffey was able to narrowly defend the office of Governing Mayor for the SPD and plans to continue cooperation with the Greens and the Left Party.

The lead-up to **the elections to the 20th German Bundestag** (the national parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany) saw some reshuffles at party leadership level: while the SPD had nominated Olaf Scholz as its top candidate as early as August 2020, it took the CDU/CSU until April 2021 to settle the question of their candidate for the office of chancellor between Markus Söder and Armin Laschet in favour of the latter. Christian Lindner stood as top candidate for the FDP, and the Green's co-chair Annalena Baerbock led her party into the Bundestag elections. The Left Party entered the election campaign with Dietmar Bartsch and Jeanine Wissler, and the AfD put forward Tino Chrupalla and Alice Weidel. The topics that dominated the Bundestag election campaign were **climate change** and the **flood disaster** that hit the states of Rhineland-Palatinate and North Rhine-Westphalia in July, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the unprepared withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The outcome of the **Bundestag elections on 26 September** saw **Olaf Scholz** become the first **SPD** politician to take office as German Chancellor since 1998. The SPD received 25.7% of the votes, while the CDU/CSU experienced its poorest result since 1949, achieving 24.1%. In contrast, the Greens were able to almost double their result from 2017 (14.8%), and the FDP also gained votes, achieving 11.5%. Although the AfD lost at federal level (10.3%), it became the strongest force in Saxony and Thuringia. With 4.9%, the Left Party only just made it back into the Bundestag, while the minority party South Schleswig's Voters Committee (Südschleswigscher Wählerverband) is for the first time since 1949 represented in the Bundestag with one MP.

In view of the record number of 735 MPs, the reform of the complex electoral system gained in importance. Nearly 40% of its members are for the first time represented in the German parliament, the share of female members stands at 35%, and 26% of the MPs are under 40 years of age. The office of President of the German Bundestag is held by SPD politician Bärbel Bas.

At federal level, Germany is for the first time ever led by a tripartite alliance. In the coalition agreement adopted by the **“traffic light” government consisting of the SPD, the Greens and the FDP**, the main focus is placed on fighting the COVID-19 pandemic as the most urgent task. Other topics that rank on the government’s agenda relate to cooperation towards realising the goals set out in the Paris Climate Agreement, the transformation towards an eco-social market economy, the promotion and further development of digitalisation, and the creation of good and equitable living conditions throughout Germany. On 8 December, Olaf Scholz was elected Chancellor by the Bundestag and his “traffic light” government, composed of SPD, Greens and FDP, was sworn in – marking the end of the 16-year “Merkel era”.

German foreign policy is to remain committed to a functioning, multilateral, rules-based world order. Led by Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, commitment to peace, freedom, human rights, arms control and disarmament as well as sustainability and climate neutrality worldwide will play a particularly important role. The new Federal Government has set itself the goal of investing three percent of the country’s GDP in the long-term into activities at international level.

Germany had also increased its **spending on foreign policy and development cooperation** in 2020 and 2021, the years marked by the COVID-19 pandemic. The major part of these expenditures went to humanitarian aid and bilateral development cooperation. When it comes to Official Development Assistance (ODA) spending, Germany is the second largest donor nation after the United States of America (USA). By joining and cooperating in the **COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) platform**, Germany seeks to contribute towards making vaccines against COVID-19 global goods that are accessible and affordable for all countries.

Germany remained committed to supporting implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement, digitalisation, the protection of human rights, a rules-based trade order and strengthening women’s rights. In the context of restructuring the procedures on flight and migration, Germany is attaching increasing importance to the humanitarian responsibility to protect.

Relations with Russia, Turkey and the Middle East feature as challenges on the German foreign policy agenda. Cooperation with Africa, especially in the Sahel, continues to gain importance in the context of migration. The USA remains by far Germany’s most important partner outside of Europe. The **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** continues to constitute an integral element of the German

security concept, in which context the European pillar in NATO is to be strengthened and cooperation between NATO and the EU is to be intensified.

At **European policy level**, the new “traffic light” government set itself numerous very ambitious goals in its coalition agreement, especially as regards the future of the EU. The objectives to be pursued include inter alia the further development of Europe into a federal state, the implementation of a uniform European electoral law with partly transnational lists and a binding top candidate system, more votes to be taken with a qualified majority in the Council, as well as the call for a “genuine” common European foreign and security policy, with the Federal Armed Forces (Bundeswehr) remaining a parliamentary army subject to parliamentary control.

At political, economic and social level, there was **regular bilateral exchange** involving numerous contacts at all levels. As a result of the pandemic, bilateral relations were dominated by topics such as border controls and entry restrictions. There was also an **intensive exchange of visits at political level**: at the beginning of June, Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen travelled to Berlin for a bilateral working visit, and at the end of June to Potsdam for the meeting of German-speaking heads of state. Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz travelled to Berlin for talks in March, June and August. Federal Ministers Karoline Edtstadler, Karl Nehammer, Margarete Schramböck, Elisabeth Köstinger and Martin Kocher as well as the President of the National Council Wolfgang Sobotka met their respective German counterparts.

Germany remained by far the **most important foreign trade partner for Austria**. Between January and June, Austrian exports to Germany amounted to 24.9 billion euros and imports from Germany to 28.7 billion euros. The most important goods sourced from Germany were mechanical engineering products and motor vehicles.

Czech Republic

The **parliamentary elections** on 8 and 9 October resulted in a change of power. Winning 27.8%, the electoral alliance **SPOLU** (“Together”), formed by the Civic Democratic Party (**ODS/ECR**), Christian Democrats (**KDU-ČSL/EPP**) and **TOP09 (EPP)** became the strongest political force. **ANO** (Action of Dissatisfied Citizens, **RENEW**) led by former Prime Minister Andrej Babiš achieved 27.1%, the Alliance of Mayors and Independents (**STAN/EPP**) and Pirates (Greens/EFA) won 15.6% of the votes, and the Freedom and Direct Democracy Party (**SPD/ID**) was supported by 9.6% of Czech voters. The Czech Social Democratic Party (**ČSSD**) and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (**KSČM**) that reached 4.7% and 3.6%, respectively, fell both short of the 5% threshold and are thus for the first time no longer represented in parliament. SPOLU and the alliance formed by STAN and the Pirates agreed on forming a coalition government and signed the coalition

agreement on 8 November. On 28 November, President Miloš Zeman appointed ODS party leader and SPOLU's top candidate Petr Fiala to the office of Prime Minister and subsequently held individual talks with all figures put forward for ministerial positions.

The country's **domestic policy** agenda continued to be dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the wave at the beginning of the year hitting the Czech Republic particularly hard. The state of emergency imposed in October 2020 lasted until 11 April and went hand in hand with a comprehensive lockdown. In contrast to 2020, it was possible to avoid border closures. From mid-October onwards, the number of infections were, however, again on the rise.

On 12 April, Foreign Minister Tomáš Petříček (ČSSD) resigned due to internal party disputes and Jakub Kulhánek was appointed as his successor on 21 April. On 26 May, Adam Vojtěch (no party affiliation, nominated by ANO) took over the post of Minister of Health, which he had previously held until 21 September 2020 during the government's current term of office.

At national level, the dominant topic remained Prime Minister Andrej Babiš' role in the **Agrofert conglomerate**, which he had transferred to a trust company in 2017. On 23 April, the European Commission published its final report auditing the disbursement of grants from the EU Structural Funds to the Czech Republic. It found that Babiš continued to exercise decisive influence over the Agrofert group, which constituted a **conflict of interest**. Agrofert would have to reimburse aid wrongly granted, otherwise EU funds for the Czech Republic would be reduced.

At **foreign policy** level, the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs continues to regard the strategic dialogue with Germany, the Visegrad Four (V4) cooperation and cooperation with Slovakia and Austria in the context of the "Slavkov/Austerlitz" format, whose rotating chair the Czech Republic took on 1 July for a one-year term, as very relevant platforms for regional cooperation. The "Central Five" (C5) format, initiated by Austria and also involving Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary has come to play an increasingly important role. Joint initiatives were, for instance, launched in the Western Balkans region. Together with their Slovenian counterpart, the two foreign ministers travelled to Tirana and Skopje for talks with Albanian and North Macedonian government representatives aimed at supporting both countries in their EU accession processes. Furthermore, EU and NATO membership as well as South East Europe and the EU's Eastern Partnership continued to top the Czech foreign policy agenda. The government is committed to strengthening the Czech Republic's voice in the EU. The country sees a need for reform in the EU in so far as the Union should take on fewer tasks and at the same time work more effectively.

With respect to the area of **asylum and migration**, the Czech Republic is of the opinion that competence regarding admission should remain with the Member States. The Czech Republic seeks to continue to play an active role in improving

external border protection and in supporting countries of origin and transit outside the EU.

The **bilateral exchange of visits**, which has been intensified since 2014, continued with visits paid to Austria by President Miloš Zeman on 9–10 June, Prime Minister Andrej Babiš on 16 March, Foreign Minister Jakub Kulhánek on 30 June as well as by further specialised ministers. Visits to the Czech Republic were paid by Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz on 7 September, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg on 6 May, 20 July and 30 December (inaugural visit to the new Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavský), as well as Federal Minister Karl Nehammer on 23–24 June. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the exchange of visits was severely limited and until May meetings were largely held virtually.

The **dialogue on nuclear issues** was continued on 25 November with the annual nuclear meeting at expert level – held this year as a video conference – and involving an ongoing exchange of information. The main topics on the agenda were the planned expansion of the Dukovany nuclear power plant by the Czech Republic and the search for a deep geological repository site for nuclear waste in the Czech Republic. In this context, Austria repeatedly emphasised its rejection of the use of nuclear power due to the associated risks.

Financed by the two states, the **joint history textbook** compiled by the Standing Conference of Austrian and Czech Historians, established in 2009, was published in German in 2019 and in Czech in 2020. Reflecting the objective approach towards addressing and dealing with the two countries' common history, this book represents a milestone in coming to terms with the political past.

The Czech Republic is Austria's most important **trading partner** in Central and Eastern Europe and the third most important trading partner among the EU Member States after Germany and Italy. For Austrian companies, the Czech Republic continues to be one of the most relevant destinations for investments (currently ranking third worldwide), while Austria is one of the most important investors in Czech Republic. Furthermore, guests from the Czech Republic also make up the fourth-largest group of international tourists visiting Austria.

Slovakia

A serious government crisis in spring – attributable to different approaches to dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic – led to a **government reshuffle** on 1 April: former Finance Minister Eduard Heger (OLaNO, Ordinary People and Independent Personalities) replaced OLaNO party leader Igor Matovič as Prime Minister, who took over the office of Finance Minister. The four-party coalition remained committed to the priorities it had set itself at domestic policy level: anti-corruption, law enforcement, education and health. Major expectations focus on the use of funds from the EU recovery package “Next Generation EU”, in the context of

which one billion euros has, for instance, been earmarked for the modernisation of hospitals. The fight against corruption has led to numerous arrests, and there have already been some trials and convictions. However, the opposition, especially the Smer-Social Democracy party led by former Prime Minister Robert Fico, considers these to be politically motivated investigations.

In Slovakia, too, the second year in a row was marked by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the first months of the year, the country temporarily suffered the highest number of deaths in the world. It soon became apparent that in Slovakia, the interest in vaccinations was far below the EU average. Consequently, starting in autumn, the country was faced with another severe wave of infections that again took the health system to and beyond its limits, requiring another lockdown at the end of November.

In contrast to the frequently changing and regionally diverse measures taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic within the country, those related to the border regime remained largely unchanged. Alongside the EU-wide “Green Passport”, available as of the middle of the year, this was mainly attributable to close coordination between Austria and Slovakia as well as within regional formats involving other neighbouring countries. Taking account of the important economic and social role played by regular commuter traffic, a number of facilitations were granted to this group and remained in force throughout the year.

At foreign and European policy level, Slovakia’s pro-European and pro-Atlantic orientation remained unchanged, with the government adopting a clearly more “pro-Western” stance than its predecessors, for instance with regard to the events in Belarus and in its relations with Russia. In early December, a resolution condemning Belarus’ migration policy as a political tool against the EU was adopted also by Parliament. The USA is seen as a traditional partner and key ally. Slovakia’s clear commitment to active multilateralism also remains unchanged, as does its focus on assuming an active role in international organisations. Together with the Czech Republic, the country cooperates with Austria under the trilateral Slavkov/Austerlitz format and the Central European regional cooperation format, Central Five.

Bilateral exchange of visits had to be restricted to the months recording lower infection rates. On 4 May, Prime Minister Eduard Heger paid his inaugural visit to Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz in Vienna, where he also met Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen. On 13 May, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg took part in a Central Five meeting in Bratislava. On 15 June, Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz paid his return visit to Prime Minister Eduard Heger and also attended the GLOBSEC Bratislava Forum. In the context of this forum, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg took part in a panel discussion on 16 June. On 25 June, the President of the National Council, Wolfgang Sobotka, visited his counterpart Boris Kollár in Bratislava, where a joint declaration of intent

was signed on developing democracy workshops, based on the Austrian model, in Slovakia. On 29 June, Minister of the Interior Roman Mikulec met Federal Minister Karl Nehammer in Vienna for consultations. Taking part in the handover of the Slavkov/Austerlitz Chairmanship from Austria to the Czech Republic, Foreign Minister Ivan Korčok attended a Slavkov/Austerlitz Foreign Ministers' Meeting and a conference on Digital Humanism in Poysdorf/Lower Austria on 30 June. On 25 July, President Zuzana Čaputová visited the Salzburg Festival at the invitation of Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen. On 26 July, Defence Minister Jaroslav Nad' met his counterpart Federal Minister Klaudia Tanner for consultations in Vienna. The Speaker of the Slovak National Council, Boris Kollár, took part in an informal Slavkov/Austerlitz working meeting in Grafenegg on 27 August. Foreign Minister Ivan Korčok attended a commemorative event on the 100th birthday of Alexander Dubček held at Vienna City Hall on 16 September. On 11 October, Federal Minister Karl Nehammer paid a visit to Interior Minister Roman Mikulec in Bratislava, where both agreed on intensifying bilateral police cooperation. On 22 October, Foreign Minister Ivan Korčok attended another Central Five meeting in Vienna at the invitation of Federal Minister Michael Linhart. Due to the lockdown introduced in Austria, it was necessary to conduct the inaugural visit of Federal Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg to Prime Minister Eduard Heger, scheduled for 23 November, at short notice as a video conference.

Slovakia is a very open **economy**, and its industry is closely interlinked with the neighbouring countries' supply chains. The export ratio of around 90% of GDP indicates a strong dependence on foreign countries, especially the dominant automotive industry. After it had slowed down by around 4.8% in 2020, Slovakia's economic growth is expected to increase by 4.4% in 2021.

Following a COVID-19-related decline in the generally very intensive bilateral **trade relations** in 2020, Austrian exports picked up again in the first half of 2021, rising by 13.9% to 1.6 billion euros, in the same period imports even increased by 20.9% to 1.7 billion euros. Slovakia remained Austria's eleventh most important trading partner, and along with Germany and the Netherlands, Austria continues to be one of the largest foreign investors in the country. The conditions on the Slovak market have proven particularly positive for Austrian SMEs that may benefit from a competitive edge due to their specialised know-how.

In connection with the use of **nuclear power** by Slovakia, in particular the construction of reactor units three and four at the Mochovce nuclear power plant, Austria regularly reaffirms its safety concerns and its strict rejection of nuclear power and stresses the importance of rapid and transparent exchange of information. On 13 May, the Slovak Nuclear Regulatory Authority in a first-instance decision granted authorisation for commissioning Unit 3 of the Mochovce NPP, the decision on the appeal filed by Global 2000 has, however, not yet been taken. The initial loading with nuclear fuel depends on the completion of numerous upgrades and repairs still to be approved by the regulatory authority.

Hungary

For the first time in the country's history, **primaries** were held by the **opposition** parties in the lead-up to the 2022 parliamentary elections in autumn. As a result, Péter Márki-Zay, who has no party affiliation, emerged as the top candidate of the six allied opposition parties, and 106 candidates were elected for the individual constituencies.

Domestic policy was dominated by **measures aimed at combating the COVID-19 pandemic** and the launch of the election campaign in the lead-up to the parliamentary elections in spring 2022. After the emergency law, adopted in 2020, and its extension had expired, Parliament passed an Act on the Containment of the Coronavirus Pandemic on 22 February. This third Authorisation Act continues to enable the government to issue or apply special decrees with regard to the "state of danger". The effect of the act that was originally limited to 90 days, was extended until 31 May 2022. In terms of immunisation against COVID-19, the purchase of Russian and Chinese vaccines enabled the country to relatively quickly achieve a vaccination rate of 50%, but the process subsequently started to slow down.

Alongside fighting the pandemic, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán set further thematic priorities in the areas of security, immigration and increasing the Hungarian state's share and level of involvement in economic sectors defined as "strategic" (including the energy, banking, media and information communication sectors, the construction materials industry as well as the production of railway vehicles). The inclusion of passages concerning LGBTQI in the Child Protection Act in June was met with some fierce criticism. The European Commission initiated infringement procedures against Hungary, stating that the law violates fundamental rights such as respect for human dignity, freedom of expression, security of information and respect for private life. Also in response to this criticism, the government announced that it intended to launch the controversial referendum on child protection at the same time as the 2022 parliamentary elections.

The main focus of the government's **economic programme** was on protecting jobs and kick-starting the economy, while continuing work on the key government policy elements, including the protection of families, and developing private housing as well as a work-based society. To achieve these goals, an "Economy Protection Fund" of 2,550 billion forints (approx. 7.1 billion euros) and an "Action Plan to Reboot the Economy", involving tax benefits for families, financial support for small businesses, investments in higher education, and projects in the field of green energy, the circular economy and digitalisation, were adopted.

At **European policy level**, Hungary stressed its right to national sovereignty with respect to socio-political topics, including family and migration policies, its related course triggering repeated debate. The annual Rule of Law Report, published by the European Commission, found that Hungary had deficits in the fight

against corruption, that media pluralism and the independence of the judiciary were still at risk, and raised concerns about the system of checks and balances. The procedure initiated by the European Parliament under Article 7 TEU against Hungary for risk of breach of the common values of the Union was continued as the concerns persisted. The escalation of the debate on the rule of law led to a delay in the disbursement of funds from the European Recovery Fund earmarked for Hungary.

Holding the **Presidency of the Council of Europe** from May to November, the priorities set by Hungary included national minorities, interfaith dialogue and religious communities as well as protection of children and families. In the context of its **Presidency of the Visegrad Four Group** from July 2021 to June 2022, Hungary focused on intensifying cooperation on economic recovery, promoting investment, tax policies, infrastructure development, migration as well as European integration of the Western Balkans.

Relations with Austria were intensive and focused on cooperation in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. A particular focus was placed on maintaining cross-border economic relations despite travel restrictions. On 22 April, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg met his Hungarian counterpart Péter Sziijártó in Nickelsdorf. On 31 May and 1 June, President of the National Council Wolfgang Sobotka paid a visit to Budapest, where he met President János Áder, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Speaker of Parliament László Kövér for talks. Foreign Minister Sziijártó visited Vienna for bilateral meetings with Federal Ministers Michael Linhart and Margarete Schramböck on 19 October. The already close cooperation on security as well as management and protection of the EU's external borders was continued with regular contacts between the Ministers of the Interior and Defence. Contacts between specialised ministries and representatives of the federal provinces were further intensified, some meetings being held as video conferences.

Economic relations and **tourism** play a key role in bilateral relations. Austria is Hungary's second most important trading partner and third largest investor. Some 1,500 Austrian companies employ around 60,000 individuals in Hungary. The importance of regional and cross-border cooperation was highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Austria and Hungary jointly and pro-actively contributed to regional cooperation programmes such as the INTERREG V-A Austria-Hungary 2014 to 2020 programme, under which a total budget of around 95 million euros was earmarked for projects.

Slovenia

In office since 13 May 2020, Prime Minister **Janez Janša** from the right-wing conservative SDS has led a four-party government. After two MPs from the governing coalition's parties switched to the opposition, the government has been holding a narrow majority of 48 out of the 90 MPs. Following the resignation of Agricul-

ture Minister and DeSUS party leader Aleksandra Pivec on 5 October 2020, Jože Podgoršek took office as Minister of Agriculture. In June, Marjan Dikaučič succeeded Lilijana Koslovic as Minister of Justice, after the latter's resignation in May.

Throughout the legislative period, Prime Minister Janša and/or individual members of his government had been faced with numerous motions of no confidence (the most recent against the PM on 27 May). All these motions failed by a narrow margin and had been introduced for failures in combating the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic also remained a dominant domestic policy issue in Slovenia. The beginning of the year had already been marked by a nationwide state of emergency and lockdown, which ended only slowly and continued to restrict life in all areas until mid-June. In autumn and winter, Slovenia was faced with consistently high contagion levels. By December, the country recorded some 5,200 deaths attributable to the COVID-19 virus, and the vaccination rate of those fully immunised ranged at 55%. Although the nationwide introduction of the obligation to provide proof of being either healthy, having recovered or having been fully vaccinated (PCR or antigen-tested) in shops, public transport, sports centres, and many other places in September triggered considerable protests, it led to stagnating (albeit at a high level) infection figures, and enabled maintaining at least some limited continuation of public life.

Under the Central Five meetings of foreign ministers, Slovenia contributed actively to close **regional cooperation** among the five Central European neighbours (Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Slovenia). With regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, Slovenia sought to apply restrictive border measures only as a last resort, seeking to maintain commuter and freight traffic and enable commercial service providers to cross the border.

Holding the **Presidency of the Council of the EU**, Slovenia moved into the limelight in the second half of the year. Together with Germany and Portugal, the country has formed the Presidency Trio for a period of 18 months. For the six months of its own Presidency, Slovenia chose the **motto of "Together. Resilient. Europe"**, focusing on economic recovery, the Conference on the Future of Europe and the EU enlargement process in the Western Balkans. Alongside hosting informal ministerial meetings, the **EU-Western Balkans Summit**, which the country organised in a European Council format on 5 and 6 October, marked a highlight of the Slovenian Presidency.

The **unresolved border issue between Slovenia and Croatia** in the Bay of Piran was put somewhat on the back burner. Departing from its previous policy of blocking Croatia's OECD and Schengen accession aspirations, the government led by PM Janša has moved to supporting Croatia's accession to Schengen – provided

all conditions are met – as it regards the latter's Schengen membership as a contribution to strengthening the EU's external borders against irregular migration.

The **Year of Austrian-Slovenian Neighbourhood Dialogue 2019/2020** was to add a further impetus to the already very close and intense relations. As some of the momentum was taken away due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was agreed that the initiative be extended. The Neighbourhood Dialogue flagship project, the exhibition “when gesture becomes event”, focusing on solidarity, attracted a wide audience and was shown in both Vienna and Ljubljana.

The participation of Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz in the events celebrating 30 years of independence and the start of Slovenia's Presidency of the Council of the European Union in Ljubljana on 25 June was another highlight of bilateral relations. Furthermore, numerous **bilateral visits** contributed to fostering relations between Austria and Slovenia. Prime Minister Janša, for instance, travelled to Vienna on 16 March for a working meeting with Federal Chancellor Kurz, and the President of the Austrian National Council Wolfgang Sobotka met his counterpart Igor Zorčič in Ljubljana on 22 June. The bilateral exchange of visits was rounded off by exchanges between specialised ministries, visits by province governors, representatives of municipalities and almost all members of the federal government paid to Slovenia in the course of its Presidency of the Council of the EU. Regional cooperation within the Central Five format was continued, with meetings of the Central Five foreign ministers in Brdo, Slovenia, on 1 March and in Vienna on 22 October. This year, the trilateral meeting at Heads of State level between Austria (represented by Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen), Slovenia and Croatia was hosted by Slovenia.

The **Slovene ethnic group** in Carinthia and Styria acts as a bridge between Austria and Slovenia. Austria continued to strongly support the call by the **German-speaking ethnic group in Slovenia** (Untersteirer, Gottscheer) for constitutional recognition and for preserving their linguistic and cultural identity. Austria provides both project and basic support, while Slovenia still refuses recognition, and funding provided by Slovenia remained limited. Against this background, hope for progress is placed in a newly established dialogue group.

Austria continued to assert the more than 80 **denationalisation cases** involving Austrian nationals that have been pending before Slovenian authorities for more than 27 years. In individual cases, rulings by the Slovenian Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court have enabled some progress in the deadlock surrounding the cases.

The developments regarding the **Krško nuclear power plant** continued to be followed critically by Austria. On 20 August, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg and Governor Hermann Schützenhöfer paid a joint visit to Ljubljana to once again advocate for maximum safety.

Austria and Slovenia cooperate very closely on **foreign and European policy matters**. This holds particularly true for their strong support of EU enlargement to include the countries of the Western Balkans, and especially for opening accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania. In this spirit, joint initiatives have been launched, including, for instance, at the EU-Western Balkans Summit, hosted by the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU. Together with their Czech counterpart, the two foreign ministers travelled to Tirana and Skopje in May, where they met Albanian and North Macedonian government representatives with a view to supporting both countries in their EU accession processes.

An expression of the **close economic relations** between the two countries are the around 1,000 Austrian companies active in Slovenia and the almost 30,000 Slovenian cross-border commuters who work mainly in industrial and tourist businesses. Austria has for many years now been the largest foreign investor in Slovenia, while Slovenian citizens remain the most important per capita consumers of Austrian products. The bilateral trade volume recovered from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and again ranged at 5.4 billion euros.

Italy

The four-party coalition government Conte II collapsed in January. Referring to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the urgent need to finalise Italy's recovery plan, President Sergio Mattarella rejected the right-wing parties' call for new elections. After having charged Mario Draghi with forming a government, the latter succeeded in uniting all parties – except for the far-right Fratelli d'Italia, led by Giorgia Meloni – in a government of national unity that was sworn in on 13 February. Since then, the Draghi government has pursued a pro-European and pro-transatlantic course with a focus on combating the impact of the pandemic and rebuilding Italy's economy.

In 2020, Italy was one of the countries most severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe. Following the introduction of strict measures that were implemented in a disciplined manner by the population, the impact of the pandemic was relatively moderate in 2021, with infection rates remaining at a low level compared with other EU Member States. On 15 October, Italy was the first country in Europe to introduce the mandatory provision of proof of being either healthy, having recovered or having been fully vaccinated (PCR or antigen-tested) for people working in the public and private sectors.

Apart from combating the COVID-19 pandemic and the related economic crisis, **Italy's foreign and European policy priorities** remained unchanged, i.e. Libya, the Middle East and European integration of the Western Balkan states. Italy remains open for dialogue with Russia, and China is a strategic economic partner. However, Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio firmly rejected Chinese ambitions regarding the expansion of the 5G network in Italy. The USA remains a strategic partner

for Italy. Prime Minister Mario Draghi declared transatlantic partnership, along with further EU integration central pillars of Italy's foreign policy.

Located at the EU's external border and as the main country of arrival along the central Mediterranean route, Italy faces **particular migratory pressure**. In terms of asylum applications, Italy ranked fourth in the EU in absolute figures; in relation to its population, Austria, however, recorded almost five times as many applications. After having increased only moderately due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of individuals apprehended when seeking to illegally cross the borders into the EU picked-up rapidly in the second half of the year. The Italian government took measures to speed up returns (e. g. bilateral agreements with countries of origin), stem the arrival of migrants and crack down on migrant smuggling. In this context, Italy placed a focus on strengthening cooperation with countries of origin and transit.

Being a classic country of first arrival, Italy holds a rather sceptical, wait-and-see position regarding the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, presented by the European Commission on 23 September 2020, and advocates a mandatory distribution key within the EU.

Italy is one of the countries with the highest levels of national debt in the EU. Over the last ten years, national debt has risen by more than 40% and is expected to rise to 159.7% of GDP by the end of the year. At the same time, the country's economy has been stagnating for about a decade. The EU Recovery Plan – supplemented by a national complementary fund – is to provide over 200 billion euros for investments into greening, digitalising and modernising the country. GDP growth is expected to reach 6%. The government has set out to ensure rapid implementation of reforms in public administration and the judiciary and has already initiated key legislative processes.

Italy's already low employment rate was pushed down further by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, just over 55% of the working-age population is in employment. Although all population groups are affected by rising unemployment levels, young people, women, people living in the South of Italy and low-skilled individuals are hit particularly hard.

The **excellent bilateral relations** between Austria and Italy were reflected in an intensive exchange of visits:

On 17 and 18 March, Federal Minister Karoline Edtstadler visited State Secretary for European Affairs, Vincenzo Amendola, and Ministers Vittorio Colao (Technological Innovation and Digitalisation) and Massimo Garavaglia (Tourism). From 6 to 8 June, Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen paid an official visit to Italy and met, inter alia, President Sergio Mattarella, Prime Minister Mario Draghi and Minister of Transport Enrico Giovannini. The Federal President was accompanied by Federal Ministers Karoline Edtstadler and Leonore Gewessler, who met Interior Minister Luciana Lamorgese and Transport Minister Enrico Giovannini for talks. On

28 June, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg attended the ministerial meeting of the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh/ISIS in Rome and held an exchange of views with his counterpart, Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio. On 7 and 8 October, Federal Minister Margarete Schramböck visited Rome and Milan and met, inter alia, Minister of Economy Giancarlo Giorgetti and Minister of Digitalisation Vittorio Colao.

At parliamentary level, the Presidium of the Federal Council (President Christian Buchmann, Vice-President Doris Hahn and Vice-President Peter Raggl) paid a visit to Rome from 8 to 10 June, where they held talks with the President of the Italian Senate Maria Elisabetta Alberti Casellati and the President of the Chamber of Deputies Roberto Fico.

Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Italy remained **Austria's second largest trading partner** and the most popular holiday destination for Austrian travellers.

Switzerland

Austria and Switzerland have traditionally enjoyed close and trusting relations that were further intensified in 2021: on 11 June, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg and Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis signed a **Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Cooperation** that will serve as a basis for even closer cooperation in such areas as services provided to citizens, peacebuilding, sustainability and environmental affairs, science and research as well as culture and exchange programmes for young people. In terms of relations between the **EU and Switzerland**, and especially after Switzerland had broken off negotiations on the **Institutional Framework Agreement**, Austria advocated continued dialogue and finding a pragmatic solution in its contacts with the EU and fellow Member States.

Another expression of strong mutual interest was an **intensive and ongoing exchange of visits**, which was resumed in spring after having been interrupted for some time due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The President of the Swiss Confederation Guy Parmelin visited Vienna on 2 March and met Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen, Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, President of the National Council Wolfgang Sobotka as well as Federal Ministers Margarete Schramböck and Karoline Edtstadler for working discussions. On 16 April, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg met Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis and the foreign ministers from Liechtenstein, Luxembourg and Germany in Lugano at the annual meeting of foreign ministers from German-speaking countries. On 30 April, Federal Minister Klaudia Tanner travelled to Bern for an official working visit and held an exchange of views with Federal Councillor Viola Amherd, among others. At the invitation of the President of the Swiss National Council, Andreas Aebi, the President of the National Council, Wolfgang Sobotka, paid a visit to Bern on 5 and

6 May. In summer, Federal Ministers Margarete Schramböck and Karl Nehammer held exchanges of views with their counterparts in Basel, Geneva and Bern. Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis took part in the European Forum Wachau on 11 and 12 June. Furthermore, a large number of meetings were held at regional, province, cantonal and municipal level as well as between parliamentary friendship groups.

Switzerland is **Austria's fourth largest trading partner**, the fourth most important buyer of Austrian goods and the second most important consumer of services. Swiss investors are among the most relevant investors in Austria. Swiss companies active in Austria employ more than 28,000 people, while some 14,000 individuals work for Austrian companies in Switzerland.

Swiss voters decide on substantive issues at all levels of the state. Being a central element of the Swiss Confederation, this form of **direct democracy** is not only used intensively but also constitutes an important hallmark of its citizens' national identity. The electorate was called to the ballot boxes four times, voting on a total of thirteen initiatives. A higher level of attention was attracted by the **popular initiative on the introduction of a ban on full facial coverings**, which was narrowly adopted, receiving 51.2% of the vote, on 7 March – similar to the Austrian ban on full facial covering, the wearing of full-face veils in public spaces is thus to be prohibited. The fact that the “**CO₂ Act**”, submitted by the Federal Council, was rejected by 51.6% of the voters on 13 June, was considered a surprise. This also meant that the draft for the introduction of a national CO₂ tax, but also tax concessions to be granted to companies investing in sustainability were not adopted and that the Federal Council had to focus on new, smaller-scale climate protection measures. The biggest controversy was, however, created by the **vote against the COVID-19 law** introduced on 28 November by the group of Swiss opponents of vaccination and pandemic measures. The goal was to abolish the COVID certificate. However, the otherwise rather silent majority of supporters of the Federal Council's COVID-19 policy clearly prevailed – and the COVID-19 law was approved by 65.72% of the electorate.

In early summer, the negotiations on the Institutional Framework Agreement between the EU and Switzerland, which had been going on for years, came to an abrupt end as the **Swiss government unilaterally broke off negotiations on 26 May**. The Federal Council explained this move citing irreconcilable differences over the free movement of persons and wage protection issues. The objective pursued by the Institutional Framework Agreement was to create rules governing existing and future agreements that deal with Switzerland's comprehensive participation in the EU Single Market. It had also sought to address questions related to dynamic legal adaptation to the EU's *acquis communautaire* and guarantee a dispute settlement mechanism. **Currently, the future of bilateral relations between Switzerland and the EU is uncertain**. The Swiss government proposed a political dialogue to the EU, focusing on developing a positive agenda involving a wider range of topics instead of just focusing on market access-related issues.

The European Commission made it clear that the status quo is unsustainable in the long run, since privileged access to the Single Market, as enjoyed by Switzerland, requires compliance with the same rules and obligations. By the end of the year, the situation was still subject to detailed analyses by the European Union with a view to reaching joint agreement on consequences and next steps.

Switzerland also continued to be faced with the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact. Seeking to combat the spreading of the virus, the Federal Council extended the COVID measures, adopted in December 2020, until spring, which significantly reduced the number of new infections. The COVID-19 situation remained relaxed over the summer. At the end of October, however, the number of confirmed cases of new infections started to increase rapidly on a daily basis, which necessitated the introduction of new measures. In November, the vaccination rate ranged at 65.68% in Switzerland. Despite this low vaccination rate, Switzerland deliberately sought to steer a more relaxed course in fighting the pandemic, relying to a large extent on people's sense of responsibility. In order to counteract the pandemic's negative impact on its national economy, the Confederation has made around 100 billion Swiss francs available since last year. The Swiss economy was able to cope relatively well with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ranging at around 110 billion Swiss francs, and equalling approximately 28% of its GDP, Switzerland's gross debt ratio is not alarming compared with other European countries. Thanks to a substantial support programme (short-time work, wage subsidies), the country was able to avoid large-scale redundancies and company closures. At both political and officials' level, Switzerland was involved in virtually all formats of the EU's COVID-19 crisis management.

Liechtenstein

Hallmarks of **bilateral relations** with the Principality of Liechtenstein are the close ties between the Princely House and Austria, cooperation based on mutual appreciation and trust in a wide range of local, regional and national formats, and an active exchange at all levels of society. Some 2,300 Austrian citizens live in the Principality, and more than 8,700 persons commute daily from Austria to their workplace in Liechtenstein.

Prince Hans-Adam II is **Head of State** of the constitutional hereditary monarchy, although his son, Hereditary Prince Alois, has been in charge of official functions and duties since 2004. On 7 February, **parliamentary elections** were held for the 25 members of the Principality's Landtag (unicameral parliament). The elections were won by a narrow margin by the Vaterländische Union (VU, Patriotic Union) ahead of the Fortschrittliche Bürgerpartei (FBP, Progressive Citizens' Party), and the former continued the grand coalition with the latter. On 25 March, the new government led by Daniel Risch (VU) was sworn in. Presented on 5 October, the

government programme (2021–2025) is based on the principles of social, economic, ecological and financial sustainability and reliability of the state.

Liechtenstein's **foreign policy priorities** include safeguarding its sovereignty – inter alia through active and thematically focused membership in international organisations – free access to global markets, deepening relations with its neighbouring states, a clear and pronounced commitment in particular to promoting the rule of law, protecting human rights, women's and children's rights, the abolishment of the death penalty as well as the fight against torture and impunity.

Both in the bilateral and in the multilateral context, as a member of the UN, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the **European Free Trade Association (EFTA)**, the **European Economic Area (EEA)**, and the **World Trade Organization (WTO)**, Liechtenstein proves itself a reliable and committed partner.

Since the new Liechtenstein government took office on 25 March, all members of government have paid inaugural **visits** to their Austrian counterparts in Vienna, Head of Government Daniel Risch meeting Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz on 29 April. On 6 October, the President of the National Council, Wolfgang Sobotka, travelled to Liechtenstein for a working meeting with his counterpart, Albert Frick, and also paid a courtesy visit to Head of Government Risch. The latter welcomed Federal Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg to Vaduz for a working meeting on 11 November. Federal Minister Karoline Edtstadler met Head of Government Daniel Risch, Government Councillor Dominique Hasler (Minister for Foreign Affairs, Education and Sport) and Government Councillor Graziella Marok-Wachter (Minister for Infrastructure and Justice) for working discussions in Vaduz on 29 November.

Regional Cooperation

Exchange and cooperation with neighbouring countries play a very important role in Austrian foreign policy. The significance of good neighbourly relations has become particularly apparent in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as many of the associated cross-border challenges could only be solved in cooperation with neighbours. In this spirit, Austria has participated in a number of regional formats aimed at intensifying cooperation.

Until 30 June, Austria held the rotating **one-year chairmanship** of the trilateral **Slavkov/Austerlitz format** under which it cooperates with Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Numerous high-level political and expert meetings were held to discuss and exchange measures aimed at managing the COVID-19 pandemic and deal with current topics related to the EU and the international agenda. At the Slavkov/Austerlitz conference on **Digital Humanism** in Poysdorf, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg handed over the chair to the Czech Republic. Intensive cooperation under the **Central Five** format, established on the initiative of Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg and involving the Czech Republic, Hungary,

Slovenia and Slovakia continued. With a view to further strengthening economic cooperation in Central Europe and conducting an exchange on measures aimed at containing the COVID-19 pandemic, Federal Minister Michael Linhart invited his counterparts to Vienna on 22 October. The foreign ministers convened for further meetings in the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Slovakia.

Another format that made a valuable contribution to deepening regional cooperation through regular meetings of heads of state, foreign ministers, specialist ministers and experts is **cooperation among the German-speaking countries**.

At the level of State Secretaries and Secretaries-General at the Foreign Ministries, Austria cooperates closely with Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Slovenia under the **Quadrilateral Cooperation** format, and at Presidents of State level, Austria cooperates with Croatia and Slovenia under the **Trilateral Cooperation** format.

1.2.2 South Tyrol

South Tyrol enjoys a special status within Austrian foreign policy. Austria's protective function with regard to South Tyrol, based on the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement (Treaty of Paris) of 1946, is exercised in an attentive manner by the Austrian Federal Government. Austria's protective function manifests itself in the interest taken in the general and autonomy policy developments in South Tyrol, and is also reflected in a large number of working visits and contacts. At European level, the autonomy of South Tyrol serves as a model for the resolution of minority conflicts, for the people living in South Tyrol it has become a common asset shared by all three linguistic groups (German, Italian and Ladin). 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's and Italy's common membership of the EU has facilitated a number of additional links that are also of benefit to South Tyrol. The joint responsibility of Austria and Italy for the further development of South Tyrol's autonomy is also set out in the government programme 2020–2024.

With the many initiatives it has launched, the **Euroregion Tyrol – South Tyrol – Trentino (Euregio)**, which was established in 2011 and whose chair was held by Tyrol until autumn, serves as a good example of the practical application of European instruments in the interest of regional cooperation and for overcoming borders. The Euregio celebrated its 10th anniversary at the 2021 European Forum Alpbach, where the three regional governors signed the amendment to the agreement on the Euregio's current European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation, adopted in 2020. The level of regional cooperation has been significantly strengthened on a number of topics including matters related to transit traffic

over the Brenner Pass. In order to develop a low-emission “green” Brenner corridor, the Euregio has adopted a strategy for a hydrogen corridor across the Brenner.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, South Tyrol has continued to play a special role in Austria’s neighbourly cooperation. Family members, students and commuters were able to cross borders without having to worry about bureaucracy. Austria also provided assistance with respect to care of patients and medical supplies.

At province level, the South Tyrolean People’s Party (SVP), led by Governor Arno Kompatscher, governs in coalition with the Lega Salvini Alto Adige Südtirol. On the issue of traffic transiting the Brenner Pass, views differ among South Tyrolean businesspeople, politicians and the population.

The COVID-19 pandemic also dealt a serious blow to South Tyrol’s economy. Hardest hit was the tourism sector, which registered declines of 35–40%. Before the COVID-19 crisis, Austria was South Tyrol’s second most important export market, accounting for 10% of exports, while some 10% of Austrian exports to Italy went directly to South Tyrol.

1.3 South East Europe – the Western Balkan States

The six countries of South East Europe, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, which are geographically speaking surrounded by EU Member States, are collectively also referred to as the “Western Balkans”. Considered “the inner courtyard of Europe”, this region has traditionally been a focus of Austrian foreign and European policy. Bilateral relations between Austria and the Western Balkan states are exceptionally close and friendly, with Austria’s commitment to EU enlargement being highly appreciated in the region. In this context, special mention needs to be made of the large diaspora communities involving some 500,000 people living in Austria, who have their roots in the region and form a strong and dynamic link between Austria and their countries of origin.

A particularly important event in the relations between Austria and the region was the Austria-Western Balkans Summit hosted by Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, who welcomed his counterparts from the six states to Vienna on 18 June. In parallel to the heads of government meeting, a conference, bringing together the ministers for EU affairs was held. Discussions focused on EU enlargement and the future of Europe, combating pandemics, and cooperation on migration management.

The issue of vaccine supply played a key role in the context of Austria’s cooperation with the Western Balkan countries on fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. At

the request of the European Commission, Austria assumed a coordinating role in supplying vaccines from the COVAX facility to the Western Balkan countries. Between May and October, Austria thus facilitated the delivery of some 651,000 doses of the Pfizer/Biontech vaccine, which were primarily used to vaccinate key personnel and/or particularly exposed population groups, such as individuals working in the healthcare sector.

On the margins of the Vienna Western Balkans Summit, Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz furthermore announced that Austria stood ready to make available up to one million vaccine doses from its stocks for the vaccination campaigns in the Western Balkans. Consequently, 500,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine were delivered to Bosnia and Herzegovina in August.

Austria also remained committed to promoting regional cooperation, contributing especially to the Berlin Process. Although most of the events were held only virtually due to the pandemic, it was, nevertheless, possible to achieve a key milestone under this process at the beginning of July, when all roaming charges within the region were finally abolished. Efforts aimed at implementing the action plan for setting up a Common Regional Market, however, proved somewhat more difficult, as it was not possible to complete work on agreements on the mutual recognition of professional and academic qualifications as well as on visa-free travel within the region.

Germany announced that it intended to modify the Process' structure building on recent years' experience. As yet, it had, however, not put forward any concrete proposals to this effect. In this context, Austria and many other states participating in the Berlin Process strongly advocated the continuation of this successful initiative.

The normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo remains a key factor in the lasting stabilisation of the region. After having been suspended for an extended period of time, the EU-mediated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina was resumed in 2020. Acting as facilitator, Miroslav Lajčák, EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues, is playing a key role in this context and continued his related efforts with great determination. Dialogue was continued at the level of chief negotiators, two in-person meetings between Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and the new Kosovar Prime Minister Albin Kurti have, as yet however, not succeeded in generating any tangible progress.

Seconding an Austrian diplomat, who acts as a legal advisor, Austria has been supporting the Special Representative's team since April.

Albania

In the parliamentary elections of 25 April, the Socialist Party (**SP**), led by Edi Rama, won 74 of the 140 seats. Achieving over 48% of the vote, it was thus able to defend its absolute majority. Following a longstanding boycott of Parliament by the opposition during the previous legislative period, their elected members fortunately returned to Parliament and assumed their seats.

After having been approved by Parliament, the new government was sworn in by President Meta on 18 September, making it the country's first democratically legitimised government in which the majority of cabinet positions (12 out of a total of 17) are held by women.

Following its 2020 OSCE Chairmanship, Albania continued its strong commitment to international organisations and was – for the first time ever – elected in June as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council for the period 2022/2023.

Despite disappointment over the delay in the opening of EU accession negotiations, Albania continued on its reform path, as highlighted by the European Commission in its annual country report published in October. In this context, particular importance is attached to judicial reform and the vetting of judges and public prosecutors for plausibility of their declarations of assets. The Socialist Party proposed that the vetting process be extended until the end of 2024 to allow sufficient time for all cases to be evaluated and examined. Since February 2020, the **Austrian Development Agency (ADA)** has been implementing the second phase of the International Monitoring Operation (IMO), an EU project that oversees the vetting process involving international experts. Alongside contributing to projects in the judicial sector, **Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC)** is primarily active in the water and sanitation sector and supports Albania in adapting environmental legislation to the EU *acquis communautaire*. The Agency for Education and Internationalisation (**OeAD**) started implementing a project aimed at fostering education opportunities for young people, funded by the City of Vienna, thus continuing its long-standing commitment in this field.

On 5 and 6 May, Federal Minister Karoline Edtstadler visited Tirana for talks with the Albanian President Ilir Meta, Europe and Foreign Minister Olta Xhaçka, EU Chief Negotiator, Minister of State Zef Mazi and with the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Elisa Spiroballi. Together with his Czech and Slovenian counterparts, Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg met President Ilir Meta, Prime Minister Edi Rama, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Olta Xhaçka and EU Chief Negotiator, Minister of State Zef Mazi in Tirana on 22 and 23 May. Prime Minister Edi Rama paid a visit to Vienna on 20 July and held talks with Federal Minister Elisabeth Köstinger. In the context of his trip to Tirana and Durres on 28 and 29 September, Minister of the Interior Karl Nehammer met his Albanian counterpart, Bledi Çuçi. Foreign Minister Michael Linhart visited Tirana from 18 to 20 Novem-

ber, where he held exchanges with Albanian President Ilir Meta, Prime Minister Edi Rama, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Olta Xhaçka and the Chair of the Albanian Parliamentary Committee on European Integration, Jorida Tabaku.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Persistent reform backlog, political blockades, and ethno-nationalist as well as secessionist rhetoric continued to dominate political life in Bosnia and Herzegovina also in 2021. On 1 August, the German Christian Schmidt took over from his Austrian predecessor Valentin Inzko as High Representative of the International Community to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Schmidt's appointment was based on a majority decision by the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council (PIC), however without Russia's consent. Stating that he lacked legal legitimacy as his appointment had not been endorsed by the UN Security Council, Russia, China and the Bosnian Serbs refuse to recognise Schmidt as High Representative.

Prior to these events and using his Bonn Powers, Valentin Inzko, had decreed an amendment to the penal code in July, making – inter alia – the denial of genocide and the glorification of war criminals punishable offences. Reacting to this step, the representatives of the Serb ethnic group largely blocked decision-making processes at state level. Furthermore, the central leadership figure of the Serb ethnic group, Milorad Dodik, continued to advocate the secession of Republika Srpska and, taking unilateral steps, increased his efforts towards transferring competences from the state to the Republika Srpska.

The goal of EU accession – Bosnia and Herzegovina applied for membership in 2016 – remains the strongest factor that could have the power to unite all ethnic groups in the country. However, some political leaders have started to question more and more openly whether this goal is actually realistic. In its annual country report, the European Commission also noted that due to the domestic political situation, last year remained largely unused in terms of implementing further reforms.

In view of the elections to be held in autumn 2022, a reform of the electoral law is a matter of particular urgency. In order to align current regulations with the **European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)**, this reform should not least ensure equal voting rights for all citizens, regardless of their ethnic group affiliation.

However, efforts launched by the international community, especially the EU and the USA, aimed at facilitating a compromise on such a reform have been largely unsuccessful. As yet, the country also still lacks new laws on public procurement, conflicts of interest and on the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council.

Since 2019, the Austrian diplomat Johann Sattler has held the office of EU Special Representative and Head of the EU Delegation to Sarajevo. Since the outset, Austria has contributed to the military CSDP operation for the stabilisation of the

region, EUFOR Althea, and also provides the troop commander, Major General Alexander Platzer.

On 8 March, Foreign Minister Bisera Turković met Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg for talks in Vienna. In the context of a working visit, Minister of the Interior Karl Nehammer met Minister of Security Selmo Cikotić in Sarajevo on 28 April. On 4 May, Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg handed over the first EU4Health vaccines, whose delivery had been coordinated by Austria, in Sarajevo, where he also engaged in an exchange of view with Foreign Minister Bisera Turković and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers Zoran Tegeltija. From 22 to 23 June, Defence Minister Klaudia Tanner visited EUFOR troops in Sarajevo and met with her counterpart Defence Minister Sifet Podžić. His first official journey abroad took the new Foreign Minister Michael Linhart to Sarajevo on 14 and 15 October, where he met with Foreign Minister Bisera Turković and the tripartite State Presidency chaired by Željko Komšić (together with Šefik Džaferović and Milorad Dodik). The President of the National Council, Wolfgang Sobotka, was in Sarajevo on 17 and 18 October and held talks with representatives of both Houses of Parliament, with the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Zoran Tegeltija, and with Foreign Minister Bisera Turković.

Kosovo

Due to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the turbulent developments at domestic policy level, the country has recently only succeeded in achieving progress on certain aspects of its reform efforts aimed at moving closer to the EU.

Early parliamentary elections, held on 14 February, were clearly won by Vetëvendosje, led by Albin Kurti, who stood for election on a common list with Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu. The new government headed by Albin Kurti can rely on the support of a solid majority in Parliament (67 out of a total of 120 MPs). On 4 April, Parliament elected Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu as new President of State.

In local elections, held in autumn, Vetëvendosje was not able to build on its success in the parliamentary elections, and consequently provides the mayor in only four out of 38 municipalities. These local elections also marked the end of an electoral cycle that is hoped to have created the basis for greater institutional stability in the years to come.

Alongside Kosovo's efforts towards joining the EU, the topic of visa liberalisation has been ranking high on the county's EU agenda. As early as July 2018, the European Commission had confirmed that Kosovo fulfilled all the conditions for visa liberalisation. As yet, however, it has not been possible to reach the necessary majority in favour in the Council of the European Union, which is perceived in Kosovo as unjustified discrimination compared with the other five states in the

region. Austria supports visa liberalisation for Kosovo, which is also stipulated in the Austrian government programme.

Kosovo is a priority country of Austrian Development Cooperation. The priority sectors are economic development and employment policies with a focus on rural areas. Austria is also the largest donor in the field of higher education and in terms of contributions to the **Youth Programme of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)**.

Austria contributes to the NATO-led Operation Kosovo Force (KFOR), being the largest non-NATO troop contributor. In addition, Austria provides several law enforcement officers to the EU Rule of Law Mission EULEX Kosovo and seconds one female law enforcement officer to UNMIK.

On the margins of the Prespa Forum on 1 and 2 July, Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg met his counterpart Donika Gërvalla-Schwarz for bilateral discussions. Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen welcomed President Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu for an official working visit to Vienna on 22 June. Federal Minister Heinz Faßmann met Minister for Education Arberie Nagavci in Vienna on 23 September. Minister of the Interior Karl Nehammer travelled to Kosovo, where he met his counterpart Xhelal Svecla for an official working visit on 28 September. Federal Minister Margarete Schramböck met Trade Minister Rozeta Hajdari in Vienna on 10 November. On 15 November, Foreign Minister Michael Linhart held an exchange of views with Foreign Minister Donika Gërvalla-Schwarz on the margins of the FAC in Brussels. On 23 November, Federal Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg welcomed Prime Minister Albin Kurti to Vienna.

Montenegro

Following the elections of August 2020, an expert government was formed in December 2020. From the very outset, however, this government was based on an extremely narrow majority (41 of 80 MPs), which was very heterogenous too. By the middle of the year, this led to an increasing paralysation of government work that went hand in hand with an increasingly pronounced polarisation in society between government supporters and the opposition.

Key events in this context were the fact that Parliament voted in favour of removing Justice Minister Vladimir Leposavić from office on 17 June following the latter's controversial statements about the mass murder in Srebrenica as well as the resolution adopted by Parliament condemning the genocide and its trivialisation or relativisation. Only some of the MPs representing the governing majority voted in favour of these resolutions, which would both not have been adopted had it not been for the support from the opposition.

As government work had largely come to a standstill, progress on reforms was likewise hampered. Such progress – especially with respect to the judiciary and

the rule of law – is, however, essential for the country's headway in its EU accession process. At the beginning of December, Parliament already recorded a backlog of more than 90 unprocessed bills.

On 29 September, Minister of the Interior Karl Nehammer paid a visit to his Montenegrin counterpart Sergej Sekulović, in which context it was agreed that Austria would support Montenegro in the field of border management, providing both technical assistance and personnel support.

North Macedonia

Led by Zoran Zaev, the coalition government formed by the social democratic **SDSM** and the strongest party of the Albanian ethnic group (**DUI**) continued its reform efforts aimed at making further progress in the country's rapprochement with the EU. However, parliamentary work was hampered by the fact that the opposition has repeatedly been able to prevent a quorum through absence, as the government's narrow majority is based on only two MPs.

After having been delayed for almost ten years, a census was held in September. According to preliminary results, the country's population has decreased by around 10% since 2002 to 1.8 million. Following the defeat suffered by the SDSM in the local elections, Zoran Zaev announced his resignation as both head of government and party leader on 31 October. On 12 December, Deputy Prime Minister Dimitar Kovachevski was elected as Zaev's successor at the helm of the SDSM and on 29 December, he was tasked by President Stevo Pendarovski with forming a new government.

After the European Commission had already recommended opening accession negotiations in 2018, which was in principle adopted by the Council of the EU in March 2020, EU accession negotiations with North Macedonia still failed to be initiated in 2021 due to open bilateral issues with Bulgaria. By the end of the year, talks on settling the existing issues were still ongoing between the two neighbours.

In the field of migration policy, North Macedonia remained an important partner of both Austria and the EU. Since February 2016, Austria has been supporting North Macedonia in controlling its borders by providing a contingent of Austrian border guards. In August, Austrian fire brigades contributed successfully to fighting forest fires in the mountainous region along the country's border with Bulgaria.

At the invitation of his counterpart Oliver Spasovski, Minister of the Interior Karl Nehammer paid a visit to Skopje on 27 and 28 April. On 4 and 5 May, Federal Minister Karoline Edtstadler travelled to Skopje at the invitation of Deputy Prime Minister Nikola Dimitrov and met President Stevo Pendarovski, Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, Health Minister Venko Filipche and opposition leader Hristijan Mickoski. At

the invitation of Foreign Minister Bujar Osmani, Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg visited Skopje together with his Slovenian and Czech counterparts on 22 May, where he held meetings with Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, Deputy Prime Minister Nikola Dimitrov and President Stevo Pendarovski. On 1 and 2 July, Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg took part in the Prespa Forum, held in Ohrid. On 18 November, Foreign Minister Michael Linhart travelled to Skopje and held talks with President Stevo Pendarovski, Prime Minister Zoran Zaev and Foreign Minister Bujar Osmani.

Serbia

Following the parliamentary and local elections of June 2020, which had been largely boycotted by the opposition, the Serbian Progressive Party SNS (**EPP**), led by President Aleksandar Vučić, still holds a two-thirds majority in parliament. Presidential and Belgrade City Assembly elections are scheduled for spring 2022. In addition, President Vučić announced that these elections will be combined with early parliamentary elections. An internal political dialogue, launched in 2019 between government and opposition and also involving members of the European Parliament as mediators, translated into a working document involving 16 measures, the government undertook to implement in order to ensure fairer conditions for the elections. The changes relate mainly to the inclusion of representatives from the opposition in the Republic Election Commission and fair access to national media during the election campaign.

The current government led by Prime Minister Ana Brnabić has continued its pro-European course and declared Serbia's accession to the EU a strategic priority for the country. Work on a revision of the constitution, which is to guarantee – above all – greater independence of the judiciary, has been largely completed. The corresponding amendments, which not least fulfil some important reforms required by the EU with respect to strengthening the rule of law in Serbia, still have to be put to a referendum at the beginning of 2022.

Together with Albania and North Macedonia, Serbia initiated the Open Balkans Initiative (originally Mini-Schengen) in July. The aim is to swiftly facilitate the movement of people and goods, integration of labour markets and the abolition of border controls by 2023.

On 29 April, Minister of the Interior Karl Nehammer met his counterpart Aleksandar Vulin in Belgrade. From 10 to 11 June, Speaker of Parliament Ivica Dačić met Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg and President of the National Council Wolfgang Sobotka for talks in Vienna. From 15 to 17 July, Foreign Minister Nikola Selaković travelled to Vienna for an exchange of views with Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg, President of the Federal Council Peter Raggl, Interior Minister Karl Nehammer, Minister of Economic Affairs Margarete Schramböck, Austrian business representatives and members of the

Serbian diaspora. On 6 September, Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz met President Aleksandar Vučić in Belgrade. From 4 to 5 October, Interior Minister Aleksandar Vulin paid a visit to Vienna, where he met Interior Minister Karl Nehammer. From 19 to 20 October, Defence Minister Klaudia Tanner visited Belgrade at the invitation of her counterpart Nebojša Stefanović.

1.4 The European Union's Eastern Neighbourhood and Turkey

1.4.1 Russia

Having already been severely strained since 2014, the EU's relations with Russia deteriorated further, representing – as President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen put it – “a key strategic challenge for the EU”. The respective bones of contention include Russia's repeated violations of international law, of OSCE and Council of Europe principles – which Russia has agreed to adhere to – as well as hybrid threats, cyber and hacker attacks directed against the EU and its Member States, movement of Russian troops on the border with Ukraine and the alarming human rights situation in Russia. Russia's violations of international law and its aggressive actions against individual EU Member States are also further straining bilateral relations between Austria and Russia.

Since 2016, five guiding principles have formed the basis for EU-Russia relations: implementation of the Minsk Agreements to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine; strengthening relations with Eastern Partners and neighbours in Central Asia; strengthening EU resilience; selective engagement with Russia on certain issues such as counter-terrorism; and increased support for Russian civil society and people-to-people contacts especially with a focus on the next generation. These five principles were reaffirmed in the European Council conclusions adopted in June. The EU sanctions imposed against Russia in 2014 in response to the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, which constitutes a violation of international law, were extended due to the conflict in eastern Ukraine – as were the countermeasures imposed by Russia. The same holds true for the targeted sanctions imposed by the EU, which were likewise extended and/or expanded.

The politically motivated conviction and imprisonment of Russian opposition activist Alexey Navalny upon his return to Russia and the brutal action of Russian security forces against peaceful demonstrators led to the listing of the responsible Russian actors under the new EU human rights sanctions regime. In response, Russia imposed sanctions on eight high-level EU and EU Member States' representatives. During the visit HR/VP Josep Borrell paid to Moscow (4–5 February), Russia expelled three diplomats from EU Member States. A series of mutual expulsions were triggered by the fact that the Czech Republic publicly stated that Russian intelligence officers had been responsible for the 2014 explosions

at the ammunition depot in Vrbetice. In return, Russia declared the Czech Republic and the USA “unfriendly states”, which had a particularly negative impact on the functioning of these two countries’ diplomatic missions in Russia. Reacting to all these developments, the European Commission and HR/VP Josep Borrell presented a joint communication on the EU’s relations with Russia on 16 June. Under the heading of “Push back, constrain and engage”: addressing a strategic challenge, it includes recommendations on how to strengthen the EU’s policy towards Russia. Formal summit meetings, negotiations on a new EU-Russia framework agreement and the visa dialogue remain suspended. Within the EU, Austria has advocated a dual track approach vis-à-vis Russia: a tough stance where necessary, dialogue where possible. Russia considers the post-Soviet area as its sphere of influence in which it may pursue national, economic and geopolitical interests as freely as possible. Within this area, however, Russia is facing rising competition not only from the West, but also from Turkey and China. In the current political crisis in Belarus, Russia supports Aleksandr Lukashenko as “legitimate president” against the protest movement, which Russia considers illegitimate. This crisis at the same time offers Russia the opportunity for fostering closer integration of Belarus with Russia, especially with a view to security and defence.

In view of the differences with the USA and the EU, Russia is increasingly looking towards the East and the South. Today, relations with China, Japan, South Korea and India are better than they have ever been in recent history. Moscow sees the Chinese Silk Road Initiative (“One Belt, One Road”) as a potential stimulus for further economic development of the Eurasian region. Within the context of the Eurasian Economic Union, Russia is trying to promote economic links with Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The relationship between Russia and Turkey is very ambivalent. While Russia’s and Turkey’s interests indeed complement each other in some areas, such as energy, transport, tourism and military technology, tensions persist over Syria, Turkish activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, Libya as well as Ukraine and the Crimea. In the Nagorno-Karabakh region, Turkey’s role in the conflict has created a new regional balance of power in the South Caucasus. Through its military and diplomatic engagement, Russia has been able to contribute to the survival of the Assad regime while at the same time securing its military bases in Syria, thereby consolidating its position in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. Likewise, Russia continued to exercise its influence further to the West, in Libya. Russia is in two minds about the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and the Taliban’s subsequent assumption of power in the country: on the one hand, this means increased risks to security in strategically and economically important Central Asian countries, while – on the other hand – it opens up new scope for Russian diplomacy, including, for instance under the “Moscow Format” consultations on Afghanistan, held in Moscow on 20 October. Seeking to position itself as a geopolitical and economic player in Africa alongside China and the Western states, Russia has further developed its relations with a number of African countries.

The domestic political situation remained stable. In the Duma elections, which were held from 17 to 19 September and overshadowed by reports of electoral fraud, the Kremlin's United Russia party once again secured a constitutional majority, winning 49.8% of the vote. Any genuine opposition had, however, already been eliminated in the lead-up to the elections.

The human rights situation in Russia has seen further ongoing dramatic deterioration. The trend towards sustained restrictions on fundamental rights and the space for independent civil society that had already characterised the past years continued. The objective pursued by these measures is to eliminate any tendencies whatsoever that could have a potentially destabilising effect on the domestic political system. Furthermore, the Russian authorities are also increasingly targeting other states' contacts with Russian civil society. The European Parliament awarded the Sakharov Prize 2021 to Alexey Navalny, and Dmitry Muratov the editor-in-chief of the Kremlin-critical newspaper "Novaya Gazeta" received the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize together with Filipino journalist Maria Ressa.

1.4.2 Eastern Partnership States

The **Eastern Partnership (EaP)**, established by the European Union as cooperation and assistance framework for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, seeks to foster the partner countries' rapprochement to European standards and values.

On 28 June, Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko suspended his country's participation in the EaP. As the EU and its Member States refused high-level political contacts with the regime, the seat for Belarus at important EaP meetings remained empty. Instead, repeated EU meetings were held with representatives of the country's democratic forces. In autumn the Minsk regime suspended the readmission agreement with the EU, and on 9 November, the EU, for its part, suspended visa facilitation provisions for officials of the Belarusian regime.

The work of the EaP was further affected by the post-conflict situation surrounding the Nagorno-Karabakh region, the very tense situation in eastern Ukraine, slow-paced reforms and persistent democratic deficits in partner countries, as well as the fact that due to the COVID-19 pandemic many meetings were either not held, postponed or held only as video conferences. Exceptions to this situation were the foreign ministers' meeting in Brussels on 15 November (attended by Federal Minister Michael Linhart) and, held likewise in Brussels, the 6th EaP Summit on 15 December (attended by Federal Chancellor Karl Nehammer) where the attending partner countries agreed on a balanced and forward-looking summit declaration. The EaP has proven particularly successful in the areas of trade and SMEs, mobility of people, education and connectivity of transport and energy routes.

Austria works towards a democratic, stable and prosperous Eastern Neighbourhood of sovereign and resilient states. In this context, Austria attaches particular importance to upholding values (such as democracy, the rule of law, human rights including minority rights, respect for gender issues, and non-discrimination and inclusion), tangible benefits for people (especially young people), a green agenda, comprehensive human security, e-democracy, decentralisation, social cohesion and comprehensive resilience as well as addressing the topics of emigration and brain drain. Austria contributed actively to the preparations for the EaP summit, including through a non-paper coordinated by Austria and introduced by eleven Member States on regular review of the common values' implementation by the partner countries.

Armenia

Armenia's domestic and foreign policy was once again dominated by the conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. In February, a stir was caused by the call for Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's resignation issued by the then Chief of General Staff and a number of other senior officers. This move followed a demand to the same effect made by President Armen Sarkissian and Catholicos Karekin II, among other figures. To this, the Head of Government responded by dismissing the Chief of Staff – which triggered a week-long conflict between the Prime Minister, the President and the country's generals. On 27 May, Foreign Minister Ara Ayvazyan resigned. In view of the domestic situation new elections proved inevitable and were held on 20 June. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's Civil Contract Party was able to score a convincing victory, winning almost 54% of the votes and leaving the "Armenia Alliance" led by former President Robert Kocharyan and the "I Have Honour Alliance" far behind. International election observers reported no significant irregularities. The outcome of these elections eventually led to stabilisation of the domestic political situation.

This did, however, not apply to the situation along the un-demarcated common border with Azerbaijan, where the situation repeatedly became critical. As Azerbaijani soldiers had not met with Armenian resistance when advancing into disputed border zones, the government was accused of abandoning Armenian territory. However, the Russian-led intergovernmental defence alliance, Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) that also includes Armenia, saw no reason for heeding its member's call and refrained from intervening. At military level, Armenia is currently dependent on Russia.

In the local elections held in October, the ruling party, however, suffered major losses, which were especially heavy in the Syunik province that is most affected by the border conflict. Furthermore, it also no longer provides the mayor of the second largest city, Gyumri.

In its relations with the EU, the Armenian government places high hopes – especially regarding the country's economic development – in the implementation of the **Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA)**, in force since 1 March. The EU also provides considerable funding to support Armenia's economic and investment plan "Recovery, Resilience and Reform".

Armenia is a priority country of Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC). On 1 August, ADA's country office in Yerevan, which had previously been managed from Tbilisi, was transformed into an independent coordination office.

Azerbaijan

The fact that the country had won the 44-day war in the conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region in autumn 2020 contributed to a further consolidation of the rule of President Ilham Aliyev. The human rights situation remained problematic, and the strict measures taken in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic also served to further restrict fundamental freedoms.

Efforts towards diversifying the country's economy continue, seeking to counter its strong dependence on crude oil and natural gas. Azerbaijan is furthermore striving to position itself as a central transport hub on the international north-south and east-west axes of the new Silk Road.

In the territories reclaimed in the 44-day war, Azerbaijan announced plans to construct modern prestige projects, including smart cities. The city of Shusha was made the country's cultural capital. However, reconstruction, mine clearance and repopulation of the reclaimed areas will still require huge financial and organisational efforts.

The persistent and ongoing expansion of the country's foreign policy ties with Turkey has come to play a tangible and dominant role. In its relations with the EU, Azerbaijan is pursuing a moderate course of rapprochement. The negotiations on a comprehensive Strategic Agreement, launched in 2017, were continued.

Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

The ceasefire agreement of 9 November 2020, brokered by Russia in the 44-day war over the Nagorno-Karabakh region, an area inhabited by Armenians and currently secured by Russian peace troops, left important issues untouched and/or proved difficult to be implemented in practice. The relationship between the parties to the conflict is characterised by mutual mistrust. However, Azerbaijan released a number of prisoners and in return Armenia handed over minefield maps of the disputed areas.

In the context of the ceasefire, Azerbaijan attaches key importance to the opening of transport connections across the entire region, and especially between

Azerbaijan and its exclave Nakhichevan. This issue has been the topic of discussions held between the deputy prime ministers of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia since February. On this topic, Armenia strictly opposes the establishment of a fixed corridor that would cut through its territory.

The year was marked by repeated clashes and fighting at numerous sections along the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which claimed deaths and casualties. Since the two states gained independence, the border has not been demarcated and its detailed course remains a matter of dispute.

No mention of the future status of the Nagorno-Karabakh region is made in the ceasefire agreement. The position held by Azerbaijan is that the conflict has been resolved and that a special status for the region is out of the question. The representatives of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, however, rule out any integration into the Azerbaijani state.

Azerbaijan strongly criticised the OSCE Minsk Group (France, Russia and the USA) stating that it had not contributed to a solution of the conflict. Armenia, on the other hand, supports retaining the format. Another format that had been put forward is a “3+3 South Caucasus format”, which would include Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as Russia, Turkey and Iran. The goal pursued by this approach is contributing to confidence building and improving cooperation in the region. In this context, a first meeting took place in Moscow in December and was attended - except for Georgia - by the said states’ deputy foreign ministers.

The EU sought to contribute at political level, stepping up its relevant efforts. Based on a mandate granted by HR/VP Josep Borrell, Federal Minister Schallenberg, together with his Lithuanian and Romanian counterparts, paid a visit to the three South Caucasus states in June. This trip also served to demonstrate the EU’s continued security and economic interest to the region, also as a counterweight to the increased Russian and Turkish presence.

Mediated by Russian President Putin, the Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and the Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev met in Sochi on 26 November. Building on this and mediated by the President of the European Council Charles Michel, they subsequently met in Brussels on 14 December. In the context of these encounters, it was agreed to build and/or reactivate a railway line between Azerbaijan and the exclave of Nakhichevan, leading through Armenia. In addition, concrete steps are to be taken towards demarcating the common border between the two countries. A hotline to be established between the two countries’ defence ministers is to contribute to avoiding bloody incidents. Austria has offered to host any potential dialogue between the parties to the dispute.

Belarus

In the aftermath of the rigged presidential election of 9 August 2020, in which incumbent Aleksandr Lukashenko claimed victory, peaceful protests were held by the civilian population across the country. These have ever since been met with ongoing and unabated repression, violence and the political and criminal prosecution of the independent media, members of the opposition and civilians.

Austria has continued its commitment to establishing and promoting dialogue with the Belarusian democracy movement. Following a round table meeting involving representatives of the three opposition groups, held in November 2020, another round of dialogue was conducted in January involving the National Anti-Crisis Management created by Pavel Latushka.

Apart from supporting the civilian population, the MFA organised a series of seminars involving international experts to facilitate the drafting of a constitution in accordance with international standards and in line with democratic, constitutional and human rights values. In addition, Austria supports the **International Accountability Platform for Belarus**, established in March and committed to fighting impunity of Belarusian authorities.

Another escalation occurred on 24 May, when a Ryan Air flight from Athens to Vilnius was forced to make an emergency landing in Minsk following an alleged bomb threat. Officials boarding the plane, however, arrested the founder of NEXTA-TV and operator of the second largest Belarusian Telegram channel, blogger Roman Protasevich, and his girlfriend. This was met with strong international reactions and subsequently led to extended sanctions against the regime. Furthermore, an independent investigation was initiated by the International Civil Aviation Authority.

At the end of May, the European Commission presented a **Comprehensive Plan of Economic Support to a Future Democratic Belarus** under which support of three billion euros is to be made available as soon as Belarus has completed its democratic transition. The plan covers economic aid, support for structural reforms and investments in sustainable development, infrastructure and digitalisation. While its relations with the West have deteriorated, Minsk has taken steps towards deeper union with Russia, and on 9 September, the successful completion of bilateral negotiations on 28 programmes under this union was announced in Moscow.

From August onwards, direct flights from Baghdad and Istanbul to Minsk increased significantly, as did the number of illegal border crossings into Poland and Lithuania with thousands of refugees and migrants arriving in the area bordering the EU. In the face of this instrumentalization of human beings, the EU demonstrated solidarity with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia and on 2 December adopted a fifth package extending the sanctions against the Belarusian regime and against indi-

viduals as well as entities close to it. The regime responded by imposing counter-sanctions, relating in particular to food imports. Austria strongly opposed this instrumentalization of migrants as a weapon or means of exerting pressure against the EU. The situation at the border was also the topic of a joint visit Federal Ministers Alexander Schallenberg and Karl Nehammer paid to their counterparts in Lithuania in August. In this context they called for an intensified dialogue with the countries of origin and transit, which subsequently also proved effective. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the opposition leader of the Belarusian democratic movement, has visited Vienna four times since the elections, most recently in the framework of the international conference on Belarus organised by Austria – at the joint invitation of Federal Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg and Federal Minister Michael Linhart – on 22 November. Virtual participation of several EU foreign ministers and the involvement of a wide range of actors, facilitated broad-based dialogue on the future of Belarus and sent a strong signal of support for Belarusian civil society.

Georgia

Following the parliamentary elections in October 2020 and the subsequent allegations of electoral fraud against the ruling party Georgian Dream, the leader of the largest opposition party – United National Movement – Nika Melia, was arrested in February, officially for refusing to pay bail in connection with investigations initiated against him. This led to the resignation of Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, who had – without success – opposed the arrest within the government. On 22 February, former Minister of Defence Irakli Garibashvili, was appointed as his successor as Prime Minister.

A new impetus was added to the EU/US-led negotiation process by the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, who identified five areas to be addressed as a priority: judicial reform, reform of the electoral law, power-sharing in parliament and early elections. On 19 April and only after renewed pressure from the EU, a total of seven parties signed an agreement that paved the way to parliament for most opposition parties. Although the United National Movement did not sign the agreement, its leader was released on bail and the party was able to return to parliament. Together with his Romanian and Lithuanian counterparts, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg visited Georgia on behalf of the EU at the end of June, and in this context insisted on concrete progress to be made in the field of judicial reform.

The ruling party pushed controversial appointments to the country's supreme court through parliament. A move, the opposition and EU/US mediators considered as being inconsistent with the negotiated agreement – which was subsequently unilaterally annulled by the ruling party at the end of July. In early September, the government waived the second tranche of the EU macro-financial

assistance granted to manage the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In doing so, it anticipated a negative EU decision (including for lack of judicial reform).

In the conflict involving the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the process known as “borderisation” (fortification of the previously green border between the areas controlled by Tbilisi and those controlled by Sukhumi and Tskhinvali respectively) continued. Relations with the EU continued to focus on the implementation of the Association Agreement. In view of the aforementioned tensions, EU Special Representative Toivo Klaar and the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM), to which Austria continued to contribute, sought to de-escalate the situation. Austria continued to fully support the EU Non-Recognition and Engagement Policy towards Abkhazia and South Ossetia and again supported the resolution on the situation of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, introduced by Georgia within the framework of the United Nations.

At the beginning of July, Austria supported Georgia, an ADC priority country, by providing a bilateral donation of urgently needed COVID-19 vaccines, making available 5,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine. On 12 and 13 October, President Salomé Zourabichvili paid an official visit to Austria.

Moldova

The beginning of the year was marked by a stalemate between the pro-European President Maia Sandu, in office since the end of 2020, and the socialist party led by former President Dodon as well as the Shor Party. Eventually, the previous government remained in office on a caretaker basis led by Foreign Minister Aureliu Ciocoi, who has been acting Prime Minister since 31 December 2020.

After having been seized by the President, the Constitutional Court ruled on 15 April that the conditions for the dissolution of Parliament were met (inability to form a government with full powers within three months and/or two failed attempts by Parliament to pass a vote of confidence in a Prime Minister). This was followed on 23 April by a resolution adopted in Parliament, and supported in particular by socialist MPs, to remove the president of the Constitutional Court and a declaration of no confidence against three of the Court's judges. This breach of the constitution triggered strong international reactions, to which the presumptive successor of the president of the Constitutional Court reacted by withdrawing from his “mandate”. Referring to procedural and substantive shortcomings, the Constitutional Court then resolved on 28 April to lift the state of emergency (officially introduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, unofficially, however, to delay the elections) – and as soon as this decision had been proclaimed, Parliament was dissolved.

The parliamentary elections subsequently held on 11 July, were won by the Party of Action and Solidarity, founded by Maia Sandu. Sworn in on 6 August, the new government led by Prime Minister Natalia Gavrilita, faces the challenge of having to live up to high expectations. The most important tasks to be addressed in this respect are the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, combating poverty and corruption, promoting economic recovery and tackling the strong emigration from the country (the country's population has declined from 4.3 million at the beginning of the 1990s to currently 2.6 million). **Austria supports the new pro-European government and the reform course it announced.** Parliament subsequently passed new laws aimed on the one hand at strengthening institutions tasked with fighting corruption and at paving the way for important international financial agreements on the other (adoption of the Customs Code as a prerequisite for receiving the second tranche of EU Macro-Financial Assistance).

The Swedish OSCE Chairmanship confirmed Ambassador Thomas Mayr-Harting as Special Representative for the Transdniestrian Settlement Process. Under the respective OSCE formats, he held talks with all parties.

On 27 April, Interim Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Aureliu Ciocoi paid a visit to Austria and met Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg. On 21 and 22 October, President Maia Sandu paid an official visit to Austria. Moldova is an Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC) priority country, and was extensively supported by the City of Vienna in combating the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ukraine

As outlined in the Austrian government programme, Ukraine is an important partner of the EU in Eastern Europe. Therefore, Austria's goal is Ukraine's economic and political rapprochement with Europe.

At domestic policy level, President Volodymyr Zelensky has come under increasing pressure as the reform of the judicial system – also as a result of the tense COVID-19 and economic situation – did not seem to make headway for quite some time. On 27 March, both the chairman and a further judge of the Constitutional Court were dismissed, which was regarded as unconstitutional by legal experts. This move was followed by several government reshuffles and the replacement of the Speaker of Parliament, Dmytro Rasumkov, on 7 October in connection with the controversial law on de-oligarchisation.

From 7 to 8 July, the **Ukraine Reform Conference** was held in Vilnius in a hybrid format and various reform processes (relating to the judiciary, the military and the fight against corruption as well as increasing resilience and combating disinformation) were discussed.

On 23 August, Kyiv hosted the founding summit of the Crimea Platform. This event was attended by Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg who highlighted

Austria's full solidarity with the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine. Initiated by President Volodymyr Zelensky, this platform focuses on the one hand on keeping the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia – which constitutes a violation of international law – on the international agenda, and on the other hand on promoting initiatives towards ending its occupation. During his visit to Kyiv, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg also met Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal for bilateral talks. At bilateral level, Austria donated a total of 250,000 doses of the Astra-Zeneca COVID-19 vaccine at the end of August. The 23rd annual EU-Ukraine Summit was held in Kyiv on 12 October. The topics covered by the Joint Summit Declaration include provisions related to further support to Ukraine in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, CFSP/ CSDP cooperation, and cooperation on economic reforms as well as in the field of energy. Other agreements adopted include the Common Aviation Area Agreement governing civil aviation and Ukraine's cooperation under Horizon Europe, Creative Europe and the EURATOM programmes.

From 5 to 7 October, the second President of the Austrian National Council, Doris Bures, paid a visit to Ukraine and represented Austria at the official ceremony commemorating the 80th anniversary of the Babyn Yar massacre.

Throughout the year, there were repeated massive movements of Russian troops along the Ukrainian border, which Russia, however, dismissed as training manoeuvres. In December, Russian troops were again being built up near the Ukrainian border in the course of which Russian President Vladimir Putin demanded written guarantees from the USA and NATO precluding any further eastward expansion of NATO and thus membership of Ukraine or Georgia. Austria took a very clear stance, highlighting its position that a country's security policy orientation is to be based on its own sovereign decision. No progress was made in the conflict in eastern Ukraine. There were, however, repeated violations of the ceasefire agreement of July 2020 and the OSCE observers' freedom of movement in the occupied territories was impeded, as was their ability to fulfil their mandate.

In unison with its EU partners, Austria has continued to condemn both the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula as violating international law and the destabilisation of eastern Ukraine by Russia. It furthermore supports the relevant sanctions regime as well as the EU's non-recognition policy. In this context, Austria also supported the related initiatives in various international fora and relevant resolutions within the framework of the United Nations.

Austria is one of the largest foreign investors in Ukraine, and Austrian companies are particularly well represented in the financial sector. Furthermore, Austrian companies operate around 200 branches, of which around 25 are production sites, in the country.

1.4.3 Turkey

The Turkish economy showed clear signs of recovery, with the government forecasting annual growth of more than 10%, while the World Bank and other international institutions projected growth of 8.5%. At the same time, however, inflation rose to over 20%, partly attributable to rising food and import prices. At the end of the year, the official unemployment rate ranged at 12% (reaching 22% for young people). Inflation and high unemployment were particularly hard on lower income groups. Large sections of the population experienced a noticeable loss of purchasing power. According to World Bank figures, per capita income fell to the levels of 2006 and 2007. In the aftermath of interest rate cuts, the Turkish lira fell to a record low at the end of November. Austrian economic relations with Turkey, nevertheless, continued to develop positively, recording a trade volume of around 4 billion euros. Some 250 companies financed with Austrian capital are active in Turkey.

The difficult economic situation was also strongly reflected in domestic policy debates. The Turkish government was confronted with declining opinion poll ratings and stepped-up political pressure on opposition parties, especially on the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (**HDP**). On 17 March, the Chief Public Prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Appeals (also known as Court of Cassation) announced that he had filed a request for closure of the HDP with the Constitutional Court. The procedure on closing the HDP was opened by the Constitutional Court in June, by year-end the Court's decision (requiring a majority of two-thirds of its 15 members) was still pending. The EU expressed great concern over the initiation of the closure procedure, including in statements by HR/VP Josep Borrell and Commissioner Oliver Varhelyi. Austria also criticised the procedure for posing a threat to political pluralism and democracy. International criticism was also voiced over Turkey's withdrawal from the **Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)** on 1 July. On 11 March, ministers from 16 EU Member States, including Federal Ministers Karoline Edtstadler and Susanne Raab, as well as Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg, had already called on Turkey in an open letter to reverse its decision on withdrawing. Turkey continued to fail to implement the ruling of the **European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)** in the Osman Kavala case, which led the Council of Europe to initiate infringement proceedings against Turkey on 2 December.

Although there was some easing compared to 2020, the EU's relations with Turkey remained difficult. On 25 March, the European Council declared its willingness to intensify cooperation with Turkey in a phased, proportionate and reversible manner subject to certain conditionalities. At the same time, Turkey was warned against renewed provocations or unilateral measures in violation of international law. In its conclusions on Turkey of 24 June, the European Council wel-

came the ongoing de-escalation in the Eastern Mediterranean and reiterated the EU's readiness to engage with Turkey to enhance cooperation in a number of areas of common interest, subject to the established conditionalities set out in March. The European Council also agreed to continue EU support for Syrian refugees in Turkey (an additional 3.5 billion euros until 2024), stating that it expected Turkey in the future to make a positive contribution towards the resolution of regional crises and highlighted that the targeting of political parties, human rights defenders and the media represented major setbacks for human rights in Turkey and ran counter to Turkey's obligation to respect democracy and the rule of law. **High-level talks between the EU and Turkey** were held inter alia on the topics of migration, climate change and health. On 7 October, Turkey was the last G20 country to ratify the Paris Climate Agreement. The European Commission published its annual report on Turkey on 19 October, criticising regressions in the field of democracy, increased pressure on civil society and the opposition, and worrying developments with respect to the rule of law, fundamental rights and independence of the judiciary. The European Commission report confirmed the standstill in the accession negotiations with Turkey. Austria is in favour of breaking-off EU accession negotiations with Turkey as the country has moved further and further away from the EU in recent years, including with regard to upholding minimum democratic standards. Considering the central role Turkey plays inter alia in the field of the economy, security and migration – Austria suggests developing an EU-Turkey neighbourhood concept.

On the margins of an international conference in Rome, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg and Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu met for bilateral talks on 28 June, and on the margins of the Crimea Platform on 23 August. On 25 October, Federal Minister Michael Linhart and Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu held a telephone conversation. From 6 to 9 September, the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly, Mustafa Şentop, attended the World Conference of Speakers of Parliament of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in Vienna, where he met, among others, the President of the National Council, Wolfgang Sobotka. From 6 to 9 June, Akif **Çağatay Kılıç, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Grand National Assembly**, was in Austria and held talks with MP Pamela Rendi-Wagner and Secretary General Peter Launsky-Tieffenthal. Muhammed Fatih Toprak, Chairman of the Austrian-Turkish Friendship Group in the Turkish Parliament, visited Austria from 16 to 25 April and held working discussions with the President of the National Council Wolfgang Sobotka and Secretary General Peter Launsky-Tieffenthal. On 19 November, Secretary General Peter Launsky-Tieffenthal travelled to Ankara for bilateral consultations with the Turkish Deputy Foreign Ministers Yavuz Selim Kıran and Faruk Kaymakcı.

1.4.4 Central Asia

Developments in Central Asia were also determined by the COVID-19 pandemic and the management of its impacts. The **European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)** forecast a recovery of the Central Asian economies and average growth of almost 5%. The other key topic that dominated the agenda alongside the pandemic, was the crisis in Afghanistan and concerns about a possible spillover to the neighbouring Central Asian states. Reacting to these developments, Austria adopted a multi-pronged approach. The primary goal pursued in this context was to preserve regional stability and prevent – at security policy level – the opening-up of a black hole in Central Asia. By joining forces, the objective was to ensure that Afghanistan was not again evolving into a safe haven for international terrorism.

On the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York, Austria organised a round table on Afghanistan on 21 September. Chaired by Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg, the meeting was also attended by the foreign ministers of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. Previously, on 30 August, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg and Federal Minister Karl Nehammer had already invited their Central Asian counterparts to a virtual conference to jointly analyse the threat posed by the crisis in Afghanistan and the possibilities for support. In the context of the international efforts aimed at countering the COVID-19 pandemic, Austria supported Central Asia by donating vaccines (50,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine were sent to Tajikistan and 150,000 doses to Uzbekistan).

As an expression of Austria's solidarity, Federal Minister Michael Linhart visited four of the five Central Asian republics from 4 to 9 November. Taking place in the context of the ReFocus Austria economic initiative, the Federal Minister was accompanied by a large Austrian business delegation, also seeking to add new impetus to economic relations with Central Asia.

Kazakhstan

On 16 December, Kazakhstan celebrated the 30th anniversary of its independence. In his state of the nation address, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev affirmed the country's commitment to continuing its reform and modernisation course. Overcoming the economic difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Kazakh economy showed clear signs of recovery. The government expected economic growth to range at around 3.5%, representing a return to the 2019 levels. In the energy sector, the country, which is heavily dependent on oil export revenues, seeks to focus increasingly on renewable energies (especially hydrogen). By 2030, Kazakhstan intends to increase the share of renewable energies to 15% and the share of environmentally friendly energies to 40%. However, Presi-

dent Tokayev also announced plans to examine the country's potential entry into nuclear energy.

In terms of trade balance, Kazakhstan is Austria's most important economic partner in Central Asia. At the beginning of September, the Speaker of the Kazakh Parliament Nurlan Nigmatulin attended the World Conference of Speakers of Parliament of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in Vienna, where he met inter alia with President of the National Council Wolfgang Sobotka. On the margins of the UNGA, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg met his Kazakh counterpart Mukhtar Tileuberdi on 21 September. On the same day, the Kazakh Foreign Minister also took part in the Round Table on Afghanistan, organised by Austria.

The 10th meeting of the Austrian-Kazakh Joint Economic Commission and a meeting of the Austrian-Kazakh Business Council took place in Nur-Sultan on 23 September.

Economic relations between Kazakhstan and the EU were marked by an upward trend (50% increase in EU investments in the first half of the year). From 25 to 27 November, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev paid a visit to Brussels, where he met inter alia with the President of the EU Council Charles Michel and the President of the Commission Ursula von der Leyen.

Kyrgyzstan

The early presidential elections, held in Kyrgyzstan on 11 January, were won by Sadyr Shaparov, receiving almost 80% of the vote. The OSCE Election Observation Mission reported that elections had been competitive, the playing field for candidates had, however, been uneven. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's election observation mission was headed by Member of the National Council, Reinhold Lopatka. In the course of the elections, approval was also obtained to hold a referendum on the future form of government. This referendum was then held – together with local elections – on 11 April and generated broad popular support for transforming Kyrgyzstan into a presidential republic. In the parliamentary elections held on 28 November, the pro-government parties were able to achieve the best results. At the end of April, a border dispute with neighbouring Tajikistan triggered an armed conflict.

On 30 September, Foreign Minister Ruslan Kazakbayev paid a visit to Austria and met Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg for an exchange of views. Federal Minister Michael Linhart took part in the first EU-Central Asia Economic Forum in Bishkek on 5 November. On the margins of this Economic Forum, he held talks with Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov and Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Ruslan Kazakbayev. The two foreign ministers agreed on and signed a cooperation programme between their ministries for the years 2022 and 2023. Furthermore, an Austrian-Kyrgyz business forum was held.

Tajikistan

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous Tajik migrant workers (who were active mainly in Russia) had to leave their host countries, which meant that the Tajik economy lacked important transfer payments. Breaking out at the end of April, the border conflict with Kyrgyzstan also led to fatalities on the Tajik side. Following the Taliban's assumption of power in neighbouring Afghanistan, the Tajik government feared a spillover of the crisis, especially due to possible infiltration by terrorists and extremists. Accompanied by a large business delegation, Federal Minister Michael Linhart paid a visit to Tajikistan on 6 November and had meetings with Deputy Prime Minister Usmonali Usmonzoda and Foreign Minister Shirojiddin Muhriddin. An Austrian-Tajik business forum was also convened. Austrian companies are successfully active in Tajikistan, especially in the hydropower sector. Hosted by Tajikistan, the EU and Central Asian foreign ministers convened for their annual Ministerial Meeting in Dushanbe on 24 November.

Turkmenistan

2021 was declared the Year of Peace and Trust in Turkmenistan, which celebrated the 30th anniversary of its independence in September. In early August, Turkmenistan hosted the 3rd Consultative Meeting of the Heads of Central Asian States. On 12 November, Turkmenistan for the first time took part as observer in the summit of the Organization of Turkic States. Against the background of the critical developments in Afghanistan, which is also home to a Turkmen minority of about one million people, neutral Turkmenistan endeavoured to adopt a balanced stance and sought to support the Afghan population. On 9 November, Federal Minister Michael Linhart paid a visit to Turkmenistan and held talks *inter alia* with President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov and Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov. In the context of this meeting, a cooperation agreement covering the years 2022 and 2023 was signed between the two foreign ministries. Simultaneously, an Austrian-Turkmen round table on bilateral economic relations was convened. Turkmenistan, whose economy depends on revenues from gas exports, continued its efforts towards diversifying its export routes and markets. On 21 January, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan signed a memorandum on the joint exploitation of the Dostlug oil field in the Caspian Sea. International reports on the human rights situation in Turkmenistan were again very critical.

Uzbekistan

As expected, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev was re-elected in the presidential elections of 24 October, winning 80% of the vote. OSCE election observers criticised above all the fact that no opposition candidates had been admitted.

At foreign policy level, Uzbekistan continued to pursue an active course, especially with regard to maintaining good neighbourly relations. By hosting international conferences, Uzbekistan increasingly sought to raise its foreign policy profile. Recognizing the reforms implemented thus far, Uzbekistan was admitted as a beneficiary country under the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP+) in April. Another goal pursued by the country is accession to the WTO. In November, the EU-Uzbekistan Cooperation Council was held in Brussels. Negotiations on a new, deeper Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU continued. Relations with Russia have intensified, although Uzbekistan reacted somewhat cautiously to Russia's invitation to join the Eurasian Economic Union (in which the country has held observer status since 2020). Afghanistan continued to play a special role in Uzbekistan's foreign policy. While Uzbekistan has, on the one hand, been interested in continuing planned infrastructural projects in Afghanistan even after the Taliban's takeover, it – on the other hand – fears that radical elements from Afghanistan could infiltrate Uzbekistan. Against this background, the Uzbek army therefore conducted a number of military exercises in the border region, also jointly with Russian troops. Although the border to Afghanistan had been closed, Uzbekistan established itself as a hub for evacuations from Afghanistan. Likewise, humanitarian aid supplies were sent to Afghanistan via Uzbekistan.

In the context of his visit to Central Asia, Federal Minister Michael Linhart paid an official visit to Uzbekistan in November. At the meeting with his Uzbek counterpart Abdulaziz Kamilov, the two foreign ministers signed a cooperation programme between their ministries for the period 2022–2023. Together with the Deputy Prime Minister of Uzbekistan, Sardor Umurzakov, Federal Minister Michael Linhart kicked-off a business mission involving some thirty Austrian companies under the ReFocus Austria economic initiative. Another outcome of this visit was the donation of 150,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines sent by Austria to Uzbekistan in November. On 15 July, the Austrian Honorary Consulate in Tashkent was opened as the first official Austrian representation in Uzbekistan.

1.5 The European Union's Southern Neighbourhood

The EU's southern neighbourhood comprises Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia. The EU's Southern Neighbourhood Policy creates the framework for bilateral political relations with these ten partner countries, whereby Palestine is not recognised as a state by the EU and cooperation with Syria is currently suspended. EU Association Agreements have been concluded with Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia. These agreements are being implemented on the basis of jointly prepared action plans and/or partnership priorities on a wide range of topics agreed at the level of the EU HR/VP and the respective foreign ministers in Association Councils and

developed in committees and subcommittees. Furthermore, the EU has concluded an Interim Association Agreement with the Palestinian Authority.

Regional cooperation is supplemented and further deepened by multilateral institutions, such as the Union for the Mediterranean, which is composed of the EU Member States, the ten partner countries and all other countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea.

1.5.1 North Africa

In Egypt, the government continued its programme of reforms supported by the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)**. At the same time, it maintained its efforts aimed at mitigating the hardship suffered by large parts of the population as a result of subsidy reductions and price increases by implementing social measures. Although dampened by the COVID-19 pandemic, economic growth remained positive. Egypt continued to host one of the largest registered refugee populations worldwide in urban areas.

Against the backdrop of the fight against terrorism through stricter legislation, human rights remained under pressure. According to reports from human rights organisations, numerous members of the political opposition, including human rights defenders, are in prison, some in very severe conditions. On 11 September, a national human rights strategy was presented, which focuses on social and economic rights and provides a basis for possible improvements. After having been in effect for four years, the state of emergency was ended on 25 October.

At foreign policy level, the Al-Sisi government – supported by a strategic partnership with the USA – sought to defuse tensions in the region, but also undertook efforts towards improving relations with other major powers. Egypt continued to play a mediating role between the Palestinian political forces. In the military conflict that flared up in Gaza in May, Egypt successfully brokered a ceasefire and in cooperation with the UN contributes towards consolidating it. On 13 September, President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi welcomed Naftali Bennett to Egypt, who is the first Israeli Prime Minister in over ten years to pay an official visit to the country.

Relations with Ethiopia remained strained due to the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam project. Mediation efforts aimed at easing the situation continued to be undertaken by the **African Union**, but also by the USA and the EU. In this context Austria also offered technical expertise. On 15 September, the UN Security Council dealt with the issue for the first time and adopted a presidential statement.

In **Algeria**, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the political, economic and social crisis. Held in June and November, the parliamentary and local elections were again marked by boycotts and low voter turnout (23% and 36% respectively), and

resulted in a majority for the pro-system **FLN** and **RND**, while support for the classical opposition parties plunged. Thus, the political reform calendar, launched by President Abdelmajid Tebboune with a constitutional reform in November 2020, effectively ended with a return to the status quo ante 2019 – instead of bringing about reforms towards promoting enhanced rule of law, accountability and political participation, called for by the protest movement Hirak. Economic development is likewise marked by stagnation and a lack of diversification, characterised by declining foreign exchange reserves, import freezes, rising inflation levels and a substantial black market.

Algeria's relationship with its neighbour Morocco deteriorated to a level where bilateral relations were broken off in August. Nevertheless, military escalation seems unlikely. The controversy mainly involves the Western Sahara, and the issue of support for the Palestinians and/or recognition of Israel. Furthermore, Algeria accused Morocco of supporting autonomy efforts in the Algerian region of Kabylia, which culminated in the aftermath of the devastating forest fires that raged in the region. The end of the year also marked the end of the temporary cooling of relations with France, its key EU partner country. The EU is also Algeria's most important economic partner.

The political situation in **Libya** continued to be characterised by a strong West-East divide, which was particularly noticeable in the preparations for the presidential and parliamentary elections. In the first half of the year, it was, however, possible to report progress in the UN-mediated peace process. In **February**, the **Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF)** elected a **three-member presidential council, led by Mohamed Menfi, and chose Abdel Hamid Dbeibah to serve as prime minister designate of the new interim Government of National Unity (GNU)**. The LPDF also set 24 December as the election date. Fortunately, the ceasefire of October 2020 remained in place and was largely observed. The international community sought to mediate in a series of conferences: the second Berlin Conference in June, a stability conference organised by the GNU in Tripoli in October, and a conference in Paris in November. In the context of the registration of candidates for the presidential elections in November, people took to the streets and calls for electoral boycotts were made. Among those who registered as candidates were Prime Minister Abdel Hamid Dbeibah, General Khalifa Haftar and Saif Al-Islam Gaddafi, son of the country's former head of state Muammar Gaddafi. On 22 December, however, the Libyan High National Election Commission had to officially postpone the election date. In its statement in parliament in Tobruk, it later justified this step, highlighting the numerous legal, security and political obstacles. By the end of the year, it had not been possible to agree on a new election date.

Austria and the EU remained committed to the international mediation efforts and continued in particular to advocate an end to the blatant disregard of the

UN arms embargo as well as the immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops and mercenaries from Libya.

In **Morocco**, the parliamentary elections, held on 8 September, led to a major political change at domestic level. The moderate Islamist Justice and Development Party, in power until then, registered very clear losses. Following the victory of the liberal National Rally of Independents, led by Aziz Akhannouch, the latter formed a coalition government with the Authenticity and Modernity Party, and the conservative Al Istiqlal Party. The new government headed by Aziz Akhannouch as Prime Minister, focused on comprehensive modernisation as well as strengthening the country's economy and position as a business location, while at the same time ensuring a regionally and socially balanced distribution of wealth.

Since the Frente Polisario had unilaterally terminated the ceasefire in Western Sahara, the region has seen repeated armed incidents. In this context, the appointment of Staffan de Mistura as the UN Secretary-General's new Personal Envoy for Western Sahara in October marked a positive development. **Austria and the EU** continued to support the UN dispute settlement process. Likewise, Austria also continued to contribute several military observers to the UN mission MINURSO.

In September, the General Court of the EU upheld the action for annulment by the Frente Polisario against **Council decisions on EU agreements** with Morocco on the grounds of their territorial application to Western Sahara. The Council of the EU appealed against this decision. The situation in Western Sahara also gave rise to diplomatic disagreements with both Germany and Spain.

Tunisia, long considered the showcase country of the "Arab Spring", experienced major political upheavals. After conflicts involving the Speaker of Parliament, Rached Ghannouchi of the Islamist Ennahda party, and the Head of Government Hichem Mechichi, President Kais Saied dissolved Parliament and removed the Head of Government from office on 25 July. This step was cemented in September by a presidential decree that suspended large parts of the constitution. Najla Bouden was appointed as Head of Government, succeeding Hichem Mechichi. Austria and the EU advocate a swift return to constitutional order in Tunisia, upholding democratic principles, the separation of powers, the rule of law and respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms of all Tunisians.

Tunisia was still faced with major economic and social problems. The country's economic growth remained too weak to counteract rising youth unemployment rates. Ongoing monetary devaluation, loss of households' purchasing power, the growing budget deficit and debt carried forward from 2020 as well as the reform backlog remained the biggest economic problems. After a four-month break, negotiations on an aid package with the IMF were resumed in November.

1.5.2 Middle East

The **Middle East Peace Process** did not make any significant progress. However, with Joe Biden taking office as President, the US adjusted its policy, resuming financial support to both the Palestinian Authority and the **UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)**, and announced the resumption of relations with the PLO as well as the reopening of its consulate in East Jerusalem. The peace plan presented by former President Donald Trump was not pursued further.

After successful steps towards intra-Palestinian reconciliation, mainly through Egyptian mediation, President Mahmoud Abbas decreed on 15 January that elections were to be held for the Palestinian Legislative Council in May, presidential elections in July and PLO elections in August. This was supported by Austria and the EU, and the EU entered into negotiations with Israel on sending an EU election observation mission. On 30 April, however, President Mahmoud Abbas postponed the elections indefinitely, stating that Israel had neither consented to the holding of elections in East Jerusalem nor permitted election events in East Jerusalem.

At the same time, tensions were building in East Jerusalem during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan due to threats of forced evictions of Palestinians from their homes and clashes on the Temple Mount and in the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Hamas, the terrorist organisation ruling the Gaza Strip, issued an ultimatum to Israel and began firing rockets on 10 May. Until a ceasefire brokered by Egypt entered into force on 21 May, over 4,300 rockets were fired against Israel, killing 13 people and injuring over 350. Israeli counter-attacks claimed around 250 lives and injured over 1,900 in Gaza. In view of these acts of terrorism and thousands of rockets being fired at Israeli civilian territory, Austria expressed solidarity with Israel and supported its right to self-defence. As a sign of solidarity with Israel, the Israeli flag was hoisted on the Federal Chancellery and the MFA.

Against the background of this war in Gaza, the number of acts of violence likewise increased in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, and by the end of the year also involved a number of terrorist attacks by Palestinian extremists.

After having experienced a good year, **Israel** again held early elections on 23 March. The new government, led by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and alternate Prime Minister Yair Lapid was formed by eight parties against Likud, the party holding the largest number of seats, and was sworn in on 13 June.

In September, October and at the end of December, Israeli ministers met Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas – the first such high-level meetings in many years. Israel nevertheless proceeded with its settlement policy, a growing number of houses as well as infrastructure was demolished, and forced evictions were on the rise. In addition, Israeli settlers, some of whom were armed, made increasing

use of violence, which was clearly condemned in September by Foreign Minister Yair Lapid. The Palestinians called for launching direct negotiations under international auspices, while Israel rather sought to limit itself to reducing the conflict and improving living conditions for the Palestinians.

In the context of his farewell trip to Europe, President Reuven Rivlin paid an official visit to Austria on 17 March. He held talks with Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen and Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, and together with the Federal President, laid wreaths in a solemn ceremony at the Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial. On 10 November, Nachman Shai, the Israeli Minister of Diaspora Affairs, attended the ceremonial inauguration of the Shoah Wall of Names Memorial in Vienna and also met Federal Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg for talks. Together with the Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, Federal Chancellor Kurz visited Israel on 4 March.

Mindful of its special historical responsibility and current ties with Israel, Austria has actively sought to contribute to improving the EU's relations with Israel. It successfully campaigned for the broadest possible participation of Israel in the Horizon Europe research programme and, together with other Member States, strongly advocated convening a meeting of the EU-Israel Association Council as soon as possible.

In **Syria**, the intensity of the military conflict decreased noticeably. Signs of intensified action by Syrian government troops and allied militias against Idlib as well as threats by Turkey against Kurdish units were not followed by military operations. The terrorist organisation Islamic State continued to operate, launching attacks from the underground; attacks in Turkish-occupied areas are attributed by Turkey to Kurdish organisations.

The economic crisis, however, worsened significantly as a result of the currency devaluation and electricity and water shortages that at times also posed a threat to the supply of basic foodstuffs. Furthermore, more than 13 million people, including more than six million internally displaced in Syria and more than five million as refugees in neighbouring countries, especially Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, continued to be dependent on humanitarian aid. With a view to alleviating the humanitarian emergency, Austria made available a total of 19 million euros from the Foreign Disaster Fund to the countries of Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

Austria and the EU supported the efforts undertaken by UN Special Envoy Geir Pedersen towards a political solution based on UN Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) and on the Geneva Communiqué of 2012. However, the Syrian Constitutional Committee, set up to redraft the Syrian constitution, was still unable to achieve any tangible results.

In **Lebanon**, a first success in the consultations on the formation of a new government, ongoing since 2020, was achieved only in July – and against the backdrop of possible EU sanctions against members of the elite. After Najib Mikati had

been appointed as Prime Minister designate, his government was sworn in on 10 September. The government announced urgently needed structural reforms, but by the end of the year still lacked determination in launching the relevant measures. As a result, the economic crisis worsened, affecting particularly the country's lower and middle classes. In autumn, the abolition of import subsidies for food, medicines and fuel further exacerbated inflation. Targeted measures aimed at poverty reduction were announced but have not yet been implemented. The EU adopted a sanctions regime on 30 July that provides for the possibility of imposing sanctions against persons or entities responsible for undermining democracy or the rule of law in Lebanon. Austria stressed that it was high time for the country's political and economic elites to finally take responsibility and implement the long overdue structural reforms.

Jordan remained an anchor of stability in the region. Accompanied by Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi, King Abdullah II paid a visit to Austria on 25 October and met Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen and Federal Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg for an exchange of views. In the context of these talks, it was agreed to continue existing good cooperation, including in the field of security. In view of Jordan's important regional role, including as the Custodian of the Holy Sites in Jerusalem and as a host country for a large number of Syrian refugees, Europe and Austria attach central importance to the country's stability.

2. Developments on Other Continents

2.1 Middle East and Arabian Peninsula

Monitored by an EU Election Observation Mission, to which Austria also contributed, the early parliamentary elections held in **Iraq** on 10 October were won by the party led by the Shiite cleric Moktada Al-Sadr, while the pro-Iranian parties suffered significant losses. By the end of the year it had, however, not been possible to form a government. In the face of rising oil prices and increasing political instability, the pace of economic reform slowed down. Although the terrorist organisation IS has been defeated, Iraq continues to face major challenges. According to estimates, the number of Iraqis who have been internally displaced still ranged at around 1.2 million, with the majority living in cities and towns and about one third in camps. Following the conclusion of constructive budget negotiations, the relationship between the central government and the autonomous region of Kurdistan-Iraq was comparatively good. Austria supported reconciliation between Christians and the Muslim majority population through a mediation project in the province of Nineveh, and the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund in promoting increased participation of women in decision-making in humanitarian and crisis response.

In the presidential elections held in **Iran** on 18 June, Ebrahim Raisi was elected as eighth president of the Islamic Republic, winning 62% of the valid votes. Due to the population's disenchantment with politics, the voter turnout of 42.5% was the lowest since 1979. Pessimism and discontent prevailed in view of the poor economic situation attributed, inter alia, to the sanctions imposed by the USA, the sharp decline in the currency, the high price increases as well as the cancellation of various subsidies. In the course of the year, the COVID-19 pandemic took a number of dramatic turns leading to very high case numbers. An encouraging development was the resumption of negotiations on the **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)**, held in Vienna from April to June and then again from the end of November. Adopted in 2015, the JCPOA sets out conditions to be met by Iran's nuclear programme in return for the withdrawal of US and EU sanctions. As it is considered the only guarantee against a nuclear arms race in the region, Austria therefore continued to advocate for the preservation of the JCPOA. In this spirit, Austria also stands ready to contribute to a negotiated solution by hosting further talks and negotiations as needed.

Saudi Arabia continued work on its ambitious Vision 2030 social and economic reform projects. By promoting economic diversification, the country seeks to reduce its dependence on the oil sector and at the same time facilitate the creation of jobs for the country's youth. The related efforts went hand in hand with further reforms that brought women's rights closer to international standards. A very significant event at foreign policy level was the end of the blockade on

Qatar, proclaimed at the Gulf Cooperation Council Summit, held in Al-Ula on 5 January. It was, however, still not possible to end the conflict with Yemen. Saudi peace offers remained unanswered by the Houthi militias, who continued to bombard Saudi targets with drones and missiles. From 21 to 22 June, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud paid a visit to Vienna and held talks with Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg. With a view to further deepening relations, the latter, accompanied by a business delegation, paid a return visit to his counterpart in Riyadh on 12 September.

Thanks to its enormous oil and gas reserves, the **United Arab Emirates** were able to keep the economy stable even in times of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to also weather the associated drop in oil prices. This year, the country celebrated the 50th anniversary of its formation as a state. Federal Minister Gernot Blümel paid a visit to the United Arab Emirates on 1 July. Likewise in July and in the context of the visit, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, paid to Austria, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg and the Minister of Industry of the United Arab Emirates, Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber, signed a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership agreement aimed at strengthening bilateral relations. Alongside promoting political and economic cooperation, a key element of this strategic partnership agreement is the establishment of a bilateral hydrogen alliance. In September, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg visited the United Arab Emirates to discuss initial steps towards implementation. Originally scheduled for 2020, the economic stimulus Expo was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Accompanied by a large business delegation, Federal Minister Margarete Schramböck took part in the Expo's Austria Day held on 18 November. The resumption of diplomatic relations with Israel culminated in a visit paid by the Prime Minister of Israel Naftali Bennett to Abu Dhabi on 13 December.

As was the case with other countries in the Gulf region, **Oman** faced economic challenges caused by the low oil price, high youth unemployment and reduced economic performance due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Against this background the country promoted economic diversification away from the oil and gas sector, building on its Vision 2040 programme that also involves efforts towards increasing the share of renewable energies. In September, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg visited Oman to officially open the Austrian Embassy in Muscat.

The conflict in **Yemen** led to a further dramatic deterioration in the situation of the people on the ground. According to international organisations and independent observers the crisis in the country is the worst humanitarian disaster in the world. Furthermore, the decaying oil tanker Safer continues to pose a potentially devastating threat to the Red Sea. Efforts launched by UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths to implement the 2018 Stockholm Agreement were largely unsuccessful, mainly attributable to lack of political will on the part of the Houthi rebels, who were eager to make further military gains. After having taken over from Martin Griffiths, his successor as Special Envoy, Hans Grundberg, worked intensively

towards peace in Yemen. Austria continued to support the efforts undertaken by the UN Special Envoy for a political solution to the conflict and also provided humanitarian aid and assistance.

In January, the Al-Ula Declaration ended the three-and-a-half-year-long blockade (severance of diplomatic bilateral relations as well as transport, trade and travel embargo) imposed on **Qatar** by the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Egypt. Subsequently, relations with neighbours, especially the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, were restored. On 2 October, for the first time two thirds of the deputies of the Shura Council were elected by public suffrage (the remaining third were appointed by the ruling emir). At the same time, the powers of the Shura Council were expanded. The month of October also saw a government reshuffle. The country moved into the limelight of international attention due to the central role it played in connection with the crisis in Afghanistan and the related negotiations in Doha. In October, Federal Minister Michael Linhart visited Qatar. In his discussions, he focused on the situation in Afghanistan, the protection of human rights, especially in the context of the upcoming Football World Cup, and bilateral economic relations.

In **Kuwait**, a new government was appointed by the Emir in March. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah continued to hold the position of Prime Minister. Although he had submitted his resignation twice – once in January and once in November –, the Emir entrusted Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled on both occasions with continuing his official duties. Against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and the low oil price, Kuwait is facing the challenge of having to deal with urgently needed budget restructuring measures. In mid-November, the 84-year-old Emir Nawaf al-Ahmad al-Jabir al-Sabah transferred some of his powers to Crown Prince Mishal al-Ahmed al-Sabah.

Like other countries in the region, **Bahrain** suffered two consecutive blows – first it was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and then by the drop in oil prices. Nevertheless, Bahrain has already emerged successfully from the COVID-19-related recession, which may be attributable to its rigorous containment measures, the rapidly implemented comprehensive vaccination programme, as well as timely and generous measures to support the economy.

2.2 Sub-Saharan Africa and African Union

EU-Africa Partnership

This year was again strongly marked by the COVID-19 pandemic. While the number of confirmed infections generally remained at a rather lower level than in other continents, the situation in Africa very clearly highlighted many countries' vulnerability to the virus and its effects. Support provided by the EU to Africa therefore related inter alia to procurement of vaccines and assistance in coping

with the economic impacts of the pandemic, including through debt relief for particularly affected countries.

Due to the pandemic, the summit between the EU and the **African Union (AU)** at the level of heads of state and government had to be moved to 2022. In the context of summit preparations, a ministerial meeting was held in Kigali on 26 October. The main topics addressed included the fight against the pandemic and its economic and social impacts as well as the crisis in Sudan. The joint declaration adopted by the foreign ministers covered all essential aspects of EU-AU relations, including in particular the areas of peace, stability and security, democracy, the rule of law, economic cooperation and migration. The African states also addressed the issue of the restitution of cultural assets with provenance in a colonial context.

Comprehensive Austrian Africa Strategy

Implementing the government programme, work on a Comprehensive Austrian Africa Strategy continued. This strategy aims to bundle and focus the numerous Africa-relevant activities of Austrian actors. The MFA and the Federal Chancellery are in charge of drafting the strategy.

East Africa and Horn of Africa

The situation in **Ethiopia** was marked by the conflict in the northern regional state of Tigray. Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg paid a working visit to Ethiopia on 14 and 15 January and met President Sahle-Work Zewde as well as Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Demeke Mekonnen for talks. In his discussions with Ethiopia's political leadership, the Federal Minister focused on raising such important issues as demands for unrestricted humanitarian access and an independent investigation into alleged human rights violations committed in the course of the armed conflict. In the context of his visit to the Aysaita refugee camp, Federal Minister Schallenberg announced that Austria would make available three million euros from the Foreign Disaster Fund to help people in need of humanitarian assistance due to the conflict in the Tigray region.

The parliamentary elections, held on 21 June in about 80% of the 547 constituencies, took place without major incident. Elections were, however, not held in the Tigray region and some other constituencies. Led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, the Prosperity Party was able to win support from a large majority of voters and on 4 October, the old new Prime Minister took office for his second term.

At the end of June, the central government declared a "humanitarian ceasefire" and withdrew its troops from large parts of Tigray. The **Tigray Liberation Front (TPLF)**, however, continued its military actions and extended the fighting to the neighbouring regional states of Amhara and Afar. As the TPLF troops were

advancing towards Addis Ababa, the national government declared a six-month nationwide state of emergency on 2 November. Numerous calls for a cessation of hostilities and starting a dialogue were, however, persistently ignored by both sides. Equally unsuccessful were the mediation efforts undertaken by AU Special Representative and former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo.

Following the ousting of long-term dictator Omar Al Bashir in **Sudan** in 2019, the civilian government led by Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok has worked towards consolidation. Nevertheless, cooperation between civilian and military forces has remained fragile since the signing of the Constitutional Declaration in 2019. Yet, the transition process was marked by positive developments, as highlighted inter alia by the Juba Peace Agreement, signed in October 2020 between the transitional government and two rebel groups, as well as the gradual implementation of the economic reform programme, and significant improvements in the area of human rights and legal reforms. Sudan's removal from the US list of State Sponsors of Terrorism at the conferences in Berlin (June 2020) and Paris (May) enabled the country to return to the international community, which included access to financial support from international donors, such as the EU. Yet, the relationship between the political-civilian and military forces remained tense. In a military coup led by General Abdel-Fattah Burhan, the government was dissolved on 25 October. After mediation, Burhan and Prime Minister Hamdok eventually signed a 14-point agreement on 21 November that enabled return to constitutional order.

In **South Sudan**, the members of the Transitional National Legislative Assembly, provided for in the 2018 peace agreement, were sworn in. Overall, implementation of the peace agreement has continued to proceed only very slowly and the humanitarian situation in South Sudan remains extremely tense.

The domestic policy situation in **Somalia** continued to be very unstable. Parliamentary elections, which had been postponed several times, were started in July. These are, however, not general, but are instead based on representatives delegated by tribal leaders. Elections to the Upper House of the federal parliament were completed in November, followed by elections to the Lower House. Parliament thus composed then elects the new president. The Islamist terrorist militia al-Shabaab remains a major threat in the country. In fact, only a few areas are actually controlled by the central government, as much of the power remains with regional presidents and tribal leaders. As yet, it has not been possible to determine a date for the handover of responsibility for the country's security from the **African Union peacekeeping forces (AMISOM)** to the Somali army.

In **Kenya**, the general elections scheduled for August 2022 are at the focus of domestic policy attention. The atmosphere between the political camps in the country has remained tense since the failure of the reform agenda centred on the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI), which had been pushed by President Uhuru Kenyatta and his political partner Raila Odinga. At economic level, the situation

was marked by some noticeable easing towards the middle of the year, inter alia in the tourism sector. The future government's room for manoeuvre will nevertheless remain restricted by the rising debt problem. As a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council and particularly during its Presidency in October, Kenya placed the emphasis on its multilateral commitment. The trouble spots in the Horn of Africa region, especially the threat posed by the Somali terrorist militia Al-Shabaab, remain a challenge to Kenya's stability and prosperity.

West Africa

In the **Sahel region**, the already critical security situation continued to deteriorate further. Political upheavals and Islamist terrorism, which has spread from **Mali** to the neighbouring states of **Burkina Faso**, **Niger** and also to the border region in the north of **Côte d'Ivoire**, remain the main hallmarks of the precarious situation. Offshoots of the terrorist organisations Al-Qaeda and IS are advancing increasingly further south and east, benefiting from the political failure of governments to effectively address security, economic, inter-ethnic, social and environmental problems.

This complex and multifaceted crisis situation, which particularly affected the people of Mali, Burkina Faso and **Guinea**, has been further exacerbated by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, even though the numbers of confirmed infections in the countries of West Africa remained relatively low compared to Europe or other African regions. The pandemic has, however, revealed systemic weaknesses not only in the health sector but also in terms of economic structures, food security, education and attributable to inefficient, increasingly autocratic and sometimes corrupt governance. The resulting widespread crisis of confidence contributed to further political destabilisation in the region.

After the military coup in **Mali** in August 2020, the transitional government led by interim President Bah N'Daw and Head of Government Moctar Ouane, which had been recognised by the international community, was ousted on 26 May by Vice President Colonel Assimi Goita, who accused the government of incompetence in implementing the transition process. Goita, nevertheless, claimed to seek cooperation with the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** and other international actors to enable the successful completion of the transition process.

The UN stabilisation mission **MINUSMA**, mandated with supporting implementation of the 2015 Algiers Peace Agreement, and the French military operation Barkhane (in cooperation with the G5 Sahel countries) to fight armed terrorist groups in Mali have been increasingly criticised by the Malian population due to a lack of success and unabated terrorist attacks. A noticeable anti-French sentiment has started to spread throughout large parts of the population, and manifested itself in demonstrations and street blockades. In June, France decided to

reduce the number of French troops from about 5,100 to a maximum of 3,000. At the same time, staffing for the newly founded European task force Takuba is to be increased. Efforts undertaken by the interim government to bring Russian mercenaries from the Wagner Group, notorious in Syria, Libya and the Central African Republic for their brutal methods and human rights violations, into the country to support Mali in its fight against terrorism were clearly rejected by Europe and the USA. The EU training mission **EUTM Mali**, to which Austria has contributed from the beginning, continued to train local military personnel on the ground. On 21 December, Austria, for the second time took command for a six-month period.

In **Guinea**, the military coup of 5 September marked the end of the 11-year term of President Alpha Condé. Originally, considered a harbinger of hope for democratic reform, Condé ended up as an autocratic ruler who left behind him a country in tatters. By amending the constitution, he had previously secured a third term in office for himself and had also eliminated the opposition. The military coup led by Lieutenant Colonel Mamady Doumbouya, commander of the special military forces, enjoyed broad popular support. On 1 October, Doumbouya was sworn in as interim President, and a week later he installed former UN official Mohamed Béavogui as Head of Government. Government affairs were taken over by a National Committee of Reconciliation and Development, nominated by the military, and a new constitution is to be drafted.

In **Burkina Faso**, the situation came to a dramatic head. More than 1.5 million people have been internally displaced by terrorist attacks. President Roch Marc Kaboré was confronted with accusations of mismanagement, corruption and the inability to guarantee people's security, as well as waning popular support. In response to calls for his resignation made by the opposition, the president introduced coercive measures, banning demonstrations and shutting down the internet for mobile phones in an attempt to impede mobilisation of large numbers of people. On 8 December, Prime Minister Christophe Dabiré was replaced by Lassina Zerbo, former Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission for the **Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO-PrepCom)** in Vienna. The EU decided to extend the EUTM to Burkina Faso to train Burkinabe soldiers.

After the bloody riots surrounding the presidential elections in **Côte d'Ivoire** on 31 October 2020, in which President Alassane Ouattara secured a third term in office, the parliamentary elections of 6 March were conducted in a peaceful atmosphere and were marked by the resumption of dialogue between government and opposition. Increasingly, the country is, however, becoming a target of terrorist groups that launched several attacks on security forces in the northern border region with Burkina Faso. On 10 June, an International Academy for Combating Terrorism was opened in Jacquelineville, providing counter-terrorism training for special forces.

In **Gambia**, presidential elections were held in December. On 5 December, President Adama Barrow, who had stood as interim president in 2016 to end Yaya Jammeh's 22 years of brutal rule, was declared winner by the electoral commission. The election result was, however, not recognised by three of the six other candidates. The opposition particularly resented the fact that Barrow had formed an electoral alliance with Jammeh's **APRC** party, hoping to have a better chance of winning. The opposition considered this move a threat not only to the prosecution of human rights violations committed under Jammeh's rule but also to the called-for democratic reforms.

Senegal, being the only country in the region that has peacefully completed all changes of power through democratic elections since it gained independence in 1960, is considered a democratic role model in the region. Since 2012, the country has been ruled by President Macky Sall, who has increasingly positioned himself on the international stage as an advocate of African concerns vis-à-vis the West. Rumours of Macky Sall seeking a possible third term in office, however, stirred up the political discussion. The country's opposition has, however, been weakened by political capture by the governing party. Having been postponed several times, the local elections scheduled for January 2022 are considered test elections for the presidential elections in 2024. Violent riots in March prompted the government to step up support for young people.

As the most populous country in Africa, **Nigeria** is one of Austria's most important trading partners in sub-Saharan Africa. For years, however, the security situation in the northeast of the country has been extremely precarious due to numerous attacks by the terrorist groups Boko Haram and IS-West African Province (**ISWAP**). The conflict has already claimed more than 30,000 lives. Since the death of Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau in an ISWAP attack in May, more than 13,000 Boko Haram fighters and family members have surrendered to Nigerian authorities.

Over the last decade, **Ghana** has proven to be an anchor of stability in West Africa, registering sustained high economic growth and success in poverty reduction. However, there are fears that the Sahel conflict might spill over into the north of the country. In addition, the level of threat has increased in the Gulf of Guinea, as evidenced by the sharp rise in the number of kidnappings of ship crews. In the context of cooperation with ECOWAS, an Austrian officer has since 2016 been delegated as course instructor to the Kofi Annan International Peace-keeping Training Centre (**KAIPTC**) in Accra.

The African Great Lakes Region

Since 1986, **Uganda** has been ruled by President Yoweri Museveni who was granted an unlimited number of terms in office by a constitutional amendment in 2005. In the lead-up to the parliamentary and presidential elections on 14 Janu-

ary, interventions by security forces repeatedly involved violence, also claiming deaths, and the opposition's room for manoeuvre was heavily restricted. The elections were won by Museveni who secured a large majority, but voter turnout was relatively low. The new cabinet of ministers includes more women in leadership positions. COVID-19 continues to feature prominently on the country's political agenda. On the one hand, Uganda is one of the few countries in the world whose schools have remained at least partially closed since the outbreak of the pandemic. On the other hand, the country is pursuing an ambitious vaccination strategy, consisting of domestic production, purchase of vaccine doses and broad-based vaccination campaigns.

In **Burundi**, the election of a new president in May 2020 translated into a significant easing of the longstanding political crisis. However, enormous challenges persist in the fields of peacebuilding, rule of law, human rights, development and humanitarian issues.

In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, rivalries between the political camps of President Félix Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo and former President Joseph Kabila repeatedly flared up. At the end of 2020, President Tshisekedi declared the political alliance of convenience with Kabila as terminated. The imposition of a state of emergency on the provinces of North and South Kivu and Ituri has, as yet, not succeeded in improving either the security or the human rights situation in the east of the country. After many years of armed conflict between the army and non-state armed groups, the humanitarian situation in the east of the country has become a major cause for concern.

Southern Africa

South Africa is by far Austria's most important economic and trade partner in Africa. While the **African National Congress (ANC)** had been able to defend its supremacy at the national level in May 2019, the outcome of the regional elections on 1 November saw it – for the first time in its history – fall below 50% across the entire country. Having lost substantial support, the ANC, furthermore, no longer provides the mayors in most of the country's metropolitan regions.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in February 2020, South Africa has been hit hardest of all countries on the African continent. The impacts suffered as a consequence of the pandemic and the measures taken to contain it, are substantial, both on an economic and social level. Although the country's economy picked up slightly, official unemployment figures rose to 44.4%. In addition, South Africa is also one of the countries with the highest level of inequality worldwide and a sizeable public debt ratio.

Mozambique is confronted with numerous challenges. In the Cabo Delgado province, Islamist rebels have been pushed back thanks to massive military support

from Rwanda and the Southern African Development Community. The EU also decided to launch a training mission. It is, however, unclear where the majority of the rebels are currently located, and many are waiting in the hinterland for the foreign troops to withdraw. The impacts of the conflict pose a huge burden on the civilian population that is also largely dependent on outside help. Major problems persist in the fields of freedom of expression, assembly and association.

African Union and Other Regional Organisations

African Union

The annually rotating Chair of the AU was held by the Democratic Republic of the Congo. President Félix Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo declared the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (**AfCFTA**), the promotion of Africa's cultural heritage, the fight against climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic to be the priorities of his country's AU Chairship. Held virtually in February, the agenda of the 34th AU Summit was dominated by the election of a new AU Commission. Winning an overwhelming majority, Moussa Faki Mahamat was re-elected as Chairperson of the AU Commission. Monique Nsanzabaganwa from Rwanda was the first woman to be appointed as Vice-Chairperson of the Commission. The President of Senegal, Macky Sall, was appointed Chairperson of the AU for the period 2022/2023.

IGAD

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, floods and locust infestations, the Djibouti-based **Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)** has been particularly active in the areas of health, food security and resilience. In April, the foundation was laid for the joint Regional Cancer Centre of Excellence (RCCE). In the political arena, however, IGAD was not very visible. This held particularly true for the Tigray conflict, in which context Sudan as this year's chair failed to play an active role.

Together with IGAD, ADA is implementing the project IGAD Promoting Peace and Stability in the Horn of Africa Region/**IPPSHAR**. Covering the period 2018–2023, the project is funded by the EU (25.2 million euros), the Netherlands (1.1 million euros), Austria and Sweden (one million euros each).

ECOWAS

The primary goal of the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** is deepened economic integration of its 15 member countries. Recently, it has also sought to step-up its commitment at security policy level, for instance by playing a very active role in the wake of the coups in Mali and Guinea. Chaired

by the Ghanaian President Nana Akufo-Addo, ECOWAS on 7 November imposed sanctions against members of the transition government in Mali and the military government in Guinea for obstructing the democratic transition. Mali's and Guinea's membership had already been suspended immediately after the coups.

Austria and ECOWAS have traditionally worked closely together, including in the fields of renewable energy and energy efficiency, conflict prevention and early warning systems as well as further education and training for regional peace operations.

SADC

The 41st Summit of the **Southern African Development Community (SADC)** convened in Lilongwe, Malawi, in August. Against the background of the terrorist threat in Cabo Delgado, it was decided to establish a Regional Counter Terrorism Centre in Tanzania. The President of Malawi, Lazarus McCarthy, was elected as the new chairperson for the period 2021–2022 and the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Félix Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, for the following year.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on mutual cooperation was signed by Austria and the SADC in 2008. Covering the field of good governance, it places a special focus on land issues and infrastructure, especially on rail transport and renewable energy. In addition, ADA funds regional projects in cooperation with other southern African partners. Under the ADA's SOLTRAIN programme (Southern African Solar Thermal Training & Demonstration Initiative) projects are supported in six countries in the SADC region: Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. By the end of the programme's Phase IV in 2022, over 4,000 specialists will have been trained in the installation and maintenance of solar thermal systems. Besides, numerous systems have already been installed on social and healthcare facilities' buildings, orphanages, nursing homes, student residences and on a range of industrial buildings.

EAC

The **East African Community (EAC)** has set itself ambitious goals, including monetary union, joint visa as well as major infrastructure projects involving railway construction. Recently, however, concrete progress has been slow to materialise.

Other Actors

At the end of November, Senegal hosted this year's **China-Africa Forum**. Organised every three years, it determines China's future engagement in Africa. China held out the prospect of debt relief to African countries (cancellation of debt and reallocation of 10 billion US dollars from the IMF to African countries) and also announced increased investment in health, agriculture, digitalisation and secu-

riety. With a view to combating COVID-19, China agreed to deliver another billion doses of vaccine to Africa and provide local support for vaccine production. In the context of the meeting, Senegal called on China to stop debt-equity swaps and instead invest more equity in the sustainable development of Africa's economies.

The forum took place shortly after US Secretary of State Anthony J. Blinken had completed his trip to Africa, which had taken him to Kenya, Nigeria and Senegal. The USA's commitment to the region will place a focus on the security sector. Subject to successful completion of its transition process, Mali was promised full support from the USA. Investment agreements were concluded with Senegal, focusing primarily on the infrastructure sector.

2.3 America

2.3.1 United States of America (USA)

Sworn-in on 20 January as the 46th President of the USA, Joe Biden is pursuing the goal of a comprehensive national renewal under the motto of "build back better". Former President Donald Trump refused to recognise the election results. He furthermore sought to prevent Congress from certifying the results of the election, and hence Joe Biden's victory, on 6 January by calling a "Save America" rally and encouraging his supporters to march to the Capitol. Around 800 demonstrators, some of them violent, subsequently broke through several barriers in front of the US Parliament. A number of demonstrators even entered the Capitol. In the context of these events, one demonstrator was shot dead by police, three people died of "medical emergencies" and 140 police officers were injured. On 13 January, President Donald Trump was impeached by the US House of Representatives for "incitement of insurrection". A conviction in the Republican-dominated Senate failed to secure the required two-thirds majority of 67 votes, as the 50 Democrats were joined by only seven Republicans in the vote. By the end of the year, 700 demonstrators had been charged, some having already been convicted in the first instance. A dedicated House Select Committee set up by the House of Representatives continues to investigate ex-President Donald Trump and members of his administration with regard to these events.

Achieving two electoral victories by winning the second round of the Senate elections in Georgia on 5 January, the Democratic Party succeeded in achieving parity with the Republican Party in the US Senate. In the event of a tie, Vice President Kamala Harris, who chairs the Senate, will have the deciding vote. Based on the results of the 2020 election, the Democratic Party also has a majority in the House of Representatives.

At domestic and economic level, political discourse was largely dominated by the massive outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, the drastic measures required to contain

it (restrictions on entry from the Schengen area were only eased on 8 November) and to support the US economy. The development of effective vaccines and a vaccination campaign, initiated by the Trump administration, were both vigorously pursued under President Joe Biden.

The US economy succeeded to recover quite early from the impacts of the pandemic: in the first quarter, rapid progress on the US vaccination programme, declining numbers of infections, massive government support programmes, accompanied by consistent fiscal assistance measures, and increased consumption meant that economic recovery materialised faster than expected and also generated positive spill over effects benefitting the global economy. Economic growth for the entire year was thus projected at 6%, the US unemployment rates plunged from a record level of 14.8% (at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020) to just over 4% in autumn. Growth was, however, somewhat inhibited by the emergence of the virus' delta and omicron variants, high inflation rates of over 6% and persistent supply bottlenecks in important sectors of industry.

A key topic on the US economic policy agenda was the struggle over President Joe Biden's large-scale, two-part infrastructure agenda. After months of negotiations between Democrats and Republicans, Congress approved the first part of the bipartisan infrastructure package of around 1 trillion US dollars in November. Alongside promoting ongoing measures, it also provides for new spending of 550 billion US dollars over the next five to ten years on urgently needed investments in road, rail, bridge and water infrastructure, in the electricity grid, broadband internet, e-mobility and other areas. However, a second package of measures on President Joe Biden's infrastructure agenda that envisages major investments into social welfare, education, family, energy and climate and also offers corresponding tax incentives, lacked the necessary support and was not passed by the US Congress.

By 30 November, ten individuals – five less than in 2020 – had been executed following death sentences. Three of these executions took place during Donald Trump's presidency, before the moratorium that had previously in place at federal level for 17 years was re-introduced by President Joe Biden. In March, Virginia became the 23rd state to official ban the death penalty. Apart from the US government and the US military, a total of 27 states continue to impose capital punishment. The worldwide abolition of the death penalty is a priority of Austrian foreign policy and is advocated by Austria in unison with its EU partners, also in contacts with the USA.

At foreign policy level, the Biden administration has made reviving cooperation with partners and allies, especially with the EU and its Member States one of its priorities. The joint promotion of human rights and democracy as well as strengthening the economy play a key role in this context. The USA rejoined the UN Human Rights Council and invited selected partners, including Austria, to the

virtual Summit for Democracy on 9 and 10 December, where Austria was represented by Federal Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg. By appointing former Secretary of State John Kerry as the new Special Envoy for Climate, the USA is also re-claiming a leadership role in international efforts aimed at countering climate change. In the global health field, President Joe Biden set a similar tone with the USA's return to the **World Health Organization (WHO)**, and by hosting a COVID-19 summit in the context of the UNGA. Transatlantic relations and NATO continued to feature high on the country's foreign and security policy agenda. As reflected by the USA hosting the QUAD summit – Quadrilateral Dialogue also involving Australia, Japan and India – in Washington D.C., and the announcement of the new trilateral security partnership AUKUS with Australia and the United Kingdom, the focus of US foreign policy is increasingly shifting to the Indo-Pacific region. Relations with China and Russia remained tense, and in both cases the US made efforts to restore proper channels of communication and prevent escalations, inter alia by organising summit meetings.

In the area of disarmament, the USA and Russia were able to agree on an extension of the **New START Treaty** (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) for another five years in a telephone conversation, held between the two presidents on 26 January. As regards Nord Stream 2, agreement was reached between the USA and Germany. Announced in July, it is to enable completion of the pipeline while at the same time cushioning any negative effects on Ukraine. Building on the Abraham Accords, signed with a number of Arab states and Israel in 2020 with a view to normalising relations, the USA sought to advance cooperation in the region. In this context, the USA led by President Joe Biden, has again made the two-state solution the explicit goal of US policy in the Middle East, also criticizing the expansion of Israeli settlements. At the end of November and after a five-month hiatus, the USA, together with international partners and Iran, returned to the negotiating table in Vienna to discuss a possible return to the JCPOA nuclear agreement aimed at limiting Iran's nuclear programme to exclusively peaceful goals. The USA stepped up pressure on Venezuela and Nicaragua, while sanctions against North Korea and Cuba remained unchanged. At the end of August/beginning of September, the total withdrawal of all international troops from Afghanistan, which had already been finalised under President Donald Trump in an agreement with the Taliban, was completed.

Trade relations between the EU and the US are closer than with any other trading partner. Together, the two economies account for almost 50% of global GDP. President Joe Biden sought to foster the USA's return to multilateral trade structures and to revive relations with the EU – traditionally the USA's most important economic partner – which had been strained by the previous administration's protectionist measures. Progress made in this respect included the decision to suspend the reciprocal Boeing/Airbus retaliatory tariffs for five years, and to establish the EU-US Trade and Technology Council. In September, the latter con-

vened for its first meeting, held in Pittsburgh, to primarily deal with topics related to better coordination of supply chains, semiconductors, investment screening and export controls. At the beginning of November, it was possible to arrive at a compromise on the particularly contentious issue of US punitive tariffs on EU steel and aluminium, providing inter alia for the introduction of a tariff quota by the USA. As regarded other areas, however, the new US Administration seemed rather reluctant to dismantle trade barriers. The “Buy American” principle, applied in **public procurement**, or related tax incentives harbour the risk of discrimination against European companies. With regard to rival China, President Joe Biden maintained his predecessor’s tough economic and sanctions policy approach but placed greater emphasis on avoiding escalation and building alliances as well as fostering multilateral structures and investment in research and development.

Bilateral relations continued to evolve very positively, although the exchange of visits remained restricted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. From 15 to 19 December, Federal Minister Heinz Faßmann paid a visit to Washington DC in the context of which he participated in the Austrian Research and Innovation Talk and met with President Joe Biden’s science advisor, Eric Lander. On 21 September, US Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm met Federal Minister Leonore Gewessler in Vienna. Federal Minister Martin Kocher travelled to Washington DC and Maryland from 17 to 19 October for talks, inter alia, with US Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh. Austria and the USA are connected by a strategic partnership based on shared values, such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law. In view of the increasing geopolitical tensions and the systemic rivalry among authoritarian states, transatlantic relations are a decisive vector of Austrian foreign policy.

The United States is – after Germany – Austria’s second most important export market worldwide. Following a COVID-19 induced decline in 2020, Austrian exports to the USA picked up again in the first half of the year (+21.2% compared to the first half of 2020). The high level of Austrian direct investment in the USA (**FDI**) of over 17 billion euros has continued to rise steadily, and Austria ranked second among the countries with the fastest growing FDI in the USA. Of the 650 Austrian companies active in the US market, approximately 200 have production facilities in the USA, employing around 33,000 people. Conversely, some 25,000 people are employed in Austria by some 300 US companies. Deliberations between Austria and the USA on the continuation of the national digital tax were successfully concluded and the threat of US punitive tariffs against Austria was averted. Until entry into force of the global tax reform, the Austrian digital tax will thus continue to be applied, and the USA terminated the proceedings against Austria.

In the **field of research, technology and innovation (RTI)**, the Office of Science and Technology Austria at the Austrian Embassy in Washington (OSTA Washington), which is operated and co-financed by the MFA and the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, serves as a bridge facilitating the exchange of

knowledge and experience between Austria and North America (USA/Canada/Mexico), strengthening bilateral relations in these areas and promoting Austria as a science location. The **Research and Innovation Network Austria (RINA)** supports Austrian researchers during their stay in North America and in the course of their career development. The network consists of over 3,300 scientists and innovators from all academic disciplines and career levels. As a central hub for RTI matters and science diplomacy, OSTA Washington placed a special focus on topics related to higher education, artificial intelligence, digitalisation, smart cities, the future of mobility, environmental technologies and the circular economy.

Building on their vision, the Cultural Fora in New York and Washington seek to be perceived as centres for the presentation of contemporary Austrian art and culture. Using the tools of cultural diplomacy, a visible and tangible contribution is made to Austrian foreign policy, showcasing Austria's diversity, modernity and creativity. The Austrian Consulate-General in Los Angeles as well as Open Austria, the MFA's innovation office in Silicon Valley, complement the nationwide Austrian cultural presence in the USA with their respective cultural work. The persistent COVID-19 pandemic made it necessary to increasingly move the Austrian diplomatic representations' cultural work to the virtual sphere.

The development of future-oriented relations with Jewish communities and organisations/institutions (including the American Jewish Committee/AJC, World Jewish Congress/WJC, B'nai B'rith, Anti-Defamation League/ADL, National Coalition Supporting Eurasian Jewry/NCSEJ) is a central concern of the Austrian diplomatic representations in the USA and related activities were continued despite COVID-19-related restrictions. On the margins of the UN General Assembly, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg met high-ranking representatives of Jewish organisations for an exchange of ideas at the Austrian Consulate General in New York on 23 September. The Jewish organisations welcomed the fact that descendants of victims of National Socialism can acquire Austrian citizenship and the establishment of the Shoah Wall of Names Memorial in Vienna, inaugurated on 9 November, as important signals. There is also close cooperation with Holocaust museums and research institutions in the USA, especially those in which Austrian Holocaust Memorial Servants are active. The Republic of Austria's comprehensive restitution and reparation measures, including those introduced under the Washington Agreement of 2001, are particularly appreciated by the US Administration. Nevertheless, legislative initiatives that may pose a threat to the "legal closure" agreed in the Washington Agreement, have yet again been introduced in Congress.

2.3.2 Canada

After his government had reached all-time highs in poll ratings, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called early elections in August. Held on 20 September, the out-

come of the vote fell short of his target of an absolute majority in the lower house of parliament and Trudeau again heads a minority government. Led by Erin O'Toole, the opposition Conservative Party had succeeded in gaining popularity in the course of the election campaign, but ultimately failed in the metropolitan areas and in the most populous provinces of Ontario and Quebec. The government used the reopening of parliament to present its updated programme that focuses on managing the health, economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, combating the climate crisis and fostering reconciliation with the indigenous population.

Despite COVID-19-related constraints, the Canadian economy experienced a significant upward trend starting at the beginning of the year, and between January and July, it registered a growth rate of 4.7% compared to the same period last year. In September, the unemployment rate fell to 6.9%, the lowest level since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, however, the inflation rate soared, reaching 4.7% in October, the highest level in almost 20 years. The Canadian central bank left the key interest rate unchanged at its historic low of 0.25%.

At foreign policy level, Canada contributed actively to a number of international initiatives. On 17 June, for instance, the country hosted the virtual International Donors' Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants. In the lead-up to the **26th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP26)**, held in Glasgow from 31 October to 12 November, Canada, together with Germany, conducted numerous consultations on behalf of the COP26 President Designate aimed at facilitating the mobilisation of funds to be made available by industrialised countries for climate finance.

In terms of bilateral foreign relations, Canada continued to focus first and foremost on the USA as its most important economic and security partner. The related main event being the virtual meeting between Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and President Joe Biden on 23 February. A Roadmap for a Renewed U.S.-Canada Partnership was announced, focusing on strengthening cooperation in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic, revitalising the economy and protecting the climate. Bilateral relations with the People's Republic of China (Canada's second most important export partner) have somewhat relaxed since the end of the "Huawei affair". In September, Canada permitted a high-ranking manager of the Chinese Huawei Corporation to leave the country after her lawyers had reached an agreement with the US authorities. Immediately afterwards, China released two Canadians, who had been in custody for more than 1,000 days on charges of espionage, and they were allowed to fly back to Canada. Apart from that, Sino-Canadian relations continue to be marked by fundamental differences of opinion in the field of human rights. Relations with the Russian Federation remained tense.

Canada is one of the EU's most important partners on global level. There is fundamental agreement on human rights matters as well as on the joint commitment

to the rules-based international system and international cooperation both on climate protection and in managing the COVID-19 pandemic. This attitude was also reflected at the EU-Canada Summit on 14 June. After having experienced a sharp drop in the first months of the pandemic, bilateral trade between the EU and Canada picked up again and developed very dynamically. In this context, a significant contribution was made by the **Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)**, which has been provisionally applied since 2017.

Relations between Austria and Canada are marked by particularly intensive ties at economic level but also in the field of culture. Canada is one of Austria's largest overseas export markets – with increasing potential, not least attributable to the fact that almost all customs duties had been abolished due to CETA. After Austria's exports to Canada had plunged by 12.6% in 2020 as a whole compared to 2019, the Austrian export industry recorded an increase of 29.2% in the first half of the year, compared to the same period last year. In addition to machinery and mechanical equipment, which traditionally account for the largest share of Austrian exports, pharmaceutical and wood products also featured prominently. Currently, 140 Austrian companies have subsidiaries in Canada.

Austria is perceived in Canada as a cultural nation whose musical heritage is generally appreciated and held in high regard. There is also active exchange at scientific level. In this context the Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies, established in 1998 at the University of Alberta, has been playing a prominent role.

2.3.3 Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin America and the Caribbean (**LAC**) have been particularly hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic repercussions. The impacts not only led to a significant rise in poverty but also affected the political and social functioning of many states in the region. Bi-regional cooperation between LAC and Europe has therefore come to play an all the more important role, considering Europe does not want to lose this important group of like-minded states. The attendance of the 6th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), held in Mexico City on 18 September, by the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, thus represented an important step. Another very relevant event was the hosting of a virtual “mini-summit” by Presidents of the European Commission and the European Council Von der Leyen and Michel on 2 December that involved the countries chairing ten regional and sub-regional organisations in LAC. The EU-LAC Foundation celebrated its tenth anniversary.

Since the negotiations on updating the **EU-Mexico Global Agreement** had been concluded in April 2020, internal procedures and steps towards signing, launched

by both parties, have been ongoing. Negotiations on a new EU-Chile trade agreement were also conducted in 2021.

Although an agreement in principle had been reached on the trade, political and institutional parts of the **Association Agreement** between the **EU and MERCOSUR** (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay), negotiated since 1999, it has not yet been adopted. This is attributable to the fact that the agreement had come under increasing criticism as a result of the sharp increase in slash-and-burn clearing in the Amazon rainforest and due to the negative impact assessments, particularly with regard to environmental effects. Hence the European Commission launched renewed negotiations with the MERCOSUR partners on further instruments facilitating the implementation of the sustainability chapter. In line with its government programme, Austria rejects the agreement in its current form.

Nicaragua continued to develop into an authoritarian state. In the lead-up to the general elections on 7 November, the government led by President Daniel Ortega adopted an increasingly tougher approach. Numerous members of the opposition, including the most promising candidates for the presidency, as well as members of the press and businesspeople were arrested or placed under house arrest. Some fled into exile and opposition parties were banned. Against the background of this environment that made free and democratic elections impossible, the opposition called for boycotting the elections. In fact, and contrary to officially claimed figures – voter turnout might indeed have been very low. Consequently, and considering these conditions, it did not come as a surprise that President Daniel Ortega was able to secure his fourth consecutive term in office, and the Sandinista party further expanded its supremacy in parliament. Numerous states in the region as well as the USA and the EU do not accept the election results, and the USA imposed additional sanctions. The election is also directly linked to Nicaragua's announcement of seeking withdrawal from the **Organisation of American States (OAS)**; in doing so, the Nicaraguan leadership pre-empted the OAS's threat to expel the country from the organisation. After a two-year transition period, Nicaragua will thus leave the OAS on 18 November 2023.

The general elections, held in **Honduras** on 28 November, were conducted in an atmosphere free of violent clashes and monitored by international election observation missions sent by both the OAS and the EU (including three Austrian observers). The presidential elections were clearly won by Iris Xiomara Castro Sarmiento, the candidate of the left-wing party LIBRE.

Bilateral visits between the LAC countries and Austria continued to be restricted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This also held true for a planned visit to be paid by Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen to **Costa Rica** in September that had to be cancelled at short notice. Instead, the Federal President met his Costa Rican counterpart, President Carlos Alvarado, on the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York. The Costa Rican Foreign Minister, Rodolfo Solano, trav-

elled to Vienna and met Federal Minister Michael Linhart on 3 and 4 November. On this occasion, a MoU aimed at establishing a strategic partnership between Austria and Costa Rica was signed in order to further deepen cooperation with this country that is like-minded with regard to many areas, for instance in the fields of climate and environmental protection.

Following the parliamentary elections of 6 December 2020 that had been boycotted by the opposition and did not comply with any democratic principles, the regional and local elections on 21 November also failed to improve the political crisis in **Venezuela**. Out of 23 governor's seats, a total of 20 went to the party of Nicolás Maduro's regime. Opposition leader Juan Guaidó did not succeed in uniting the fragmented opposition that is again facing increasing repression. The regime also cracks-down on the (few) victorious opposition candidates. Negotiations between the regime and the opposition, held in Mexico and mediated by Norway, are currently suspended, inter alia following criticism voiced over the human rights situation whose improvement has been linked to the lifting of sanctions. Nicolás Maduro's main focus of interest is the release of assets frozen in the USA. Over the last few years, the ongoing supply crisis and repressions have led more than five million Venezuelans to leave their country. Humanitarian assistance provided by Austria in this respect amounts to two million euros made available to the **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** and the **International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)**.

In **Colombia**, the 5th anniversary of the signing of the peace agreements with the former guerrilla movement **Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)** was widely celebrated. The fact that the FARC leadership had accepted accusations of crimes against humanity enabled an important breakthrough, but the slow implementation of the agreements has been criticised. Progress is overshadowed by a high number of murders and acts of violence against environmental and peace activists, indigenous and Afro-Colombian local leaders and ex-guerrilla fighters. Risks of a renewed destabilisation of the country could reemerge due to armed actors (including dissidents of the former FARC, and groups active in illegal trade). Despite a reduction in cultivation areas, cocaine production is again on the rise. In April/May, the country was severely hit by a wave of protests that were sometimes violent. In addition, Colombia is particularly affected by the crisis in neighbouring Venezuela. President Iván Duque announced a process of granting temporary protection status to the very high number of Venezuelan refugees. Seeking to support Colombia in this respect, Austria again made funding of one million euros, managed by the UNHCR, available. On 21 September, Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz met President Iván Duque for bilateral talks on the margins of the UN General Assembly.

On 24 May, the winner of the presidential elections in **Ecuador**, Guillermo Lasso Mendoza, took office as the country's new president. His programme is geared towards stimulating a strong economic upswing. The leftist alliance of the oppo-

sition UNES (Unión por la Esperanza) became the strongest party in Parliament. In order to realise his plans, President Lasso depends on the support of a broad coalition of most diverse groups and splinter parties in Parliament.

Barbados declared itself a republic on 30 November. The previous governor, Dame Sandra Mason, became the country's first female president.

On 21 September, Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen met the President of **Guyana**, Mohammed Irfaan Ali, for bilateral talks on the margins of the UN General Assembly.

In **Peru**, Pedro Castillo took office as president on 28 July. Standing as the candidate of an extreme left-wing party he had won the run-off election with a razor-thin majority against the right-wing conservative Keiko Fujimori. The elections contributed to further exacerbating the country's profound social and political divisions. As the governments appointed by President Castillo cannot rely on a majority in parliament, the political situation has been characterised by frequent government reshuffles, changes in the composition and a wavering course steered by the government.

In **Bolivia**, relations between the Movement for Socialism (MAS) – which, after having won the elections, returned to power in November 2020 – and the fragmented opposition, accused of having forced Evo Morales to resign in the 2019 coup, became increasingly hostile. Political developments in the country, which is marked by profound social, regional and ethnic divides, did not bring about the hoped-for reconciliation process, but were once again characterised by tension.

The lead-up to the 2022 presidential elections in **Brazil** is marked by massive political polarisation between the camps of President Jair Bolsonaro and his most likely strongest opponent, former president and leader of the leftist Workers' Party, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. This polarisation is attributable to the federal government's poor COVID-19 crisis management and promises of inclusive economic growth, public security, anti-corruption and comprehensive reforms that failed to materialise. After deforestation in the Amazon region had reached its highest annual level in 15 years, Brazil announced at the COP26 more ambitious emission reduction targets and a halt to illegal deforestation by 2028. It is assumed that these pledges could open up new possibilities for results-oriented climate policy cooperation.

Deepened cooperation with **Uruguay**, building on a strategic partnership, has been envisaged and a Memorandum of Understanding is currently being drafted.

Chile saw several landmark elections that went hand in hand with a generational change at political level. In May, local and gubernatorial elections, as well as the election for the members of the country's Constitutional Convention were held. Both resulted in a shift to the left, with the traditional centre parties registering massive losses. On 21 November and 19 December, parliamentary and presiden-

tial elections were held. The outcome of the parliamentary elections generated a stalemate between the political camps. In the second round of the presidential elections on 19 December, a total of 55.8% of the voters favoured Gabriel Boric, who was also supported by the communist party. Boric, who was successful among broad sections of the population dissatisfied with what they considered as an unfair distribution of economic wealth based on liberal ideas, announced structural reforms modelled on a European-style welfare state.

2.4 Asia

Asia's rise as an economic engine, initially slowed down by the COVID-19 pandemic, was able to pick up speed again, albeit at a reduced pace and marked by distribution levels that are more inhomogeneous than ever. The pandemic also developed in very different waves in the individual countries of the region, with the associated measures, such as entry restrictions and vaccination policies, varying accordingly.

In the pandemic context, the tensions rooted in the region's history (South China Sea, Korean Peninsula, Kashmir, Taiwan, Hong Kong) did not abate but rather escalated even further, sometimes also involving use of military means (Myanmar, Afghanistan). In light of the growing geopolitical importance of Asia and the simultaneous increase in destabilising and polarising developments in the region, the EU agreed on a **Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific** in April and in September presented an operational basis for implementation, which builds on strengthening the rules-based international order, a level playing field, an open and fair environment for trade and investment, and an inclusive approach. Austria supports this stronger focus the EU is placing on a region that is becoming increasingly important from both the security and the economic point of view. Strategic partnerships are in place between the EU and four Asian countries (China, Japan, India and South Korea) as well as with the **Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN)**; connectivity partnerships were established with two countries, Japan and, more recently, India; furthermore, a "green alliance" was concluded with Japan. Due to the pandemic, it was, however, not possible to hold regular EU summits with the partners in the region, but several meetings were convened as high-level video conferences. Hence, it was only possible to hold the **13th Summit of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)**, which had already been postponed several times, virtually in November, thus celebrating the year of the 25th anniversary of ASEM in a video conference. Austria was represented by Federal Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg. Likewise, the Board of Governors' Meetings of the Asia-Europe Foundation (**ASEF**), set up under private law by ASEM and mandated with implementing concrete cooperation projects between Europe and Asia, convened as a video conference on 1 and 2 July.

2.4.1 People's Republic of China

China has pursued a very restrictive COVID-19 policy, including extensive travel restrictions. The country's economy continued to recover relatively quickly from the impacts suffered due to the outbreak of the pandemic. The World Bank expects economic growth to range at 8.5%. At the National People's Congress in March, the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021–25) and the medium-term economic policy goals to be pursued until 2035 were adopted, as was the reform of the electoral law in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. Celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founding of the **Communist Party of China (CPC)** in July, President Xi Jinping announced the successful achievement of the first centenary goal: building a moderately prosperous society and eradicating absolute poverty. The Sixth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the CPC, held from 8–11 November, focused on preparations for the 20th National Congress of the CPC in October 2022, also setting the course for a third term of President Xi. The government's central goal is to transform China into a socialist state boasting high-quality and innovative economic development. In key technologies such as e-mobility, quantum technology, artificial intelligence, semiconductors, genetic engineering, biotechnology and space technology, China is striving not only for a high degree of self-sufficiency, but also for global leadership. At the same time, the government regulates parts of the financial system and the economy. The geopolitical initiative of the New Silk Road (Belt & Road Initiative) remains a foreign policy priority. China, furthermore, announced that it intends to become climate neutral by 2060.

At international level, China contributes actively to international organisations, development banks and fora, such as the G20. Within the UN, where the country holds numerous important positions and is a permanent member of the Security Council, China has recently strengthened its visibility and raised its profile by launching initiatives in the development and health sectors, and also in combating the pandemic. At the 76th UNGA, President Xi announced the launch of the Global Development Initiative, aimed at promoting and implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. China enjoys broad support among the **Group of Developing Countries and China (G-77)**, in whose context it offers its development model as an alternative to the Western world's liberal-democratic model. Relations with the USA continue to be marked by geopolitical tensions. On 16 November, President Xi and President Biden convened for their first (virtual) meeting. China remains an important partner for the EU when it comes to solving global challenges such as climate change, pandemic control or with respect to disarmament matters. At the same time, however, EU-China relations have been negatively impacted by the serious human rights violations in Xinjiang – to which the EU reacted by imposing sanctions, which were followed by subsequent Chinese counter-sanctions – and the ongoing exacerbation of restrictions on both

opposition and civil society in Hong Kong. Work on the EU-China Investment Agreement was suspended by the European Parliament in May.

Austria supports the EU's multi-pronged approach towards China, which classifies the country as a partner, competitor at economic level, and systemic rival. Most recently, the high-level exchange of visits between the EU and China picked up again. Austria and China celebrated the 50th anniversary of their diplomatic relations, and numerous events, concerts and projects had been planned. Against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, they could only take place virtually or had to be postponed to a later date.

2.4.2 North East Asia

In **Japan**, short-term prime minister Yoshihide Suga resigned and was succeeded by former Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida. The liberal-conservative course steered by the governing party, has, however, not been impacted by this change of leadership. The COVID-19 pandemic was kept relatively well in check, the vaccination rate rose rapidly, and – after having been postponed last year – the country organised successful Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games. The security environment, however, remained tense, not least due to increasing numbers of missile tests conducted by North Korea. The alliance with Japan's main ally, the USA, remains a priority, and quadrilateral cooperation with the USA, Australia and India has been strengthened. Japan is also actively promoting its concept of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. Territorial disputes with the country's important economic partner China are ongoing but have not escalated, relations with the equally important partner South Korea remained difficult. Even more important than territorial claims are issues relating to coming to terms with the past, such as the issue of compensation to be paid to former forced labourers and “comfort women”. Japan, as the world's third largest economy, continues to maintain technological leadership in a number of sectors, albeit challenged by competitors. The government remains committed to nuclear power, although its share is to be continuously reduced and replaced by renewable energies. Japan has adopted extensive economic packages to counter the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. While there is almost full employment, the country seeks to counter the demographic phenomenon of ageing with increased use and expansion of automation.

Although **the Republic of Korea (South Korea)** was also hit by a third and fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, infection rates were significantly lower than in Europe and fewer restrictions were imposed on public life. In November, the country reported an 80% vaccination coverage rate. President Moon Jae-in's last year in office was marked by active travel diplomacy. In June, the President was the first Korean Head of State to pay a state visit to Austria, in the context of which bilateral relations were classified as a strategic partnership. For the first time ever, South Korea attended a G7 summit as a guest. The visit paid to President Joe

Biden underpinned the strategic alliance with the USA. South Korea cooperates closely with the USA and Japan in seeking to convince North Korea to engage in a dialogue – for the time being, however, without success. Although détente with North Korea enjoys top priority, South Korea has little room for manoeuvre in this respect as its demand for denuclearisation, the sanctions regime in place, and above all the resumption of missile tests by North Korea restrict its own scope for negotiations.

At economic level, South Korea has managed the COVID-19 pandemic virtually unscathed, and especially exports of goods recorded peak growth.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) remains under international scrutiny. A busy phase of high-level talks (especially with the USA under Donald Trump's administration and with South Korea) and related efforts was followed by a phase of disillusionment. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, North Korea completely cut itself off from the rest of the world, consequently there is no reliable information on the COVID-19 situation in the country. North Korea's renewed nuclear activities were both confirmed and condemned by the **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)**; the regime also presented advanced missile weapons at military parades. Violating the UN bans, the country conducted a total of nine missile tests that were condemned by the majority of the international community and stand in the way of any relaxation of the sanctions regime in place. Although the provision of humanitarian aid for the suffering population remains possible, it has come to a virtual standstill due to the country's auto-induced COVID-19 shut-off. The long-term goal pursued by the international community remains the complete and verifiable denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula.

Mongolia was faced with rapidly increasing COVID-19 infection rates, to which the government responded by introducing a nationwide lockdown that severely affected the country's already struggling economy. In the presidential elections of 9 June, Ukhnaagiin Khurelsukh, candidate of the Mongolian People's Party and former Prime Minister, was able to score a clear majority in the first round, winning 68% of the vote. This victory made the Mongolian People's Party the dominant political force in the country, holding the key political posts of president and prime minister. At foreign policy level, Mongolia is striving for a good and balanced relationship with its two large neighbours, China and Russia. With the latter a comprehensive strategic partnership has been in place since 2019. Furthermore, Mongolia maintains political relations with the USA, Japan and the EU, and has also intensified its commitment within the UN in recent years.

2.4.3 South and Southeast Asia

Since the Taliban's assumption of power and the withdrawal of the NATO-led **Resolute Support Mission (RSM)** – to which Austria had contributed with up to 20 members of the Austrian Armed Forces – at the end of August, **Afghanistan** has been caught in a humanitarian and economic crisis. Due to the international sanctions against the Taliban and the resulting restrictions on international payments, aid funding of more than one billion euros pledged by the international community in September, is reaching the country only via indirect means, such as UN trust funds. At the beginning of September, Austria resolved to make available 18 million euros from the **Foreign Disaster Fund** to alleviate the humanitarian crisis and shortly afterwards supplemented this aid package by making available two million euros from ADC funds: ten million euros have been handed over to the **UNHCR**, five million euros to **UN Women**, three million euros to the **UN World Food Programme (WFP)** and two million euros to the **ICRC**. Austria supports the implementation of the five EU benchmarks for future operational engagement with the Taliban-appointed caretaker government, adopted by the EU on 21 September, and in particular the benchmarks regarding an inclusive Afghan government as well as respect for women's and human rights. From Austria's point of view, recognition of the Taliban government is out of the question. Instead, humanitarian aid must continue to be provided to support the Afghan civilian population. In addition, close cooperation with Afghanistan's neighbouring states is essential to prevent the security issues, such as organised crime and rising Islamist terrorism, from spilling over into the region. The mandate of the **UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)** was extended until 17 March 2022.

In **Pakistan**, a persistent balance of payments crisis and the difficult macro-economic situation thwarted substantial progress in the implementation of Prime Minister Imran Khan's progressive government programme "The Road to Naya Pakistan" ("New Pakistan"). At domestic policy level, the latter has come under pressure from the radical Islamic party TLP (Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan). At foreign policy level, the developments in Afghanistan had a massive influence on Pakistan. The government fears that a further deterioration of the situation in the neighbouring country could trigger a wave of refugees and thus increase the influence of the Taliban's Pakistani offshoot. The Kashmir conflict with India remains a trouble hotspot.

In April, **India** was faced with a strong second COVID-19 wave involving up to 400,000 new infections per day, which posed a challenge to the health system in many parts of the country, especially in New Delhi. Many countries, including EU Member States, sought to support India in managing the impacts and sent aid. Austria contributed, mobilising two million euros from the Foreign Disaster Fund. In October, the Jammu and Kashmir region was shaken by the worst attacks since

the lifting of the autonomous status in August 2019. At the informal EU-India summit in Porto on 8 May, agreement was reached on officially resuming negotiations on a free trade agreement, originally launched in 2007 and suspended in 2014, and on engaging in talks on both an investment protection agreement and an agreement on the protection of geographical indications.

Albeit hit by two severe COVID-19 waves, **Bangladesh** was able to generate growth of 5.5% of GDP for the fiscal year that ended in June. On the recommendation of the UN Committee for Development Policy, graduation from the group of least developed countries, scheduled for 2024, was postponed to 2026. In October, riots directed against the Hindu minority in the country claimed several lives. In the context of the internal relocation of some of the Rohingya refugees that had fled Myanmar, to the island of Bhasan Char in the Bay of Bengal, which began at the end of 2020, almost 20,000 (of the planned 100,000) people have been moved. In October, the government and the UN signed a cooperation agreement for Rohingya humanitarian response on Bhasan Char.

In **Nepal**, the year was marked by a crisis within the ruling Communist Party. Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Oli dissolved parliament twice to call new elections. Both times, the dissolution was reversed by the Supreme Court. In numerous court proceedings, the Communist Party – under which the Marxist Party and the Maoist Party had merged only in 2018 to form a joint Communist Party – was split up into its two original parts. Shortly after, the Marxists split again, with one part of the five-party coalition following former Prime Minister Deuba, and the other joining Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Oli. Eventually, Prime Minister Oli was removed by the Supreme Court and replaced by Sher Bahadur Deuba of the Nepali Congress party.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, **Bhutan** largely shut itself off from the outside world, implementing strict lockdowns and travel restrictions. Thanks to international support, especially from Europe and the USA, Bhutan reached a vaccination rate of over 90% in August.

A report on **Sri Lanka**, prepared by the **Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)** on 27 January, criticised the increasing restriction of minority rights and the concentration of power in the hands of the president, as well as impunity for serious human rights crimes committed during the civil war. In the immediate aftermath, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution criticising these conditions. The collapse of tourism dealt a severe blow to the country's economy and led to a shortage of foreign exchange. On 30 August, food emergency was declared.

In the **Maldives**, Speaker of Parliament Mohamed Nasheed was seriously injured in a bomb attack carried out by Islamist terrorists on 6 May and returned to the country only after several months of treatment in Germany. Nasheed had repeatedly spoken out publicly against a radical interpretation of Islam. After the slump

attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism sector that is very relevant for the country's economy, gradually recovered. According to figures from the Asian Development Bank, economic growth is expected range at 18% by the end of the year.

In **Myanmar**, the armed forces led by Commander-in-Chief General Min Aung Hlaing, took power on 1 February in a military coup launched against the civilian government of State Counsellor and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who had won a landslide victory with her party **National League for Democracy (NLD)** in November 2020. The aftermath of this coup saw widespread arrests, including of Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint, and mass protests by civil society that claimed numerous lives. The international community – including Austria – responded to these developments by condemning the coup and the escalating violence in Myanmar, and the EU imposed sanctions under the human rights regime. NLD supporters formed a National Unity Government that puts up resistance against the military and seeks international recognition as the legitimate representation of Myanmar. In April, ASEAN adopted a five-point programme and appointed a special envoy to Myanmar to facilitate a political solution to the crisis in the country. At the beginning of December and amid heavy criticism from the international community, Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint, both still under arrest, were each sentenced to four years of imprisonment.

In **Thailand**, the political protests, which have been ongoing since 2019 and are mainly supported by students and pupils, continued. Calls by the generally peaceful protesters mainly focus on political reforms of the monarchy. The leaders of the demonstrations faced charges and indictments for offences related to threats to national security, including defamation, incitement, attempted subversion, computer-based offences and violations of the COVID-19 Emergency Decree, that carry long prison sentences.

In **Cambodia**, freedom of assembly, press and expression has come under increasing pressure. Proceedings against opposition leader Kem Sokha, who had been arrested in 2017, remained adjourned. The trade preferences previously granted by the EU under the Everything But Arms initiative and partially withdrawn in 2020 due to human rights and labour rights violations remained suspended. Cambodia hosted the 13th ASEM Summit, which it chaired virtually.

In the one-party state of **Laos**, parliamentary elections were held in spring and a new president and prime minister were appointed. Civil society is tightly controlled in Laos, whose geographical location makes it a country of interest for Chinese strategic infrastructure projects.

Vietnam, that had long been able to keep case numbers in the very low range by taking both early and strict measures to control the COVID-19 pandemic, registered an increase in infection rates in the second half of the year. In the aftermath of the Communist Party Congress, held in January, state leadership positions

(including president of state and prime minister) were filled with new appointments. Especially against the background of the tensions in the region, Vietnam is interested in an active and strong multilateral foreign policy – as also evidenced by its non-permanent membership of the UN Security Council for the 2020/2021 term. The importance of relations with the USA was highlighted by the visit, Vice President Kamala Harris paid to the country in August.

In **Malaysia**, the conservative Islamic-dominated government led by Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, which has been in power since March 2020, resigned on 16 August. The resignation was preceded by months of tensions between the coalition partners. On 21 August, the King appointed former Deputy Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob as the new Prime Minister. Inaugurated on 30 August, his government is based on the same alliances as the previous one and many key positions were filled by ministers who had already served under Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin. Likewise, the new government continues to focus on combating the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic impact. In this respect, major progress on vaccinating the population was made in autumn.

The main topic on **Brunei Darussalam's** political agenda in 2021 was its ASEAN Chairmanship, for which it had defined the motto of “We Care, We Prepare, We Prosper”. The 38th and 39th ASEAN Summits were held on 26 October.

Despite a successful vaccination campaign and comparatively low infection rates, **Singapore** continued to steer its cautious COVID-19 policy course of gradual reopening. At foreign policy level, it remained true to its committed approach, placing a clear focus on dialogue and cooperation within the ASEAN group of states as well as with major global and regional powers. Cooperation with the EU was further stepped up, and negotiations were initiated on an agreement on digital economy.

Political events in **Indonesia** were significantly influenced by the COVID 19 pandemic. The country was, however, able to generate slight economic growth despite the comprehensive lock-down imposed over several months on the islands of Java and Bali. Plans to move the capital to Kalimantan are progressing. Despite protests from trade unions and Islamic associations, the government led by President Joko Widodo continued its work on the labour law reform, already adopted in 2020, and aimed at raising the country's attractiveness for a larger number of foreign investors. The discussion on the sustainability of palm oil delayed the negotiations on a free trade agreement with the EU, which had only been resumed in 2020.

In addition to being hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, the tropical cyclone Seroja that reached centennial scales, also raced through **Timor-Leste**, with the country's economy being particularly affected by the related impacts. In its COVID-19 response, Timor-Leste implemented lockdowns, entry bans, border closures and sought international support through the COVAX vaccination mechanism.

In the **Philippines**, home affairs were almost entirely dominated by the upcoming presidential, legislative and local elections, scheduled for 9 May 2022. On 15 September, the **International Criminal Court (ICC)** officially opened investigations in relation to alleged crimes against humanity committed in the Philippines in the context of the “war on drugs”. With respect to his country’s relations with the USA, President Rodrigo Duterte reversed his decision to terminate the bilateral Visiting Forces Agreement and the agreement became fully effective again at the end of July. Relations with Austria were marked by the 75th anniversary of bilateral relations, with numerous festivities and events being held – albeit virtually due to COVID-19. The pandemic also led to a pronounced economic slump that had massive impacts on all sectors of the economy. However, gradual recovery started to take effect in the first half of the year.

In **Palau**, Surgangel Whipps Jr. was sworn in as Palau’s tenth president on 21 January. Although the COVID-19 pandemic had dealt a severe blow to the island state’s economy, especially tourism, recovery started to pick up in the first half of the year. As in the previous year, Palau – that had swiftly closed its borders – did not record a single COVID-19 case.

2.5 Australia and Oceania

The COVID-19 pandemic remained well under control in Australia and New Zealand, with both countries reporting very high vaccination coverage rates of around 90% by the end of the year.

Owing to the ongoing and constantly high demand for raw materials, **Australia** again registered economic growth. At foreign policy level, relations with China, the country’s most important trading partner, remained tense. Australia deepened its alliances with like-minded partners in the Indo-Pacific region under the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (with the USA, India and Japan) and initiated the **AUKUS security pact** in cooperation with the USA and the United Kingdom. This pact provides for the construction of an Australian submarine fleet as well as research cooperation on defence technology. Against this backdrop, the multi-billion contract for the delivery of French submarines was cancelled, which was a source of major resentment in the country’s relations with France.

Negotiations on a free trade agreement with the EU were continued. Australia has already reached agreement in principle on a free trade agreement with the United Kingdom. On the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York, Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison signed an agreement on strategic cooperation on 21 September. Providing for deeper bilateral cooperation, it focuses especially on the multilateral level, sustainable energy and technology, medical research and health technology, as well as infrastructure.

Besides relations with Australia, which are regarded as a priority, economic relations with China remain of key importance for **New Zealand**. Negotiations with the EU on a free trade agreement are at an advanced stage, but have as yet not been concluded. New Zealand continues to work closely with Austria on disarmament, in which context a particular focus is placed on the universalisation of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) and the establishment of international standards for autonomous weapon systems.

The issue of climate change and the economic crisis associated with COVID-19 remain the biggest challenge for the **Pacific Island States**. China is pushing for greater influence in the region. Due to a lack of consideration for their interests, the five Micronesian members of the Pacific Island Forum have announced their withdrawal from the organisation. In **Samoa**, the oppositional FAST Party won the parliamentary elections, competing against the Human Rights Protection Party which had been in power for 23 years. Considerable confrontations marked the lead-up to the handover of power to Prime Minister Fiame Mata'afa, the first woman to hold the office. In November, the **Solomon Islands** were shaken by violent protests against the government's pro-China policies.

3. Austria's Multilateral Engagement

3.1 United Nations and its Specialised Agencies

3.1.1 General Assembly

General Matters

The General Debate of the 76th UN General Assembly (**UNGA**) was held in a hybrid format from 21 to 25 and on 27 September. In the opening segment, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and almost all speakers addressed the assembly in person, including for the first time US President Joe Biden. On the margins of the General Debate, several high-level events were organised, including the “SDG Moment”, the “Transformative Action for Nature and People” event, the meeting on the 20th anniversary of the Durban Declaration, the Food Systems Summit, the CTBTO Art. XIV Conference, as well as the High-Level Plenary Meeting to commemorate and promote the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. In total, **more than 100 heads of state and government and/or foreign ministers** attended the general debate **in person** and 80 speakers took part online or contributed video messages.

Austria was represented by Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen, Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg, who took part in the high-level meetings, numerous side events and held over 20 bilateral meetings. Alongside management of the COVID-19 pandemic and especially vaccine equity, the meetings focused on climate and environment-related topics, “Our Common Agenda” – the report prepared by the UN Secretary-General on the future of the UN, strengthening multilateralism, human rights, as well as disarmament, humanitarian issues, the rule of law, the implementation of sustainable development goals and regional tensions and conflicts.

Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen participated in the event “Transformative Action for Nature and People” on 22 September. In his video message, he highlighted Austria’s goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2040 and referred to the establishment of the Biodiversity Fund. The Federal President also participated virtually in the Food Systems Summit on 23 September, underlining the key role played by agriculture in the fight against climate change and stressed the importance of implementing nature-based solutions as well as ecosystem-based approaches.

On 24 September, Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz participated in the High-Level Dialogue on Energy via video message, emphasising Austria’s goal of generating 100% of its electricity from renewable sources by 2030. The Federal Chancellor also took part in a virtual COVID-19 summit hosted by US President Joe Biden, in the context of which he drew attention to Austria’s active contribution

towards managing the pandemic by bilaterally donating over two million doses of vaccine and providing support to COVAX. Major interest was attracted by a high-level Roundtable on Afghanistan hosted as an in-person meeting by the Permanent Mission of Austria to the United Nations in New York under the heading of “Ensuring protection of Afghan people, especially of women and girls, in Afghanistan and in the region”, to which Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg had invited representatives of all major UN organisations, the EU as well as partner states and countries from the region.

On 23 September, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg addressed the UNGA. In his speech, he issued a strong plea in support of defending values and rights, including human rights and the rule of law as jointly developed by the international community over the past decades. He also focused on management of the COVID-19 pandemic, disarmament, climate change and aid to Afghanistan. On 24 September, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg invited Austrian entrepreneurs to an event on digitalisation organised in the context of ReFocus Austria.

Administrative and Budgetary Affairs including UN Procurement

Austria contributed actively to the work of the Fifth Committee of the UN General Assembly (Administrative and Budgetary Affairs), chaired various resolution negotiations and assumed an important role in numerous EU negotiating teams. A major topic on the agenda of the Fifth Committee was the UN Regular Budget for 2022, which was for the third consecutive time negotiated to cover one year instead of two years. The UN budget adopted at the end of the year totals 3.229 billion US dollars. Based on the **scale of assessments** for contributions to the UN, likewise negotiated this year, Austria's share amounts to 0.679% for the period 2022–24.

Another major issue was the **UN's long-standing liquidity crisis**, which has been somewhat eased due to more reliable payments of mandatory contributions. This has led the UN Secretary-General to lift the hiring freeze on positions to be financed from the regular UN budget, introduced in 2020. However, due to the debts accumulated over the past few years, the UN Secretary-General is still compelled to introduce restrictions on activities that are not absolutely necessary, which continues to impact the organisation's day-to-day work.

While the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has actually led to a substantial reduction in travel expenses, it has at the same time involved higher expenditure on health measures for UN staff and on upgrading information and communication technology for video conferences.

The annual budget adopted for **peacekeeping operations (PKO)** from July 2021 to June 2022 amounts to 6.37 billion US dollars, which falls by some 200 million dollars below the level of the previous period. Based on the applicable scale of

assessments for Member States' contributions, Austria's share again amounts to 0.679%. The Fifth Committee adopted a budget for the twelve PKOs, the UN Logistics Base in Brindisi, the Regional Service Centre in Entebbe and the PKO Support Account.

With regard to **UN reform**, ongoing since 2019 and regularly reviewed by the Fifth Committee, it was possible to achieve progress on all essential administrative and budgetary measures designed to facilitate higher levels of coherence, transparency, effectiveness and accountability throughout the UN system. Covering the areas of peace and security, development and management, UN reform aims to improve mandate implementation, especially in the latter, through decentralisation and a higher level of decision-making powers granted to the managers active at the UN Secretariat in exchange for increased accountability.

Safeguarding Austria's economic interests also includes supporting participation of Austrian companies in **public procurement by the UN** and its specialised agencies. According to the 2020 Annual Statistical Report on United Nations Procurement, the total value of contracts awarded by the UN system rose in 2020 to 22.3 billion US dollars (2019: 19.9 billion US dollars). This marks the highest increase ever and underscores the upward trend witnessed over the past decade. With respect to COVID-19-related procurement, Austria had evolved into the third largest supplier worldwide. The total of 110.1 million US dollars generated in this field included medical protective equipment worth 66 million US dollars as well as laboratory and test equipment amounting to 27 million US dollars. Overall, 1.28% of all UN procurement orders (goods and services) were awarded to Austrian companies, putting Austria 20th place worldwide. The total order value amounted to 284.9 million US dollars, which represents a significant increase over the previous year (189.0 million US dollars).

International Law

In the context of the **76th session of the UNGA's Sixth Committee** (International Law Committee), Austria placed a special focus on the debate on crimes against humanity, the rule of law as well as strengthening and promoting the international treaty regime. The Sixth Committee also dealt with the annual report of the **UN Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL)** and applications for observer status in the UN General Assembly.

The report of the 72nd session of the **UN International Law Commission (ILC)** was discussed by the Sixth Committee and taken note of by the UNGA. Likewise, the ILC's work on the protection of the atmosphere and the provisional application of treaties was concluded and taken note of by UNGA resolutions. International Law Week, as the traditional annual gathering of UN Member States' legal advisors for discussions on international law issues, was held from 25 to 29 October. In cooperation with Sweden, Austria again organised an interactive dialogue

involving ILC members. The EU-US Informal Legal Advisors Dialogue focused mainly on control of **Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS)**. For Austria, International Law Week was also marked by the campaign for re-election of the Austrian ILC member August Reinsch. Winning 149 votes, he was re-elected by the UNGA on 12 November – despite substantial competition – and will thus continue to serve on the ILC in the period 2023–2027.

Crimes against humanity: As in the previous two years, the further course of action with regard to the **draft articles on the prevention and punishment of crimes against humanity**, completed by the ILC on its second reading in 2019, was discussed by the Sixth Committee during the 76th UNGA. After long and intensive informal consultations, it was, however, ultimately not possible to reach agreement on a compromise text for the resolution, making it once again impossible to achieve substantive progress. During resolution drafting negotiations, Austria, together with a group of like-minded states, again actively supported the elaboration of a convention on the basis of the draft articles and setting up an UNGA ad hoc committee with a view to preparing a codification conference. In its related position statement, the EU again called for the elaboration of a convention. The topic will be revisited and included in the Sixth Committee's agenda at the 77th UNGA.

Rule of Law: In its national statement, Austria, as coordinator of the Group of Friends of the Rule of Law, emphasised its commitment to a rules-based international order. As Headquarters State hosting the **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)** and the **International Anti-Corruption Academy (IACA)**, Austria underlined the importance of the fight against corruption. Next year's debate will focus on the "The impacts of the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on the rule of law at the national and international levels".

UN Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL): Alongside the traditional omnibus resolution on the annual report of the 54th session of UNCITRAL, Austria facilitated three further resolutions on mediation rules, rules for expedited arbitration and the enlargement of UNCITRAL membership.

Middle East Conflict

The Middle East conflict once again featured as a special priority on the UNGA's political work agenda. As in previous years and on the initiative of Palestine, over a dozen resolutions were adopted both in the individual committees and in the plenary, dealing with various aspects of the political and humanitarian situation in the occupied territories and with Jerusalem. As in previous years, the EU sponsored the humanitarian resolution on "Assistance to the Palestinian People". Negotiations on resolutions under the "Palestine Package" are conducted with the Palestinian representation under the leadership of the EU delegation. As in previous years and within the EU, Austria worked towards reducing the number

of resolutions as well as mandated reports on the situation, and advocated more balanced texts; this enabled, for instance, condemning rocket attacks launched from Gaza on Israel. This year, too, the issue of the terminology used to designate the holy sites was a focal point of the negotiations, especially in the context of the resolution relating to Jerusalem. Together with like-minded partners, Austria advocates adding the English term “Temple Mount” to the Arabic term “Haram al-Sharif” or deleting or completely rephrasing the term. In cooperation with the USA, it was possible to include references to the need for improved internal supervisory processes as well as more transparent, independent and neutral working methods in the resolutions dealing with UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East).

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 of international security policy. The implementation of the UNSG’s disarmament agenda, on which Austria has volunteered to be the driving force on some sub-topics, such as use of explosive weapons in populated areas (**EWIPA**) and lethal autonomous weapon systems (**LAWS**), was at the centre of the relevant activities undertaken by the UNSG’s High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu.

After the entry into force of the Treaty on the **Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)** on 22 January, in the promotion and development of which Austria played a leading role, Austria engaged in outreach efforts to foster its universalisation.

Due to COVID-19-related restrictions, the UNGA’s First Committee (Disarmament) once again met in a restricted format. Discussions on nuclear issues were mainly dominated by the **Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)**, which had to be moved to January 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Together with the core group of like-minded states, Austria introduced the annual implementation resolution for the Treaty in the UNGA’s First Committee, which was adopted by a large majority of Member States despite ongoing criticism voiced by nuclear-weapon states. Initiated by Austria, the resolution on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons was adopted by more than 70% of the UN Member States. Austria also continued its efforts on banning LAWS, the promotion of the **Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)**, the drafting of a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons, and topics related to the militarisation of outer space as well as cyber security.

Major differences of opinion between the USA on the one hand and Russia and China on the other, became particularly apparent on topics related to militarisation of outer space, involving mutual accusations of engaging in an arms race, and with respect to nuclear disarmament (especially regarding the AUKUS alliance).

Another key topic in this context was export control regimes, on which China, for the first time in 30 years, introduced a resolution it had drafted in the First Committee. Adopted by a narrow margin, this resolution at the same time reflected the increasingly pro-active stance adopted by China in the First Committee.

Economic, Development and Environmental Affairs

The Second Committee (Economic and Financial Committee) of the UNGA met from 5 October to 23 November. The topics addressed focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sustainable development, macroeconomic issues, climate and environmental matters, energy, biodiversity, information and communication technologies, civil protection and disaster control, financing for development and reform of the UN development system, globalisation, poverty reduction, agriculture, food security, nutrition, tourism, science, technology and innovation, as well as the situation of the **Least Developed Countries (LDCs)**, **Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs)**, **Small Island Developing States (SIDS)** and **Middle Income Countries (MICs)**. Representing the EU, Austria chaired and/or co-chaired the negotiations on a resolution on LLDCs and a resolution on the International Year of Sustainable Mountain Development. Due to the COVID-19-related adjustment of working modalities in the Second Committee, the number of resolutions introduced totalled 37 and was, as in the previous year, significantly lower than before the pandemic. Negotiations focused on technical updates as well as on the most important recent developments that were mainly associated with COVID-19-specific aspects of the topics addressed in the resolutions.

Social Policy

The resolutions on policies and programmes involving youth, the role of cooperatives in social development, the International Year of the Family, and the Second World Assembly on Ageing, dealt with in the Third Committee under the agenda item “Social Development”, were adopted by consensus. The resolution on the World Summit for Social Development, traditionally introduced by the Group of Developing Countries and China (**G-77**), was adopted after a vote. A new resolution addressing the challenges of persons living with a rare disease and their families was introduced to the Third Committee by Spain, Brazil and Qatar, as was a resolution on immunisation solidarity announced at short notice by the **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)**. Despite difficult negotiations – the initiators were, for instance, advised that health-related topics should be introduced in the UNGA’s Second Committee or the World Health Assembly – both resolutions were adopted by consensus. In addition, the 59th session of the **Commission for Social Development (CSocD)**, a subsidiary body of the **UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)**, was held from 8 to 17 February, focusing on the priority theme of “Socially Just Transition Towards Sustainable Development: The Role of Digital Technologies in Social Development and Well-being of All”. The CSocD

adopted three resolutions on this priority theme, on policies and programmes involving youth, and the annual resolution on the social dimension of the **New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)**.

Commission on the Status of Women

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (**CSW**), held from 15 to 26 March, could not convene in its traditional format as a large-scale UN conference, since it was not possible for delegations from the Member States' capitals as well as NGO representatives to attend in person. Chaired by Armenia, it was, nevertheless, possible to convene all segments either in a hybrid or – mostly – virtual format. The session was dedicated to the priority theme of “Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”. Led by Federal Minister Susanne Raab, the Austrian delegation, composed of representatives from the MFA, the Federal Chancellery, ADA and the Permanent Mission of Austria to the UN in New York, contributed virtually to the 65th CSW. Members of Austrian civil society, including the Austrian National Committee for UN Women, were regularly updated on the process of the 65th CSW in virtual discussion rounds. Representing Austria, Federal Minister Susanne Raab contributed a video message and took part in a ministerial round table. Furthermore, and in cooperation with UNODC Executive Director Ghada Waly, Federal Minister Susanne Raab organised a high-level side event on “Child, early and forced marriage – preventing forced marriages and empowering girls in an international context”. Together with partner organisations, Austria organised two further side events, on the implementation of the **Women, Peace and Security (WPS)** agenda and on the protection of journalists. In the general debate at the 65th CSW session, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and outgoing Executive Director of UN Women Phumzile Mlambo Ngcuka stressed the COVID-19 pandemic's disproportionate impact on the situation of women and girls. Building on a compromise drafted by the Armenian Chair, the conclusions of the 65th session of the CSW on the priority themes of participation and violence prevention were adopted by consensus.

On 14 September 2020, Austria was elected as a member of the CSW for the period 2021–2025. Austria's membership of the CSW began with the end of the 65th and the official opening of the 66th session of the CSW in March. Until the end of its 69th session in 2025, Austria will therefore serve as one of the CSW's 45 members.

Humanitarian Affairs

The 76th UNGA adopted thematic resolutions on the coordination of humanitarian aid, the safety and security of humanitarian personnel, cooperation in pro-

viding assistance following disasters, **internally displaced persons (IDPs)**, the White Helmets and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Resolutions with a regional focus related to support to the Palestinian people, assistance to refugees and returnees, and displaced persons in Africa. As one of the most important humanitarian donors, the EU again played a pivotal role in the negotiations on resolutions, with Austria supporting four humanitarian resolutions as a co-sponsor.

3.1.2 Security Council

Albeit still affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the UN Security Council (**UNSC**) returned to an almost regular session mode in the course of the year. Adopting a related resolution, the UN Security Council had already endorsed the call for a global ceasefire, issued by the UN Secretary-General in July 2020. At the beginning of 2021, a resolution focusing especially on ceasefires in conflict zones to allow the delivery of vaccines was adopted.

Alongside the ongoing crises in the Middle East and North Africa, the UNSC placed a particular focus on conflicts on the Horn of Africa and in Asia. In the Middle East and North Africa, the Middle East conflict, especially the escalation in Gaza in May, and the situation in Syria, Yemen and Libya were at the centre of attention. The extension of the cross-border humanitarian aid mechanism for Syria continued to be a source of internal divisions within the UNSC. It was, however, possible to avert the feared expiry of the mechanism. In Libya, the UNSC agreed on a ceasefire monitoring mechanism. In sub-Saharan Africa, the situation in Ethiopia, Sudan, Mali and the entire Sahel region took centre stage. Myanmar and Afghanistan were at the core of the UNSC's activities in Asia. Likewise, Europe increasingly moved up the agenda: major topics were, alongside Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina – including due to the extension of EUFOR Althea's mandate, and the crisis in the Belarussian border region.

Core topics, such as the impact of climate change on **women, peace and security (WPS)**, which also concur with Austrian priorities, continued to gain importance this year, although content-related differences within the UNSC remained. The adoption of the first-ever resolution on climate and security envisaged for December, was, however, thwarted by Russia's veto. A common theme addressed in all UNSC dossiers was the threat of terrorism and the topic of counter-terrorism – on which there was, notwithstanding other differences, widespread agreement among the members of the UNSC. Austria participated actively in the various discussions, delivering national statements and contributing to numerous EU statements. Austria continued to contribute pro-actively to the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency (ACT) Group composed of some 30 like-minded medium-sized states that advocate increased accountability, coherence and transparency

of the UNSC's activities. In this context, Austria assumed a leading role on the issue of enhanced involvement of non-members.

Within the framework of the EU, close coordination continued between the EU Member States among the permanent and non-permanent UNSC members. Furthermore, there was close cooperation with future UNSC members, such as Albania, in the lead-up to their membership, including through joint statements after UNSC meetings.

Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict

Chaired by China, the annual open **debate on the protection of civilians (PoC)** was held on 25 May and took place virtually for the second year in a row. The debate focused on the fifth anniversary of the adoption of UNSC resolution 2286 (2016) and the protection of medical care facilities and personnel in armed conflict. The UNSC was briefed by Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock, President of the ICRC, and Orzala Nemat, representative of an Afghan NGO. Numerous UN Member States stressed the need to respect international humanitarian law. Other central topics were unhindered access to COVID-19 vaccinations and EWIPA. Austria delivered a national statement and contributed to the statements of the EU and the Group of Friends of PoC. In the context of the debate and contributing to PoC week, a side event on the use of EWIPA was organised by Austria in cooperation with UNICEF, ICRC, the **International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW)** and like-minded Member States.

In this year's report, the UN Secretary-General took stock of the PoC agenda, focussing in particular on three issues: protection of medical care in armed conflict, the connection between conflict and hunger, and the interlinkages between environmental degradation, climate change and conflict. In contrast to previous years, when specific conflicts were highlighted, this year's report was more of an overarching analysis of trends in conflict areas – both in terms of major challenges, but also in terms of positive initiatives launched by Member States.

The interdisciplinary leadership training programme on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, in place since 2012, was successfully continued with a national seminar held at the **Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution (ASPR)**. This course was certified according to UN standards in December 2014 and again in December 2018. Austria thus continues its fruitful cooperation with the **Department for Peace Operations (DPO)** on training measures to improve the protection of civilians. At the Austrian Armed Forces International Centre in Götzendorf (Lower Austria), Austria furthermore hosts an annual PoC course at tactical level that also involves international participants.

Women, Peace and Security (WPS)

Austria took part in the inaugural meeting of the **Generation Equality Forum**, held in Mexico City from 29 to 31 March. This process, organised by Mexico and France in cooperation with UN Women and international NGOs working in the field of women's rights, seeks to add momentum to the implementation of the global agenda for gender equality. Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz attended the culminating meeting in Paris from 30 June to 2 July, announcing a contribution of two million euros for the protection of women and girls in Syria and Lebanon. In addition, Austria signed the Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Assistance. In this framework, Austria pledged a total of 11.4 million euros for related ADC projects to be implemented over the next five years.

The annual debate on sexual violence in conflict was held on 14 April and chaired by Vietnam. The debate focused on ensuring support and services for survivors of sexual violence. The UNSC was briefed by the Special Representative of the UNSG on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Nobel Peace Prize laureate and Congolese gynaecologist Dr Denis Mukwege, and Carolin Atim, deaf founder and Executive Director of the South Sudan Women with Disabilities Network. The debate focused on the rights of persons with disabilities and civil society, as well as on the activities launched by the Special Representative to support survivors of sexual violence. The reports also included specific country situations with a focus on Tigray/Ethiopia. The majority of UNSC members stressed the need for a victim- and survivor-centred approach at both local and national levels. Several members condemned the increase in systematic sexual violence witnessed in the civil war in Ethiopia. Austria contributed to the statements by the EU and the Group of Friends of WPS. This year, the UNSC did not adopt a resolution on the topic.

Chaired by Kenya, the annual UNSC debate on WPS was held on 21 October. The open debate was characterised by broad support for the importance of the WPS agenda. Austria delivered a national statement and contributed to the statements of the EU and the Group of Friends of WPS. The Austrian statement focused on support for women and girls in Afghanistan, the long-standing commitment to ADC support for women's organisations in conflict areas through contributions to the **UN Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF)**, and Austria's commitment to the WPS agenda, also reflected in Austria's participation in the Paris Gender Equality Forum. The UNSC did not adopt a resolution on the topic.

On 3 November, the **Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP)**, ADA and the Permanent Missions of Austria and Norway hosted a joint virtual event in New York entitled "Amplifying women's stories; launch of the Global Media Award for the implementation of the women, peace, and security agenda". The global award presented at this event will be granted to journalists and media professionals whose work contributes to the implementation of the WPS agenda, thus seeking to recognise and support their related efforts.

With a view to improving the implementation of UNSC resolution 1325 (2000) and other UNSC resolutions on this topic, the Women, Peace and Security Focal Points Network was set up in 2016. As in previous years, Austria actively participated in a number of virtual Network meetings.

Children and Armed Conflict

Chaired by Estonia, the UNSC held an open debate on Children and Armed Conflict (**CAAC**) on 28 June. This year also marked the 25th anniversary of the UNSC Agenda on Children and Armed Conflict. Referring to UN report S/2021/437, the UNSG and UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore provided information on the most important challenges and negative trends. In 2020, the UN investigated 24,000 grave violations against children in 21 countries. The rising numbers of abductions and cases of sexual violence are particularly staggering. Attacks against schools often remain without consequence. EWIPA was referred to as the main cause of child killing and mutilation. In its national statement, Austria condemned war crimes against children and expressed support for the UN Secretariat's important work with parties to conflicts. The statement also highlighted Austria's commitment to supporting child victims of armed conflict within the framework of the activities launched by ADA, for instance in Sudan. Austria also contributed to the statements of the EU and the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict.

Islamic State and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee

Particularly since its last membership of the UNSC (2009/2010), Austria has consistently remained committed to strengthening the rule of law in the UNSC, advocating in particular fair procedures and effective legal remedies in the sanctions committees. Established by the UNSC in resolution 1904 (2009), the **Office of the Ombudsperson**, who reviews requests from individuals, groups, undertakings or entities seeking to be removed from the consolidated ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions List, has enabled major progress in this respect. On 17 December, Daniel Kipfer Fasciati's term in office as Ombudsperson ended. Within the framework of the informal Group of Like-minded States on Targeted Sanctions, Austria continues to advocate further improvements geared towards legal protection both on the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee and in the other UNSC sanctions committees.

Peace Missions

Some 76,000 troops from 120 countries were deployed in a total of twelve **UN peacekeeping operations (PKOs)**. After 13 years, the joint UN-African Union operation in Darfur ceased operations at the end of 2020. The PKO's main focus

was placed on the further implementation of the eight priorities outlined in the UN Secretary-General's **Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative**, endorsed by most of the UN Member States. The strict instructions introduced to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic remained in force both in the areas of operation and for staff rotation of UN personnel (i.e. operational staff must be fully vaccinated prior to deployment).

Austria continued its commitment as a responsible partner in PKOs. Furthermore, Austria made relevant contributions to the areas of protection of human rights and civilians in armed conflict, training of UN personnel and regional capacity building. In this spirit, it also continued to second staff to the **Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC)** in Ghana and the **Peace Support Operations Training Centre (PSOTC)** in Bosnia-Herzegovina. At the United Nations Peacekeeping Ministerial in Seoul in December, Austria announced it would maintain the support it provided in these areas also in the year to come.

Within the framework of the UN PKOs, Austria has contributed in 2021 some 200 military personnel, including a contingent to the **UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)**, four military observers to the **UN Truce Supervision Organization in the Middle East (UNTSO)**, four military observers to the **UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO)**, three staff officers to the **UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP)**, two staff officers to the **UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)** and one staff officer to the **UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)**. Seconding one female Austrian police officer to UNMIK, Austria is also an active police-contributing member and furthermore strives to continuously increase the share of women in PKOs.

In the UNGA's Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, which is responsible for developing political guidelines, Austria, representing the EU, negotiated in February and March the "protection" chapter of the annual report, achieving a – from the Austrian point of view – satisfactory outcome. As in the previous year, the 2021 report was again structured in eight chapters, thus reflecting the **A4P priorities**. The approximately 80 recommendations contained in the report are aimed inter alia at enhancing the PKOs' efficiency, increasing protection of both deployed UN personnel and local civilian population, as well as creating the necessary framework conditions for increasing the share of women in PKOs.

3.1.3 International Court of Justice

The International Court of Justice (**ICJ**), responsible for settling legal disputes between states and for providing advisory opinions, is the principal judicial organ of the UN and the only one of the six main organs based in The Hague. Austria is one of 74 states that recognise the ICJ's compulsory jurisdiction according to

Art. 36 para. 2 of its statute. Currently, 15 cases are pending before the ICJ. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, court hearings continued to be held largely in hybrid form.

On 6 February, Judge Georg Nolte (Germany) was sworn in as new Member of the Court. Subsequently, judges elected Joan E. Donoghue (USA) as the new President and Kirill Gevorgian (Russia) as the Vice-President. As Judge James Crawford (Australia) had died in office in May, elections for the vacant seat were held at the UN in New York on 5 November. Thus elected as new Member of the Court, Hilary Charlesworth (Australia) was sworn in on 7 December.

In its judgement of 3 February, the ICJ found that it indeed had jurisdiction in the case Iran vs. USA for Alleged Violations of the 1955 Treaty of Amity, Economic Relations, and Consular Rights. The Court will now address the substance of the application in which Iran alleges treaty violations due to US sanctions imposed against it.

In the case of Qatar v. United Arab Emirates concerning alleged violations of the **International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)**, the ICJ found on 4 February that it had no jurisdiction and upheld the first preliminary objection raised by the United Arab Emirates stating that discrimination based on national origin did not fall within the scope of the ICERD.

On 5 March, new proceedings were instituted before the ICJ between Gabon and Equatorial Guinea (Land and Maritime Delimitation and Sovereignty over Islands) on the basis of a Special Agreement in which the parties request the Court to determine the disputed delimitation of their common maritime and land boundaries.

On 30 April, public hearings on the merits of the case concerning Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo (Democratic Republic of the Congo vs. Uganda) were concluded. On 1 October, public hearings on the merits of the case were likewise concluded in the case Nicaragua vs. Colombia concerning Alleged Violations of Sovereign Rights and Maritime Spaces in the Caribbean Sea. On 16 September, Armenia filed in the Registry of the Court an application instituting proceedings against Azerbaijan, requesting the Court to indicate provisional measures. On 23 September, Azerbaijan in turn instituted proceedings against Armenia. Both proceedings were instituted for alleged violations against the ICERD. On 7 December, the ICJ delivered an order indicating provisional measures to protect certain rights claimed, ordering inter alia both parties to refrain from any action which might aggravate or extend the dispute.

On 12 October, the ICJ delivered its judgement in the case Somalia v. Kenya (concerning Maritime Delimitation in the Indian Ocean), determining the course of the maritime boundary between the two states. Kenya, which had not attended the hearings in March, was also not present when the ICJ delivered its judgement.

3.1.4 United Nations Specialised Agencies

At the **41st United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) General Conference**, Austria was elected to the organisation's Executive Board for the term 2021–2025, winning 166 of 175 valid votes cast. Having both seat and vote in this very important supervisory body, Austria will for the next four years thus be able to contribute to shaping the agenda of UNESCO at a time of global challenges. With this successful bid, Austria is for the fourth time since its accession to UNESCO in 1948 represented on the organisation's Governing Body.

Austria considers the outcome of the vote also a reflection of other Member States' appreciation of numerous initiatives and projects launched over recent years. Following particularly successful elections to various UNESCO committees during the last few years, Austria is represented in a total of seven intergovernmental steering committees: the Intergovernmental Council of the International Hydrological Programme, the Intergovernmental Council of the International Programme for the Development of Communication, the Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the International Bioethics Committee, the Intergovernmental Committee for Physical Education and Sport, the Coordination Council of the UNESCO Programme Man and the Biosphere and the Committee on the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

Austria also seeks to contribute to visibly shaping UNESCO's work including through concrete projects on human rights and human rights education, protection of the World Heritage, the safety of journalists, gender equality, anti-discrimination, education as a tool to prevent violent extremism, "futures literacy", intangible cultural heritage, biodiversity as well as water and river management.

Austria contributed 0.874% or 1.925 billion euros to UNESCO's regular budget. Furthermore, Austria made available 19,056 euros to the World Heritage Fund as well as 18,912 euros to the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund and 20,000 euros to the International Fund for Cultural Diversity.

Austria has been a member of the **Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)**, the largest of the UN's specialised agencies, since 1947. The important role played by the FAO was once again highlighted on World Food Day. According to the latest State of Food and Nutrition report, around 811 million people suffered from chronic hunger in 2020. This increase of over 150 million people compared to 2019, is mainly due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic – and makes it even more difficult to achieve 'a world free of hunger' by 2030 as striven for under Sustainable Development Goal 2, despite the fact that the world produces enough food to feed everyone. What is more, food losses and especially food waste continue to be a major challenge. With the world population projected to grow to

10 billion people by 2050, undernutrition and malnutrition will continue to grow unless food systems are transformed. Against this backdrop, the UN Food Systems Summit, held on 23 September at the UNGA in New York, set the course for the transformation of global food systems to contribute towards still achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

At its 47th Plenary Session, held in February, the FAO Committee on World Food Security adopted the Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition, which suggest possible actions for governments, institutions and other stakeholders to address the root causes of hunger and malnutrition. Another challenge posed to the FAO is the desert locust crisis that has rapidly spread from East Africa to the Arabian Peninsula and Southwest Asia. The FAO contributes towards efforts aimed at countering the spread, including through a regular monitoring and early warning system (Desert Locust Information Service, DLIS) providing high-quality analyses and spread forecasts. At its 74th session, the FAO Committee on Commodity Problems reviewed the latest developments in food and agricultural markets, placing a special focus on global value chains, smallholder farmers and digital innovations. Meeting for their 34th session, the members of the FAO Committee on Fisheries adopted the first-ever declaration on sustainable fisheries and aquaculture.

Founded in 1951, the **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** has for 70 years now been the leading intergovernmental organisation in the field of migration, with more than 16,000 staff and over 578 offices worldwide. Austria joined the IOM in 1952. Currently, the organisation has 174 member states and a further eight states as well as numerous global and regional international organisations and NGOs enjoy observer status. In accordance with its mandate, IOM is committed to humane and orderly migration. Since 2016, IOM has formed part of the UN family as a related agency. Since 28 June 2018, António Vitorino (Portugal) has held the office of Director General. Alongside its country office in Austria, IOM has since 2011 operated a regional office in Vienna that is responsible for Eastern and South East Europe as well as Central Asia. A headquarters agreement between Austria and IOM has been in force since 2014. The IOM Country Office for Austria is mainly responsible for analysing national migration issues and emerging trends, and for developing and implementing Austria-specific projects and programmes. The IOM Country Office in Vienna is the National Contact Point Austria of the European Migration Network and cooperates with the relevant Austrian institutions. IOM inter alia supports migrants in their voluntary return and implements projects to support reintegration in the respective regions of origin. Special attention is paid to particularly vulnerable migrants, such as unaccompanied minors. In addition, IOM advises Austrian institutions inter alia with respect to identifying victims of human trafficking during asylum procedures and on training activities in fostering intercultural skills. Other services provided by IOM include awareness-raising activities on human trafficking.

In the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the **International Labour Organization (ILO)** continued to monitor the impact of the crisis on the world of work and was able to continue its day-to-day-business virtually. However, it proved difficult to agree on a virtual format for the 109th session of the **International Labour Conference (ILC)**, which had been cancelled in 2020 and was finally held in two parts over seven weeks (instead of the usual two weeks). In June, the ILC adopted a “Global Call to Action for a Human-Centred Recovery that is Inclusive, Sustainable, and Resilient” addressing COVID-19-related measures and an ILC Resolution on Myanmar calling for a return to democracy and respect for labour rights. The ILC Committee on the Application of Standards, a key element of the ILO standards monitoring system, resumed its work and the elections to the ILO Governing Body, that had been moved to this year, were held. Just like the consultations on social security held in June, the two general discussions held in December, – one on “Inequalities and the world of work” and the other on “Skills and lifelong learning” – were marked by the pandemic. Austria continues to participate as an observer in the sessions of the ILO Governing Body, where it has traditionally contributed to addressing legal issues and strengthening the standards system. Apart from the pandemic, the paramount topics were the preparation for the election of the new ILO Director-General scheduled for 2022, the difficult situation of workers in Myanmar, Venezuela, Bangladesh and Guatemala, but also attempts to weaken the ILO standards monitoring system through an alliance formed by the employers’ group and Latin American and Asian countries.

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to dominate the agenda of the **World Health Organization (WHO)** the second year in a row. Although COVID-19 vaccines had gradually become available in larger quantities since spring, the number of reported COVID-19 cases had risen from 63 to 263 million since the beginning of December 2020. The number of reported COVID-19 deaths skyrocketed from 1.5 to 5.2 million. The number of doses of COVID-19 vaccines administered worldwide exceeded 7.8 billion at the beginning of December, although only about 600 million were administered through the WHO COVAX vaccine initiative, making the target of vaccinating 40% of the population in WHO Member States by the end of 2021 unattainable. In terms of the course set not only for improving pandemic and/or epidemic preparedness and response but also with a view to sustainable financing of the organisation, 2021 could in retrospect go down in WHO history as a milestone year. At the special session of the World Health Assembly (29 November to 1 December), Member States agreed to draft an international instrument under the Constitution of the WHO on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response (Pandemic Accord). In addition, and with a view to reacting to the experience gained in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, informal negotiations on the targeted revision of the International Health Regulations were launched shortly afterwards on the initiative of the USA. Profound importance is to be attributed to the process aimed at securing sustainable funding for the WHO,

initiated this year. If successful, this approach could lead to a gradual, significant increase in Member States' mandatory contributions by 2028–2029, which would have far-reaching and substantially positive impacts on the organisation's capacity to act.

Established in 1950, the **World Meteorological Organization (WMO)** became part of the UN family as a specialised agency in 1951. This year, it continued its work on coordinating the worldwide expansion of a meteorological and hydrological measurement and observation network. Furthermore, activities towards implementing its Strategy 2020–2023 and the reform of the WMO's governance structure, adopted at the 18th WMO Congress in June 2019, dominated the agenda and related to both the Constituent Bodies and the Secretariat itself. The previously eight Technical Commissions were reduced to two (focusing on the tasks of infrastructure and services), a Scientific Advisory Panel was established, and the Secretariat was reorganised, involving the relevant Directorates. The Austrian Michael Staudinger (former Director of the Central Institute of Meteorology and Geodynamics) holds the office of President of the Regional Association VI Europe (RA-VI).

The Geneva-based **International Telecommunications Union (ITU)** is a specialised UN agency in which government and industry representatives coordinate the utilisation of the radio frequency spectrum and the satellite orbit, develop technical standards that ensure the seamless connection of networks and technologies, and seek to improve worldwide access to information and communication technologies. Furthermore, the establishment and operation of global telecommunication networks and services is being coordinated. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the annual World Summit on the Information Society Forum was again held virtually. Likewise, the ITU Council continued to be able to meet in informal virtual formats only, as did the working, study and focus groups. Within the framework of the ITU, Austria supports an open, secure, free and easily accessible internet for all – as well as the responsible and human rights-based use of new technologies.

The London-based **International Maritime Organization (IMO)** is a specialised UN agency and comprises 174 Member States. Austria has been a member of the IMO since 1975 and even though it closed its shipping register for commercial deep-sea shipping in 2012, Austria – as a strongly foreign trade-oriented economy – is very much interested in safe and ecologically sound deep-sea shipping. Held in a hybrid format, the IMO Assembly met for its 32nd session from 6 to 15 December. The UNGA elected the 40 members of the IMO Council for the period 2022–2023 and agreed on steps towards reforming the Council. The IMO's substantive priorities include the reduction of atmospheric pollution from maritime shipping, enhancing security of international trade, improving the participation of women in the shipping industry, and work towards ensuring safe maritime shipping and supporting the role of seafarers as an essential workforce in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The main item on the agenda of the **International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)** was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on air transport. A dedicated Council Recovery Task Force was set up to provide guidance to governments and businesses on how to revitalise the international aviation sector. In this context, the ICAO developed comprehensive recommendations and guidelines to assist states and companies to respond adequately and in a coordinated manner to the crisis. Another focus was the work on the organisation's Framework on Ethics, which has now been largely aligned with that of other UN organisations, to ensure that the work of ICAO and its staff meets high ethical standards.

The Madrid-based **United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)** is the leading international organisation in the field of tourism and a global forum for tourism policy and the exchange of tourism know-how. Since 1975, Austria has been a full member of the organisation that comprises 159 full members and six associate members. UNWTO is the only organisation that collects and processes data on tourism worldwide. In the light of the substantial need for information in connection with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on global tourism, the relevance of the organisation's related activities has become particularly visible (including through tools such as the UNWTO Recovery Tracker and the Tourism Dashboard). The UNWTO is also increasingly involving destinations, businesses and training institutions in its initiatives. At the 24th UNWTO General Assembly, held in Madrid at the end of the year, discussions focused on tourism and rural development, innovation and digitalisation, as well as education and training.

3.2 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

The OSCE's Third (human) Dimension ranked high on the ambitious agenda pursued by the Swedish Chairmanship, placing a special focus on women's and gender rights, as well as on conflict management. Generally, the overarching theme of the Chair's activities was enhanced implementation of existing commitments. However, the increasing frictions between the participating States substantially impacted work in the human dimension: for the second consecutive year it was, for instance, not possible to hold the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, the largest human rights conference in the OSCE area involving over a thousand participants.

The conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region that had flared up again and the ongoing Ukraine crisis made cooperation within the OSCE considerably more difficult. Thus, the organisation's budget could, for instance, only be adopted in August, which markedly impaired programmatic work.

Bringing together some 50 ministers (including Federal Minister Linhart representing Austria) in Stockholm, the Ministerial Council offered – alongside the ple-

nary meeting – a rare opportunity for engaging in bilateral talks with numerous other participants. An important outcome of the Council was the programmatic decision on strengthening cooperation to address the challenges to comprehensive security in the OSCE area caused by climate change. Furthermore, participating States agreed to entrust Finland with the Chairmanship in 2025. The adoption of a number of further texts was, however, prevented by stalemates due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Ukraine conflict and human rights issues. Austria chaired negotiations in the Economic and Environmental Committee and the Forum for Security Co-operation.

Despite the difficult geopolitical situation and NATO rearmament efforts, the Structured Dialogue on current and future challenges and risks to security, initiated by the Austrian Presidency in 2017, continues to facilitate high-level dialogue and contacts in the military field – although concrete progress on arms control does not seem likely at present.

The OSCE's three autonomous institutions – the **Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM)**, the **High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM)** and the **Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)**, its 15 field missions in the Balkans, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, as well as the thematic units of the Secretariat provide participating States with tailor-made, cost-effective programmes for the further development of democracy, the rule of law, economic fundamentals and security stability. ODIHR is, furthermore, the leading body on election observation and monitoring in the OSCE area.

3.2.1 Regional Issues and Field Activities

The OSCE Security Community in the Context of the Crisis in and around Ukraine

The crisis in and around Ukraine continues to substantially influence work within the OSCE. The annexation of Crimea in violation of international law, and Russia's support for the armed formations in eastern Ukraine have led to a serious loss of confidence and a deep rift within the organisation.

The OSCE continues to contribute to de-escalation, crisis management and improving the civilian population's living conditions in eastern Ukraine through its **Special Monitoring Mission (SMM)** and the **Trilateral Contact Group (TCG)**. The year 2021 was, however, marked by an increasing deterioration in the situation on the ground – especially in terms of ceasefire violations and the humanitarian situation – as well as a stalemate in political negotiations.

Mandated with monitoring the ceasefire agreement, the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) involves some 1,200 observers and is by far the largest OSCE field mission. The observers are, however, not only increasingly being obstructed in

their work – such as being prevented from crossing the contact line between Donetsk and Luhansk – but are even being threatened. For the first time, they were prevented from leaving their accommodation in non-government-controlled areas. Furthermore, SMM observers are largely denied access to the Ukrainian-Russian border and all access to Crimea. Due to pressure exercised by Russia, the Border Observation Mission at the Checkpoints in Gukovo and Donetsk had to discontinue its operations at the end of September. The OSCE Project Co-ordination Office in Ukraine has implemented numerous projects aimed at supporting the rule of law and fostering conflict prevention.

The Crisis in Belarus

Since the rigged presidential elections in August 2019, documented by Austrian professor Wolfgang Benedek under the “Moscow Mechanism”, fundamental democratic and human rights continued to be increasingly violated. Against this background, 35 participating States invoked the “Vienna Mechanism”. Nonetheless, Belarus neither provided any substantive answers nor did it change its policy of repressing opposition and civil society. As had been the case under the previous Albanian Chairmanship, dialogue facilitation offered by the current Swedish Chairmanship was not accepted by the Belarusian government.

South East Europe

In support of the respective reform agendas, the OSCE maintains field operations in South East Europe, where it is represented with a presence in Albania and missions to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. Through their comprehensive security concept, these operations make a significant contribution towards stability in the region, supporting the transformation of societies based on democracy and the rule of law, the consolidation of multi-ethnic societies – for instance in North Macedonia, where the Austrian diplomat Clemens Koja has headed the local OSCE Mission since September 2018 – and towards regional economic co-operation. The central tasks and objectives pursued by the OSCE are strengthening human and minority rights, promoting freedom of the media, development of an active civil society and good governance. A special focus was placed on topics related to radicalisation and migratory flows as well as on police cooperation.

South Caucasus

The OSCE's efforts towards containing and/or resolving the two protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus – the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the conflict in Georgia – suffered setbacks. The Minsk Group that seeks to achieve a long-term political settlement to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict – and in particular its three

Co-Chairs – were unable to prevent the resurgence of armed conflict on some sections of the undemarcated border between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Efforts are now focusing on developing the groundwork for a lasting peaceful solution based on confidence-building measures. Although it was again possible to hold in-person meetings under the Geneva International Discussions to address the consequences of the conflict in Georgia, it was still not possible to achieve any substantive thematic progress.

Central Asia

The level of urgency for activities undertaken by the OSCE field missions in all five Central Asian states has increased as a result of the impact of the Afghanistan crisis on the OSCE area. The OSCE Programme Office in Nur-Sultan (**Kazakhstan**), the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat (**Turkmenistan**) and the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Tashkent (**Uzbekistan**) are active in all three dimensions of the OSCE, focusing on capacity building in the fight against corruption, border management and combating transnational threats such as terrorism and extremism. The OSCE Academy in Bishkek, which is co-funded by Austria, provides training on international relations with an OSCE focus and directed at experts from the region, including from Afghanistan. Apart from supporting Tajikistan in the areas of conflict prevention and the fight against transnational threats, corruption and violent extremism, the OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe places a special focus on providing support on border management – in particular through the OSCE Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe, which is likewise supported by Austria.

3.2.2 Election Observation

The provision of support in implementing democratic elections in the OSCE area is one of the tasks jointly assumed by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). The COVID-19 pandemic has, however, posed major challenges to the ODIHR's election observation activities. Travel restrictions or quarantine regulations in the OSCE area as well as the duty of care for observers meant that some election observation missions either had to be cancelled or were often conducted only as Limited Observation Missions (by long-term observers) or as Special Election Missions (by experts recruited by ODIHR). As of June, such missions took place in relation to election processes in Armenia, Moldova, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Georgia, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. An election observation mission to Russia, planned for September, failed due to the conditions imposed by the Russian authorities.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Austria participated by seconding only two short-term election observers and one long-term election observer, as well as 26

members of the Austrian Parliament, who took part in election observations in the context of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

3.2.3 The Security Policy Dimension

From September 2021 to 7 January 2022, Austria is holding the rotating chair of the Forum for Security Co-operation, placing the focus of discussions on the erosion of conventional arms control, the illicit transfer and possession of small arms and light weapons as well as conventional ammunition, the promotion of military-to-military contacts aimed at revitalising discussion on doctrine, and full integration of women in the armed forces. In addition to the routine meetings, two special thematic events were organised, one focusing on the presentation of a study on arms control and the other on security measures in conventional ammunition storage facilities.

The impact of the armed conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region and the escalating crisis in and around Ukraine dominated the cooled relations among OSCE participating States. Crisis settlement formats were hampered by the pandemic and often found it impossible to harness their full potential: due to procedural aspects, the Trilateral Contact Group on Ukraine made hardly any progress in implementing the Minsk Agreements; in the aftermath of the armed conflicts, the effective scope of the Minsk Group on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is limited; and the Geneva International Discussions on the conflict in Georgia generated hardly any progress either. It was, however, possible to strengthen the “5+2” process on the Transdniestrian Settlement Process through a joint statement at the Ministerial Council.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many arms control reviews had to be postponed or cancelled. The Structured Dialogue on the Ministerial Council Declaration “From Lisbon to Hamburg. Declaration on the 25th Anniversary of the OSCE Framework for Arms Control and Risks to Security in the OSCE Area” dealt under Spanish Chairmanship inter alia with “Understanding for Security”. Attended by representatives from the participating States’ capitals and national experts, agreement on continuing the dialogue was reached at the meetings. Opinions, however, diverged on security policy threats relevant for revitalising arms control.

Austria continues to participate actively in the Group of Friends on Conventional Arms Control in Europe, launched in 2016. Contributing proposals and national expertise, Austria supports the efforts aimed at modernising and updating the 2011 Vienna Document on confidence and security-building measures. Furthermore, Austria has supported the implementation of the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security, including related regional events on security sector reform. In the field of small arms and light weapons as well as conventional

ammunition, projects in Moldova and Montenegro were supported both financially and by sharing of expert knowledge.

At the Stockholm Ministerial Council in December, participating States did not succeed in adopting a declaration on the Security Policy Dimension. The politicisation caused by unresolved conflicts, in particular the Ukraine conflict and the conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region, as well as military tensions between the USA, NATO and Russia meant that several proposals were doomed to fail, especially on small arms and light weapons as well as on conventional ammunition, on the establishment of military-to-military contacts, on the declaration on the 25th anniversary of the Framework Convention and on equal participation of women in the armed forces, to name but a few. For similar reasons, decisions on combating terrorism and organised crime could not be adopted. Nevertheless, a common position on small arms and light weapons presented by Montenegro, which was largely based on the text of a Ministerial Council decision, received strong support and was endorsed by 50 participating States.

3.2.4 The Economic and Environmental Dimension

The priorities defined by the Swedish Chairmanship under the OSCE's Second Dimension focused on economic empowerment of women, continued work on fighting corruption, promoting sustainable growth, as well as addressing challenges in the environmental field at all levels.

The work plan of the **Economic and Environmental Committee (EEC)** included a number of thematic meetings dealing with climate and security, biodiversity and security, environment and security, sustainable development and security, good environmental governance, as well as waste management and security. Since the beginning of November 2020, the EEC has been chaired by Austria.

The 29th Economic and Environmental Forum (EEF) met in Prague on 9 and 10 September, focusing on "Promoting comprehensive security, stability and sustainable development in the OSCE area through women's economic empowerment". The agenda of the annual implementation meeting of the **Economic and Environmental Dimension (EEDIM)** on 18 and 19 October focused on best practices on anti-corruption and good governance in the OSCE context, especially with a view to digitalisation and women's equality, as well as civil society involvement.

In the lead-up to the Stockholm Ministerial Council in December, three Ministerial Council decisions were negotiated in the economic and environmental dimension dealing with "Strengthening security, resilience, and prosperity in times of a changing climate", "Advancing women's economic empowerment to strengthen security in the OSCE region" and "Strengthening dialogue and co-operation on environmental protection and security in the OSCE region". Ultimately, the text on

the security-relevant effects of climate change, which provides a sound basis for placing a stronger focus on this topic within the OSCE, was adopted.

3.2.5 The Human Dimension – Human Rights

In line with the priorities of the Swedish Chairmanship, the OSCE's "human" Dimension took centre stage, as emphasized by topics related to freedom of expression and the rights of women and girls. Involving civil society, a festive event was organised at the ODIHR's headquarters in Warsaw on 14 and 15 October in celebration of the Office's 30th anniversary. Apart from playing a pioneering role in election observation, the ODIHR also provides support to participating States in implementing their human rights and fundamental freedom commitments. Key roles in the Third Dimension are played by the Vienna-based **OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM)**, and the **High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM)** based in The Hague. As a member of the related OSCE Group of Friends and in close cooperation with RFoM, Austria works committedly towards promoting the safety of journalists.

For the first time since 2017, it was possible to reach agreement on holding the Human Dimension Seminar, which took place on 16 and 17 November and was dedicated to the topic of Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Girls. The topics media freedom and gender equality, ensuring participation in democratic law-making, and opportunities and challenges of digital technologies for human rights dominated the agenda of the three annual Supplementary Human Dimension Meetings (SHDMs). Experts, civil society and the participating States made active use of the opportunities for engaging into an active exchange of ideas and experiences in the human dimension, offered by these events. In light of the divergent views between East and West on the protection and status of human rights, the December OSCE Ministerial Council in Stockholm failed to adopt a decision on the human dimension.

3.2.6 Regional Partnerships

The OSCE maintains dialogues with partner states in Asia (Afghanistan, Australia, Japan, South Korea and Thailand) as well as in the Mediterranean and the Middle East (Egypt, Algeria, Israel, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia). Due to the impact of the crisis on the ground, cooperation with Afghanistan played a key role this year.

3.3 Council of Europe

This year, the work of the Council of Europe (CoE) was again dominated and significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, whose ramifications on the CoE's

core topics, i.e. human rights, democracy and the rule of law, were – as in the previous year – a key focus of activities. At the same time, work on future-related issues, such as environmental protection and human rights as well as the impact of artificial intelligence was resumed, and the “47+1” negotiations on the EU’s accession to the **European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)** were continued. Problems regarding, for instance, the full application of the ECHR continued to prevail in some of the CoE’s member States. In particular, “infringement proceedings” were initiated against Turkey for its failure to implement the judgment of the **European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)** in the Kavala case. Attention should also be drawn to Turkey’s withdrawal from the **Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)**, and the fact that the Convention has also come under attack from other CoE member States.

3.3.1 Political Issues

The COVID-19 pandemic had a substantial impact at all levels of the Council of Europe’s activities. While the meetings of the various CoE bodies and the inter-governmental expert committees could be switched to online or hybrid events, work proved difficult for the various monitoring bodies. On-site visits could only be resumed in the second half of the year and only to a limited extent. With a view to gradually reducing this backlog in the coming years, approval for a reallocation of unused budget funds was granted.

At the same time, preserving and upholding the CoE’s values played an important role in these times of pandemic. In her annual report on “A democratic renewal for Europe”, CoE Secretary General, Marija Pejčinović-Burić, noted a democratic backsliding witnessed in many member States with respect to COVID-19-related restrictions and freedom of speech and expression. The Secretary General as well as the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe dealt intensively with the increasingly tense situation freedom of the media has been subject to since the beginning of the pandemic, and also referred to the deteriorating security situation for journalists.

During the online Ministerial Conference in Hamburg, the Secretary General’s four-year strategic framework was taken note of and she was invited to report regularly on its implementation. A document on **human rights in the digital age** was adopted to help advance the Council of Europe’s work in the field of artificial intelligence. The Committee of Experts on Artificial Intelligence is working on drafting a potential new legal instrument on artificial intelligence, and the link to the CoE’s core themes of human rights, the rule of law and democracy.

Another future-oriented topic, experts are dealing with, is the link between **environmental protection and human rights**. The responsible committee is working

on a detailed analysis to identify possible gaps in the respective legal framework as well as potential new legal instruments. The **Parliamentary Assembly (PA)** also adopted a number of resolutions on this topic.

Holding the Chairmanship from May to November, Hungary focused on the **rights of national minorities** and hosted a total of four conferences on this topic. Other focal areas included freedom of religion and the protection of the rights of the child.

The Istanbul Convention, one of the most important and successful recent CoE instruments has remained under pressure. In March, Turkey declared its withdrawal from this convention, stating that individual elements would be contrary to traditional family values. This move was regretted and criticised by many as a backwards step for women's rights. The Polish government is still considering withdrawing from the Convention. At the same time, however, supporters also stepped up their efforts aimed at increasing the number of members to this legally binding instrument. The increase in domestic violence witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic added to the Istanbul Convention's visibility, also increasing support for this instrument.

With regard to **Turkey**, the situation of Osman Kavala, a human rights defender who has been imprisoned for many years, and of the opposition politician Selahattin Demirtaş – and in this connection, the issue of independence of the judiciary – topped the agenda. As Turkey had failed to comply with the ECtHR's judgement and not released Kavala, the Committee of Ministers initiated infringement proceedings against Turkey in December.

The situation in and around **Ukraine** continued to be the subject of lively debates in the CoE's political committees. The human rights aspects were mainly covered by the Human Rights Commissioner who, like other CoE monitoring bodies, was denied access to the occupied territories. The CoE developed a Ukraine Action Plan 2018 – 2021, which supports the Ukrainian reform processes.

The situation in **Belarus**, whose admission to the Council of Europe is a declared long-term strategic goal of the organisation – as soon as the situation of human rights and democracy so permits, continued to be subject to close monitoring. An issue that attracted massive criticism in political debates was a course of action pursued by Belarus that involved bringing migrants to the common borders with Poland, Latvia and Lithuania. In her related statements, the CoE's Commissioner for Human Rights drew particular attention to the humanitarian aspects of this crisis. Currently cooperation is based on the second Action Plan 2019–2021. The CoE has an Information Point in Minsk. Belarus participates in individual CoE conventions, including as an associate member in the **European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission)**.

The **Venice Commission** has been asked for opinions on a wide range of legal and constitutional issues concerning major political and constitutional developments

in Europe. These include opinions on constitutional issues in Hungary, Kyrgyzstan and Serbia, on electoral law in Armenia, Georgia and Hungary, on the compatibility with European standards of certain criminal law provisions applied by Belarus, and on the compatibility with international human rights standards of certain legal provisions applied in Turkey and Russia, as well as on the Citizens' Security Law in Spain, on the legal protection of citizens in the Netherlands, and the draft law on the state of emergency in North Macedonia.

3.3.2 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 the rule of law (justice), which arise from their accession to the CoE. Monitoring is undertaken by the PA, the **Ministers' Deputies Committee (MDC)**, the **Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE)** and the Secretariat. Several CoE conventions provide for independent expert bodies to perform thematic country monitoring.

Monitoring by the MDC of the national implementation of the judgements passed by the ECtHR is based on Art. 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 Honouring Obligations and Commitments by member States of the CoE is **currently monitoring** eleven states: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine, as well as Poland (making Poland the only EU Member State subject to this monitoring process, which was re-opened in view of the developments in the areas of independence of the judiciary and the rule of law). A Post-Monitoring Dialogue on strengthening the democratic institutions of the respective countries is being conducted with Bulgaria, North Macedonia and Montenegro. Since 2015, the PACE Monitoring Committee has also reviewed CoE member States that are not subject to a monitoring process and prepares country reports and recommendations for the PA plenary. This year, such a review was performed in France, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands, Romania and San Marino.

Monitoring by the MDC is also based on the obligations arising from the accession procedures, as in the cases of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Bosnia-Herzegovina. All monitoring processes are flexible and are performed over an extended period of time. CLRAE also monitors compliance with commitments relating to promoting democracy at local and regional level, which involves all 47 CoE member States.

At irregular intervals, the **Secretariat** issues reports on Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia to the MDC and on "stocktaking" of the situation in Moldova. The impact of the armed conflict between Georgia and the Russian Federation that broke

out in August 2008 continues to feature on the agenda of the MDC, to which the Secretariat reports every six months on new developments. In addition, the local CoE offices also report on developments and implementation of CoE programmes in their host countries.

Thematic monitoring is related to commitments and obligations arising from member States' accession to specific CoE conventions. 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, conducts 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 evaluations and peer pressure to ensure that countries comply with CoE standards. The Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (**GRETA**) monitors the implementation of the CoE Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. The Advisory Committees of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (**FCNM**) and the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (**ECRML**) each assess the national implementation of these two conventions. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (**ECRI**) primarily conducts country reviews and also addresses cooperation with civil society. The European Committee on Social Rights (**ECSR**) monitors compliance with the provisions set out in the European Social Charter by the States parties. The Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (**GREVIO**), established in 2015 by the Istanbul Convention, has already completed twenty country reports. The reports on Austria and on Monaco were the first two GREVIO country reports to be completed.

Monitoring visits and country reports on Austria: In spring the Interim Compliance Report of the Fourth Evaluation Round on Austria, prepared by GRECO, was published. In September, Austria submitted its Fifth State Report on the implementation of the FCNM, followed in November by the Fifth State Report on the implementation of the ECRML. Staying in Austria from 23 November to 3 December, the CPT conducted visits to prisons, police detention centres and psychiatric care facilities. From 13 to 17 December, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, paid the visit to Austria originally planned for the previous year.

3.3.3 Austria and the Council of Europe

In her capacity as a member of the PA, the Second President of the National Council Doris Bures took part in PA sessions in Strasbourg. As members of the CLRAE, the presidents of the diets (province parliaments) of Vorarlberg (Harald Sonderegger), of Tyrol (Sonja Ledl-Rossmann), and of Carinthia (Reinhart Rohr) attended the CLRAE's meetings. On 3 August, the instruments of ratification of

the “Convention on Cinematographic Co-production” and the “Convention on an Integrated Safety, Security and Service Approach at Football Matches and Other Sports Events” were deposited with the Council of Europe. These agreements thus became binding for Austria under international law. At the same time, the “European Convention on Spectator Violence and Misbehaviour at Sports Events and in particular at Football Matches” was denounced, thus ceasing to be in force.

European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz: Founded in 1994, the European Centre for Modern Languages (**ECML**) is based on an enlarged partial agreement. It supports member States in the implementation of 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, sign language, promoting foreign language education in schools, digital approaches to language education and establishing a frame of reference for language teachers. The ECML also dealt with the integration of Roma.

Austrians in the Council of Europe: Austria has traditionally shown a high level of commitment in the CoE and has already been represented by three Secretary Generals, two Presidents of PACE and three presidents of the CLRAE. In total, some 20 Austrians are employed in the CoE. Since November 2015, Gabriele Kucsko-Stadlmayer has been the Austrian judge at the ECtHR. Since 2006, Christoph Grabenwarter has been the Austrian member of the Venice Commission and since 2010 Andreas Kiefer has held the office of Secretary General of the CLRAE. Harald Sonderegger, President of the diet of Vorarlberg, holds the office of Vice President of the Chamber of Regions of the CLRAE. In 2021, Karin Lukas was elected President of the European Committee of Social Rights and Gerhard Ermischer was elected President of the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) of the Council of Europe.

3.4 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Developments and General Trends

2021 was marked by the election of the new Secretary-General of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (**OECD**): Succeeding long-serving OECD Secretary-General, José Ángel Gurría from Mexico, Mathias Cormann from Australia, took up his duties at the helm of the organisation on 1 June in the first of the two sessions of the OECD Ministerial Council meeting. Chaired in person by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Paris, the second session was held in hybrid form in October. The meeting was taking place under the heading of “Shared Values: Building a Green and Inclusive Future”. Marking the 60th anniversary of the OECD’s establishment, ministers adopted a New Vision Statement,

which places a special emphasis on the common values shared by the OECD Member countries. Taking account of the increasing importance of fostering interaction between the OECD and external partners – states and organisations – the organisation's first external relations strategy was also adopted.

The work of the committees continued to be dominated by the wide range of economic and social aspects that have emerged in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its management. Another main topic on the agenda was the OECD's contribution to the international green agenda. The debate on the organisation's enlargement also regained momentum. On 25 May, Costa Rica became the 38th Member country to join the OECD. Adopted in 2020, the actual accession was preceded by a one-year ratification process, and completed with Costa Rica depositing its instrument of accession. The applications for accession submitted by Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Argentina, Brazil and Peru are currently being examined and accession negotiations are expected to be launched at the beginning of 2022. Austria is in favour of starting this process without delay.

The 2021 Economic Survey of Austria was presented on 20 December by OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg, Federal Minister Margarethe Schramböck and Federal Minister Magnus Brunner at the MFA. Every two years, the OECD Secretariat reviews the economic and social state of its Member countries, undertaking not only a traditional economic policy analysis, but also examining social and environmental policy aspects. Based on these Economic Surveys, the OECD seeks to support its Member countries in implementing concrete future-oriented political projects. The 2021 Country Report on Austria is the result of a broad-based process, building on contributions from and cooperation of more than 300 experts from Austria. Thematically, the report addresses in particular the structural impacts of the technical and financial shocks attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Global Relations

For the first time, Austria held the chair of the **External Relations Committee (ERC)**. With a view to remaining a globally relevant player, the OECD needs to adopt a two-pronged approach, retaining its character as an evidence-based expert organisation and standard setter while at the same time maintaining awareness of geopolitical developments. Aimed at enhancing the general level of coherence of the entire OECD's external relations and to speak with one voice when engaging with non-members, the ERC has developed a Global Relations Strategy that applies to all parts of the organisation.

OECD's Global Relations seek to make OECD standards as widely applicable as possible and to bring third countries as close as possible to the organisation's standards and best practices. The OECD's Key Partner Countries are China, Brazil, Indonesia, South Africa and India. In addition, there are regional programmes

for South East Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, Eurasia, Southeast Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. Furthermore, bilateral country programmes are in place with Thailand and Morocco, and since this year, also with Egypt. Furthermore, the OECD cooperated closely with the G20, chaired this year by Italy. Having been invited to the G20 summits since 2009, the OECD participates in all working groups and also prepares specific analyses for the G20. The OECD cooperates with the UN through its office in New York.

Development Policy

The COVID-19 pandemic had a sustainable impact on the work programme of the **OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC)**.

At the beginning of the year, the DAC adopted a new Global Relations Strategy, which aims to strengthen global cooperation in specific thematic areas. Implementing this strategy, the first joint high-level meeting with the UN was held as early as February and focused on reviewing the implementation of the DAC Recommendation on Ending Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance, in the drafting of which Austria played a major role.

Published in April, the **Official Development Assistance (ODA)** figures for 2020 had reached an all-time high. Austria also recorded a slight increase. However, when it comes to achieving the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, the financing gap has, nevertheless, widened due to the pandemic and calls for alternative funding opportunities were increasingly made. In this respect, the new Impact Standards for Financing Sustainable Development (**DAC-UNDP**) adopted in May, create important framework conditions for mobilising more private capital in future to facilitate achieving the SDGs.

In the second half of the year and supported by Austria, an **instrument** aimed at **enhanced civil society involvement in development cooperation and humanitarian assistance** (DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance) was adopted. While promoting and strengthening civil society participation, this instrument at the same time emphasises the latter's responsibility.

In the negotiations on a joint DAC declaration for COP26 in Glasgow, Austria advocated support for developing countries in order to promote their ability to adapt to climate change and to also facilitate climate neutrality in these countries.

Austria's leading role in terms of cooperation with South East Europe has also been underlined by a joint project, involving Switzerland and the OECD, on the challenges of labour migration. The project, that is to be completed in 2022,

seeks to develop strategies and create favourable conditions with a view to countering labour migration.

Economic and Financial Policy

The OECD's economic policy bodies reviewed the measures taken to date in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic with regard to their effectiveness. One of the questions, discussed between the lines especially with regard to the Eurozone, was whether countries with greater budgetary room for manoeuvre had secured an unfair competitive advantage for themselves by providing more extensive support to their economies' manufacturing and productive potential. The **OECD Economics Department (ECO)** generally recommended maintaining fiscal support measures for the current year and expects the current inflationary pressure to be only temporary. The discussion on an optimal economic policy strategy to curb greenhouse gas emissions in order to mitigate climate change gained momentum.

Work in the OECD Committee on Financial Markets again centered on the topic of ethical financing and dealt intensively with various facets of **financial digitalisation (FinTech)**. In cooperation with the OECD, a strategy for financial literacy in Austria was developed and presented to the Austrian Council of Ministers in autumn.

After the sharp contraction in the previous year, the global economic outlook improved steadily in the first half of the year, not least thanks to rising COVID-19 vaccination rates in OECD countries. Positive developments were, however, somewhat clouded in the short term by the advent of yet another pandemic wave and the emergence of vaccination scepticism in some countries. This year, main hallmarks of the global economy were ongoing expansive monetary and fiscal policies, major supply difficulties (especially for products from the Asian region), combined with a price shock on the energy markets and the increased occurrence of labour shortages for demographic reasons. Taken together, all these factors led to inflationary pressure to levels that had not been seen for a long period of time.

International Tax Policy

With the new US administration, the previously stalled negotiations on the "two-pillar" solution for the tax challenges involved in digitalisation of the economy, dealt with in the working groups of the Committee on Fiscal Affairs picked up speed again. In the context of the **OECD/G20 Inclusive Framework (IF) on Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS)**, 136 of the 140 countries reached an agreement on both pillars on 8 October, which was subsequently endorsed by the G20 Heads of State and Government.

Trade, Investment Policy and Corporate Responsibility

As the COVID-19 pandemic progressed, evidence increasingly suggested the exacerbation of existing, primarily protectionist tendencies in international trade. In view of these developments, the OECD therefore continued to conduct in-depth analyses on the COVID-19 pandemic, addressing in particular the topics of resilience of global supply chains and creating a level playing field. In addition, the OECD analysed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to trade facilitation, government support measures and various aspects of digital trade (especially in connection with the horizontal OECD initiative Going Digital), publishing corresponding policy notes. Another thematic focus was discussions on “Promoting Trade for All”, i.e. the extent to which trade and investment policies can promote fair and open markets worldwide including trust in these markets, and in how far they may contribute to better lives for all through sustainable strategies. In addition, discussions on the effects of climate protection measures (Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism) on global trade were initiated. With its fact-based work, the OECD contributes significantly to timely information on current developments in international trade.

In terms of investment policy, the OECD Investment Committee (**IC**) focused in the first half of the year on in-depth analysis of the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on **foreign direct investment (FDI)**, placing an emphasis on economic recovery, sustainable impact and resilience. Other thematic priorities were investment policy and digitalisation, as well as the role of the Policy Framework on Investment as a helpful tool for fostering development cooperation in dialogue with OECD partner countries. In the second half of the year, the work on an “FDI Qualities Policy Toolkit” was an important focus of activities. The planned tool aims to optimise evidence-based promotion of sustainable FDI. Another major topic was interactions between tax competition (keyword: “global minimum effective corporate tax rates”) and FDI. Finally, work on a reform of substantive standards for investment treaties (The Future of Investment Treaties) and how to design these treaties with an eye to meeting sustainability goals, was launched at the end of October.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has added a whole new dimension to the important role, corporate responsibility is playing for resilience and competitiveness. The most important global corporate responsibility standard is the **OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises**. The Guidelines are the only international instrument with an integrated resolution mechanism that provides for National Contact Points. Ten years after their last update, the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises are now being reviewed under the auspices of the **Working Party on Responsible Business Conduct (WPRBC)** in order to determine whether the Guidelines are still “fit for purpose” under the current circumstances and in today’s world. After conducting a public consultation process and

collecting input from all stakeholders, options for the way forward are to be discussed. The Austrian National Contact Point fulfils its obligation to promote the OECD Guidelines through a project on due diligence in responsible supply chain management in compliance with OECD standards, which was particularly highlighted by the OECD.

Labour and Social Affairs

The increasing shift in recent years away from narrow silo thinking towards stronger interlinkage of economic, ecological, social and health aspects and thus a more integrated approach towards the analysis work undertaken by the organisation proved to be particularly fruitful.

In addition, a large number of activities performed last year in the field of labour and social affairs dealt with the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and examined various aspects that have arisen in this context. Furthermore, and presented only recently, the **Centre on Well-being, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equality (WISE)** facilitates bundling the organisation's analyses on reducing inequality and improving social mobility as well as distribution, thus contributing towards enhancing visibility of the entire range of topics.

Consumer Protection

In the area of consumer protection, activities focused particularly on consumer policy-related issues in connection with the digital transformation. In this context, work on examining the role online marketplaces played for consumer protection and product safety, as well as on expanding the evidence base for the risks to consumers in the digital world, and the analytical investigation of hidden unfair online business practices ("dark commercial patterns") is of particular relevance.

Health

The important work performed for the health sector by the Health Committee includes "Health at a Glance 2021", published this year. The report is one of the most relevant OECD publications in the health sector. In addition to numerous other OECD papers on the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. on long-term care or inequality), Health at a Glance 2021 also addressed some of the effects COVID-19 had on health at large (with respect to, for instance, mental health or on healthcare professionals, the topic of long COVID, cut-backs on planned surgical interventions or examinations, and deaths), analysing in particular the substantial effects COVID-19 has on people's mental health. It also highlighted the fact that risk factors (including unemployment and anxiety) increased during the pandemic, while factors related to protection (such as social relationships, daily routine) decreased. Among the 15 OECD countries, including Austria, surveyed, an esti-

mated three-fold increase was on average reported for prevalence of depression or symptoms of depression in adults.

Education and Skills

Work in the field of education and skills is considered one of the most high-core elements of OECD activity. Based on OECD data, international **benchmarks on the impact on education and skills** are prepared for students and adults (**PISA, PIAAC**) and national skills strategies are developed. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was decided to postpone the next round of the PISA study until 2022. Notwithstanding the pandemic, the national PISA offices, however, have continued their activities to provide valid data in this field. The activities launched by the Education Directorate are characterised by its forward-looking, future-oriented approach, also reflected in the presentation of the Education Outlook Report and the Education Policy Reform Dialogues, held as in-person events at the end of November.

Digitalisation

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified all aspects of the digital transformation (“home office”, distance learning, e-commerce, digital tools for companies, data exchange in research and applications involving artificial intelligence in the field of crisis management). At the same time, these developments have led to an increase in the demand for high-quality network connectivity. The OECD Digital Economy Outlook 2020, published in November, highlighted the need for an integrative approach to digital transformation. Austria is among the 25 OECD members to already have a national digital strategy.

The OECD’s “Going Digital” integrated policy framework covers the seven policy dimensions of digital transformation: access, use, innovation, trust, jobs, society and market openness. Currently, the project is in its third and final phase that seeks to shed light on new approaches towards understanding and shaping digital transformation and its impact on national economies and societies.

The priorities defined for the project are artificial intelligence, blockchain, as well as digital government and digital economy. In this context, the fourth OECD Global Blockchain Policy Forum in September and October dealt with the latest developments and new challenges at all levels of governance. At the E-Leaders Meeting that convened on 7 and 8 October, participants discussed ways and means for digital government to contribute to a socially just and sustainable digital transformation. Adopted by the OECD Ministerial Council Meeting in October on the topic of data management, the OECD Recommendation on Enhancing Access to and Sharing of Data (EASD) is the first internationally agreed upon set of principles and policy guidance on how governments can maximise the cross-

sectoral benefits of all types of data – personal, non-personal, open, proprietary, public – while protecting the rights of individuals and organisations.

As communications infrastructure is one of the most important foundations of digitalisation, the Austrian Federal Government is committed to providing fixed and mobile gigabit connections across the whole of Austria by 2030. The goal of facilitating the nationwide availability of high-performance broadband connections contributes to making Austria fit for the future, especially with regard to the digital inclusion of rural regions. Making available targeted funding instruments, the “Initiative Broadband Austria 2030” contributes to promoting equality between urban and rural areas aimed at ensuring equal living conditions for all people in all regions of Austria.

Environment

The OECD contributes to the international climate and environmental protection efforts, placing a special focus on strengthening social and economic resilience, improving productivity and reducing inequalities. In response to this year’s extraordinary circumstances, the OECD issued numerous publications providing detailed analysis of the impact, the COVID-19 pandemic has on the environment, also addressing its interlinkages with economic, social and healthcare systems. In this context, a special focus is placed on measures aimed at tackling global environmental problems to contribute towards improving environmental health and societies’ resilience.

Building on the results generated, a new project was initiated under the heading of “Building Climate and Economic Resilience in the Transition to a Low-Carbon Economy”. Under this project, the **International Programme for Action on Climate (IPAC)** evaluates Member countries’ climate policies. Austria is, however, critical of this project for two reasons: firstly, its added value with respect to relevant UN activities is not clear and secondly it considers and promotes investments in nuclear energy as part of a solution to the climate crisis.

The importance of climate issues is also reflected in the latest OECD Economic Survey of Austria, which dedicates a separate chapter to this topic. The plans for the gradual introduction of CO₂ pricing starting from 2022 are viewed positively by the OECD. However, the OECD holds the view that the goal of climate neutrality by 2040 – ten years ahead of the EU target date – will be difficult to achieve on the basis of measures currently in place. The need for additional reductions in greenhouse gas emissions has been identified across all sectors.

Tourism

The massive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on global tourism has dominated the OECD’s work in this area. While in 2020 the focus was placed on forecasts

and states' support measures for the tourism industry, this year, the OECD mainly dealt with the issue of international mobility during the COVID-19 pandemic (safe travel blueprint) and the steps to be taken to ensure sustainable, inclusive and resilient tourism in the medium and long term. The documents produced in this context serve as an important source of information for rebuilding tourism. In cooperation with the OECD and chaired by Italy, the G20 countries' tourism ministers developed the "G20 Rome Guidelines for the future of tourism" in September. The recommendations contained in the document are based around seven interrelated policy areas: safe mobility, crisis management, resilience, inclusiveness, green transformation, digital transition, as well as investment and infrastructure.

Austria attaches importance to strategies, structures and instruments, as also emphasized by the OECD, that are associated with the role of tourism as a successful driver for sustainable regional development. This is particularly relevant as the tourism industry and its complex value chains have a particularly strong effect at the regional and local level.

Agriculture

Studies prepared by the OECD showed that global food supply chains proved to be surprisingly resilient even during the pandemic. Highlighting its plea for the smoothest possible unhindered agricultural trade, the OECD noted that disruptions in the market structure occurred where governments, fearing local supply shortages, restricted the free flow of goods through restrictive measures such as export and import restrictions. According to the *Agricultural Outlook 2021–2030* prepared in cooperation with the FAO, the OECD expects the agricultural sector – despite its inherently high level of adaptability – to be faced with major challenges in the next decade, ranging from rising demand due to demographic growth, more environmentally friendly production methods, changing dietary habits and societal expectations (biodiversity, animal welfare, waste reduction) through to the impacts of climate change. Building on the high-profile UN Food Systems Summit in September, the OECD is increasing its focus on the interactions between agriculture, food systems and climate change.

3.5 Austria as a Host Country to International Organisations

3.5.1 Austria's Role as a Host Country

A dynamic and future-oriented **host country policy is one of Austria's foreign policy priorities**. The goal is thus to attract international organisations and institutions that establish their permanent headquarters or other offices in Austria. As

home to the offices of many international organisations and entities, Austria acts as a hub for two major thematic areas: the promotion of peace and security, as well as promoting sustainable development in the context of energy and environmental challenges. The fact that Vienna hosts more than 40 international organisations – and an increasing number of non-governmental organisations, some of which enjoy the status of quasi-international organisations – strengthens the city's relevance as a venue for dialogue and multilateral diplomacy. Along with New York, Brussels, Geneva and The Hague, Vienna is among the top-ranking host city locations for international organisations' headquarters.

Austria's position as a headquarters location also has a highly positive effect on its national economy. International organisations secure, for instance, around 19,000 jobs in Austria per year, and economic researchers put the annual positive net effect of the international presence at around 1.35 billion euros. In addition, all Austrians benefit from the taxes and duties amounting to about 527 million euros annually, which are collected thanks to the presence of international organisations.

Building on its efficient convention sector, Vienna enjoys an excellent reputation as one of the most important conference and congress venues in the world. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has also had a negative impact on Vienna as a congress venue, the resumption of the talks with Iran in Vienna in spring clearly shows that Austria's role as a host of international conferences continues to be in demand and appreciated despite the crisis.

Under its **proactive host country policy**, Austria continues to strengthen its legal framework conditions, seeking to remain an attractive location for the established offices while at the same time attracting new international organisations and entities. These concepts are also enshrined in the new comprehensive **headquarters law** that entered into force on 1 May. This flexible instrument of proactive host country policy was designed to ensure, promote and further develop Austria's long-term attractiveness as a host country and headquarters location.

Since 1979, Vienna has been one of the four headquarters of the United Nations (**UN**). The **Vienna International Center (VIC)**, which celebrated its 40th anniversary last year is home to a large number of UN organisations and specialised agencies, including the United Nations Office at Vienna (**UNOV**), the International Atomic Energy Agency (**IAEA**), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (**UNIDO**), the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (**CTBTO**), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (**UNODC**), the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (**UNODA**), **UNCITRAL**, **UNHCR**, the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (**UNOOSA**), the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (**ICPDR**) and a liaison office of the UN Environment Programme (**UNEP**), which also administers the Secretariat of the **Carpathian Convention**. Furthermore, the UN Office for

Project Services (**UNOPS**), which manages projects and maintains partnerships in Central Asia, Turkey, the Southern Caucasus and the Western Balkans, is expanding its presence in Vienna.

Apart from the UN organisations and specialised agencies based in the VIC, a number of other major international organisations are located in the city of Vienna, including the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (**OSCE**), the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (**OPEC**), the OPEC Fund for International Development (**OFID**), the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (**FRA**), the Wassenaar Arrangement (**WA**), which focuses on promoting transparency in the field of disarmament, and the Secretariat of the Hague Code of Conduct Against Ballistic Missile Proliferation (**HCOC**).

Only recently, the Vienna office of the World Bank Group has significantly strengthened its presence: alongside organisational units of the **International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)**, the **International Finance Corporation (IFC)** has also expanded its operational activities in Vienna. The **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** set up its Regional Resident Representative Office for the Western Balkans in Vienna. For many years now, the Joint Vienna Institute (**JVI**), an internationally recognised IMF training institution, has been based in Vienna. Vienna is also home to a sub-office of the **European Patent Office (EPO)**, which is the EPO's globally recognised patent information centre.

Headquartered in Vienna, the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (**ICMPD**) deals with strategic aspects of migration management. Alongside its country office, the International Organization for Migration (**IOM**) also maintains a liaison office in Vienna, which is responsible for Eastern and South East Europe as well as Central Asia. As a quasi-international organisation, the **Ban Ki-moon Center (BKMC)**, which opened in Vienna in 2018, focuses on the position of young people and women in the global society.

With a view to tapping into synergy effects, several Vienna-based international organisations and NGOs that are active in the **energy sector**, joined forces and formed the **Vienna Energy Club**. Among these organisations are the Energy Community of South East Europe as well as the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership (**REEEP**) and the Sustainable Energy for All (**SEforAll**) initiative.

Founded in 2011, the International Anti-Corruption Academy (**IACA**) chose to set up its headquarters south of Vienna 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)** has been based in Innsbruck. The **European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe (ECML)** has been based in Graz since its foundation in 1994.

Austria has submitted a bid to host an office of the Hague-based **Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA)** in Vienna.

3.5.2 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 uses of nuclear energy, increasing nuclear safety and security as well as verification of states' compliance with the safeguards under the **Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)**. The IAEA was the first UN organisation to set up its headquarters in Vienna. With currently around 2,500 staff, it is also the largest of the Vienna-based organisations. The IAEA has been headed by Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi (Argentina) since 2019.

In the context of its project **Renovation of the Nuclear Applications Laboratories (ReNuAL)**, the IAEA has modernised and updated its laboratories in Seibersdorf since 2014 in order to be able to meet its members' growing demand for scientific services. The first modernisation phase, which was supported by several countries, including Austria, was successfully completed. The second phase (ReNuAL 2) was launched in mid-2021.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the IAEA has started to implement the **Zoonotic Disease Integrated Action (ZODIAC) initiative**. Building on its expertise, the IAEA is expanding existing capabilities in combating zoonoses in the veterinary field using nuclear technologies and transferring these to human medicine. Under this initiative, permanent structures in the form of local centres of excellence are then to be established to contribute towards combating the current pandemic and preventing future health crises caused by zoonoses.

Seeking to combat plastic waste using nuclear technologies, the IAEA has launched the **NUclear TECHNOlogy for Controlling Plastic Pollution (NUTEC Plastics)** project.

The monitoring of nuclear activities and fissile material in Iran within the framework of the **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)** is a key challenge for the IAEA. Since the unilateral US withdrawal from the agreement in May 2018, Iran has progressively scaled back its implementation of the commitments set out in the plan. Consequently, the IAEA's verification and monitoring activities as well as the related reports from the Director General assessing the degree of Iran's compliance and implementation of the JCPOA have become matters of increasing importance that are dealt with by the IAEA's main decision-making body, the quarterly Board of Governors meeting. This year, negotiations aimed at all parties' return to the JCPOA were launched in Vienna. Until the end of September 2022, Austria is one of the 35 members of the IAEA's Board of Governors.

3.5.3 Preparatory Commission of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO)

The Preparatory Commission of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO) has been operating in Vienna since 1997. Lassina Zerbo's (Burkina Faso) term as Executive Secretary came to an end in July and Robert Floyd (Australia) was elected as his successor. The development of the CTBTO's International Monitoring System, based on high-tech solutions for seismic, hydroacoustic, infrasound and radionuclide measurements, has made further progress. To date, the Treaty has been signed by 185 states and ratified by 170. The Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty has, however, not yet entered into force as it has not been ratified by eight (Egypt, China, India, Iran, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan and USA) of the 44 Key States listed in Annex 2. The year 2021 marked the 25th anniversary of the CTBT.

Established in 2019, the new permanent **CTBTO Technology Support and Training (TeST) Centre** in Seibersdorf is primarily used as a storage and maintenance facility for the equipment of the On-site Inspections Department. Furthermore, the TeST Centre also houses state-of-the-art training facilities and a media centre for the entire organisation.

3.5.4 United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

Although the work of the **United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)** continued to be severely affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was possible to successfully continue technical cooperation. Likewise, UNIDO contributed to international crisis management. The organisation's most important meetings were held as planned. The **37th Programme and Budget Committee (PBC)** met from 26–28 May, the **49th Industry Development Board (IDB)** from 12–15 July, and the **19th General Conference** was held from 29 November to 3 December.

In the context of the 49th IDB in July, a new UNIDO Director-General was elected to succeed Director-General LI Yong, who held the office for two terms. The election of German candidate Gerd Müller, former German Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, was formally confirmed on 30 November. In December, Gerd Müller took office as new Director-General.

Since 3 December 2015, Austria had consistently been a member of the PBC (each time for a two-year term) and since 30 November 2017, it had been a member of the IDB (for a four-year term).

Membership in both decision-making bodies routinely ended with the end of the 19th General Conference that convened from 29 November to 3 December. Aus-

tria's project-related cooperation with UNIDO focuses on the one hand on job creation and the promotion of women and young people, especially in regions that are subject to high migratory pressure, and on the other hand on sustainable energy production, for instance by supporting a number of renewable energy and energy efficiency centres in a range of geographic regions, and by hosting the biennial **Vienna Energy Forum (VEF)**. This year's VEF took place as a hybrid event, held at the Vienna Hofburg conference centre from 6–7 July.

3.5.5 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

As the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (**UNODC**) is based in Vienna, the city has become an important venue for substantive discussions on international drug matters and the fight against corruption and crime. In this context, the main governing bodies are the two ECOSOC subcommittees, the **Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND)** and the **Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ)**, which also meet in Vienna. Since February 2020, the Egyptian Ghada Fathi Waly has been at the helm of UNODC. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, UNODC continued to fulfil its mandates and by holding the 14th Crime Congress in Tokyo, it set an example of best practice in successfully convening major conferences in times of the pandemic.

Austria has been a member of the CND since 2000 and, apart from a two-year interruption, a member of the CCPCJ since 2003. As the host country, Austria contributed actively to both the CND and the CCPCJ and in the first half of the year took over the chair of the **Western European and Others (WEOG)** Group.

Within the UN system, UNODC plays a key role in the fight against organised crime, illegal drug trafficking, HIV/AIDS, money laundering, corruption, human trafficking and terrorism. In cooperation with other UN organisations such as the WHO, the **UN Development Programme (UNDP)**, the Joint UN Programme on **HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)** and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR), UNODC also assumes a central coordinating role on drug issues. In the field of anti-corruption, UNODC has – in collaboration with UNDP and the Department of Political and Peacekeeping Affairs – assumed a leading role in the elaboration of a joint UN position on corruption. In June, after eight months of negotiations in Vienna, an agreement was reached on the text of the political declaration of the UNGA Special Session against Corruption, which marked an important milestone.

Furthermore, UNODC is also responsible for programme and project planning and implementation, as well as for providing technical assistance to states in implementing the UN conventions on drugs, organised crime, corruption and terrorism. In January 2022, negotiations will be launched on the drafting of a new UN convention to combat cybercrime. As the responsible UN entity and Secretariat of

the Ad Hoc Committee, UNODC assumes an important role in the related negotiation process.

The beginning of the year was marked by the 14th UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (Crime Congress) in Kyoto. This first major UN conference to be held away from the Vienna headquarters since the onset of the pandemic also saw the adoption of the Kyoto Declaration, contributing to enhanced international cooperation on crime prevention and criminal justice.

The 64th session of the CND was held from 12 to 16 April in an almost exclusively virtual format. Austria's strong commitment was once again underpinned by its co-sponsoring of a draft resolution on promoting scientific evidence-based, quality, affordable and comprehensive drug prevention, treatment, sustained recovery and related support services. In addition, Austria supported an event against the death penalty.

This year's session of the CCPCJ that convened from 17 to 21 May, marked the 30th anniversary of the Commission. Alongside her counterparts from Italy and Japan, Federal Minister Alma Zadić attended the ceremonial opening segment. A special event organised by Austria on the topic of domestic violence, in the context of which the Federal Minister, the Egyptian Minister of Justice and the UNODC Executive Director addressed the meeting, met with great interest.

3.5.6 Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)

Founded in 1960, the Vienna-based Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (**OPEC**) is currently composed of 13 members. Today, OPEC Member Countries together produce around 40% of the world's oil supply and hold some 80% of the world's crude oil reserves. The objective pursued by OPEC is to coordinate its Member Countries' petroleum policies in order to ensure the stabilisation of the volatile oil markets in the interests of both consumers and producers.

In 2017, OPEC members signed a Declaration of Cooperation with eleven non-OPEC oil producing countries (including Russia) to form the "OPEC Plus". The aim of including additional producers was to further stabilize the global oil market as well as oil prices. The signing of the Charter of Cooperation in 2019 contributed to further intensifying and institutionalising mutual cooperation, which was continued under the OPEC Plus format also in 2021.

Likewise based in Vienna, **the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID)**, was established in 1976 with the goal of promoting socio-economic development in the areas of energy, water, transport and health in the global South. OFID places the regional focus of its activities on Africa, Asia and Latin America. In cooperation with ADA, OFID worked on a sustainable energy project in South and East Africa.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a substantial impact on global economic output and thus on transport and traffic, going hand in hand with a historic decline in oil consumption. An agreement on cutting production, reached among the OPEC Plus members, helped to stabilise the oil price. Since the onset of the pandemic, the oil price has picked up again, rising significantly to stabilise on average long-term levels.

The first Vienna Energy Scholar Programme was implemented in October. The programme, organised by OPEC, the City of Vienna and Wien Energie (largest regional energy provider in Austria), aims to increase visibility and understanding of OPEC activities in Austria, also seeking to provide talented young people with an insight into OPEC's work, internal processes and structures.

Both OPEC and OFID have contributed to the work of the Vienna Energy Club, a platform of Vienna-based organisations for dialogue on international energy issues, and also participated in the Vienna Energy Forum.

3.6 Human Rights

The commitment to human rights is a **core priority and guiding principle of Austrian foreign policy**. The protection and promotion of human rights worldwide are indispensable to preserving freedom and democracy for future generations. In this spirit, Austria also supported the **Summit for Democracy, held by US President Biden on 9 and 10 December**. The main topics on the meeting's agenda included human rights, the fight against authoritarianism and disinformation, combating corruption, and corresponding commitments for action.

The priorities of Austria's human rights policy include freedom of expression and freedom of the media as well as the safety of journalists, the promotion of women's rights, the topic of human rights and new technologies, strengthening human rights of particularly vulnerable persons and groups – such as minorities. Furthermore, a special focus is being placed on the protection of religious minorities as well as freedom of religion or belief, the promotion of the rights of the child as well as protecting children against violence and exploitation, strengthening the rule of law in international relations and at national level, promoting the rule of law and democracy, the fight against impunity as well as the implementation and dissemination of international humanitarian law. Austria furthermore strongly and consistently calls for the abolition of the death penalty.

Its membership of the **United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)** for the period 2019 to 2021 enabled Austria to launch concrete initiatives. In this spirit, Austria consistently advocated its priorities in all international fora and as an EU Member State, raised them in bilateral talks and made corresponding recommendations at the meetings of the Working Group on the **Universal Periodic Review (UPR)**.

3.6.1 Priorities

Freedom of the Media and Safety of Journalists

Freedom of the media is an essential pillar of every democratic society, in which independent reporting has to be guaranteed. In line with these principles, freedom of the media and the safety of journalists remain at the core of Austria's human rights policy.

At the 76th UNGA, **the resolution on the safety of journalists** was adopted by consensus. In addition to Austria, traditionally a member of the core group, the resolution was co-sponsored by further 106 states. Key areas dealt with by the resolution were the gender perspective and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the situation of journalists. It also places a stronger focus on the online sphere, condemns extraterritorial attacks, addresses concerns about targeted attacks on family members and searches of homes as well as reprisals against journalists for their work, and also refers to the 10th anniversary of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity in 2022.

With a view to effectively coordinating international efforts on enhancing the safety of journalists and facilitating the exchange of information, Austria chairs the respective Groups of Friends in Geneva and at UNESCO in Paris, and is also a member of the Groups of Friends at UN headquarters in New York as well as at the OSCE.

Led by Austria, a virtual conference was jointly organised with UNESCO on 1 March, focusing on "The role of the judiciary and international cooperation to foster safety of journalists - What works?".

In the context of **International Women's Day**, Austria supported the UNESCO campaign on online violence against women journalists and highlighted the importance of the related UNESCO study, which found that 73% of the women journalists surveyed had already experienced online violence in connection with their work. To further highlight the importance of this topic and on the initiative of Austria, the Groups of Friends published a joint declaration addressing this issue on World Press Freedom Day in May. At the 41st session of the UNESCO General Conference, Austria co-sponsored the resolution on adopting the principles of the Windhoek+30 Declaration on Information as a Public Good.

Together with his Czech and Slovak counterparts, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg published an op-ed on media freedom in the daily newspaper "Die Presse" on **World Press Freedom Day**.

Further emphasizing his commitment, the Federal Minister took part in the award ceremony at this year's World Congress of the International Press Institute, also delivering a speech.

Women's Rights

Recent crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, but also climate change, have made it very clear that women and girls are disproportionately affected by the corresponding negative impacts, including economic poverty, lack of access to education, inadequate healthcare, forced marriages, rising maternal mortality rates as well as increasing violence against women and girls. It is therefore essential to take targeted action towards countering these developments.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the **65th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)** was held largely in a virtual format. The priority theme was “Women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”. Led by Federal Minister Susanne Raab, the Austrian delegation contributed actively to the General Debate, a ministerial Round Table and held a statement in the framework of the Group of Friends for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls. Furthermore, Austria hosted a high-level side event that addressed the topic of forced marriages and also involved UNODC Executive Director Ghada Waly. In addition, two virtual events, one on “Women, Peace and Security” and the other on the topic of economic empowerment of women by breaking down negative stereotypes were organised by ADA and attracted a large number of attendees.

Austria also contributed to the UNSC Open Debates on Sexual Violence in Conflict, held in April, and on Women, Peace and Security, held in October.

In the negotiations in all international fora, in particular in the UNGA and the UN Human Rights Council, Austria, together with like-minded Member States, stood up against watering down international standards on the rights of women and girls. In the context of the 76th UNGA, Austria contributed to negotiating a number of resolutions on strengthening the rights of women and girls.

At EU level, Austria was actively involved in strategic discussions on the rights of women and girls as well as in the EU High Level Task Force on the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the Council Working Group on Human Rights. In this context, special emphasis was placed on defending the term “gender equality” as an internationally established concept.

Austria also took part in the **Generation Equality Forum (GEF)**, held from 29 to 31 March in Mexico and from 30 June to 2 July in Paris. 25 years after the groundbreaking Beijing World Conference on Women in 1995, the Forum sought to add new momentum to the implementation of the gender equality agenda, especially against the backdrop of the negative impacts, the COVID-19 pandemic was having on the situation of women and girls worldwide. Austria was represented by Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, who announced during the opening ceremony

that Austria had pledged funding of two million euros to support the education of women and girls in Syria and Lebanon.

In addition, Austria signed the **Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action** and made ADC pledges of EUR 11.4 million to be implemented over the next five years. ADC participated in an event held at the GEF that dealt with the Triple Nexus – an approach that builds on stronger cooperation and coordination between actors in the fields of humanitarian aid, development cooperation and peacebuilding as well as gender-sensitive implementation.

Taking account of the fact that the **crisis in Afghanistan** has led to an acute humanitarian emergency for the Afghan civilian population that particularly affects women and girls, **twenty million euros were made available from the Austrian emergency aid package for assistance to Afghanistan, of which five million were specifically earmarked to support women and girls** in the context of projects implemented by UN Women.

Austria continued efforts in support of the **ratification of the CoE Istanbul Convention** by as many Member States as possible and the EU itself. In connection with the 10th anniversary of the Convention's entry into force in May, Austria, together with like-minded states, contributed to numerous initiatives, demarches and public letters. The relevant activities included a joint letter by 31 ministers representing 16 states, signed by Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg, Federal Minister Susanne Raab and Federal Minister Karoline Edtstadler. Opinion 1/19 by the European Court of Justice resolved any remaining uncertainties with respect to the conclusion of the Istanbul Convention by the EU.

Austria supported the global campaign "**Orange the World - 16 days of activism against gender-based violence**", launched worldwide by UN Women. Numerous initiatives and outreach activities launched by the MFA in Austria and the Austrian representations worldwide contributed to raising the general public's awareness of gender-based violence.

With regard to the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on **Women, Peace and Security**, the 12th Report on the National Action Plan was adopted by the Austrian Federal Government on 15 December. As a long-standing supporter of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, Austria continues to promote the empowerment of women in peace processes and humanitarian situations as well as women journalists working in this field. ADC's commitment to combating sexualised and gender-based violence includes preventive measures and emergency aid for women and girls affected, such as telephone helplines in Palestine or Mozambique, and the long-term empowerment of women, including for instance through economic empowerment in Georgia. ADC also supports the strengthening of sexual and reproductive health and the corresponding rights, for instance through its activities in refugee camps in Ethiopia and by raising aware-

ness about such harmful practices as female genital mutilation in Burkina Faso and Uganda.

New Digital Technologies

New digital technologies may on the one hand contribute to promoting the realisation of human rights, but on the other hand, they may – without adequate measures in place – also pose a serious threat to them. While fake news, cyberattacks and autonomous weapon systems controlled by artificial intelligence demand relevant responses from the international community, it is at the same time necessary not to hold back research and innovation. In this respect, it is essential that human rights, the right to privacy, democracy and transparency be respected and upheld also in the cyber domain. The digital world must not be a legal vacuum. The topic of new digital technologies is omnipresent, it features prominently in national and international debates, also ranking high on the agenda of numerous areas of work by international organisations. **In international bodies, Austria committedly advocates compliance with and implementation of human rights standards when developing and applying new technologies.** In this context, it is of key importance that human rights standards be already applied today both in the digital space and to new digital technologies.

In line with its commitment, Austria therefore placed a special focus on this topic in all three regular sessions of the UN Human Rights Council, including by contributing as a member of the core group to drafting resolutions on new and emerging digital technologies and human rights as well as on the right to privacy in the digital age.

In the context of the 46th session of the UNHRC, Austria contributed to the drafting of the resolution on the extension of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy in the digital age, which for the first time also included elements on automated decision-making, machine learning and facial recognition. In the lead-up to the drafting of the resolution on **human rights and emerging digital technologies**, to which Austria contributed in the context of the 47th session of the UNHRC, Austria organised an event in cooperation with South Korea and other partners. Held on 15 June, this event was also attended online by Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet. The adoption of the resolution on new and emerging digital technologies and human rights marks a success and focuses on the need for better exchange between tech and human rights experts, as well as the implementation of human rights standards in the tech industry. At the 48th UNHRC, Austria participated in the drafting of the resolution on the right to privacy in the digital age, which was adopted by consensus. Building on and continuing the long-standing Austrian focus on the rule of law and human rights in the administration of justice, Austria, in cooperation with the **Office of the UN High Com-**

missioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and UNODC, furthermore organised a virtual event on the impact of digital technologies on the protection of human rights in the judiciary and the penal system.

Austria stressed the importance of a human rights-based approach, both within the Council of Europe in the context of the feasibility study, with respect to the development of elements for a legal framework for artificial intelligence, and at the EU level (including through a draft regulation laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence). Furthermore, in the context of the EU, Austria advocated a coordinated, coherent and human rights-based approach to new digital technologies in international fora.

Within the framework of the **Freedom Online Coalition (FOC)**, Austria contributed to the task force on artificial intelligence and human rights, established in 2020, and initiated – in cooperation with Finland – the “Silicon Valley” task force aimed at promoting exchange with global tech companies. Held in a hybrid format, the annual Freedom Online Conference was attended by Federal Minister Michael Linhart, who also delivered a statement on disinformation and human rights. Celebrating the 10th anniversary of the FOC, the meeting adopted the “Helsinki Declaration”, which confirms the importance of protecting and promoting human rights online and offline. It furthermore encourages all participants to join forces in working towards a rules-based, democratic and digitally inclusive world in which the use of the internet and digital technologies strengthens human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Protection of Minorities

Austria is committed on a global scale to combating exclusion, stigmatisation and persecution of those who are perceived as different due to their origin, background, language, religion or for other reasons. Furthermore discrimination, exclusion and hatred can potentially lead to violence and armed conflict.

At the 76th UNGA, Austria introduced a resolution on the protection of **national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities**, building on which a high-level meeting of the UNGA will be held in September 2022 on Austria’s initiative to mark the 30th anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Minorities.

Austria actively supports the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Fernand de Varennes from Canada, and in particular the implementation of UN regional fora on minority issues, set up by the Special Rapporteur. Due to the pandemic, the Regional Forum for Europe was held as a virtual meeting from 12 to 13 October.

On the initiative of and with financial support from Austria, the **UN Forum on Minority Issues** convened in **Geneva** on 2–3 December. This Geneva-based forum for the implementation of the UN Declaration on Minorities places special empha-

sis on actively involving civil society and representatives of minorities from all over the world. Bringing together participants for the 14th annual meeting, this year's focus was placed on conflict prevention and minority rights.

Within the EU context, major importance is attached to the protection and integration of Roma. This is also highlighted by the preparation of the EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation for 2020–2030 and the review of the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies. Austria works consistently on the implementation of its National Roma Integration Strategy and regularly reports to the European Commission on progress made.

In the field of protection of minorities, Austria cooperates closely with the **Council of Europe monitoring mechanisms**, which are governed by the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. In the context of periodic country reviews, Austria has comprehensively fulfilled its reporting obligations to the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and to the Committee of Independent Experts monitoring the application of the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Freedom of Religion or Belief and Protection of Religious Minorities

At the multilateral level, Austria, together with the other EU Member States, introduced resolutions on freedom of religion or belief in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and in the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and supported the resolutions introduced by the **Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)**. Austria thereby also supports the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Austria has also regularly addressed the difficult situation of religious minorities in the UNHRC country debates, in the framework of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of individual countries' human rights records, as well as within the UNGA. This approach is also in line with the increasing focus, the European Union (EU) has placed on this topic.

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 third countries. Austria is a member of the dedicated Task Force, set up within the EU to address this issue, and has advocated the revival of the mandate of the EU Special Representative on Freedom of Religion.

Austria is a founding member of the **International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance**, launched by the USA in February 2020. On 23 November, Austria took part in the virtual Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom and in the meetings

of the International Contact Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief coordinated by Canada.

Rights of the Child

At the **76th UNGA**, Austria supported the biennial resolution on the rights of the child introduced by the EU and the **Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC)**, which dealt with the priority theme “**Rights of the Child and the 2030 Agenda**”. In this context, Austria placed a special focus on mandating the continuation of the UN Global Study on Children and Deprivation of Liberty.

During the 46th session of the UNHRC, Austria contributed to the interactive dialogue with the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence against Children, supporting the recommendations of the Global Study on Children and Deprivation of Liberty. Under the Trilateral Initiative, Austria, together with Slovenia and Croatia, contributed to the annual panel debate that focused this year on the rights of the child and the Sustainable Development Goals. As a member of the Group of Friends, Austria also participated in the interactive dialogue with the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict.

Austria supported an event organised by the Safe Schools Declaration (that recognises the special need for the protection of educational institutions in situations of armed conflict), held in Geneva on 28 May and signed the joint statement of the Friends of the Safe Schools Declaration at the 47th session of the UNHRC.

In the context of COP26 in Glasgow, Austria – together with 60 other countries – supported a **declaration by the Group of Friends on Children and Sustainable Development Goals**, which emphasizes that the climate crisis is at the same time a children’s rights crisis.

Implementing resolution 103/E, adopted by the Austrian National Council on 14 October 2020 (request to raise the topic of age of legal responsibility under criminal law that is contrary to human rights in numerous states of the world), Austria advocated raising the age of legal responsibility both in bilateral contacts and at international level, also making relevant recommendations in the context of UPRs to states concerned.

ADC promotes the rights of the child, based on a two-level approach. In implementing a human rights-based approach, ADC on the one hand takes special account of the needs and rights of children in all activities, including political dialogue. On the other hand, ADC promotes projects and programmes that are specifically tailored towards protecting and promoting the rights of children. Activities launched in this context focus inter alia on improving the living conditions of children with disabilities in Ethiopia, Syria and Jordan, supporting refugee children and their host communities in Burkina Faso, and improving the living condi-

tions and social inclusion of Roma children in the Western Balkans in cooperation with UNICEF.

Combating Capital Punishment

The consistent efforts towards the **worldwide abolition of the death penalty** enjoy top priority on Austria's international human rights agenda. Together with a large group of states from all regions, Austria committedly advocates and calls for outlawing the death penalty worldwide. Over the last few years, the general trend has in fact been pointing towards the abolition of capital punishment.

For Austria, the relevant efforts by the UN, the establishment of the World Coalition against the Death Penalty, and the EU Guidelines on the Death Penalty are key instruments in combating capital punishment. Austria supports the biennial resolutions in the UNGA and the UNHRC. In this spirit, Austria actively contributed to the negotiations on the **resolution on the global moratorium on the use of the death penalty** at the 76th UNGA in New York and at the 48th session of the UNHRC, which it also co-sponsored.

In the **Universal Periodic Review (UPR)**, conducted by the UNHRC to review the UN Member States' human rights records, Austria made recommendations on the abolition of the death penalty to Singapore, Somalia, Thailand and Trinidad & Tobago.

Austria regularly raises this topic in bilateral contacts with states that use capital punishment. Austria supports EU interventions and démarches, in particular with respect to unfair trials, minor offences, pregnant women, people suffering from mental health problems or persons who were minors at the time the offence was committed. In a number of individual cases, Austria intervenes and/or supports EU démarches in third countries. In the event of imminent executions, the issue is often raised directly in bilateral contacts. The MFA also maintains close cooperation with civil society organisations that advocate the abolition of the death penalty.

The MDC of the Council of Europe regularly addresses the topic of full and universal abolition of the death penalty. In several EU declarations delivered at MDC meetings, Belarus, the USA and Japan were criticized for executions.

On **World Day against the Death Penalty** on 10 October, the Secretary General of the CoE and the EU HR/VP issued a joint statement again this year.

Combating Human Trafficking

Austria is affected by human trafficking both as a transit and a destination country. Cases of human trafficking in Austria predominantly involve human trafficking

for the purpose of sexual exploitation, however, cases of exploitative labour conditions and child trafficking have also been detected.

At the national level, efforts towards combating human trafficking are coordinated by the **Task Force on Human Trafficking** based on **National Action Plans** and led by the MFA. The head of the Legal and Consular Department, Petra Schneebauer, is the National Coordinator for Combating Human Trafficking and Chairperson of the Task Force, which is responsible for drawing up National Action Plans on combating human trafficking and ensuring their implementation. The sixth **Austrian National Action Plan on Combating Human Trafficking (2021–2023)** was adopted by the Council of Ministers on 28 July. The Action Plan's further development, which is based on a comprehensive and human rights-based approach, is part of the government programme under which combating human trafficking was made a priority.

The National Action Plans pursue a comprehensive approach towards combating human trafficking and include measures aimed at national coordination, prevention, victim protection, law enforcement and international cooperation. All relevant public and government institutions, the federal provinces, social partners and non-governmental organisations cooperate closely within the Task Force. Furthermore, the Task Force has set up separate dedicated working groups, led by the relevant ministries to address and focus on details of such complex issues as child trafficking, prostitution and labour exploitation.

With a view to raising awareness of the topic among the general public and moving it into the focus of public discussion, the Task Force organises an annual conference marking EU Anti-Trafficking Day (18 October). On 12 and 13 October, the conference "Follow the Money. Financial Aspects of Combating Trafficking in Human Beings" was organised at the **Diplomatic Academy (DA)** of Vienna. Due to COVID-19-related restrictions, the event was held in a hybrid format, with 130 individuals attending in person and almost 500 virtual participants.

Austria is party to international legal instruments on combating human trafficking, including the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings as well as the Protocol to the International Labour Organization Convention on Forced Labour.

In terms of global cooperation, Austria has continued its successful cooperation with international organisations such as UNODC, the OSCE, the Council of Europe and GRETA, as well as with ICMPD. At project level, Austria continues to support UNODC projects aimed at preventing human trafficking and protecting vulnerable individuals locally, in potential victims' countries of origin and/or transit, such as the Balkans and Libya. Together with the OSCE, Austria supports the fight against human trafficking along migration routes.

Building on its cooperation with the United Nations in Vienna (especially **UNODC**) and the **OSCE**, as well as due to the successful attraction of relevant NGOs in recent years, Vienna is increasingly perceived as the hub of expertise in the fight against human trafficking.

As host country to important international organisations, it is essential for Austria to ensure the protection of private domestic staff of international officials accredited to Austria, and to prevent potential labour exploitation. To this end, the MFA, in cooperation with victim protection organisations, has for some years now launched regular prevention and control measures and held information events for domestic workers, thus assuming a pioneering role at the international level.

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 this comprehensive and informed understanding, awareness of human rights shall thus be sustainably strengthened and implemented in society. The Understanding Human Rights manual, published by the **European Training and Research Centre for Democracy and Human Rights – ETC Graz**, has enabled Austria to provide an important tool that is used worldwide in meeting this goal. The manual has already been translated into 17 languages and is used successfully by numerous countries and regions in their respective training and education programmes.

Staff of the International Law Office and the Human Rights Department at the MFA regularly teach at universities and contribute to training programmes at the Diplomatic Academy, give lectures, take part in discussion events with the interested public and engage in exchange with students and civil society.

3.6.2 Human Rights in the United Nations

3.6.2.1 Membership in the UN Human Rights Council

Austria was a member of the UNHRC from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2021. During its membership in the central UN human rights body, Austria continued to promote the priorities it had defined for its UNHRC membership through initiatives for resolutions on minority rights, safety of journalists, internally displaced persons and human rights in the administration of justice. In addition, Austria placed a special emphasis on the protection of human rights and digital technologies, an emerging field that requires increased attention from the international community.

Especially in the EU context, Austria was able to contribute the expert knowledge on institutional matters acquired during its UNHRC Presidency in 2020.

Furthermore, the President of the UNHRC, Ambassador Nazhat Schameem Khan from Fiji, entrusted Austria with co-facilitating the ongoing process aimed at increasing efficiency within the UNHRC and strengthening the Council's working methods, set up a few years ago.

Due to the numerous human rights crises that required urgent attention, 2021 proved to be a particularly intense year for all members of the UNHRC. In the aftermath of the military coup in Myanmar, the UNHRC held its **29th Special Session** as early as on 12 February. Jointly convened by the EU and the United Kingdom, the session adopted a resolution by consensus expressing the international community's concern about developments in the country. Austria contributed to the debate, delivering a national statement in which it condemned the military coup in Myanmar as well as the subsequent human rights violations.

Addressing the **high-level segment of the 46th session of the UNHRC**, held from 22 February to 24 March, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg highlighted **Austria's ongoing commitment to human rights**, placing a special emphasis on the **safety of journalists and the protection of human rights in connection with digital technologies**.

Austria took part in the **interactive dialogues on the human rights situation in Belarus**, condemning the suppression of protests and the repression of the opposition. Furthermore, Austria demanded accountability for the human rights violations committed in Belarus, and also contributed to the interactive dialogues on Yemen, Syria, Myanmar, Venezuela and Eritrea. During the general debate and interactive dialogue with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Austria also expressed concern about developments in China, Iran, Turkey, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka and Cameroon.

As part of its **thematic focus**, Austria participated in the debates on human rights defenders, human rights and the environment, as well as violence against children and minorities. Joining forces with its partners from the Quadrilateral Initiative (Slovenia, Switzerland and Liechtenstein), Austria called for the universal abolition of the death penalty during a panel debate.

The EU again expressed its **opposition to the bias regarding the situation of Israel**. As in 2020, Austria voted in favour of the resolution on the **right of the Palestinian people to self-determination** and abstained from voting on the resolution dealing with Israeli settlements in the occupied territories. In addition, Austria supported country resolutions on Myanmar, Sri Lanka, South Sudan, Syria and Nicaragua, that were adopted. Based on a draft jointly introduced by the EU, a resolution on a mechanism to investigate human rights violations in Belarus in the lead-up to the 2020 presidential elections and its aftermath was adopted.

On 27 May, the UNHRC held its **30th Special Session** on the Grave Human Rights Situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. The resolution adopted at the special session, establishing an ongoing commission of

enquiry, was rejected by Austria and some other EU Member States. In an explanation of vote, Austria once again expressed its opposition to the bias regarding the situation of Israel.

Like all June sessions, the 47th session of the UNHRC from 21 June to 14 July focused on **women's rights**. In the negotiations on the resolution, Austria strongly advocated for the worldwide protection of women's rights.

Austria also contributed to the interactive dialogues and debates on the human rights situations in Belarus, Eritrea, Myanmar and Venezuela. In a debate on Ukraine, Austria supported the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country and called for giving international human rights mechanisms access to the Crimean Peninsula that had been annexed in violation of international law. In an interactive dialogue with the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Austria expressed concern about developments in Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Russia, China and Ethiopia. Austria also joined a widely acclaimed Joint Statement on the human rights situation in Xinjiang (China).

In addition, Austria made statements in debates on the **human rights of LGBTQ persons, women's rights, systemic racism, female genital mutilation, freedom of expression and internally displaced persons**.

In the context of the 47th session, Austria contributed to the drafting of two resolution initiatives on its thematic priorities. The adoption of the resolution on **new and emerging digital technologies and human rights** marked a major success in this context.

In addition, and within the framework of a supra-regional core group, Austria advocated for a strong resolution on the negative impact of corruption on human rights.

Furthermore, Austria actively supported the adoption of the resolutions on the extension of the mandate of the Special Rapporteurs on Eritrea and on Belarus, as well as the resolutions on the human rights situation in Tigray/Ethiopia, and in Syria.

At the request of Afghanistan and supported by a total of 29 UNHRC members, including Austria, the UNHRC held its 31st special session on the **human rights situation in Afghanistan** on 24 August. In a statement delivered during the special session, Austria expressed its great concern about the developments in Afghanistan, especially the situation of women and minorities. The resolution eventually adopted by the UNHRC by consensus fell short of many states' expectations – which was also highlighted in a statement by the EU read out by Austria.

The 48th session of the UNHRC convened from 13 September to 11 October and focused on **climate change and the environment**. In a resolution supported by Austria, the UNHRC recognised the right to a healthy, sustainable and clean

environment. In addition, and through a resolution co-sponsored by Austria, the UNHRC established the position of a Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change.

Austria set thematic priorities delivering two joint statements, both of which were supported by a total of 53 Member States: one statement drafted in cooperation with its partner states under the Slavkov/Austerlitz 3 format and read out by Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg, underpinned Austria's firm commitment to combating **antisemitism** worldwide. The other was a **joint statement on the rights of intersex persons**, following up on the corresponding initiative launched by Austria in September 2020, again read out by Austria.

In the context of the 48th session, Austria contributed to the interactive dialogues and debates on Myanmar, Tigray, Belarus, Libya and in further statements expressed its concern about the human rights situations in Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Yemen, Cameroon, Syria, Venezuela and Burundi. On behalf of the Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists, Austria also read out a statement on the situation in Afghanistan.

In the aftermath of the 31st Special Session on Afghanistan, whose outcome it deemed rather disappointing, the EU introduced a resolution on the establishment of a Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Afghanistan, which Austria pro-actively supported. In addition, Austria supported resolutions on the situations in Burundi, Syria and Libya, and also advocated extending the mandate of the expert group on Yemen, which was, however, rejected by the UNHRC due to opposition from numerous states.

Reacting to the **military coup in Sudan**, the UNHRC held its 32nd Special Session on 5 November. The special session was convened by the United Kingdom, Germany, Norway, the USA and Sudan itself, and supported by a total of 55 states, including Austria. In a national statement, Austria condemned the coup, called for a return to the democratic transition process and actively supported the Core Group in the negotiations to enable the broadest possible support for establishing an Independent Expert on the human rights situation in the country.

In view of the deteriorating human rights situation in Ethiopia, the UNHRC held its 33rd Special Session on 17 December, convened by the EU and supported by a total of 53 states, including Austria. Austria contributed to the plenary debate, delivering a national statement. Building on the resolution, adopted by a vote, an international human rights commission was established to investigate and report on human rights violations in Ethiopia.

In addition, the UNHRC conducted the third Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on Austria in which 116 states made a total of 317 recommendations to Austria on how to strengthen the protection and promotion of human rights at national level. Recommendations related to improving protection against discrimination, combating xenophobia, incitement and hate crimes, promoting equal opportunities

for women in the labour market, access to education for all children, independent investigation of the police abuses, taking further measures against human trafficking, fostering protection of the rights of national minorities, human rights and the economy, ratification of international conventions and increasing funding for ODA to 0.7% of gross national income. Austria accepted 236 of these 317 recommendations, committing itself to implementing them by the next UPR (expected for 2026). Under the current implementation process, a major focus is being placed on cooperation with civil society.

At the three meetings held by the Working Group on the UPR, Austria made recommendations to the following countries: Georgia, Lebanon, Rwanda, Myanmar, Namibia, Mozambique, Estonia, Belgium, Denmark, Somalia, Latvia, Singapore, Thailand, Tajikistan, Greece, Tanzania, Hungary, Ireland and Trinidad & Tobago. The Austrian recommendations were based, inter alia on its related priorities, i.e. minority rights, freedom of the media and safety of journalists, the rights of women and children, and the rule of law.

Human Rights in the United Nations General Assembly

In the Third Committee of the 76th UNGA, 58 resolutions on human rights and social issues were dealt with. Overall, the number of votes (18) remained almost unchanged compared to the previous year. Against the background of the thirtieth anniversary of the UN Declaration on Minorities in 2022, Austria introduced a resolution on the **rights of minorities**, hate speech and the social media, which was co-sponsored by 58 states from all regions and adopted by consensus.

As regards further resolutions, the adoption of the traditional EU initiatives on the human rights situation in the DPR of Korea and on freedom of religion or belief can be regarded as a success. In addition, and in cooperation with the **Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC)**, the EU was able to facilitate the adoption of a resolution on the human rights situation in **Myanmar**, condemning the displacement of the Rohingya minority and the associated human rights violations. Likewise, the votes taken on the resolutions on the human rights situation in **Iran, in Syria, and in Ukraine/Crimea** were also successful.

What is more, the adoption of **resolutions on the rights of persons with disabilities and on the protection of human rights defenders** are to be considered a success. Consensus on the EU resolution on religious freedom and the OIC resolution against religious intolerance was maintained. The resolution on the rights of the child, which was initiated jointly by the EU and the Group of Latin American States and focused on the priority theme of “Child Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, was adopted by consensus. Negotiations on a resolution on contemporary forms of racism and glorification of Nazism and/or neo-Nazism, initiated by Russia, resulted in only minor changes to the text as compared to previous years. The EU Member States thus again jointly abstained

from voting on this initiative. In an explanation of vote, the EU condemned all crimes committed during the Nazi regime, especially the Holocaust, in the strongest possible terms and called for effective measures towards fighting neo-Nazism in all its forms. In addition, the Third Committee again adopted several resolutions on strengthening women's rights, including on the protection of migrant women workers and on the improvement of the situation of women and girls in rural areas. Although some of the negotiations were controversial, particularly with regard to sexual and reproductive health, the resolutions were eventually adopted by consensus. The African group introduced a new initiative for a resolution on the human rights situation of widows, which, due to delays in the process, was not negotiated until after the Third Committee had convened.

Within the framework of the agreed EU position, Austria took on the role of EU negotiator for two resolutions. By introducing the resolution on the **human rights of minorities** and the **safety of journalists**, Austria also highlighted its national priorities. Austria contributed actively to the negotiations of the resolutions on the **rights of the child**.

In addition to the respective EU statements, Austria also delivered six national statements with the Special Rapporteurs on freedom of expression, internally displaced persons, minorities, freedom of religion or belief, the right to privacy and the human rights situation in Belarus.

The Permanent Mission of Austria to the UN in New York was in close exchange with the Austrian Youth Delegate representing the Federal Youth Advocacy to the UN. The Youth Delegate took part in the interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Representing a group of states (Liechtenstein, Switzerland, Slovenia), Austria delivered a statement in the interactive dialogue with the Independent Expert on sexual orientation and gender identity. Joining 42 other states, Austria endorsed a joint statement on the situation of the Uyghur minority in China, and together with 44 states, a statement on the human rights situation in Belarus.

Furthermore, Austria organised a roundtable discussion on minority rights and the 2030 Agenda, involving the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, the UN Special Rapporteur on Minorities, and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Together with the UNODC New York Liaison Office, Austria organised an event on the activities undertaken by UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice as well as the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the relevant role both played for the 3rd Committee of the UNGA.

3.6.3 Human Rights in the European Union

The development and consolidation of democracy and the rule of law as well as safeguarding human rights and fundamental freedoms are defined in Article 21 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) as objectives of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The protection of fundamental rights is a cross-cutting issue that affects all areas of activity of the European Union. Matters related to human rights policy within the EU are dealt with in the Council **Working Group on Fundamental Rights, Citizens' Rights and Freedom of Movement (FREMP)**.

In 2021, the main topics on the agenda were the EU's accession to the ECHR, combating violence against women, fighting antisemitism and promoting the effective implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. Austria has continued to advocate a consistent EU human rights policy and calls for better integration of human rights into all EU policies.

The EU took part in the 7th meeting of the intergovernmental working group on the development of an international legally binding instrument on transnational corporations and human rights, which met in Geneva at the end of October.

Austria supports the **Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020–2024** as an essential instrument for coherent EU action delivering on its common commitment to human rights and advocates regular evaluation of its implementation.

The Action Plan also provides important guidance for the activities of the **EU Special Representative for Human Rights (EUSR)** Eamon Gilmore. Seeking to strengthen human rights in third countries, the EUSR thus continued the EU's dialogue efforts by engaging – sometimes virtually – in consultations with Afghanistan, the AU, Belarus, Colombia, Pakistan, Ukraine and Central Asia, to name but a few.

An integral part of the **EU's human rights policy** is a set of Guidelines on Human Rights identifying priority areas, designed to ensure coordinated and coherent action by EU actors and Member States vis-à-vis third countries on human rights issues. Each of these guidelines comprises inter alia a catalogue of concrete measures for the EU's permanent commitment to individual human rights issues such as combating 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, combating violence against women, international humanitarian law, the human rights of LGBTIQ persons, freedom of religion or belief, safe drinking water and sanitation, and the protection of freedom of expression online and offline. Austria is committed to and advocates the full implementation and further development of these guidelines.

The **European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)** was merged into the newly created **Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI-GE)**, with human rights and democracy now forming a separate thematic pillar within the instrument. The European Commission is responsible for the Instrument's implementation and is guided and supported in its relevant efforts by a dedicated Human Rights and Democracy Committee format.

A concrete contribution to strengthening democracy at global level is being made by **EU election observation missions**. Austria has been contributing on a regular basis to these missions, conducted since 2000, by nominating Austrian election observers. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic also led to the cancellation of numerous planned election observation missions, either because the respective elections were postponed or because the situation on the ground did not permit deployment of observation teams. It was, however, possible to conduct observation missions in Honduras, Iraq, Kosovo, Zambia and Venezuela.

The Vienna-based **European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)** provides advice on fundamental rights issues to the bodies and institutions of the EU and its Member States. The FRA collects information on the fundamental rights situation in the entire EU and prepares recommendations for improvement. The FRA examined the measures taken in the EU Member States in relation to the pandemic and their impact on human rights. The agency furthermore provided concrete support to EU Member States, giving practical advice and putting together reports on victim protection, legal cooperation, anti-discrimination, racism, children's rights, the integration of Roma, migration and asylum as well as data protection and privacy. Austria has cooperated closely with the FRA since its foundation.

Structured Human Rights Dialogues

The EU applies special **Guidelines on Human Rights Dialogues** under which it sets out various 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 60 states and groups of states**. The respective topics, issues and opportunities for cooperation addressed during these dialogues are defined on a case-by-case basis. The topics that feature most frequently in these talks include, for instance, **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 also endeavours to actively involve civil society, for instance by hosting joint preparatory meetings in the lead-up to human rights dialogues, which are usually held alternately in the EU and in the respective partner state.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU human rights dialogues and consultations as well as the subcommittee meetings had to be convened mainly virtually. Discussions were held with Afghanistan, the AU, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Australia, Bahrain, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Ecuador, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Cuba, Kuwait, Laos, Moldova, Morocco, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Palestine, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and the United Arab Emirates. The dialogue with Iran has been suspended since 2004, the dialogues with Belarus and China were suspended in 2021.

3.6.4 Human Rights in the Council of Europe

The **Council of Europe'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 of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). By launching the Interlaken Process, which ended in 2019 and sought to strengthen the ECHR system and its long-term effectiveness, and by adopting Protocol No. 14 to the ECHR, important steps towards promoting the sustainability of the ECHR system were taken. In the course of these reforms, it has been possible to substantially reduce the very high number of cases pending before the ECtHR – from originally over 160,000 to some 60,000 cases in recent years.

On 1 August, **Protocol No. 15 to the ECHR** entered into force, which aims to ensure and improve the ECtHR's efficiency. Among other things, the amendment reduced the time-limit within which an application may be made to the Court following the date of a final domestic decision from six to four months. It also includes a reference to the principle of subsidiarity vis-à-vis national jurisdiction and member States' margin of appreciation.

Article 15 of the ECHR provides for the possibility of suspending, i.e. "derogating from", the application of individual provisions of the ECHR in the case of public emergency. As had been the case in 2020, only a few member States – and this year even fewer (Georgia, Latvia, Republic of Moldova) invoked this emergency clause, suspending individual ECHR articles in connection with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of High Contracting Parties, however, considered their respective measures as covered by the existing possibilities under the ECHR.

The **implementation of ECtHR judgments** was again a focus of the Council of Europe's work. Germany that chaired the MDC, made the implementation of judgments a central element of activities. **Turkey's failure to implement the judgment** against it in the case of the longstanding pre-trial detention of Osman Kavala led to regular discussions and, in December, to the initiation of infringement proceedings against Turkey. If the country continues not to release Kavala,

the ECtHR will thus be requested to rule again on whether Turkey has violated its obligation to implement the Court's judgments. A whole series of problems in connection with the implementation of ECtHR judgments also involved Russia.

The **Treaty of Lisbon** provides for the **EU's accession to the ECHR**, which would enable a review of EU legal acts by the ECtHR with regard to their compatibility with the ECHR, also on the basis of individual complaints. Following its finalisation in April 2013, the draft agreement on the EU's accession was submitted by the European Commission to the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) for review. In this context, the Court challenged several issues and the draft had to be renegotiated. The topic of accession to the ECHR gained in momentum under the Austrian and the subsequent Presidencies of the Council of the European Union. In September 2020, negotiations were ultimately resumed in the Group 47+1 format (i.e. the 47 members of the Council of Europe and the EU). Although five meetings were held in a hybrid format by the end of 2021, it has, as yet, not been possible to reach agreement on all open issues.

The MDC regularly deals with the full and **universal abolition of the death penalty** worldwide and adopted two declarations on this issue. On International Day against the Death Penalty on 10 October, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy again issued a joint statement.

The **Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe Dunja Mijatović** paid country visits to Malta and Poland, and was on a contact mission to Ukraine. Her otherwise busy travel schedule was severely limited by the COVID-19 pandemic, but she presented a number of statements on the situation of vulnerable groups. The Commissioner's respective reports and statements on country-specific and thematic developments contribute to raising awareness of human rights in the member States. In this context, special emphasis is regularly placed on the protection of human rights defenders. Originally planned for 2020, Dunja Mijatović's visited Austria in December, placing a special emphasis on topics relating to refugees and on women's issues.

3.6.5 International Criminal Court

The International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague is a permanent international court established by the **Rome Statute (RS)** of 1998. It has jurisdiction over genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression. 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 of crimes. In total, 123 states are party to the RS.

Elected by the States Parties to the RS on 12 February, **Karim Khan** succeeded Fatou Bensouda **as the new Chief Prosecutor of the ICC** on 16 June. Judge Piotr Hofmański took over as President of the Court in March, and Silvia Fernández de Gurmendi as the new President of the Assembly of States Parties in February.

16 situations were pending before the ICC at the end of the year: Uganda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Darfur/Sudan, Central African Republic I and II, Kenya, Libya, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Georgia, Burundi, Bangladesh/Myanmar, Afghanistan, Palestine, Philippines and Venezuela I. In addition, the Office of the Prosecutor is conducting preliminary examinations in five situations (Guinea, Nigeria, Ukraine, Venezuela II and Bolivia).

The **20th session of the ICC Assembly of States Parties (ASP)** convened in The Hague from 5–10 December and was held in a hybrid format due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The review mechanism, established in 2020 by an ASP resolution to monitor and coordinate the implementation of the 384 recommendations contained in the report prepared by the independent experts reviewing the Court, was extended for one year. The ASP elected Ms Nazhat Shameen Khan (Fiji) and Mr Mame Mandiaye Niang (Senegal) as ICC Deputy Prosecutors. In addition, five new members of the Board of Directors of the Trust Fund for Victims and nine new members of the Advisory Committee on Nomination of Judges of the ICC were elected.

3.7 Climate Protection, Environment and Energy Issues

3.7.1 Climate Change and Climate Policy

After the COVID-19 related interruption in 2020, international climate negotiations were resumed at COP26, held in Glasgow from 31 October to 13 November. In the context of these talks, it was possible to reach agreement on the open issues relating to the shaping of the Agreement. As one of the most ambitious countries in climate protection, Austria also participated in the COP26 World Leaders Summit on 1 and 2 November, being represented by Federal Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg accompanied by Georg Knill, President of the Federation of Austrian Industries. Thus, Austria also emphasized the importance of cooperation with business. The most important decisions taken at COP26 relate to rules for market mechanisms enshrined in Art. 6 of the Paris Agreement, which Federal Minister Leonore Gewessler negotiated for the EU, and to reporting regulations. Another success achieved at the conference was the clear commitment to the 1.5 degree target. The goal laid down in the Paris Agreement actually seemed to be at risk, as the **nationally determined contributions (NDCs)** somewhat lacked ambition and since the level of global warming had in the meantime already reached 1.1 degrees. The almost unchecked progress of climate change was again highlighted in the latest comprehensive **assessment report, prepared**

by the **UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** and published in August. Therefore, achieving the net-zero emissions target and thus climate neutrality in the long term is all the more important. Numerous large economies, which – taken together – account for around 90 % of global greenhouse gas emissions, have committed themselves to this goal either at COP26 or already in the lead-up to the conference. For the first time, coal was actually specified as the main cause of climate change in the framework decision, although the wording used in this regard still represents an inadequate compromise (“phase-down” instead of “phase-out”).

Building on the green growth strategy outlined in the **European Green Deal (EGD)**, the EU seeks to achieve an economy with net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Hence, the target of long-term climate neutrality by 2050 was enshrined in the European Climate Law, adopted in April. On top of that, the European Council agreed in December 2020 on a more ambitious medium-term climate target, i.e. reducing the EU's net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 % below 1990 levels by 2030. With a view to implementing the EGD and the 2030 target, the first part of the “Fit for 55” package was presented by the European Commission in July. The comprehensive package of measures contains new provisions and adjustments in the areas of the emissions trading system, renewable energies, energy efficiency, burden sharing in the EU, CO₂ emission standards for passenger cars, charging infrastructure, energy taxation, Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, sustainable fuels for aviation and maritime transport, and the creation of a Social Climate Fund. Negotiations on the Fit-for-55 package are expected to be concluded in 2022–2023. Furthermore, the EU also supported joint global action on climate protection and green recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic in third countries. The related efforts were strongly supported by Austria. Thus, Austria inter alia contributed to the EU démarches in the lead-up to COP26. What is more, Austria earmarked 59 % of the national funds approved under “Next Generation EU” to climate protection.

3.7.2 United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the **Fifth Session of the UNEP Assembly (UNEA)**, originally scheduled for 22–26 February, was split into two parts, one was held this year and the other will take place next year. Held on 22 and 23 February, the first part was convened as a virtual meeting. Discussions focused on administrative and budgetary issues, and also involved an online Leadership Dialogue at Environment Ministers' Level to which Federal Minister Leonore Gewessler contributed. The second part of the fifth session was moved to 2022. This year's activities also included preparations for the celebrations to mark the 50th anniversary of the founding of UNEP (1972 Stockholm), planned for 2022.

3.7.3 Global Environmental Protection Agreements and Initiatives

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was necessary to postpone the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) several times. In the end, the conference was split into two parts. The first part, held as a virtual meeting, took place from 11 to 15 October. The second is planned to be held in Kunming (China) and scheduled for 25 April to 8 May 2022. Thus, new post-2020 global biodiversity targets will not be adopted until 2021.

The decision on the **National Biodiversity Strategy 2030** has not yet been taken. Once adopted, it will provide the framework for bringing the biodiversity crisis in Austria to a halt and reversing the loss of biodiversity to the largest extent possible.

The **Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)**, i.e. chemicals having harmful effects on both the environment and human health, is regularly updated. Held as an online meeting, the first segment of the 10th Conference of the Parties convened from 26 to 30 July and adopted the work programme and the budget. In the context of the second segment, scheduled from 6 to 17 June 2022, the Conference of the Parties will decide on including new chemicals in the Convention.

Within the framework of the **Rotterdam Convention on Prior Informed Consent (PIC) Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade**, the 17th meeting of the Chemical Review Committee (8–11 September) considered recommendations on the inclusion of further industrial chemicals and pesticides, in particular the fungicide iprodione and the insecticide terbufos.

Due to Covid-19, the first part of the 15th Conference of the Parties to the **Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal** convened as a virtual meeting from 26 to 30 July. In the context of this segment, the Parties adopted the budget and a work programme. The second part of the Conference is to be held an in-person meeting from 6 to 17 June 2022.

In regional platform meetings, the focus of activities was on substantive preparation for the 7th session of the **Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction** (Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030), scheduled for May 2022. The European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction was held in Portugal in November. At the 76th UNGA, Member States agreed on a mid-term review of the framework, scheduled for 2023. Austria contributed actively to the ongoing target monitoring process.

With a view to preparing the substantive topics to be addressed at the 15th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to **Combat Deserti-**

fication (UNCCD), the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention, met – due to the COVID-19 pandemic – virtually from 15 to 19 March to engage in an exchange of information. The 15th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD, scheduled for September, was moved to spring 2022. As in the period 2009 to 2013, Austria is again holding one of the Convention's vice-presidencies from 2019 to 2022.

On 16 June, the Secretariat of the global **Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM)** launched a stakeholder experience survey that built on a virtual working group process conducted between October 2020 and February 2021. This process served to support the subsequent inter-sessional process considering the Strategic Approach and sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020. The survey was completed on 16 July. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the **4th meeting of the inter-sessional process (IP4)** and the **5th International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM5)** were postponed. It is currently foreseen that IP4 will be held in autumn 2022 and ICCM5 not until 2023.

Having also been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is expected to be held in Panama from 14 to 25 November 2022.

The **International Whaling Commission (IWC)** convened for a special meeting, held virtually from 8–10 September, and focusing on the budget for the coming year. The 68th meeting of the IWC is now scheduled to take place in Slovenia from 13 to 21 October 2022. Over the last few years, Austria has been able to contribute significantly to introducing environmentally relevant topics at IWC meetings, thus playing a role in the reorientation of the IWC from a purely whaling-oriented to a more environmentally focused organisation. On 2 December, the IWC celebrated the 75th anniversary of its establishment.

The second part of the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the **Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer** and the 33rd Meeting of the Parties to the **Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer** were held virtually from 23 to 29 October. The decisions taken mainly related to postponing the replenishment of the Multilateral Fund, now scheduled to take place in the context of an in-person meeting in 2022, and to monitoring emissions. The high level of trichlorofluoromethane (CFC-11) emissions, observed in 2018, has decreased significantly as a result of related measures taken by China, nevertheless further monitoring of developments is deemed necessary.

Since December 2020, Switzerland has held the Presidency of the **Alpine Convention**. Celebrating its 30th anniversary on 7 November, the Convention continues to place the focus of its work on the priority areas of climate, sustain-

able transport and Alpine cities. In two ministerial meetings, scheduled for 2022, members will look more closely into the inter-relationships between environment and transport in the Alpine region. In the context of World Environment Day on 5 June, the first edition of “Climate Hour” was launched and dealt with climate change in the Alpine region. Chaired by Austria, work in the Alpine Climate Board, set up under the Alpine Convention, in the Soil Protection Working Group, and in the Platform on Natural Hazards (**PLANALP**) continued. The focus of the Alpine Climate Board’s activities is currently on the implementation of the Alpine Climate Target System 2050 and, above all, of the Climate Action Plan 2.0 that was developed building on 30 implementation pathways.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 4th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the **Minamata Convention** on Mercury was split into two segments. The first segment was held online from 1 to 5 November and dealt with budget and funding matters, effectiveness review and reporting. The second segment is scheduled to take place in Bali, Indonesia, in March 2022.

The 7th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the **Aarhus Convention** on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters convened in a hybrid format in Geneva from 18 to 19 November. In the context of the high-level segment, delegations focused on the role played by the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol in furthering sustainable infrastructure and spatial planning. Building on these discussions, the Parties and a wide range of stakeholders adopted the Geneva Declaration on Environmental Democracy for Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Development. The main focus of negotiations under the Convention was the adoption of a rapid response mechanism to protect environmental defenders from persecution, invoking Article 3(8) of the Convention. Austria and Ireland emphasised their readiness to act as lead countries during the next inter-sessional period from 2021–2025 and to also contribute to funding the mechanism.

3.7.4 Sustainable Energy

The energy sector is still responsible for about three quarters of all greenhouse gas emissions worldwide and thus contributes significantly to global warming. A global shift away from fossil fuels towards emission-free, renewable forms of energy is therefore central to climate protection and sustainable development. At the Vienna Energy Hub, ten organisations active in the energy sector and based in Austria’s capital have made a special contribution towards promoting the global energy transition. Accordingly, the members of the Vienna Energy Club also organised a side event at COP26.

Sustainable Energy For All (SEforALL) is a Vienna-based quasi-international organisation, initiated in 2011 by the then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon.

A main focus on SEforALL's agenda within the context of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is the implementation of SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy for all), which is considered an important lever for climate protection and sustainable development. To this end, SEforALL cooperates with government, private sector and civil society representatives thus contributing to global awareness raising. The office of CEO was held by Damilola Ogunbiyi (Nigeria), who also acts as the Special Representative of the UNSG for Sustainable Energy for All and as Co-Chair of UN-Energy in New York. In this dual role, she was instrumental in the success of the **High-Level Dialogue on Energy (HLDE)**, held at the UNGA in September. As the first UN conference on energy since 1981, the HLDE convened under the motto of "Charting the path forward to 2030 – mobilising capital for accelerated action on SDG 7". The HLDE's two main outcomes included voluntary "Energy Compacts" and a "Global Roadmap" outlining the path towards the implementation of SDG 7 by 2030. These two outcomes sent a strong signal in the lead-up to COP26, where SEforALL for the first time hosted a dedicated pavilion for side events.

Following a COVID-19 induced intermission in 2020, the **Vienna Energy Forum (VEF)** was finally held from 5 to 7 July under the heading of "Where Action Meets Ambition". This year's Forum marked the first meeting whose first day of conference was dedicated to the young generation. Organised by its initiators MFA, ADA, **International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA)** and UNIDO, the cross-sectoral conference generated five concrete recommendations, including for the HLDE that met a few weeks later in September: (1) increasing funding for research & development and innovation, (2) expanding access to green technologies, (3) adapting training programmes to the energy transition, (4) improving data availability (including gender-disaggregated data) and (5) developing and implementing coherent strategies. Highlights set by Austria at the VEF 2021 included the launch of a global hydrogen partnership and a **conference segment on Small Island Developing States (SIDS)**. In total, more than 2200 registered attendants from 146 countries and over 330 speakers took part in the VEF.

3.7.5 Nuclear Safety

Austria recognises the right of each and every country to choose their energy mix. At the same time, Austria remains committed to clearly expressing its firm opposition to nuclear energy, both in bilateral contacts and within the framework of the EU, the IAEA and other international organisations. In Austria's view, nuclear power is neither a sustainable form of energy nor is it a viable or appropriate means for tackling climate change. Not least due to the lengthy approval processes and the long construction times, it is impossible for nuclear energy to make any contribution to speak of to the mandatory decarbonisation within the timeframe set by the EU (climate neutrality by 2050). Likewise, new concepts,

such as **Small Modular Reactors (SMR)**, which are repeatedly being put forward as solutions that claim to be able to dispel all concerns, actually exist only on paper. As the claimed benefits would anyway materialise much too late for making a contribution to halting climate change – which must start right now – these concepts are thus not an option. Taking into account the entire fuel cycle as well as costs involved in building, operating and finally decommissioning the plants, the operation of **nuclear power plants (NPPs)** has furthermore proven economically unviable, not least due to the fact that it still remains impossible to quantify the costs of the globally unresolved question of final storage. Operating countries are therefore increasingly forced to provide public funding.

As early as 2018, Austria had already brought an action for annulment against the decision of the European Commission according to which the granting of state aid for the construction of reactor units at the British Hinkley Point NPP and the Hungarian Paks II NPP were compatible with Union law. However, the action for annulment of the European Commission's decision according to which the granting of British state aid for the construction of the Hinkley Point C reactor units was compatible with EU law was ultimately dismissed on 22 September 2020 by the Court of Justice of the EU. The case involving the Paks II NPP had been suspended for the duration of the Hinkley Point proceedings and was subsequently resumed.

Within the framework of the EU, Austria also consistently **opposes the direct and indirect promotion of nuclear energy**. This holds particularly true for EURATOM research and the “taxonomy” regulation, which sets out criteria for ecologically sustainable investments. For Austria, a classification of nuclear energy as a “green” form of energy is out of the question. This position was also corroborated by a scientific and a legal opinion from a renowned international law firm. Both expert opinions were shared with the relevant members of the European Commission. Austria also pointed out that any inclusion of nuclear energy in the taxonomy regulation would seriously damage the taxonomy system's credibility. However, the draft delegated act submitted by the European Commission on New Year's Eve indicated that it would, nevertheless, be included. Austria announced that it would in this event consider bringing an action before the ECJ.

Particularly with respect to all cases of nuclear facilities that could have a negative impact on Austria, Austria continues to make full use of all available means and legal possibilities for protecting its safety interests. Thus, Austria participated in the following cross-border environmental impact assessment (**EIA**) procedures: completion of units 3 and 4 of the Mochovce NPP, new construction at the site of the Dukovany NPP, construction of two nuclear power plant units at the Paks site, construction of the Hinkley Point C NPP, construction of a dry storage facility for spent fuel elements at the Krško site, and extension of the operating lives of the Doel 1&2 and the Loviisa 1&2 NPPs.

At the invitation of Belarus, the **European Nuclear Safety Regulators Group (ENSREG)** conducted a peer review of the country's National Action Plan for the Astravets NPP, in which Austria was also actively involved. Austria not only provided an expert in the Peer Review Team, but also the Chair of the ENSREG Board for Stress Tests in Third Countries. Due to Covid-19, the ENSREG peer review mission was conducted in two phases, one in February and the second one from late August to early September. The full ENSREG peer review report was adopted by ENSREG in November.

As yet, not a single repository (deep geological repository) for high-level radioactive waste and spent fuel elements has been put into operation worldwide. However, in some neighbouring countries, such as Hungary, Switzerland and the Czech Republic, concrete sites are being considered. In December 2020, the Czech government decided to reduce the number of potential sites from originally nine to four. These four sites are not located in the immediate vicinity (less than 30 kilometres) of the border with Austria. The decision for a concrete site will not be made before 2025 and an EIA procedure will have to be performed prior to construction. Austria called for appropriate involvement, starting with the site selection process.

Compliance with the highest safety standards when building new nuclear power plants and/or extending the operating lives of existing nuclear power plants remains a matter of particular concern to Austria and is consistently being stressed at international, European and bilateral level. At the bilateral level, this is done within the framework of the regular meetings under the Nuclear Information Agreements. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it had not been possible to hold all of these bilateral meetings. However, a meeting with Slovenia was able to be held in Ljubljana in October. Furthermore, it was possible to discuss some pressing issues with the Czech Republic, Hungary, Germany, Poland, Slovakia and Switzerland by video conference. As yet, there have still not been any indications of the COVID-19 pandemic having concrete negative impacts on the safety of nuclear facilities. It will, however, be necessary to continue monitoring the related developments very closely.

3.8 International Disarmament and Arms Control

3.8.1 Risks of Weapons of Mass Destruction

Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)

The commitment to a world free of nuclear weapons is a priority of Austria's foreign and security policy. The risks inherent in this category of weapons of mass destruction and the devastating humanitarian consequences of their use are unacceptable. Austria holds the view that such risks can only be eliminated through the absolute prohibition and the complete destruction of these weapons.

Building on the “Humanitarian Initiative for Nuclear Disarmament”, the related conference having taken place in Vienna in 2014, a ban on nuclear weapons under international law was discussed within the UN framework on the initiative of Austria and several other states. These negotiations were successfully concluded on 7 July 2017 in New York, and since 20 September 2017 the **Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)** has been open for signature in New York.

Following its ratification by Honduras on 24 October 2020, the TPNW reached the historic milestone of 50 ratifications. On 22 January 2021, ninety days after its 50th ratification, the Treaty entered into force, officially banning nuclear weapons under international law. As at 31 December, the Treaty has been signed by 86 states and ratified by 59 states.

Austria signed the Treaty on 20 September 2017 and ratified it on 8 May 2018. At Austria's suggestion, the first meeting of the States Parties will in all probability be held at the United Nations Headquarters in Vienna from 22 to 24 March 2022 and be chaired by Austria. Austria remains committed to encouraging as many states as possible to join the Treaty.

Comprising a preamble and 20 articles, the Treaty is the first concrete result generated by multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations since the adoption of the **Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)** in 1996, which has, however, not yet entered into force. The TPNW strengthens and complements the existing international regime on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation and represents a substantial contribution towards facilitating the implementation of the disarmament requirement under Article VI of the **Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)**, which requires other instruments such as the TPNW to be implemented. A world without nuclear weapons cannot be achieved without a legally binding prohibition of such weapons under international law. In essence, the treaty provides for the prohibition of the acquisition, possession, use and other activities related to nuclear weapons. Furthermore, it also contains provisions on victim assistance and on the remediation of environmental damage caused by the use or testing of nuclear weapons.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons opens up an opportunity for nuclear weapon states to irreversibly and verifiably eliminate their arsenals.

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**) has formed the legal basis and cornerstone of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime. The treaty obligates its 191 States Parties – with the exception of the five nuclear weapon states recognised in the treaty, namely China, France, Great Britain, Russia and the USA – not to receive, manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons and at the same time establishes the right

to peaceful uses of nuclear energy. For their part, the five nuclear weapon states recognised in the NPT commit themselves to nuclear disarmament and the goal of complete elimination of nuclear weapons. A goal, which has, however, not yet been achieved. Quite on the contrary: a new nuclear arms race is emerging. India, Israel and Pakistan have not joined the NPT, while the Democratic People's Republic of Korea declared its withdrawal from the Treaty in 2003. Every five years, the States Parties conduct a Review Conference on the state of implementation of obligations and commitments undertaken under the Treaty.

Originally scheduled for 27 April to 22 May 2020, the tenth Review Conference of the States Parties to the NPT had to be postponed several times due to the COVID-19 pandemic and is expected to take place in New York in summer 2022. The pandemic is, however, not the only challenge to be faced by the NPT. Major issues include the lack of implementation or sometimes even retraction of disarmament commitments undertaken by nuclear weapon states under Article VI, and the lack of progress towards establishing a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, which had already contributed in 2015 to the fact that no consensus could be reached on a final document. Equally worrying is the proliferation of highly enriched nuclear material and missile technologies in several regions of the world. The security and proliferation aspects of the trilateral AUKUS alliance, formed by the USA, Australia and the United Kingdom, will also constitute important topics to be dealt with at the upcoming review conference.

Austria participates in a number of initiatives aimed at achieving progress at the Review Conference, despite current international tensions.

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 the draft treaty by the UNGA in 1996, the CTBT has been signed by 185 states and ratified by 170. Thanks to its global monitoring and verification system, the CTBT – once it has come into force – will make the secret development of operational nuclear weapons impossible. However, as eight of the key States listed in Annex 2 of the treaty (Egypt, China, India, Iran, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan and the United States of America) have not yet ratified the CTBT, it can thus not enter into force.

In the meantime, the CTBT Preparatory Commission has made major progress towards setting up the verification system, thus ensuring that its worldwide network of monitoring stations is 90% complete and largely operational. The monitoring system consists of high-tech facilities for seismic, hydro-acoustics, infrasound and measurements. It is already in use today, including for civilian applications, such as tsunami early warning services and for radiological measurements following the nuclear power plant disaster in Fukushima (Japan), for instance. The capabilities of the international monitoring stations were also repeatedly dem-

onstrated during the nuclear weapons tests conducted by North Korea. One of the CTBTO-certified radionuclide laboratories for the analysis of samples from the verification system's radionuclide stations is located in Seibersdorf (Lower Austria).

Austria participates in the efforts to promote the Preparatory Commission and, inter alia, advocates sustainable funding of CTBTO projects within the EU support context. Adopted by the Council of the EU in 2020, a three-year financial support programme totalling some six million euros is currently being implemented. As yet, EU funding has, for instance, been used to establish the Technology Support and Training (TeST) Centre in Seibersdorf, thus enabling proper storage and maintenance of the CTBTO's specialised equipment.

Geneva Conference on Disarmament

Since 1979, the **Conference on Disarmament (CD)** has served as the UN's standing multilateral forum for negotiation of disarmament agreements and treaties with its 65 member States, including Austria since 1996.

In a video message, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg emphasized the increasing risks nuclear weapons pose to humanity. However, as the CD applies the consensus principle, member States have – as in the past 24 years and despite intensive efforts by the presidencies – yet again not been able to agree on opening concrete treaty negotiations.

Chemical Weapons Convention

In force since 1997, the Chemical Weapons Convention (**CWC**) introduced a ban on all chemical weapons and stipulates their phased destruction by all States that possess such weapons. With 193 States parties, the CWC has now come close to reaching its stated objective of universalisation. The **Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)** based in The Hague monitors and supervises the CWC's implementation. Fundamental decisions are taken by the annual **Conference of the States Parties (CSP)**. As the governing body of the OPCW, the **Executive Council (EC)** meets in three regular sessions (March, July and October) per year and may hold special meetings whenever required between sessions. The EC prepares the decisions before they are discussed in the CSP. Austria was elected to serve on the OPCW's Executive Council for the period from May 2020 to May 2022, thus making an effective contribution towards the goal of a world free of chemical weapons.

In the context of the 26th CSP, held from 29 November to 2 December, members adopted the first-ever two-year budget (2022 and 2023) and extended the mandate of Director General Fernando Arias González (Spain) for a second four-year term. The CSP furthermore adopted a decision supported by Austria, which made

it very clear that the use of aerosolised nerve agents in police operations is not compatible with the CWC.

The use of chemical weapons in the Syrian civil war has presented the CWC with its greatest challenge to date. At the same time, the use of chemical weapons has increased in some states against the ruling regime's opponents. The attack on Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny in 2020 marks the continuation of the trend of similar incidents witnessed in recent years and signals a highly worrying erosion of tabooing the use of chemical weapons. Austria has condemned this incident in the strongest terms as a "red line crossed". In October, Austria together with 44 other States Parties, submitted a request under Article IX (2) CWC in the OPCW, requesting Russia to answer all relevant questions.

Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention

Signed in 1972, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (**BTWC**) effectively prohibits the development, production and stockpiling of biological and toxin weapons. Currently, 183 countries are States Parties to the BTWC and 109 countries are signatory States. The annual meetings at experts' and the States Parties' level focus on the development of measures aimed at enhancing biosafety, monitoring and training.

The Conference of the States Parties to the BTWC originally scheduled to take place in Geneva from 8 to 26 November 2020, was held from 22 to 26 November. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Tenth Review Conference was postponed to 2022.

Ballistic Missiles

The **Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation (HCoC)** was developed based on enhanced efforts on the part of the international community to establish an international control mechanism for ballistic missiles capable of carrying weapons of mass destruction. Along with the **Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR)**, the HCoC is the only multilateral instrument in this field. Chaired by Argentina, the 20th Regular Meeting of Subscribing States was held in Vienna on 7 and 8 July.

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 (especially with respect to early notifications of missile launches) in the context of the HCoC mechanism. A total of 143 states have subscribed to the HCoC, with Austria taking a leading role in its universalisation process.

3.8.2 Addressing the Issue of Conventional Weapons

Protection of civilians in armed conflict has been a long-standing thematic priority of Austrian foreign policy. The committed course Austria has pursued for decades with a view to the full implementation and universalisation of the treaties prohibiting anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions is a very important humanitarian contribution in this respect. These weapons are inherently indiscriminate, cause death, horrific suffering and have devastating effects even decades after fighting has stopped.

Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention

The Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and their Destruction (the **Ottawa Convention** or Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention) entered into force in 1999 and comprises 164 States Parties. The success of the Ottawa Convention is reflected in the fact that in recent years only one State Party has used anti-personnel mines, trade has virtually been brought to a halt, major stockpiles have been destroyed and large contaminated areas have been cleared of mines. Over the years, the number of people who fall victim to anti-personnel mines every year around the world has steadily declined. Recently, however, the use of improvised, non-industrially produced explosive devices by non-state actors, particularly in Afghanistan, Colombia, India, Libya, Myanmar, Syria and Pakistan has again led to a resurgence in the number of victims. The 19th Meeting of States Parties to the Convention was held virtually from 15 to 19 November and offered States Parties the first opportunity to take stock of progress towards the targets set out in the Oslo Action Plan adopted at the 4th Review Conference in 2019, and to take further steps towards the Convention's full implementation.

Austria provided three million euros for mine risk education, mine clearance and victim assistance projects in Syria and Ukraine.

Convention on Cluster Munitions

The Convention on Cluster Munitions (**Oslo Convention**) entered into force in 2010. By the end of the year, it had been ratified by 110 states and a further 13 states had signed it. The Convention 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 – also through Austria's committed efforts – sets new and forward-looking standards. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2nd Review Conference was held in two parts: the first part convened virtually from 25 to 27 November 2020, while the second part took place on 20 and 21 September in Geneva and was held in a hybrid format.

Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas (**EWIPA**) claims a particularly high and constantly increasing civilian death toll worldwide, with international statistics showing that 90% of the victims are indeed civilians. The term explosive weapons covers, for instance, aircraft bombs, artillery shells, rockets, but also **improvised explosive devices (IEDs)**. In recent armed conflicts (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Ukraine) the use of such weapons in populated areas has demonstrably been one of the main causes of casualties, pain and suffering among the civilian population. Furthermore, such weapons destroy civilian infrastructure (including means of transport, schools, medical care, water and electricity supply), which has a lasting impact on the livelihoods of the affected population. Therefore, explosive weapons in populated areas are one of the main reasons for conflict-driven migration or flight. According to surveys conducted by renowned NGOs, the suffering and damage caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, e.g. in Syria, is the primary reason why people flee their homes. In 2020, the number of documented cases of civilians killed by explosive weapons worldwide reached at least 18,747. The actual number of victims is assumed to be much higher.

Together with a group of like-minded states, Austria aims to move the topic of EWIPA into the limelight of related discussions, contributing to avoiding human suffering and to promote compliance with international humanitarian law. Austria thus supports the drafting of a political declaration on EWIPA, as proposed by the UNSG and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Following initial regional initiatives in Africa and Latin America (Maputo and Santiago Communiqués), Austria hosted the first global conference on the topic under the heading of “Protecting Civilians in Urban Warfare” in 2019. Held in Vienna, this international event was attended by 133 states and over 500 delegates. Building on the main elements emerging from the Vienna conference, a draft political declaration was developed in subsequent consultations hosted by Ireland in November 2019 and February 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the adoption of this declaration, originally planned for 2020, was postponed. The most recent virtual negotiations were held from 3 to 5 March.

Autonomous Weapons Systems

Autonomously operating systems and artificial intelligence (AI) are not only widely used for civilian purposes but are also on the rise in the military field. Technological progress does not stop short at weapons systems. Autonomous Weapons Systems (**AWS**) select and attack targets autonomously without human control. This development gives rise to numerous moral, ethical, legal, military and security concerns – even more so with respect to **Lethal Autonomous Weapons**

Systems (LAWS). Therefore, one of the most pressing challenges in the field of disarmament is establishing relevant regulations before such AWS without meaningful human control are being used. In this spirit, a group of experts was set up in the context of the Meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the **Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW)** in 2013. This group, whose mandate has repeatedly been renewed, has been meeting in Geneva since 2017 as the **Group of Governmental Experts (GGE LAWS)**. As yet, it has not been possible to agree on a universal definition of AWS. However, there is consensus among most states that international humanitarian law is in principle applicable to such systems and that a certain degree of human control over weapons systems must be maintained. Austria is among the states that advocate a legally binding instrument prohibiting AWS without meaningful human control.

At the meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons in November 2018, Austria and a number of like-minded states presented a draft for opening negotiations on a legally binding protocol. Since the principle of consensus applies within the CCW, it was, however, not possible to adopt a corresponding mandate. Even the idea of a legally non-binding political declaration on the issue had no prospect of consensus. Likewise, the GGE LAWS, set up for the first time for a period of two years, was not able to reach substantive agreement in 2020–2021. The 6th Review Conference of the CCW took place in Geneva from 13–17 December. Due to lack of substantive agreement, the group of governmental experts decided to reconvene in 2022.

At the 75th UN General Assembly, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg called on the international community to act before “killer robots” arrive on the world’s battlefields. He stressed that life and death decisions must not be left to a machine or an algorithm. Adding momentum to discussions on the regulation of LAWS, Austria hosted an international conference in Vienna on 15 and 16 September on “Safeguarding Human Control over Autonomous Weapons Systems”. The conference’s high level opening panel discussion involved Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg, New Zealand’s Minister for Disarmament Phil Twyford, UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu and ICRC Vice President Gilles Carbonnier. In three conference segments, experts examined international law, ethical and security policy aspects that ensure human control over such systems and answered questions posed by the 400 participants.

3.8.3 Multilateral Export Controls

Export Control Regimes

Building on coordination among national export controls, the objective pursued under the five existing control regimes is to ensure that sensitive technologies and knowledge are only shared at international level subject to compliance with

strict standards and in accordance with the relevant provisions under international law. The main instruments of these regimes are lists of relevant goods and/or substances and guidelines governing exports to non-Member States. Austria is a member of all five regimes. On a national level, the Foreign Trade Act and the War Material Act cover the national implementation of these instruments.

The relevant regimes in the nuclear context are the Vienna-based **Zangger Committee (ZC)**, which has 39 members, and **the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)** with 48 members. 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. Originally scheduled to take place in Brussels from 22 to 26 June 2020, the 30th NSG Plenary Session was moved to 24 and 25 June due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The 43-member **Australia Group (AG)** seeks 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 35 members who have committed themselves to preventing the proliferation of missile technology capable of carrying weapons of mass destruction. Austria held the MTCR's annually rotating chair in 2020 and handed it over to Russia in 2021. Founded in 1996, the **Wassenaar Arrangement (WA)**, which comprises 42 Participating States, aims to prevent destabilising accumulations of conventional weapons, dual-use goods and technologies by coordinating national export controls and increasing transparency. The Secretariat, headed by Philip Griffiths (New Zealand), is based in Vienna. Celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, the WA convened in December for its plenary session.

Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)

The text of the **Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)**, which sets out the rules for international trade in conventional arms, was adopted by the **UNGA** with an overwhelming majority in 2013. Supporting a robust ATT, Austria was among the first states to sign the treaty. Having come into force on 24 December 2014, the Treaty at this stage has a 110 States Parties.

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 trade and diversion of arms on stability, security and human rights as well as on sustainable economic and development policy. Under the treaty, arms exports are banned if they have been or could be used to commit serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights. In export decisions, criteria such as their impact on peace and security, the risk of illicit transfer or trafficking (including the exchange of information on corruption) or gender-based violence are to be taken into account. However, the ATT does not include a ban on weapons nor an obligation to destroy existing weapons. The

right to individual or collective self-defence according to Art. 51 of the UN Charter remains unaffected by the Treaty.

Austria has successfully advocated that the international Arms Trade Treaty lives up to the highest possible standards. These include inter alia the development of mandatory human rights criteria in approval procedures, a comprehensive and complete scope and enforcement mechanisms. The Seventh Conference of States Parties to the ATT was held in a hybrid format from 30 August to 3 September.

National Export Controls

In Austria, the Foreign Trade Act (main responsibility held by the Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs) and the War Material Act (main responsibility held by the Federal Ministry of the Interior) form the legal basis governing the export of conventional arms. The MFA and the Federal Ministry of Defence are involved in the approval procedure. Defence equipment subject to approval is defined in the Foreign Trade Act of 2011, by the items listed in the EU Common Military List, and the Second Foreign Trade Regulation of 2011 in conjunction with its annex. Moreover, such equipment is also defined in the War Material Regulation. In addition, Austria is committed to adhering to the EU Common Position of December 2008 that defines common rules governing the exports regime of military technology and equipment. This legally binding Common Position makes a significant contribution towards further harmonisation of national export regimes and implementation activities.

3.9 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Since 1995, Austria has been a member of the **Partnership for Peace (PfP)** and since 1997 a member of the **Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC)**, the dialogue and consultation forum between NATO and the Euro-Atlantic partner countries. Cooperation with NATO on the one hand facilitates addressing important security policy issues in a transatlantic framework, and on the other hand fosters the further development of the Austrian Armed Forces' capabilities. Austria has participated in various future-oriented NATO programmes (e.g. in the cyber area) and is an important and recognised troop contributor to NATO-led peace operations.

With regard to **EU-NATO cooperation**, the Joint Declaration adopted by EU and NATO leaders in 2016, identified seven areas of cooperation (i.e. countering hybrid threats, operational cooperation including in the maritime domain, cyber security and defence, defence capabilities, defence industry and research, exercises, and defence and security capacity building). Building on the 2016 Declaration, a second joint declaration was adopted by EU-NATO leaders in July 2018, placing an additional focus on military mobility, counter-terrorism and strength-

ening resilience to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear-related risks. The drafting of a third joint declaration is envisaged for 2022.

With a total of around 290 troops, Austria continued to provide the largest contingent of any partner country for the NATO-led **peace operation in Kosovo (KFOR)**. Together with the Kosovar police and EULEX, KFOR contributes towards maintaining a safe and secure environment and ensuring freedom of movement for all ethnic groups. KFOR also supports the development of professional, democratic and multi-ethnic security structures in Kosovo.

Austria contributed 20 soldiers to the NATO-led **training, advice and assistance mission Resolute Support (RSM)** in Afghanistan that was terminated at the beginning of September.

Against the background of the fundamental change in the geopolitical situation and in view of the security and defence policy challenges, the NATO summit in Brussels decided in June to draft a new Strategic Concept, i.e. NATO's key strategic document. The objective is to adapt NATO to the challenges to be faced in the next decade.

4. Austrian Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs

Austrian development policy makes a fundamental contribution to security, prosperity and stability in its immediate and wider neighbourhood, which makes it an essential pillar of Austrian interest and foreign policy.

Austrian Development Cooperation (**ADC**) focuses on creating perspectives on the ground. The key objectives of ADC as enshrined in the **Development Cooperation Act (DCA)** are combating poverty in developing countries, ensuring peace and human security, preserving the environment and protecting natural resources. Relevant activities in the field of development policy are coordinated by the MFA, which also holds responsibility for the strategic orientation of ADC. The **Austrian Development Agency (ADA)** plans, finances and supports programmes and projects in priority countries and key regions. As a member of the EU, the OECD, the UN and the World Bank Group, Austria also contributes actively to shaping international development policy within the relevant bodies.

Budget for Development Cooperation

Official Development Assistance (ODA) amounted to 1,234 million euros or 0.31% of gross national income (GNI) in 2021. This corresponds to an increase of over 120 million euros or 0.02% of GNI compared to the previous year.

Policy Coherence

Active, responsible development policy is a whole-of-government approach. This principle is also enshrined in Article 1 paragraph 5 of the Development Cooperation Act. Policy coherence has become increasingly important in the context of the adoption of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. In Austria, policy coherence is ensured inter alia by involving all relevant stakeholders in strategic planning processes such as the Three-Year Programme on Austrian Development Policy, country and regional strategies as well as thematic-strategic guidelines. Austria furthermore participates in both the EU's and the OECD's policy coherence networks.

Promotion of Civil Society Engagement

Civil society organisations (CSOs) are important partners of ADC. Making available a mix of tailor-made promotional instruments and a budget of 15.4 million euros, Austria supported some 100 programmes and projects in 40 countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia as well as in South East and Eastern Europe.

Contracts for Framework Programmes and Strategic Partnerships were maintained with eleven CSOs, involving a total contract volume of about 32 million euros covering three to five-year periods. Under the Technical Assistants Programme, funding is provided for assigning experts to developing countries who assist local development organisations in capacity-building. Under the funding instruments ‘Individual Projects South’ and ‘Individual Projects East’, 45 projects were implemented in developing countries in the South as well as in South East Europe, Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. Furthermore, ADA support was provided to some 35 ongoing EU co-financing projects. Total funding of around four million euros was made available in a second phase for co-financing six projects operated by Austrian CSOs on “migration and development/flight-asylum-return”. Under the call “FGM/Female Genital Mutilation, Women’s Health and Family Planning”, four projects were funded with a total of 1.2 million euros.

In cooperation with the **Austrian CSO umbrella organisation AG Globale Verantwortung (WG global responsibility)**, a three-year programme was successfully implemented. The objective pursued in this context consisted of both strengthening Austrian CSOs’ related capabilities and making an active contribution towards shaping the development policy framework at European and international level.

Promotion of Entrepreneurial Commitment

The private sector is an important development policy actor. Not only with respect to direct economic objectives, but also with a view to other areas included in the Agenda 2030. Consequently, ADC works with market systems and enterprises in a wide range of different sectors. By pursuing the approach of inclusive market system development, the ground is prepared for enterprises to contribute to sustainable development and to the achievement of the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** under the Agenda 2030.

In order to promote direct cooperation with enterprises, ADA relies on **business partnerships**. Some 40 such projects were being implemented by the end of the year. The respective funding pledges totalled 15.2 million euros.

Since 2012, a total of 160 business partnerships and numerous feasibility studies have been launched. More than 77,600 local businesses and institutions have already benefitted from projects that have opened up additional opportunities and prospects. Thus, more than 8,800 new jobs have been created and some 3.3 million people have been able to lead a better life.

The “Kofi Annan Award for Innovation in Africa” is directed at African social entrepreneurs who support the health of people in Africa by providing digital or technological solutions, thus making a contribution towards SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being). Initiated by the Federal Chancellery together with the Kofi Annan

Foundation, the award was launched in cooperation with the Innovation Accelerator of the **World Food Programme (WFP)** and ADA. The call for proposals under this award was very well received by applicants, potential investors and the media. In a first round, nine nominated winners will receive professional support in the context of a WFP boot camp and in a second round, the three best bidders will also be granted financial support made available by ADA and amounting to 250,000 euros.

Evaluation

Strategic evaluations of ADC are planned and managed by the MFA in cooperation with ADA and conducted by independent, external evaluators. In accordance with international transparency standards, the strategic evaluations performed since 1999 can be accessed on the ADA website. Two strategic evaluations were completed, one related to the human rights-based approach (HRBA) in ADC and the other to the evaluation and evidence synthesis in implementing the whole-of-government approach (WGA) in Austrian development policy. Work on a further strategic evaluation of ADC cooperation with the private sector, and especially business partnerships, was continued. Furthermore, the implementation plan (i.e. Management Response) for the evaluation of the HRBA, that had already been completed, was prepared and the related work on the evaluation of the WGA was started. The objective pursued in this respect is to tap into the benefits and lessons learned from evaluations and to ensure timely implementation.

“Evaluation Policy ADC Plus” is the first such interdepartmental policy, setting out qualitative requirements based on international standards, defined by the OECD and the **United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG)**. As an important framework document for Austrian development evaluation, this policy is of relevance and interest not only for the ministries involved but also for other development policy actors (such as federal provinces and NGOs) and may also be applied by all stakeholders. “Evaluation Policy ADC Plus” is not only policy coherence put into practice, but also plays an important role in the context of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) Peer Review of Austria.

At international level, the MFA and ADA were jointly represented on the relevant evaluation bodies, i.e. the OECD/DAC, EvalNet and in the extended DACH group (consisting of the German-speaking evaluation bodies of Germany, Austria, Switzerland plus Belgium and the Netherlands), as well as in the EU Head of Evaluation Services.

DAC Peer Review and Management Response

The DAC Peer Review report on ADC was published at the beginning of 2020. Peer reviews are conducted by the OECD’s **Development Assistance Committee**

(DAC) together with two DAC member states and seek to improve the quality and effectiveness of development cooperation through mutual learning. The report on Austria emphasises its role as a reliable and flexible partner. The majority of the eleven recommendations made under this Peer Review deals with issues of coherence, financial and human resources, with particular emphasis on strengthening a whole-of-government approach.

Subsequently, ADC prepared a Management Response outlining how and to what extent ADC will implement the recommendations. All stakeholders concerned were involved in drafting the Management Response, which was submitted to the DAC in February.

4.1 Thematic Priorities

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to present ADC with challenges. All sectors and thematic areas of ADC activity in developing countries have been and/or continue to be affected by the impacts of the pandemic. In the programmes and projects supported and/or implemented, a major focus was thus placed on strengthening social and economic resilience of population groups in difficult circumstances.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (SDG 5) is a central goal pursued by ADC activities and is taken into account at all levels. In this spirit, Austria is fully committed to the goals and principles and goals set out in the EU Gender Action Plan (GAP III).

At bilateral level, Austria is active in Albania, Moldova, Mozambique, Uganda and Palestine in the **water and sanitation sector (SDG 6)**. In Moldova, Austria cooperates with Switzerland on a joint programme aimed at strengthening the institutions in this sector. Moreover, Austria, in cooperation with the local municipal administration, has successfully led the construction of an EU-funded sewage treatment plant in the small town of Cantemir. In Africa, ADA supports a large-scale Global Water Partnership programme to promote gender equality in the water sector in up to 18 countries (SDG 5). Of equal importance is the work performed by the African Development Bank's African Water Facility, which is also supported by ADA. This financing facility mobilizes investments in water and sanitation projects. Launched only recently, a new cooperation project focuses on promoting cooperation between the countries in the Volta River basin in West Africa and also supports the drafting of a master plan for sustainable water management in the catchment area.

In the field of **sustainable energy (SDGs 7, 13)**, ADC, in cooperation with UNIDO, continued to focus on setting up and operating regional centres for renewable energy and energy efficiency. The goal is to promote the political and economic framework conditions for the increased use of sustainable energy solutions in the

regions, strengthen local and regional capacities and develop regional markets and value chains. The regional centres in West and East Africa, Southern Africa, the Himalayas-Hindu Kush, the Caribbean and the Pacific are already operational. Preparations are underway to establish further regional energy centres in Central America. Other partners in the energy sector are the **UN Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL)** initiative and the **Energy and Environment Partnership (EEP)** in Southern and Eastern Africa in cooperation with the **Nordic Development Fund (NDF)**.

In the context of strategies and programmes on **food security and sustainable rural development (SDGs 1, 2, 10, 13, 15)**, particular importance is attached to reducing the impact of climate change, increasing the resilience of households and communities to crises, strengthening local value creation, and sustainable use of and equal access to land and natural resources. ADC supports these approaches inter alia in Ethiopia, Burkina Faso and Mozambique, as well as in the context of agricultural projects currently being implemented in Armenia and Georgia. Some of these projects, which focus inter alia on promoting organic farming, are being implemented by ADC with funding from the European Commission.

ADC supports partner countries in building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions, respecting **human rights** and fostering a vibrant civil **society (all SDGs, especially SDG 16)**. With a view to ensuring the quality of implementation on the ground, information papers on the rights of the child, the right to water and sanitation as well as a manual on the inclusion of persons with disabilities were revised. One of the projects aimed at raising awareness of persons with disabilities, was for instance, the “Bridging the Gap” project in Ethiopia that was successfully completed. Intensive work on Austria’s DC-relevant country reviews relating to the **rights of the child**, to **economic, social and cultural (ESC) rights**, and **persons with disabilities**, and on the **Universal Periodic Review (UPR)** was continued.

ADC is particularly committed to **peacebuilding and conflict prevention (SDG 16)** in the regions of West Africa, East Africa/Horn of Africa, the Western Balkans, South Caucasus, and the Near and Middle East (SDG 16). In a joint project involving the Federal Ministry of Defence and the **Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution (ASPR)**, training courses on civil-military cooperation and humanitarian crisis missions directed at civil, military and police personnel were conducted at the **Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Center (KAIPTC)** in Accra (Ghana). In the context of ADC, special emphasis is placed on conflict prevention: the **West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)** is the mainstay of the conflict early warning system maintained by the regional organisation **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)**. Building on the cooperation of more than 500 local CSOs as WANEP partners in the region, involvement of civil society actors and consideration of their perspectives is thus also ensured.

Another important prerequisite for conflict prevention and peacebuilding in fragile contexts is a **coordinated, coherent and complementary approach based on development cooperation, humanitarian aid and peacekeeping (HDP Nexus, 3C approach)**. Among the current priorities pursued in this context is the gender-sensitive application of this linkage, to which ADC is actively contributing in cooperation with the European Commission and bilateral donors in Palestine. This “triple nexus” approach is also pursued by several projects developed by civil society actors in the Sahel region and launched by ADC this year.

In the area of **education and science (SDG 4)**, the priorities pursued by ADC related to higher education and vocational training. In this spirit, the dedicated **Austrian Partnership Programme in Higher Education and Research for Development (APPEAR)** facilitates multi-annual partnerships between higher education institutions in the priority countries of ADC and Austria, thus promoting comprehensive capacity development. Following a very positive evaluation outcome, another phase of this internationally recognised programme was launched in 2020. This year, the focus was on selecting the first 26 partnerships that are to benefit in this new phase from funding or a grant enabling them to engage in concrete planning activities. In cooperation with the **Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research**, ADC furthermore supports partner countries in the key region Danube Region/Western Balkans in their efforts towards approximation with and/or integration into the European Higher Education and Research Area. Furthermore, partner countries in this region as well as Moldova and Burkina Faso were supported in the reform of their respective vocational training sectors.

Environmental and climate protection (SDG 1, 9, 13, 15) is pursued at various levels in the context of ADC. Support to priority countries and key regions covers, for instance, assistance towards enhanced integration of environmental and climate matters into development plans and ecologically sustainable growth paths in line with the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the SDGs. ADC seeks to achieve this goal inter alia through cooperation with the Poverty Environment Action Programme under the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Resource efficiency, climate protection, disaster risk reduction (DRR) and ecosystem preservation are addressed holistically in all projects and programmes. Furthermore, Austria has for many years now also played an active role in the Network on Environment and Development of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which has been vice-chaired by ADA since October 2018.

4.2 Bilateral Development Cooperation

The **COVID-19 pandemic is having a particularly serious impact** on developing countries. According to international reports – including those published by the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Bank – the world’s poorest

countries have been hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts. It is expected that they will thus also suffer major setbacks in their economic development and poverty reduction efforts. According to both the UN and the World Bank, the lockdown restrictions and economic slumps are estimated to have pushed an additional 119 to 124 million people into extreme poverty, with some 60% of those affected living in South Asia. These developments have translated into the highest increase in the global extreme poverty rate since 1998, having risen from 8.4% in 2019 to 9.5% in 2020. This means that almost one in ten people on this planet are affected by extreme poverty, with young people and women being the most severely affected. The above also applies to the 11 ADC priority countries and the fragile states and regions supported by ADC (especially in the Near and Middle East). Being massively hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, they also suffer the associated socio-economic impacts as well as the political repercussions. Since the onset of the crisis, ADC has therefore supported the priority countries and key regions in dealing with these severe impacts and the related knock-on effects. Assistance is provided on the one hand through concrete project financing and on the other hand by supporting global measures managed via international organisations or funds, and within the framework of the EU.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Austria has provided more than 268 million euros in the context of the international fight against the spread of the virus and its impacts, including contributions to the global vaccination alliance **COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX)**, to the **UN COVID-19 Response & Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF)**, to the **UN Global Humanitarian Response Plan COVID-19**, to a number of UNDP COVID-19 Integrated Response Plans, to the ICRC/IFCR COVID Response Appeals, and via ADC projects, by participating in vaccine research as well as through guarantees provided by the Austrian Development Bank. Since the end of February, it was, for instance, possible to under COVAX to deliver more than 600 million vaccine doses to more than 140 countries, including 92 middle and low-income countries (GNI per capita per year less than US\$ 1,045). In this context, all ADC priority countries (Albania, Kosovo, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Uganda, Mozambique, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Bhutan and Palestine) benefit from the COVAX facility: Albania, Georgia, Armenia, for instance, via purchase options, while others receive donor-financed vaccine doses. By the end of the year, COVAX vaccines had been delivered to the following ADC priority countries: Burkina Faso (1.37 million doses), Ethiopia (11.13 million doses), Uganda (12.54 million doses), Mozambique (5.62 million doses), Kosovo (739,620 doses), Palestine (909,020 doses), Moldova (535,590 doses) and Bhutan (505,850 doses).

Team Europe

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, **EU development ministers** agreed to coordinate support and assistance provided to partner countries in addressing

and managing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and to increase the EU's visibility **as the largest donor worldwide** through joint external action. Since then, assistance and funding made available by the EU and all its Member States, institutions, agencies and actors, including the **European Investment Bank (EIB)** and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), have been pooled under the heading of **"Team Europe"**. The initiative is also related to the EU's efforts aimed at generally joining forces and bundling activities in development cooperation under a joint programming effort. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Team Europe has thus provided a total of **46 billion euros in support to partner countries**. Together with EU delegations, representatives of multilateral fora and EU Member States' representatives on the ground, a range of tailor-made Team Europe flagship projects, also known as **Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs)**, have been developed for each of the partner countries covering the areas of Green Deal, technology/digitalisation, growth, jobs, migration, governance/peace/security and humanitarian development.

Bilateral Development Cooperation

According to the Three-Year Programme of Austrian Development Policy 2019–2021, ADC was active in **three categories of countries**: 1) Least Developed Countries (**LDCs**), 2) South East European/South Caucasian countries, 3) crisis regions and fragile states.

Least Developed Countries

In the context of support provided to least developed countries, ADC focuses on countries and regions in Sub-Saharan Africa and Bhutan.

In the priority country **Ethiopia**, the focus is on strengthening resilience and inclusive governance in accordance with the new Country Strategy 2019–2025. Geographically, the focus is placed on the Amhara region, especially its rural areas, and its rural development. However, due to the acts of war in the North of the country, some ongoing projects had to be discontinued or – if possible – were reorganised to the provision of humanitarian aid and assistance. As set out in the new Country Strategy 2019–2025 for the priority country **Burkina Faso**, Austria is active in the fields of sustainable economic development in rural areas as well as technical education and vocational training. The geographical focus is on the Boucle du Mouhoun region. In these areas, a third-party funded project financed by the **EU Trust Fund for Emergencies in Africa (EUTF)** is being implemented, as well as a project in cooperation with the Province of Vorarlberg. Within the framework of the new Country Strategy 2019–2025 for the priority country **Uganda**, projects are being implemented in the priority sectors of water supply and sanitation as well as access to justice. Since 2012, three EU-funded third-party projects have been implemented. The key region is northern Uganda. ADC's Coun-

try Strategy 2019–2024 for **Mozambique** focuses on sustainable agriculture and food security as well as rural water supply and sanitation. The geographical focus is on the province of Sofala, where an EU-funded third-party project is being implemented.

Complementing its commitment in the priority countries, ADC also supports regional actors in **Sub-Saharan Africa**. Alongside the cooperation with the African Union, the local ADC partners include the following regional organisations: **the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)**, **the East African Community (EAC)**, **the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)**, which is supported through an EU-funded third-party project, and **the Southern African Development Community (SADC)**.

In this region, ADC focuses on the thematic priorities ‘peace and human security’ and ‘integrated transboundary water resource management’. In accordance with a whole-of-government approach, ADC endeavours to tap into synergies between all Austrian actors and stakeholders, particularly in the fields of science and research, humanitarian assistance, migration and mobility, business and development as well as sustainable energy and energy efficiency.

The transition strategy for the **priority country Bhutan** 2019–2023 accompanies and monitors Bhutan on its path towards classification as a middle-income country and focuses on the priority sectors of good governance, especially in the legal and judicial sector, and sustainable energy supply.

Special importance is attached to implementing the humanitarian aid, development cooperation and peace consolidation nexus. Regional and multilateral cooperation in all phases of the conflict cycle seeks to ensure the sustainability of contributions to peace and human security. Integrated water resources management endeavours to promote spatial and sectoral cooperation and the interdependencies between food security/agriculture, trade and industry, health, environmental and climate protection and social justice (“Leaving no one behind”). The declared goals of ADC remain eliminating poverty, improving livelihoods and creating sustainable prospects for life. Thus, ADC also contributes to reducing migration. Furthermore, particular attention is paid to supporting the necessary framework conditions such as legal security, capacity development in research, innovation and investments in renewable energy as well as financing for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. In the area of science and research, the focus is on facilitating access for young people to research and science as well as to vocational training.

The situation of women and girls is explicitly addressed in all priority areas. ADC lays down minimum standards for the empowerment of women that must be observed in the promotion of educational initiatives in family planning and reproductive rights of women and in conflict resolution, peacebuilding and peacekeep-

ing. ADC supports gender equality, the fight against genital mutilation and the empowerment of women and girls.

Countries in South East Europe/South Caucasus

In supporting priority countries in South East Europe and the South Caucasus, ADC attaches importance to fostering these countries' economic development focusing on employment, vocational and higher education as well as governance, human rights, rule of law and institution building. A main goal pursued in this context is ensuring that the poorest are not left behind. Currently a new ADC strategy for the Western Balkans is being finalised, which pursues a two-pronged approach: providing even more targeted and visible support to the Western Balkan states in moving closer to the EU by building on the related ADC reorientation, while at the same time strengthening regional cooperation.

In **Albania**, governance and the rule of law, labour market-oriented vocational training/employability as well as integrated water management are promoted, while in **Kosovo** support is provided to foster education, focusing especially on tertiary education, as well as economic and private sector development, placing an emphasis on rural areas. Special mention is to be made of the EU International Monitoring Operation (IMO) project ADA is implementing in Albania. Under this project, ADA is overseeing a vetting process under which approximately 800 Albanian judges and public prosecutors are evaluated by international experts to determine whether they adhere to rule of law and anti-corruption principles in exercising their duties.

The country strategy coordinated with **Moldova** is directed at supporting the development and EU association of the Republic of Moldova. To complement the related activities, ADC successfully implemented an EU-funded third-party project in the country aimed at promoting the agricultural sector's competitiveness and improving drinking water supply as well as sanitation in rural regions.

Austrian development involvement in the South Caucasus focuses primarily on supporting the two ADC priority countries **Georgia** and **Armenia**, with special attention being given to cooperation in the agricultural sector. A special highlight in this context is the EU-ADA financed project "**Local Empowerment of Actors for Development**" (LEAD4SHI-RAK) aimed at strengthening inclusive growth in the rural areas of Shirak in Armenia by supporting community-based development and partnership initiatives.

Crisis Regions and Fragile States

Austria continues to support **Palestine**. In line with the "European Joint Strategy in Support of Palestine 2021–2024" and the Palestinian "National Policy Agenda 2017–2022", Austrian development cooperation is particularly active in the the-

matic field of water supply and socio-economic resilience with a focus on women and youth. In support of a negotiated two-state solution, Austria furthermore contributes to institution building for a state of Palestine. Austria is also a long-standing supporter of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (**UNRWA**).

Furthermore, Austria has financed support measures for fragile states in the Near and Middle East. Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan and Afghanistan, for instance, were supported through programmes managed by the United Nations. In the context of the efforts aimed at alleviating the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and in order to provide support to Afghan refugees in neighbouring states, Austria has provided funding under emergency assistance totalling 20 million euros.

4.3 Multilateral Development Cooperation

European Union Development Cooperation

The EU (Member States and the European Commission) is the largest donor of Official Development Assistance (ODA). Austria's financial contribution to EU development cooperation is one of the largest single items of Austrian ODA. In 2021, Austria contributed 347 million euros to development cooperation under the EU budget and the European Development Fund (**EDF**), equalling 28% of Austria's total ODA.

The **Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI-GE)** was created in the context of the EU's Multi-annual Financial Framework from 2021 to 2027. Merging previous stand-alone instruments into one, it covers all third countries except for the candidate countries. Equipped with total funding of 70.46 billion euros for the entire period, this instrument seeks in particular to promote the EU's values, principles and interests worldwide, foster democracy, the rule of law, human rights, sustainable development, multilateralism (including the SDGs, the Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement) as well as partnerships with third countries. It also aims to contribute to the reduction and long-term eradication of poverty, the fight against climate change and irregular migration and displacement. Negotiations on the post-Cotonou agreement between the EU and the members of the **Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS)** were successfully concluded on 15 April and the agreement was initialised.

Agenda 2030

Presented to the United Nations in 2020, Austria's first **Voluntary National Review of the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals/SDGs (VNR)** illustrates Austria's high level of commitment to implementing the SDGs,

addressing topics such as digitalisation, climate protection and climate change adaptation as well as women, youth and Leaving No One Behind, and highlights numerous concrete success stories.

This year's focus was placed on promoting and expanding coordination of SDG implementation in Austria as well as intensified dialogue and public relations work on the Agenda 2030. Based on the members of the VNR editorial team, a steering group was set up in which the Federal Chancellery, the Federal Ministry of the Interior, the Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology, the Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs as well as the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection cooperate.

With a view to intensifying dialogue, the first Austrian SDG Dialogue Forum was organised on 28 September in cooperation with the Ban Ki-moon Centre for Global Citizens and SDG Watch Austria. Discussions focused on options for action and innovation after the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as on partnerships towards achieving the 17 SDGs. Participants (members of the government, experts and important stakeholders from business, science, administration and civil society) discussed current challenges, innovations and approaches to sustainable development in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic based on the priority themes outlined in the VNR.

4.4 Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief

Humanitarian aid seeks to save lives, alleviate human suffering and ensure protection and care for all affected people who find themselves facing a humanitarian emergency (natural disasters, armed conflicts, pandemics) as well as to create the basis for a return to acceptable, decent and humane living conditions. The central instrument of Austrian humanitarian aid is the **Foreign Disaster Fund (fdf)**, whose funding was increased by 19.5 million euros to 69.5 million euros, with the majority of the increase being used for the largest emergency aid package in the history of the Second Republic, i.e. humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan following the Taliban's seizure of power.

4.4.1 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 for Agriculture, Regions and Tourism, the Federal Ministry of Defence, the federal provinces and municipalities as well as other public bodies and institutions. The gradual increase in funding allocated to the fdf enables more comprehensive responses to the increasing humanitarian needs worldwide.

Bilateral humanitarian aid responds to extraordinary crisis situations, which are mostly triggered by natural disasters or armed conflicts. Massive flows of refugees and famine are the most obvious consequences of such extreme crisis situations. These included the refugee crises in Syria and neighbouring countries as well as in Afghanistan and the surrounding region, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in South East Europe and famine in Africa.

In response to and with a view to mitigating the impacts of the crisis in Syria and the region, a total of around 18.2 million euros was made available for the provision of basic care and services, humanitarian mine clearance and rehabilitation of mine victims. Another focus of activities was the situation in Afghanistan. With a view to facilitating the provision of fast and effective humanitarian aid on the ground, an emergency aid package totalling 20 million euros was adopted.

In addition to these long-lasting crises, the COVID-19 pandemic dominated the humanitarian aid agenda. Austria demonstrated solidarity with countries in need also in times of the pandemic by providing vaccine doses. In this context, the focus is placed on the countries in Austria's neighbourhood (i.e. the Western Balkans and European Neighbourhood countries) as well as all countries with a low vaccination coverage rate. Special consideration is given to humanitarian crisis areas, such as the region surrounding Afghanistan. The selection of recipient countries as well as delivery management was conducted in close coordination between the MFA, the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection and the Federal Ministry of the Interior. In order to address and respond in a timely manner to the acute emergency situation, Austria acted as regional coordinator for the delivery of a total of 651,000 doses of the BioNtech/Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine under the EU Vaccine Sharing Mechanism to the six Western Balkan countries. Building on support from the Federal Ministry of the Interior, a total of 1,000,000 vaccine doses were sent to Iran, 50,000 vaccine doses to Costa Rica, 50,000 vaccine doses to Vietnam, 50,000 vaccine doses to Tajikistan, 150,000 vaccine doses to Uzbekistan and 956,550 vaccine doses to Bangladesh.

Austria also provided assistance to India that was particularly hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, making available 2 million euros from the FDF. To combat famine, ease the refugee situation and support fragile health systems, funding of 14 million euros was made available to countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Burkina Faso, Mali, Ethiopia, Uganda, Mozambique). A further two million euros was made available for South America (Venezuela, Colombia) to help mitigate the refugee situation and the resulting exacerbation of the humanitarian crisis on the ground.

The annual FDF contributions to Austrian NGOs amounting to 13.5 million euros had already been adopted as a bundle in March, thus increasing the formers' planning security.

FDF and ADA funds were used to support humanitarian programmes and projects in the Middle East (including in Syria, Palestine, Yemen, Afghanistan), in Africa, and in the Western Balkan countries, managed by UN organisations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and civil society organisations. Total bilateral humanitarian aid amounted to 78.3 million euros. The funds were channelled through UN humanitarian organisations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Austrian NGOs.

International Disaster Relief

Austria also provided international disaster relief in response to requests for assistance under the European Union Mechanism in direct coordination with the European Commission and the **Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC)**.

To support containment of the COVID-19 pandemic and manage its consequences, the Federal Ministry of the Interior also made a considerable in-kind contribution, including several million face masks, examination gloves, disinfectant products and protective suits to China, Serbia, Croatia, Italy, Bosnia-Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Moldova, Albania, the Czech Republic, Armenia, India, Nepal, Fiji, Tunisia, Romania, Latvia, Sierra Leone, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Iran. Croatia received in-kind donations after the earthquakes in January and March.

All these international disaster relief activities were organised by the Federal Ministry of the Interior as the body responsible for international disaster relief and national crisis and disaster protection management, with logistical support provided by the Austrian Red Cross, the Workers' Samaritan Federation, the regional fire brigade associations of Lower Austria and Upper Austria, the federal provinces of Styria, Lower Austria and Carinthia and the Federal Ministry for Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection. Out of the Federal Ministry of the Interior's 40 international disaster relief missions in the 2020 to 2021 period, a total of 22 missions were directly related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Austrian Food Aid

The growing importance Austria attaches to international food aid is reflected inter alia in the significant increase of contributions to humanitarian food aid, which amounted to 7.5 million euros from FDF funds alone. Another expression of this increased significance is Austria's active membership in the **Food Assistance Convention (FAC)**, under which Austria has committed itself to providing at least a minimum amount of food assistance to food-insecure third countries on an annual basis. In the context of the FAC, the Ministry of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism in cooperation with the MFA and ADA, also provides ongoing support

to relief projects implemented by the UN World Food Programme (WFP), the FAO, and the ICRC in regions of the world affected by acute crises.

4.4.2 Multilateral Humanitarian Aid and Assistance provided by the European Union

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (**OCHA**) is responsible for the international coordination of humanitarian aid, disaster relief 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. Only around five per cent of OCHA's financial requirements are covered by funds from the ordinary UN budget, while the rest is made available through voluntary contributions from Member States. Since 2010, Austria has been a member of the OCHA Donor Support Group, a forum made up of top OCHA donors.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is one of the largest UN relief organisations. It operates in 123 countries and funds its activities mainly through voluntary contributions from its Member States. As in previous years, Austria made voluntary core contribution to UNHCR. Funding from the FDF totalled 14.6 million euros. Austria supported relief activities launched by UNHCR in the field of provision of basic care and services to internally displaced persons, refugees and returnees as well as to host communities in Tunisia, Syria, Jordan, Colombia, Burkina Faso and Afghanistan. In addition, ADC contributed 1.5 million euros to UNHCR, and the Federal Ministry for Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection provided 310,000 euros in support.

United Nations World Food Programme

The World Food Programme (WFP) is the UN's largest humanitarian organisation. Austria regularly supports WFP food aid projects. Most recently, 7.5 million euros were made available from the FDF, including for Afghanistan, Syria, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso and Jordan. Furthermore, ADC contributed around 5.4 million euros to the WFP, and the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism made available 800,000 euros.

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Middle East

As in previous years, Austria made a core contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for projects in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Furthermore, ADA provided financial support to UNRWA programmes in the health and education sectors directed at Palestinian refugees in Syria. ADC contributed a total of 5.8 million euros to UNRWA.

International Committee of the Red Cross and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is the only organisation mandated with monitoring **compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL)**. The ICRC is active in more than 80 countries. Together with the **International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)** as well as National Societies, it has made a significant contribution to alleviating humanitarian emergencies and suffering worldwide. Since 2017, Austria has been a member of the ICRC Donor Support Group, an informal forum bringing together the most important ICRC donors.

Austria supported the ICRC's operational work in the field of provision of basic services, including food, drinking water as well as healthcare and cash aid to people affected in Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Burkina Faso, Venezuela and the Nagorno-Karabakh region, as well as for mine action programmes in Ukraine. In addition, a voluntary contribution of 9.5 million euros was made available from the FDF to the ICRC's core budget. Support provided by ADC to the ICRC amounted to two million euros, and contributions from the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism totalled 800,000 euros.

Humanitarian Aid in the European Union Context

Austria contributed its share to global humanitarian aid through the **European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO)**, whose operational budget was set at 1.4 billion euros. The impact of both the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change have led to a dramatic rise in global humanitarian needs. The European Commission therefore increased the humanitarian budget of originally 900 million euros, adopted in 2020, by more than 60%.

4.5 International Humanitarian Law

Austria regularly highlights the importance of compliance with **international humanitarian law (IHL)** in both multilateral fora and bilateral contacts. Building on this commitment and based on Austria's initiative, it was, for instance, possible to include a proposal on placing greater emphasis on IHL in the context of threats to the safety and security of humanitarian personnel in the negotiations on a UNHCR resolution at the UNGA.

The UNGA Open-ended Working Group on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security held its third substantive session from 8 to 12 March and successfully concluded its work by adopting a final report by consensus. Based on this report, the **applicability of international law in cyberspace**, in particular the UN Charter, was, for the first time ever, directly acknowledged by all UN Member States, which – even without explicit mention – also includes IHL. In its statements, Austria repeatedly advocated explicit reference to the applicability of IHL to cyber operations in the context of armed conflict.

Set up in 1988, the **Austrian National Committee for the Implementation of IHL**, held two sessions this year, convening virtually in spring due to COVID-19 and in a hybrid format in autumn. The Committee discussed developments in the areas of disarmament. Topics featuring on the agenda related to the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, deliberations and negotiations in the Group of Governmental Experts on **Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS)**, and the protection of cultural property in armed conflicts (focusing in particular on the deliberations of the Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Monitoring and Supervision of the Implementation of the 1999 Second Protocol to the 1954 Hague Convention). Another major topic was humanitarian aid. Furthermore, the Committee adopted the decision in principle to prepare a voluntary report on the implementation of IHL in Austria. Representatives of the National Committee also took part in a virtual meeting of governmental experts, organised by Switzerland in June.

There is excellent cooperation on IHL matters between the Austrian authorities and the ICRC, in particular between the International Law Office at the MFA, the diplomatic representation in Geneva and the legal department at the ICRC. Due to its increased financial contributions, Austria has been a member of the ICRC Donor Support Group since 2017. On account of the COVID-19 pandemic, the **European Regional Conference of National IHL Committees on the national implementation of international humanitarian law in Europe**, which Austria had pledged at the 33rd International Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference to host in Vienna in cooperation with the ICRC and the Austrian Red Cross, had to be postponed again. Likewise, the – previously – annual **seminar** on the promotion and dissemination of IHL, organised by the MFA and the Austrian Red Cross

in cooperation with the universities of Linz and Graz, could also not take place due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but is to be resumed in autumn 2022.

Within the EU, IHL issues are regularly dealt with in various fora, especially in the Council Working Parties on international law, international criminal law and humanitarian aid as well as in the **Political and Security Committee (PSC)**. Austria plays a leading role in a group of like-minded states at PSC level that advocates institutional strengthening of the EU, especially the European External Action Service, in the field of IHL and international criminal justice.

Austria continues to call for ensuring that violations of IHL do not go unpunished. The **fight against impunity** also requires **objective establishment of facts**. For this reason, Austria supports investigation and fact-finding commissions, such as the **International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)** to assist in the investigation and prosecution of persons responsible for the most serious crimes under international law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, established by UNGA resolution 71/248 and the **International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission (IHFFC)**, set up under Article 90 of Additional Protocol I of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions. On 19 November Austria took part in the election of new IHFFC members in Bern.

5. Foreign Trade

For Austria as an open economy, foreign trade is of crucial importance. The Austrian export industry creates and safeguards **jobs, prosperity and tax revenues**. Around 60% of Austria's gross domestic product (GDP) is generated by export-oriented companies and **every second job** is related directly or indirectly to **foreign trade**. The number of exporting companies has more than quintupled in the past 25 years, increasing from 12,000 to about 62,000. Around 80% of the exporting companies are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that are active in a wide range of industries and sectors. Although Austria had registered a -7.1% decline in goods exports, amounting to 143 billion euros in 2020 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, exports picked up again this year, marking a recovery of 16.1% and totalling 165 billion euros.

Together with its network of representations abroad, the MFA also makes a significant contribution to the success of the **“export nation Austria”**. The Foreign Ministry furthermore plays an important role in shaping sustainable and fair foreign trade relations, providing services and acting as a **“door opener”** and **“problem solver” for Austrian companies**. “Safeguarding Austria's economic policy interests in Europe and the world” is part of its mission and an important objective pursued by the Federal Ministry, whose **Foreign Trade and Business Services Departments** deal on an ongoing basis with foreign trade matters, relevant issues raised by individual enterprises and answer questions related to foreign trade.

Under the initiative **ReFocus Austria**, launched in September 2021 as the largest business diplomacy outreach programme in history and aimed at promoting Austria's position as a business location, the MFA, in cooperation with the Federal Ministry for Digitalisation and Economic Affairs, the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber and other stakeholders, has been contributing to the Federal Government's “comeback plan”, jointly organising more than 100 events worldwide.

In **more than 2,500 concrete cases**, the Austrian embassies provided assistance and support in the interest of the economy and of Austria as a business location. This included interventions and meetings with authorities, the handing over of company memoranda, the promotion of Austria as a business and tourism location, provision of consulting services, the procurement of information and establishing contacts. All of these services were provided by the embassies in close cooperation with the international trade offices (AußenwirtschaftsCenter), operated by the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber. The basis of this cooperation is an **agreement between the MFA and the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber** concluded on 28 September 2021 that fundamentally revises the 1995 agreement and adapts it to current requirements. **“Gemeinsam für die österreichische Wirtschaft im Ausland”** (joining forces to promote Austrian business and industry abroad) thus lays the groundwork for providing even more efficient sup-

port to Austrian companies abroad, as they are an economic engine and an essential pillar of the national economic and social system.

Especially in difficult times, Austria's companies need the best possible support to tap into new markets and generate new growth. Thus, **international economic policy is an integral part of Austrian foreign policy**, whose importance will only increase in the future due to increasing geopolitical and geo-economic conflicts worldwide, the need for a crisis-proof economy and the use of future-oriented technologies. In this spirit, the Federal Government's programme and the Foreign Trade Strategy contain guidelines for shaping the MFA's economic policy profile.

5.1 Foreign Trade Strategy

The Government Programme 2020–2024 calls for consistent implementation of the innovative and sustainable **Foreign Trade Strategy**, which sets out a total of 63 specific measures aimed at further strengthening the competitiveness of foreign trade and Austria's position as a business location as well as their further development in the light of the Government Programme. **Led by the MFA, the Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs and the Federal Economic Chamber**, the objectives and concrete measures specified in the new strategy are currently being implemented.

The primary objective pursued by the strategy is to safeguard the prosperity and interests of the Austrian population in a global environment that is subject to constant and rapidly increasing change and transformation. It aims to anticipate trends and new growth markets in a forward-looking manner, tap into opportunities such as digitalisation, and create the necessary economic policy framework for the Austrian economy and for Austria as a business location. These approaches and goals are particularly important for promoting economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Many aspects that are important from a foreign policy perspective, such as **sustainability, policy coherence and value orientation, human rights and responsible corporate action** in line with the relevant OECD guidelines were integrated as pivotal elements into the strategy. In this context, the section on "sustainability as an opportunity for companies and business locations" is of relevance, as the global trend towards sustainability, the circular economy and environmental technologies opens up a huge number of opportunities for Austrian trade and industry, both at home and abroad.

Building on the drafting of a **post-COVID package of measures for Austrian foreign trade**, adopted in July, it was agreed to further develop the Foreign Trade Strategy based on the three priorities of foreign trade policy focusing on resilience, i.e. export strategy, green economy, and "export champions", by pursuing a strategic visiting diplomacy approach. In implementing this concept, the MFA has thus placed an emphasis on establishing **pro-active exchange of informa-**

tion that is as comprehensive as possible on the **foreign travel activities of all relevant actors at political level.**

As a member of the steering committee supporting the Austrian National Contact Point for the **OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises**, the MFA is also actively involved in applying and implementing the Guidelines for Responsible Business Conduct.

5.2 Bilateral Foreign Trade Policy

Austria has entered into **bilateral investment protection agreements** (Bilateral Investment Treaties, BITs) **with 58 countries** in order to **improve both the investment environment and legal certainty** for Austrian companies doing business in third countries. In its ruling of 6 March 2018 in the case *Slovak Republic v. Achmea BV*, the CJEU found that provisions on arbitration tribunals in agreements under international law between EU Member States are incompatible with EU law.

Implementing the legal consequences of this ruling, Austria has initiated the **termination of its investment protection agreements with EU Member States** in order to repeal them in full as soon as possible, including their legal consequences.

In this context, Austria advocates that steps be taken swiftly at EU level to ensure comprehensive and effective legal protection of investments in the EU internal market and to safeguard Europe's appeal as a business location.

Investment Control Act

The new Investment Control Act entered into force on 25 July 2020. This serves in particular to implement the EU Regulation on the Screening of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI Screening VO 2019/452 of 19 March 2019) and takes into account current developments at the international level in this area. As a permanent member of the Investment Control Committee, the MFA is actively involved in the implementation of the law.

5.3 Multilateral Foreign Trade Policy

EU Trade Agreements with Third Countries

Having concluded 45 trade agreements with 77 trading partners, the EU boasts the **most extensive network of trade agreements worldwide**. In 2021, the European Commission held negotiations on trade agreements with Australia, New Zealand, Chile and Indonesia.

At the EU-US Summit in June, it was agreed to establish a joint **EU-US Trade and Technology Council** to promote cooperation, including in the area of trade. The Council held its first meeting on 29 September and shortly afterwards, it was possible to reach an agreement in principle with respect to the disputed EU-US steel and aluminium tariffs.

Following the agreement in principle, reached on 30 December 2020 between the EU and **China on a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI)**, further ratification steps are currently on hold due to the sanctions imposed by the EU on China for human rights violations relating to its oppression of Uyghurs in the Xinjiang region and China's subsequent counter-sanctions against the EU.

Since the conclusion of negotiations on updating **the joint global agreement with Mexico** in April 2020, both parties have been working on completing the necessary steps and internal procedures leading to the signing and adoption of the agreement.

An agreement in principle was reached on 28 June 2019 on the trade part and on 18 June 2020 on the political and institutional part of the EU Association Agreement with MERCOSUR (composed of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay), which had been negotiated since 1999. The agreement as such has, however, not yet been adopted, as it has come under **increasing criticism** due to the renewed increase in slash-and-burn agriculture in the Amazon rainforest and several negative impact assessment reports, particularly with regard to its environmental effects. Hence the European Commission has resumed talks with the MERCOSUR partners on further instruments towards implementing the sustainability chapter. In line with the Austrian Government Programme 2020–2024, **Austria rejects the MERCOSUR Trade Agreement in its current form**. Based on the relevant opinion, adopted by the Sub-Committee on EU Affairs of the National Council on 18 September 2018, this rejection is legally binding.

The **EU-India Summit** on 8 May reaffirmed that negotiations on a comprehensive trade agreement and an investment protection agreement, which had been suspended since 2013, are to be resumed.

The updated **EU trade strategy**, presented on 18 February, seeks to reach consensus on a new medium-term focus of EU trade policy, responding to **new global challenges** such as digitalisation or the diversification of supply chains building on the concept of **Open Strategic Autonomy**. Several calls made by Austria, including for more powerful sustainability and climate protection provisions, are reflected in the related Communication. Another item that continues to rank high on the EU's agenda in this context is comprehensive WTO reform.

World Trade Organization (WTO)

The WTO develops rules for international trade that are binding under international law. Its currently 164 member states account for about 96% of world trade. Since 1 March, the organisation has been headed by the Nigerian politician Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as the new Director-General. The 12th Ministerial Conference, originally scheduled for June 2020 was moved to December, but had to be postponed again because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Topics to be addressed at the Conference include the conclusion of an agreement on **fisheries subsidies**, the establishment of a **working group on WTO reform**, and measures aimed at promoting progress on several **joint initiatives** (including on domestic regulations governing e-commerce and investment facilitation).

In the area of **trade and health**, the EU, as the main producer/exporter of COVID-19 vaccines and the main donor to the COVAX facility, initially opposed the suspension of significant parts of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) and has advocated ensuring that intellectual property be not seen an obstacle but as part of the solution. Building on that, it is seeking to arrive at a compromise to resolve related issues.

Austria and the entire European Union are **strongly committed to modernising and strengthening the WTO's multilateral trading system**. A functioning, rules-based international trading system is of fundamental importance for the global economy and especially for small and medium-sized economies like Austria. What is more, a functioning, effective WTO is also essential for economic reconstruction and international cooperation in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Economic Security of Supply and Crisis Resilience

In Austria too, the global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed numerous difficulties in supply with critical goods and commodities. This held particularly true for medical goods, but in some cases also related to foodstuffs. In the field of supply security, the level of (foreign) dependence has also become apparent. **In order to ensure supply of medical goods in view of the ongoing spread of COVID-19, numerous interventions and assistance by the MFA and the Austrian diplomatic representation authorities abroad were necessary.** Against this background and to better prepare for crisis situations in the future, various initiatives aimed at **improving economic crisis resilience** at both the Austrian and the European as well as the international level have been launched. The MFA contributes to developing relevant measures, including as a member of the inter-ministerial task force on economic crisis preparedness, in order to ensure better contingency planning and preparedness for supply interruptions in the future and to counteract supply bottlenecks at an early stage. In this context, the Austrian embassies abroad assume an important early warning function.

Under the international response to the COVID-19 pandemic and in line with its commitment to **vaccine solidarity**, Austria provided support and assistance to **numerous countries**, contributing a total of some 4.8 million vaccine doses that were no longer needed in Austria in 2021. Of these, around 3.2 million doses (approximately 66%) of the AstraZeneca vaccine were donated bilaterally, and around one million (20.5%) of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine were donated via COVAX. Furthermore, the transfer of some 650,000 (13.5%) doses of the BioNTech/Pfizer vaccine to the six Western Balkan states was organised within the context of Team Europe. Austria thus belongs to the group of EU Member States that were particularly committed to putting active vaccination solidarity into practice in 2021.

5.4 Department for Business Services

Austrian diplomacy has always sought to support and promote Austrian business interests. Since its establishment in 2015, the Department for Business Services (“Unternehmensservice”) at the MFA has been a **central contact point for Austrian companies active at the international level**.

The **Department for Business Services’ primary task** is to handle matters that require official or diplomatic support. Such issues may include violations of European internal market regulations, interventions giving cause to concern from a rule of law point of view, unjustified tax claims, poor payment practices on the part of foreign public sector clients or other situations in which Austrian investors are put at a disadvantage. An essential measure in this respect is to raise such topics in the context of high-level visits, including by handing over company memoranda. The wide range of activities aimed at promoting Austrian business interests also covers the forwarding of tenders to the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber and the organisation of information events on current topics. In 2021, such events were, for instance, held on Brexit, Iran, Belarus or UN procurement. In these activities, the Department for Business Services cooperates with relevant stakeholders, including other federal ministries, the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, the Federation of Austrian Industries and the **Austrian Business Agency (ABA)**.

An excellent example of the cooperation among various actors is the **Open Austria** initiative in San Francisco, where a “Tech Ambassador” from the MFA as well as experts from the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber and the ABA ensure exchange between Austria and Silicon Valley as a centre of innovation. Appreciated by companies and stakeholders alike, the **ALPS (Austrian Leadership Programs)** is a visiting programme that offers Austrian companies the opportunity to present themselves to leading “high potentials”. Active promotion of Austria as a business location is the focus of information events organised periodically by the

MFA's Department for Business Services and directed at representatives of the Austria-based international diplomatic corps.

In addition, the MFA's Department for Business Services launched two further series of events focusing on “**Foreign Policy Insights**” and “**Austrian Success Abroad**”. Under these initiatives, the Austrian diplomatic service's expert knowledge, experience and international contacts are made available to a domestic audience. Under both formats, current and future-oriented topics are placed in a geopolitical context and dealt with in detail by experts from the MFA as well as external specialists.

5.4.1 The ReFocus Austria Initiative

The global business initiative ReFocus Austria was launched jointly by the MFA, the Ministry for Economic Affairs, the international trade department at the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (“*Advantage Austria*”), the Austrian National Tourist Office and other stakeholders to support the recovery of the Austrian export sector in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. **ReFocus Austria is Austria's largest global outreach programme and an integral element of the “comeback plan”, adopted by the Federal Government to promote post-COVID-19 economic recovery.** Under this initiative, the Austrian embassies and consulates-general are further stepping-up their support, putting their networks, expert-knowledge and know-how at the service of the Austrian economy.

Together with their local partners, i.e. the international trade offices (“*AußenwirtschaftsCenter*”) operated by the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber or the local desks of the Austrian National Tourist Office, Austrian diplomatic representation authorities abroad, organised events aimed at ‘opening doors’ for Austrian companies abroad, thus securing jobs, attracting further foreign investment to Austria and promoting Austria as a tourist destination. The **thematic priorities** addressed in this context were the future-oriented core competences of the Austrian economy: renewable energies, e-mobility, sustainability and circular economy, digital transformation, infrastructure, urban technology and tourism. In the context of these events, Austria presented itself to the world as a strong, stable and innovative business location in the heart of Europe and demonstrated that “*Made in Austria*” continues to be synonymous with excellent quality, reliability and outstanding engineering and craftsmanship.

The entire campaign was further supported by high-level trips by members of both the Federal Government and the regional governments. In this spirit, Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg and Federal Minister Michael Linhart each were accompanied by large business delegations on the visits they paid to the Gulf region and Central Asia, respectively. Federal Minister Margarete Schramböck made ReFocus Austria the motto of her trips to Poland and to the EXPO in

Dubai. Likewise, the visit paid by Federal Minister Martin Kocher to the USA was also dedicated to this initiative. In the context of the visits, she paid to her counterparts abroad, Federal Minister Karoline Edtstadler raised high-level decision-makers' awareness of the initiative, promoting it at EU level. The aim is to make Austria known as a business location within the EU. By the end of the year, more than 100 events had been organised worldwide, thus sending out a strong and visible signal promoting Austria's role and attractiveness as a business location.

6. Consular Affairs

6.1 The Consular Department's Areas of Activity

The Citizens' Service and the Austrian embassies and consulates abroad provide a wide range of consular services to Austrians who travel abroad and to those who live abroad either permanently or for an extended period of time. The task of promoting digitalisation, set out in the Government Programme, is being pursued with particular vigour by the MFA, also in the consular field. In connection with the digitalisation activities planned by the respective federal ministries, the MFA attaches particular importance to ensuring that Austrians who live abroad also have the opportunity to use and benefit from the continuously expanded range of electronic services.

6.2 Citizens' Service and Operational Crisis Management Abroad

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to play a key role in the context of the services provided by the Citizens' Service, which shared ongoing updated information on entry and exit regulations, quarantine provisions and the COVID-19 situation in the respective countries.

Further crises that led to increased consular contacts with Austrians travelling or living abroad included the earthquakes in Croatia, forest fires in the Mediterranean region as well as political unrest in Myanmar and Ethiopia. The rapid takeover of power by the Taliban in Afghanistan in August and September translated into additional challenges with respect to operational crisis management. Crisis teams consisting of staff from the MFA, the Federal Ministry of the Interior and the Federal Ministry of Defence were dispatched to Afghanistan to assist Austrians at the airport in Kabul and relevant measures were taken at the embassies in the region.

The country-specific travel information and safety advice updated around the clock and made available on the MFA website was accessed more than 23 million times and staff answered some 228,000 telephone enquiries.

6.3 General Consular and Legal Matters

As at 1 December, 146 Austrian citizens were detained in prisons abroad, most of them in Germany (28 persons), Hungary (24 persons) and Turkey (11 persons). The most frequent offences committed by Austrians imprisoned abroad were offences against public security (99 cases), drug offences (66 cases) and offences against life and limb (52 cases).

Staff from diplomatic representations made more than 30 prison visits. The purpose of these visits is mainly to ascertain at regular intervals that Austrian prison inmates are being treated in line with the respective country's national regulations, as well as to ensure that international minimum standards are met and that Austrian inmates enjoy any relief they may be entitled to under the respective regulations. Another important part of the support provided to Austrians imprisoned abroad consists in forwarding parcels and small sums of money. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, prison visits were severely limited in most countries. Therefore, support meetings for Austrians imprisoned abroad were increasingly held via telephone or video conferences.

In cases of **child abduction**, the **Hague Convention on Child Abduction** of 1980 (**HCCA**) foresees direct cooperation between the respective national judicial authorities. Especially in countries that are not party to the HCCA, the MFA and the Austrian diplomatic representations support the parent concerned within the scope of possible consular assistance in asserting his/her rights abroad. In total, Austrian authorities dealt with around 20 cases of child abduction.

The MFA handled some 5,000 requests for legal assistance and administrative cooperation from both Austrian and foreign authorities. In terms of legal protection, the consular section at the MFA and the Austrian diplomatic representations provided assistance in more than 200 cases worldwide.

The MFA's scope of responsibility also includes the national coordination of the Austrian position on and the chairing of negotiations on treaties in the fields of legal assistance, extradition and transfer of sentenced persons as well as police and judicial cooperation. In this context, the MFA cooperates very closely with competent ministries and the Austrian diplomatic representations in the countries concerned.

A number of bilateral and multilateral agreements in these fields were dealt with in the year under review. In total, seven agreements were in the process of ratification, and 13 agreements were being negotiated. National coordination processes were arranged for a further seven agreements.

6.4 Austrians Abroad

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

The scope of services provided by the MFA to Austrians residing abroad is being expanded on an ongoing basis. Against the background of changing requirements, the most recent update included, for instance, improvements in the areas of electoral law, online registration and online information. This related inter alia to simplifying participation in elections from abroad in the form of simplifications

introduced in the area of postal voting by the Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2009 and extended in 2010. The introduction of the new Central Voters' Register in 2018 made it possible for Austrians whose main registered residence is abroad to also register for popular initiatives and submit a declaration of support online by means of a qualified digital signature (by means of "Bürgerkarte"/Citizens' Card, "Handy-Signatur"/mobile phone signature or "ID Austria"/e-ID).

The amendment to the E-Government Act in summer 2017 laid the foundation for the new electronic proof of identity ("ID Austria"/e-ID). ID Austria establishes a link between the analogue and the digital world through a novel type of – voluntary – sovereign registration, available for every citizen, and an innovative digital ID system as well as a secure login – which is cutting-edge in the whole of Europe. Since 13 December, pilot phase 4 of ID Austria has been rolled out, covering all of Austria's diplomatic representations abroad. Citizens' mobile phones thus become a digital identity card to be used for unique online identification when dealing with authorities.

Just like the MFA's dedicated website for "Austrians abroad" (www.auslandssoesterreicherInnen.at), the Austrian diplomatic representations are an important link between Austrians abroad and their (former) home country. They constitute the first point of contact with regard to passport, citizenship and voting matters, for further contact with authorities and consular protection, for obtaining information about Austria, effective support in crisis situations, or with respect to organising and facilitating events related to Austria.

For the first time, digital meetings between the Federal Minister, together with the ambassadors to the United Kingdom, to the USA and to Germany as well as Austrians abroad were held, in the context of which a large number of questions from Austrians abroad were answered. Furthermore, the Austrian embassies also organised virtual meetings for Austrians living in their area of responsibility aimed at further intensifying direct exchange and offering assistance on a wide range of topics.

With a view to facilitating contacts with Austrian authorities, Austrians abroad may also register online with the Austrian diplomatic representations abroad. Based on an up-to-date and globally standardised registration system, Austrian diplomatic representations are thus able to contact registered persons quickly and efficiently (via email or text message) relying on an increasing number of registered Austrians and enhanced data quality.

Since there is no obligation to officially register one's permanent residence abroad, the figures relating to Austrians living abroad are largely based on estimates. While available data therefore does not reflect their actual number, it may be assumed that some 580,000 Austrians currently live abroad.

By far the largest number of Austrians residing abroad live in Germany (257,000), followed by Switzerland (67,000). Significant numbers reside in the United King-

dom (33,000), the USA (30,500), Australia (20,000), Spain (12,000), South Africa and Brazil (10,000 each), Argentina (9,400), Israel and the Netherlands (9,000 each), Italy (8,700) and France (8,100). Thus, more than 80% of Austrians living abroad are based in just a few countries. Some 216,000 Austrians abroad, 204,00 of whom at voting age, are registered with the Austrian diplomatic representations.

In 2021, a total of 36,580 passports (34,635 ordinary passports, 1,945 emergency passports) and 11,637 identity cards were issued at the Austrian diplomatic representations abroad. Currently, Austrian nationals may apply for passports and identity cards at 139 diplomatic representations, including the authorised honorary consulates/consulates-general. The number of “Austrians at heart” – i.e. persons who used to be Austrian citizens and children of Austrian citizens who hold another nationality – can only be estimated.

Since the amendment to the Central Civil Status Register and the Central Citizenship Register entered into force in 2014, Austrians abroad have had the opportunity to have civil status documents and citizenship certificates issued by the Austrian diplomatic representations abroad. In 2021, Austrian embassies and consular offices abroad thus issued a total of 3,743 civil status documents and 9,079 citizenship certificates and confirmations. The Office for Consular Legalisation at the MFA issued or recorded a total of 17,374 legalisations and apostilles that ensure international recognition of Austrian documents abroad. In total, Austrian diplomatic representations abroad processed 39,102 legalisations and issued 804 apostilles.

Organisation of Austrians Abroad

Ties between Austrians living abroad and their home country are maintained particularly through associations of Austrians abroad, other societies that have links with Austria and increasingly also via social media. There are some 400 such associations and societies in 61 countries worldwide. The Vienna-based Auslandsösterreicher-Weltbund (AÖWB, the World Federation of Austrians Abroad), is the umbrella organisation concerned with the representation of interests and at the same time provides a service platform for associations of Austrians abroad. The President of the AÖWB is Jürgen Em, and Irmgard Helperstorfer serves as Secretary-General. The AÖWB maintains the dedicated website www.weltbund.at and publishes the magazine “ROTWEISSROT”. The online platform www.austrians.org, operated by the AÖWB serves to further strengthen its online presence.

The AÖWB organises an annual meeting of Austrians abroad in Austria. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting planned for this year had to be cancelled again. Funding provided by the MFA to the AÖWB amounted to 100,000 euros.

Some federal provinces also maintain their own organisations directed at natives of their province who reside abroad. The Burgenländische Gemeinschaft, for instance, is the umbrella organisation of Burgenlanders abroad. Its aim is to maintain and deepen the ties between Burgenlanders all over the world and their native province. The dedicated magazine “Die Burgenländische Gemeinschaft” and the social network “Burgenland Bunch” also serve this goal. Succeeding Walter Dujmovits, Eduard Nicka was elected as President of the Burgenländische Gemeinschaft.

The provinces of Upper Austria (through the network “Oberösterreich International”), Lower Austria (“Blau Gelb in der Welt”/Blue Yellow in the World) and Styria (“Büro für Auslandssteirer”/Office for Styrians Abroad) also pursue initiatives to improve networking among and between Austrians abroad and their home country as well as their native province.

Matters of Interest to Austrian Nationals Living Abroad

The Fund for the Support of Austrians Abroad (Auslandsösterreicher-Fonds) was established in 1967 with a view to assisting Austrians who live abroad and find themselves in serious difficulties.

The fund, which is financed with a total of 550,000 euros by Austria’s nine federal provinces and the MFA, contributing 50% each, provided financial assistance totalling 544,050 euros to 551 Austrians in need in 67 countries. Since 16 September, the Board of Trustees appointed by the Federal Government has been chaired by Ambassador (ret.) Franz Josef Kuglitsch, the office of Managing Director is held by Sabine Müstecaplıoğlu.

The Christmas campaign, organised by the MFA every year in support of Austrians abroad in need, raised cash and in-kind donations totalling some 45,850 euros, which were made available to 407 Austrian nationals living in 54 countries.

For Austrians living abroad who are elderly, in need of permanent help or seriously ill and no longer able to care for themselves, the MFA may 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 individual’s state of health allows them to travel and that they agree to repatriation. In the course of the year, eight individuals residing in the Germany, Canada, South Africa, Hungary and the United Kingdom made such requests for repatriation; two individuals were brought to Austria.

At the explicit request of Austrians abroad, persons who apply for a passport may request a “BMEIA Express” passport with shortened delivery times. Where feasible from a legal and organisational point of view, this special service is offered at a number of Austrian diplomatic representations abroad. In contrast to the “normal” passport application, this “express” passport is produced at the latest on the

first working day following application, shipped by DHL and can be sent either to the diplomatic representation, to honorary consulates or directly to a private individual in the foreign country.

In light of Brexit and in line with the Government Programme, the MFA and the Austrian Embassy in London continued their efforts towards providing the best possible support to Austrians residing in the United Kingdom.

Recognising its historic responsibility towards the victims of National Socialism and their descendants, the Austrian Parliament unanimously passed an amendment to the Austrian Citizenship Act in October 2019. Since 1 September 2020, descendants of victims of National Socialism can acquire Austrian citizenship. As a user-friendly digital tool providing support in this process, an online questionnaire was created by the MFA in cooperation with the City of Vienna (Municipal Department 35). By the end of the year, a total of 18,437 online questionnaires had already been completed, almost 11,840 notifications were filed with Municipal Department 35 and almost 8,653 procedures were successfully concluded.

Participation of Austrians Abroad in Political Decision-Making in Austria and the European Union

Austrians residing abroad who are on the (European) electoral register and Austrians who normally reside in Austria but are abroad on election days, have had the right to vote in Austrian parliamentary and presidential elections and to participate in nationwide plebiscites, public consultations and referenda, and may also vote in elections for Austrian Members of the European Parliament.

Voting rights of Austrians abroad enable participation in elections from the age of 16. Postal voting is possible in Austria and abroad for anyone who is unable to cast their vote in a polling station on election day. Furthermore, Austrians abroad can order absentee ballots in advance for a period of ten years (“absentee ballot subscription”). Thus, it is ensured that they will automatically receive their absentee ballots for all nationwide elections, plebiscites and referenda held during this period.

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 province of residence. So far, the provinces of Lower Austria, Tyrol and Vorarlberg have implemented this option.

Working Holiday Programme

Working Holiday Programmes (**WHPs**) are agreements with other countries that enable young people between the age of 18 and 30 to stay in the respective other country for a period of six to twelve months and to work without a work permit.

It is thus possible for these young people to enter spontaneously into a short, fixed-term employment relationship while on holiday.

These programmes also seek to enable young people to gain practical work experience abroad and to use training and educational opportunities, particularly in the field of languages and culture.

By the end of 2021, Austria had concluded a total of ten WHPs, namely with New Zealand and the Republic of Korea (both in 2012), Hong Kong and Taiwan (both in 2015), Japan (in 2016), Israel, Canada and Chile (all in 2017), Australia (in 2018) and Argentina (in 2019).

6.5 Visa and Residence Matters

As of 31 December, Austrian holders of regular passports were free to enter 119 states without a visa. Austrians were even able to enter 42 of these states with an ID card only, and 17 states with a passport that had expired within the last five years. Four countries required electronic registration before entry. Nationals of 105 states needed a visa to travel to Austria. Due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, many states tightened entry requirements either fully or temporarily. Thus, the actual number of states that (temporarily) required Austrian citizens to hold visas due to COVID-19-related measures changed frequently in the course of the year. Austria and the EU did not introduce any additional visa requirements.

Visas for entry to Austria can be applied for not only at Austrian embassies and consulates but also at embassies of other Schengen states as well as at visa centres operated by the MFA's external service provider. In total, it was possible to file visa applications for entry into Austria in 297 locations worldwide. Due to the pandemic, individual application centres or representations on visa matters at embassies of other Schengen states were temporarily closed or merged, depending on the circumstances.

The Austrian embassies and consulates processed around 75,000 visa applications. Although this is a 79% decrease over the same period in 2019 (i.e. before the COVID-19 pandemic), these figures reflect a slight recovery of +13% in visa applications processed compared with the 'pandemic year' 2020. Of these applications made in 2021, 94% were granted. Of the visas granted, 59.5% were Schengen visas, and 40.5% national visas for a stay in excess of 90 days. In the context of the representation for other Schengen states, some 1,200 visas were processed, making up a share of 1.6% of the overall volume.

The opportunity to turn to the Federal Administrative Court in order to appeal against decisions taken by Austrian embassies and consulates in visa matters was used 70 times. This represents a significant decline in the number of procedures compared to the previous year (79 appeals in 2020). A total of 74% of the

appeal cases were appeals against the denial of an entry permit lodged pursuant to § 35 Asylum Act 2005 (family reunification). In 60% of the cases, the Federal Administrative Court confirmed the decision of the embassy or consulate.

Settlement and Residence Applications

In the context of procedures under the **Settlement and Residence Act**, embassies and consulates are responsible for accepting applications, ensuring that they are complete and correct, and forwarding them to the competent provincial authority in Austria for a decision. If, following a request for the provision of additional documents, the application still fails to meet certain formal requirements or preconditions, the procedure is to be terminated. A total of 10,703 applications for residence under the Settlement and Residence Act were filed with embassies and consulates. A major part of these applications was submitted for the purpose of family reunification (5,596) and for taking up studies in Austria (3,429). Efforts towards developing an IT programme, which enables inter alia secure electronic forwarding of settlement or residence applications from the embassies and consulates to the competent provincial authority were continued.

6.6 Asylum-related Issues and External Aspects of Migration

Flight and migration to Europe continue to pose a particular challenge. In this context, a clear distinction is to be made between immigration and asylum. The aim pursued by Austria is effective migration management to be achieved through a series of measures at international, EU and national level. Austria is committed to an asylum policy that complies with the principles of the rule of law in all aspects of the asylum procedure.

In line with the Government Programme, the focus is to be placed on providing protection as close as possible to the region of origin. This requires sustainable contributions to reducing the root causes of flight and migration, including through provision of support in the countries of origin to create local prospects and economic opportunities. Furthermore, it is essential to ensure effective EU external border management and to effectively combat human smuggling in order to prevent the uncontrolled influx of migrants to Europe as well as irregular secondary migration within Europe.

Within the UN family Austria cooperates on migration and asylum-related issues primarily with UNHCR, IOM, UNODC, UNDP, UNICEF and WFP. Funding for UNHCR was increased significantly. The first High Level Officials Meeting on the Implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees was held in December 2021.

Cooperation with the **International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)** continued. Headed by Director General Michael Spindelegger, the Vienna-based international organisation continues to grow. ICMPD organises the annual **Vienna Migration Conference (VMC)**, which was held in a hybrid format this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Austria contributed to the migration dialogues held by ICMPD under the Budapest, Prague, Khartoum and Rabat processes. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this year's meetings were, however, held virtually.

Negotiations on a **New Pact on Migration and Asylum**, presented in September 2020 by the European Commission, were continued this year. The draft provides, inter alia, for a common European framework for migration and asylum management, a robust crisis preparedness and response system, integrated border management, strengthening the fight against migrant smuggling, cooperation with international partners, opportunities for skilled workers and talent to migrate to the EU, and support for integration processes to promote social cohesion in society. Central Austrian concerns such as provision of support and assistance as close as possible to people's home country, the focus on the fight against human smuggling and intensified cooperation with countries of origin and transit were taken into account. In this context, Austria continues to advocate the creation of work and life prospects in countries of origin as well as a common European solution to the asylum issue.

So far, progress has been made in individual areas, for instance with regard to cooperation with third countries. On 22 October, the European Council adopted action plans for eight third countries.

On 7 October, the revised "Blue Card" Directive was adopted, which provides for new rules for the entry and residence of highly skilled workers. Thus, an important goal of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum package was achieved.

It was also decided to transform the **European Asylum Support Office (EASO)** into an EU Agency on Asylum. The corresponding regulation was adopted on 9 December. The agency will be equipped with a pool of 500 experts to be sent to Member States that require support.

On 30 June, the High-Level Working Group on Migration and Asylum ended its activities. On 1 July, the **Working Party on External Aspects of Asylum and Migration (EMWP)** commenced work, placing a main emphasis on the analysis of migration flows on the three key migration routes towards Europe as well as on the countries of origin of international migrants. On behalf of the European Council, it revised the eight action plans for third countries, with Austria contributing actively to the corresponding negotiations. Endorsed on 22 October by the European Council, these plans place a special focus on combating the root causes of flight in the countries of origin, providing care to displaced persons close to

home, stepping-up cooperation against human smuggling and enhancing third countries' willingness to readmit irregular migrants.

The number of arrivals in Spain via the Western Mediterranean route was comparable to 2020. A strong increase in arrivals was, however, registered via both the Central Mediterranean and the Western Balkans routes, while the number of arrivals via the Eastern Mediterranean route decreased. The implementation of the EU-Turkey Agreement continued, with the relevant funding coming from the EU budget.

Under the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021–2027, a total of 71.8 billion euros is currently provided for the **Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)**, with 10% of this amount being earmarked for migration projects. Furthermore, tailor-made programmes have been developed for individual countries and regions.

Austria is committed to improving cooperation on readmission and intensified police cooperation (including by deploying police officers to provide border management assistance) in the context of EU CFSP missions as well as to promoting progress on national border management in the Western Balkans.

In summer, Belarus deliberately started transporting third-country nationals willing to migrate to its border with Lithuania, and later also to the borders with Latvia and Poland. Assessing this approach as a hybrid threat, the EU condemned the instrumentalization of migrants and imposed new sanctions on Belarus. Contacts with the main countries of origin and transit translated into a significant reduction in travel from these countries to Belarus. Iraq, for instance, organised the repatriation of over 4,000 migrants. Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan as well as the United Arab Emirates supported EU efforts and pledged to tighten controls on flights to Belarus. The EC suggested taking action against transport companies that facilitate or support trafficking or smuggling of human beings involving illegal entries into the EU.

Austria has concluded a total of 40 legally binding and six politically binding readmission agreements. In close coordination with the Federal Ministry of the Interior, the MFA seeks to enter into further readmission agreements. In the negotiations on the Post-Cotonou Agreement, consensus was reached on the provisions governing migration as well as on directly applicable readmission provisions.

In 2021, the number of returns of foreign nationals totalled 8,946. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, readmissions sometimes proved difficult. Returns to Afghanistan have been suspended since the Taliban took power in August.

By the end of the year, some 545,140 applications for asylum were submitted across the EU, the number of asylum applications filed in Austria amounted to 38,638 – which marks an increase of 161.5% compared with 2020. In terms of numbers of asylum applications filed per capita, Austria thus ranked second

(behind Cyprus) among EU Member States. Syrians accounted for the largest share of asylum seekers in Austria, followed by Afghan, Moroccan, Somali and Iraqi nationals.

In Austria, 24,894 final decisions on asylum, subsidiary protection and humanitarian residence were issued. Of these, asylum was granted in 11,672 cases, in 13,222 cases legally binding negative asylum decisions were issued. A total of 13,134 decisions related to subsidiary protection, 17,603 to humanitarian residence titles and 8,536 to other decisions. The largest number of positive asylum decisions were issued to Syrian nationals (asylum granted in 6,861 cases), followed by Afghan nationals (asylum granted in 2,568 cases). Iranian nationals (asylum granted in 611 cases) and Somali nationals (asylum granted in 565 cases) ranked third and fourth, respectively. Subsidiary protection was granted to 4,262 individuals and denied in 9,306 cases. Applications for a humanitarian residence permit were granted in 3,130 cases, while 15,016 individuals were issued a negative decision.

A total of 7,233 applications for family reunification under Art. 35 of the Asylum Act were submitted to Austrian embassies and consulates. Austria thus continued to fulfil its international obligations, arising, inter alia, from the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

6.7 Border Matters and the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Due to the spread of COVID-19 and the emergence of new viral variants, Austria introduced temporary internal border controls and epidemiology-based entry restrictions on several occasions. Likewise, such temporary border closures for public health reasons were imposed by Austria's neighbours.

As in 2020, a large number of COVID-19-related travel warnings were issued, most recently for some countries in southern Africa due to the "Omikron" variant.

Issued in March 2020 by the Federal Ministry of Health and subject to several amendments, the COVID-19 Entry Regulation sets out a number of COVID-19-related travel warnings under which restrictions on entry into Austria are imposed based on epidemiological criteria. Exceptions apply to commuters, people who travel on business, students, and persons entering Austria for medical reasons or for family reasons requiring special consideration.

At EU level, a Council recommendation on the gradual lifting of temporary restrictions, containing a "positive list" of third countries, was introduced in 2020. The majority of EU Member States, including Austria, have implemented the recommendation to some extent. July saw the implementation of the "Digital Green Certificate", establishing a uniform standard and form for vaccination and test

certificates across all EU Member States, thus facilitating mutual recognition of these documents.

7. International Cultural Policy

All efforts aimed at promoting Austrian art, culture and scientific achievements, networking and fostering intercultural relations were for yet another year marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, whose impacts were further aggravated by some extensive restrictions on travel and events. Despite these often long-lasting restrictions, the Austrian Cultural Fora and Austrian representations abroad developed ways and means to successfully continue supporting international networking using the tools of cultural diplomacy. These new ways and means enabled opening-up new opportunities of cultural cooperation to ensure the greatest possible international visibility of Austria's cultural and scientific achievements.

7.1 Priorities and Projects

Published at the end of 2020, **“The International Cultural Relations at the Federal Ministry of European and International Affairs. Basic Principles, Key Areas and Programmes”** defines two new areas that will play an increasingly important role in Austria's future international cultural relations and activities: **ecology** and new approaches towards sustainable management, as well as the question of how **digitalisation** will impact the future of everyday life and the world of work. Focusing on these topics, international cultural policy cooperated with the Ö1 radio station under the **“Reparatur der Zukunft”** (repair the future) initiative.

Supported by Austrian diplomatic representations, a worldwide search was launched for initiatives to make a positive difference and change both Austria and the world for the better. In the context of this ‘global casting of new ideas’, the focus was on innovative concepts and/or projects that had already been realised and tackle global problems – both big and small. Answering this call for making a change, more than 330 projects and concepts were submitted from Austria and over 20 other countries.

In the field of digitalisation, **“digital humanism”** is playing an increasingly important role. Under this human-centred approach, the value, people attach to technology is to determine the development of technology and not the other way around. Between these poles of people on the one hand and machine or algorithms on the other, international cultural policy can make important contributions in the fields of art, culture and science. Contributing towards this goal, the foreign ministers of Austria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia signed the **“Poysdorf Declaration”** on 30 June, under which they undertake to increasingly raise awareness of and promote the topic of **“digital humanism”** in intergovernmental fora, such as the EU, the UN, UNESCO, and the OSCE.

A special, very topical focus of Austrian international cultural relations was the **“Austrian-Slovenian Year of the Neighbourhood Dialogue”**, which had already been launched in autumn 2019. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, two of its flagship projects were, however, realised only after a long delay. The exhibition **“When Gesture becomes Event”** was shown from 8 December 2020 to 7 April at the Vienna Künstlerhaus and from 30 April to 21 June at the Ljubljana City Gallery. On 16 September, the Weltmuseum Wien opened the exhibition **“Alma M. Karlin - Einsame Weltreise”** (Alma M. Karlin – The Lonely Journey), on the life, work and ethnographic collection of this author who is arguably the best-known female travel writer of the 1920s.

In the context of the **“Austrian-Arab Cultural Season”**, an evening of music, art and culinary delights from 16 Arab countries was organised in the grand Festival Hall at Vienna City Hall. The programme presented under the **“Year of Literature and Theatre Austria - Russia 2020/21”** included Russia’s participation as a guest country at the **“BUCH Wien” 2021** (Vienna book fair), the Ganymede project **“Flora”** performed in the Hermitage St. Petersburg in September and a guest performance of Chekhov’s **“Three Sisters”** by the Vienna Volkstheater ensemble at the Moscow NET (**“New European Theatre”**) Festival in November. To mark **50 years of diplomatic relations between the People’s Republic of China and Austria**, a wide range of cultural events were held in both countries. Common to all of these focus and/or anniversary events, cultural years and/or seasons, was that some projects had to be moved into the virtual space, whilst others had to be postponed or even cancelled.

The efforts aimed at advancing **digitalisation of international cultural relations and activities** and to break new ground in terms of activities launched by Cultural Fora and Austrian representations abroad were continued, especially as the majority had to take place online due to the pandemic. Related activities included the newsletter on international cultural relations as well as regular webinars aimed at fostering further training and exchange of experience directed at staff working at the Austrian representations abroad. A key element of digital cultural public relations work continues to be the **online platform** www.austriakulturdigital.at, which makes digital and online projects of the Austrian representations abroad digitally accessible to a broad national and international audience.

The **Austrian International Cultural Relations** network is represented worldwide by 30 Austrian Cultural Fora and a Cooperation Office in Lviv, 89 embassies and consulates-general, 65 Austria Libraries (Österreich-Bibliotheken), 10 Austria Institutes (Österreich Institute) and two Offices of Science and Technology Austria (OSTAs).

Expressed in **figures**, the achievements of international cultural relations – albeit very much impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic – become somewhat quantifica-

ble: in 2021 a total of 4,370 events took place in 1,730 locations abroad, involving 3,806 partners and the participation of 6,896 artists and scientists.

The objective pursued by Austrian International Cultural Relations in the field of **music** is to present Austria, the country of music, in all its facets and its abundant new talents. In this regard, musical performances that cover a wide range of genres, from classical music to jazz, world music and pop to new music as well as experimental approaches (electronic music, sound installations) are presented abroad and supported by Cultural Fora and Austrian representations. In this context, a particular focus is placed on those musicians who were selected for participation in the highly successful long-term sponsorship programme for young Austrian soloists and ensembles **“The New Austrian Sound of Music”** (NASOM). Initiated in 2002 by the MFA in cooperation with mica-music Austria, NASOM has developed into an established Austrian music brand, even though many planned concerts had to be cancelled in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. An extremely successful cooperation was established with the Austrian digital platform **“konzertsaal.at”**. In addition, the International Cultural Relations department at the MFA initiated the **“Virtual Concert Hall Foreign Ministry”** at the beginning of January. Via this platform embassies and Cultural Fora were able to stream concerts by Austrian musicians worldwide. The initiative **International Music Dialogues**, which also promotes musical encounters in the digital space, was continued.

Due to the pandemic, the International Cultural Relations department at the MFA also used new digital and innovative formats in the field of **visual arts**. At the beginning of the year, the MFA launched its first-ever international call for tenders for **“On the road again”**, directed at contemporary artists from Austria. From the total of over 480 bids submitted, 23 artistic positions were selected to be presented in 2022 at the Austrian International Cultural Fora and in a group exhibition at the Vienna Künstlerhaus in 2023. In cooperation with the Province of Upper Austria, an artist-in-residence programme was developed, under which artists from Upper Austria may stay at the Austrian Cultural Fora in Belgrade, Budapest, Ljubljana, Rome and Warsaw. In cooperation with Austrian institutions, such as Kunsthistorisches Museum or Admont Abbey, the International Cultural Relations department organised virtual tours offered by embassies and Cultural Fora worldwide. The Austrian embassies and Cultural Fora increasingly used the format of digital travelling exhibitions that can be viewed online on a specifically created platform (www.online-exhibitions.at). In cooperation with **Ars Electronica Linz**, the **“Digital Humanity Award”** was launched. Funded by the MFA, this award is presented to creative projects in the field of digital media. In addition, the MFA increasingly supported artists active in the field of **“digital humanism”**.

By supporting the participation of Austrian filmmakers and their films in European and international film festivals, the MFA makes an important contribution to this sector. Furthermore, Austrian Cultural Fora and embassies regularly organise

Austrian or German-language film festivals abroad. However, the COVID-19-related restrictions imposed often at very short notice around the globe required the film sector to react flexibly to changing conditions. Thus, Austrian films were often presented online or in hybrid formats. This also applied to the cooperation **between the MFA and Ars Electronica Linz in the field of animated films**, in place since 2011. For the first time, the films selected in the categories of computer animation, film and visual effects were presented exclusively online by embassies and Cultural Fora. Likewise for the first time, selected short films presented abroad as “Österreichische Kurzfilmschau” (Austrian short film series) by the MFA’s international cultural network under the cooperation set up in 2013 with the **Academy of Austrian Film**, were also shown online. This enabled an even larger audience, based in over 40 countries worldwide, to be reached. Furthermore, the **cooperation between the MFA and the Tricky Women/Tricky Realties Festival**, which was launched in 2014 and exclusively presents animated films produced by female filmmakers, was moved to the digital sphere. One focus of this cooperation is promoting international networking between the Tricky Women team and female directors through workshops and discussions with international festival organisers and foreign filmmakers. This year, these meetings and encounters also took place online. Cooperation between the International Cultural Relations department at the MFA and Sixpackfilm enabled Austrian Cultural Fora and embassies to present Austrian films online on their websites. The number of films retrievable was increased to 23, covering a very broad range in terms of both genre and content.

Digital formats were also promoted in the **field of literature** to enable Austrian authors who could not travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic, to be presented abroad. At the beginning of the year, the International Cultural Relations department at the MFA developed the “International Literature Dialogues” in cooperation with the Österreichische Gesellschaft für Literatur (Austrian Literature Society). Inviting proposals, the goal of this project was to initiate, launch and support creative and innovative projects by Austrian writers in cooperation with cultural professionals at international level. From over 50 submissions entered by Austrian authors and their cooperation partners from over 28 countries, a jury of experts selected 16 projects that lived up to high literary standards. The award-winning submissions dealt with a broad range of topics, and submissions were received from all around the world, ranging from Egypt to a number of European countries as well as Central and North America. Established in 2020, the online literature programme “SchreibART Austria online” that focuses on contemporary Austrian literature, was successfully continued. Readings and workshop discussions with Austrian authors were held on the premises of the Austrian Literature Society. Due to COVID-19, however, there were held without audience on-site, recorded on video and subsequently shared with Cultural Fora, embassies and Austria libraries via streaming. In cooperation with the **Literature Museum of**

the Austrian National Library, three videos were produced on the exhibitions “Utopias and Apocalypses” and “Stefan Zweig - World Author” and on the permanent exhibition on literature, which were all shown by the Austrian embassies and Cultural Fora around the globe. Some of the Austrian representations also had the videos translated into the respective national language in order to reach an even larger audience. The Writer-in-Residence programme, launched in 2010 and implemented in cooperation with Quartier21 in the MuseumsQuartier Wien, was also continued. Under this programme both authors and translators are invited to Vienna. In **cooperation with Literaturhaus Wien**, the “**Crossing Borders**” programme was continued. In the context of this series of events the respective guest author and an Austrian author are presented at a public event in Literaturhaus Wien, with the aim of supporting networking between protagonists of the literary scene in Austria and other countries. In November, the Residenzverlag publishing house issued “Erklärung für alles. Neue Texte aus Mitteleuropa, Osteuropa, Südosteuropa und dem Schwarzmeerraum” (explanation for everything. New texts from Central Europe, Eastern Europe, South East Europe and the Black Sea region) involving a total of 45 contributions by guest authors, who had been supported by the MFA between 2010 and 2020. The MFA also continued its commitment to the Traduki translation programme and/or network. Launched in 2008, it already covers 14 countries (Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Kosovo, Liechtenstein, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia and Switzerland). Designed as a sustainable peace project for the Western Balkans, this literature and translation promotion programme, was chosen as a key theme for the Leipzig Book Fair in the years 2020–2023 under the heading of “Common Ground”. This year for the first time, the MFA was represented at the Vienna book fair (Buch Wien) with its own stand and a diverse literary programme of readings and book presentations. The MFA stand also served as a hub for the presentation of publications by the Austrian International Cultural Relations department on its wide range of priority programmes as well as of numerous scientific papers and documents published by the Austria Libraries.

7.2 Science, Education and Language

Alongside cultural exchange and dialogue, science is a focal point of international culture. Diplomacy means building and maintaining relations between countries, and in this respect Science and Technology Diplomacy is the contribution that science, technology, education and the use of knowledge can make to international relations and global engagement. Science and technology impact everyone and each and everyone’s life. All global issues of the future have a scientific or technological component and can only be implemented through international cooperation.

Science Diplomacy has therefore become an important field of work for the MFA and is pursued in close cooperation with the specialised ministries and departments as well as science institutions. The focus is on establishing alliances between science and politics with the aim of continuously improving international relations.

The long-standing cooperation with the **International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA)** was successfully continued. Founded as a confidence-building measure based on international scientific cooperation between East and West and located in Laxenburg, IIASA continues to make its mark at international level in this field. Further areas in which the MFA, building on Science Diplomacy, was able to make important contributions were in bilateral dialogues with Iran, Indonesia and China and in the work of the Austrian-Russian Commission of Historians and the Permanent Conference of Austrian and Czech Historians.

Over the years, Austrian Science Diplomacy has proven to be a stabilising and continuing element in politics as it builds bridges between society and science. It contributes towards combating prejudice, creates trust and thus establishes a basis for dialogue and cooperation. The **Science Concept of International Culture** analyses these experiences and outlines the framework under which Austrian cultural diplomacy can fully tap into this potential by placing a focus on science. The concept was coordinated with the ministries responsible for education, science, research, digitalisation, innovation and technology.

Diplomatic representations play a central role in the context of Science Diplomacy. As “facilitators” and “matchmakers”, so to speak, they support the respective ministries and science institutions in their international cooperation activities, create meeting and networking opportunities and initiate discourses on new topics and at interdisciplinary interfaces such as culture and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or Art and Tech. They set a wide range of priorities, for instance, in the context of science networks, in archaeological research, in educational cooperation and on the future-oriented topic of smart cities. The strategic further development of Science Diplomacy aimed at integrating science into political decision-making processes and translating scientific findings into policies also ranks high on the international agenda. Austria is a member of the growing international network of **Foreign Ministry Science and Technology Advisers (FMSTAN)**, established in 2016 to strengthen this dialogue between science and politics within the framework of **INGSA, the International Network for Government Science Advice**.

The Österreich Institut GmbH, (Austria Institute Ltd.) set up to offer and organise German language courses, to support and promote **German language instruction abroad** and to cooperate with national and international organisations, was once again successful in improving intercultural networking. Its mandate covers the cultivation of international cultural relations via the German language. It thus

promotes the study and cultivation of the German language as it is written and spoken in Austria, and as a means for sharing a modern, contemporary image of Austria. Based in Vienna, the organisation maintains Österreich Institute (Austria Institutes) in Belgrade, Wrocław, Brno, Budapest, Krakow, Bratislava, Rome, Warsaw, Sarajevo and Moscow. The Austrian Institutes are also licensed examination centres for the **Austrian Language Diploma in German (ÖSD)** and cooperate with other examination partners in their host countries.

Austria Professorships and Centres of Austrian Studies have been established at universities in the USA, Canada, Europe and Israel. In 2021, these facilities again succeeded in initiating, deepening and coordinating the study of **topics specifically related to Austria and Europe** in the respective host country's academic life and in stimulating academic research in this subject area as well as encouraging publication of the relevant findings. Regular collaboration with embassies, consulates-general and Cultural Fora contributes significantly towards enabling university chairs and centres for Austrian studies to fulfil their tasks.

The **OeAD GmbH** (Austrian Agency for International Mobility and Cooperation in Education, Science and Research) is an important partner for Austrian Cultural and Science Diplomacy. In addition to providing services to scholarship and grant holders and administering various programmes such as Erasmus+, bilateral scholarship programmes, including those operated by ADC, as well as scientific and technical cooperation programmes, it also makes an important contribution to the further development of the education and higher education systems in Austria based on its analytical capabilities.

Since the integration of **KulturKontakt Austria (KKA, culture contact Austria)** on 1 January 2020, OeAD GmbH now operates a total of seven field offices abroad. The OeAD cooperation offices in Lviv and Shanghai support scientific cooperation. The regional cooperation offices in Sarajevo (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia) and Tirana (Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia), and cooperation offices in Chisinau, St. Petersburg and Odessa support educational cooperation in the pre-university sector. These field offices are important cooperation partners for the Austrian diplomatic representations and in 2021 were again able to make a significant contribution to collaborating with local authorities and institutions in the fields of science and education. The offices focusing on scientific cooperation support academic mobility (“incoming” and “outgoing”), the initiation of university cooperation, the positioning of Austria as a location for education and science through participation in trade fairs, offering study counselling and scholarship advice, and also contribute to strengthening alumni networks. Another focus of activities is, for instance, the provision of support to and fostering cooperation between Austrian and local academics. Launching some 20 projects per year, the five OeAD cooperation offices support sustainable system reforms in the partner countries with emphasis on the pre-university sector. The individual thematic focus is guided by common development priorities at the interface between

national developments in the field of education in both the partner countries and in Austria as well as the relevant developments at EU level.

On behalf of the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, the OeAD supports the teaching of German as a foreign language abroad by implementing the Austrian lectureship (around 100 lecturers in 30 countries), and the Austrian language assistantship (around 200 language assistants in ten countries) programmes. The services provided under the “Kultur und Sprache” (culture and language) partner network involve further training offers for German teachers worldwide and teaching materials with reference to Austria made available on the Open Educational Resources/OER platform). In implementing these programmes and projects, the OeAD cooperates closely with Austria Libraries and Austrian Cultural Fora. Currently, there are **eight Austrian Schools abroad** (Österreichische Auslandsschulen): two in Budapest (Hungary) and one each in Prague (Czech Republic), Istanbul (Turkey), Guatemala City (Guatemala), Shkodra (Albania), Querétaro (Mexico) and Liechtenstein. Teachers at these schools are seconded by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research and lessons are based on the Austrian curriculum in combination with relevant curricular adaptations to the respective host country.

7.3 Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue

The **Task Force Dialogue of Cultures** at the MFA acts as catalyst and contact point for the implementation of dialogue initiatives. The Task Force has an international network of contacts and – as necessary – serves as an interface between Austrian government institutions, churches and religious communities, NGOs, institutions as well as representatives from the fields of science, culture, media and business. The Task Force’s network offers a wide range of opportunities for knowledge building and exchange of views.

The Task Force furthermore supports the Austrian Cultural Fora, embassies and consulates-general in designing and implementing dialogue projects. The hallmark of these dialogue initiatives is the promotion of intercultural understanding at national and international level. At the multilateral level, the Task Force contributes pro-actively to relevant dialogue within the framework of the UN, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the EU, and in cooperation with the International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID).

Although dialogue between cultures and worldviews is not an area of EU competence, the positions of EEAS Policy Advisor on religion and dialogue and EU Special Envoy on the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside of the EU were created and filled as early as 2016. Austria is working towards the renewal of the Special Envoy’s mandate. In July, Austria for the first time hosted an infor-

mal exchange among selected EU Member States in the context of the “Vienna Group on Religion and Diplomacy”.

Austria is an active member of the **Transatlantic Policy Network on Religion and Diplomacy (TPNRD)**, which addresses the religious dimension in external relations. As an informal forum comprising the most important state actors within and outside of the EU, TPNRD – a joint initiative of the EEAS and the US Department of State – is currently the only platform of its kind.

Committed to protecting freedom of religion or belief, Austria is a member of the International Contact Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief, coordinated by Canada, and a founding member of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance, which was launched in early 2020 and currently comprises 33 members.

The **Intercultural Achievement Award (IAA)**, initiated by the MFA, was presented for the eighth time on 23 November. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ceremony was for the second time in a row held online or at the diplomatic representations abroad. Since its inception, the IAA has developed into a key project that highlights the successful use of dialogue in civil society initiatives in the context of development work, the media and integration. Created only recently, the new website www.intercultural-achievement.com seeks to contribute towards enhancing the visibility of the best practice projects identified in the context of the IAA, making them more widely known.

7.4 Bilateral Agreements in the Fields of Culture, Education and Science

Austria has concluded **cultural agreements** with 33 states, which generally cover not only the field of culture but also education and science, and in some cases also include the fields of sports, youth and women. These agreements regulate cooperation in areas such as language teaching and educational activities, the granting of scholarships, the exchange of lecturers, the promotion of networking among researchers as well as exchange in the fields of art and culture, and generally serve to promote cooperation on all topics covered by the respective agreement. In 2021, the cultural agreement with the **Republic of Korea** was signed, cultural agreements with **Brazil and India** are currently in the planning stage.

Cultural agreements generally provide for the establishment of a joint commission formed by members of both countries in order to promote cooperation. To this end, periodic work programmes are drawn up and adopted. Led by the MFA, this process takes place in close coordination with the competent ministries, always involving the Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport as well as the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research. Substantive preparatory work had been done ahead of the meetings planned with **Italy, Croatia, North**

Macedonia and Romania that could, however, not be held due to the COVID-19 pandemic and are to take place as soon as possible. This also applied to the existing work programme with **Hungary**, whose term was extended by one year.

Austria has concluded 19 **agreements on scientific-technical cooperation** (S&T cooperation agreements), which seek to facilitate the exchange of information on structures and priorities in the scientific field and to promote the mobility of scientists in the context of joint research projects with partners in the respective contracting state. The most recent S&T cooperation agreement was signed with **Brazil** on 19 June 2019. The necessary approval process has already been completed by Austria, but is still ongoing in Brazil, therefore the agreement has not yet entered into force. Preparatory talks on its implementation are, however, already being held with a special focus on the definition of future cooperation priorities.

Furthermore, new work programmes based on S&T cooperation agreements were prepared in close cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research also involving the Federal Ministry of Arts and Culture, Civil Service and Sport and adopted with **India, Montenegro and Ukraine**. Against the background of the pandemic, the existing work programme with **Slovenia** was extended already at an early stage for another year until the end of 2022.

7.5 International Cultural Policy Activities in the Context of the European Union and UNESCO

Within the framework of cooperation among the **EU National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC)**, other cultural representations abroad and the foreign and cultural ministries of the EU Member States, the **Council conclusions on an EU strategic approach to international cultural relations** (i.e. **EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations**) negotiated under the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2018 were further implemented in the context of existing programmes. This **strategic approach** provides a framework for Member States and the EU institutions (European Commission and European External Action Service) for developing and implementing common cultural projects with third countries. As a co-founder of EUNIC in 2006 and as a member on its Executive Board from 2017 to November 2020, Austria contributed to ensuring that international cultural policy geared towards strengthening the European project was pursued and that close cooperation between EU delegations, EUNIC and national Cultural Fora or embassies in third countries was promoted. In this context, culture as a dimension of European action, is to act as a driving force for sustainable, innovative, social and economic development, which plays an increasingly important role in addressing future-related issues, in promoting intercultural dialogue and strengthening cooperation in the protection of cultural heritage. In

all these areas, Austria has a long-standing track record building on its many years of experience in bilateral cultural activities, and/or cultural institutions and actors that contribute actively to joint EU projects and cultural strategies. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the relevant activities were mainly implemented using a broad range of digital formats, which reflected the innovative and dynamic nature of cultural work.

EUNIC currently comprises 35 European organisations responsible for cultural relations as well as the 27 EU Member States with their cultural institutions and representations. Worldwide, these have set up 133 EUNIC Clusters in over 102 countries as cooperation networks of local EU cultural institutes. **Austria** is a member of 64 EUNIC Clusters, represented by its diplomatic representations and especially by its Cultural Fora, in some places also by the Austria Institutes; Austria chaired 13 of these Clusters in 2021.

The implementation of the EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations and its 2019 guidelines for cooperation between EUNIC, the European Commission and the EU delegations in third countries is being continued based on a Memorandum of Understanding signed at the General Assembly in Toledo. In addition to the cultural work undertaken by the Clusters, EUNIC implements its own programme lines in the context of innovative European cooperation models. Under the “European Spaces of Culture”, a project submitted by an EUNIC Cluster led by Austria reached the penultimate round.

In the context of the EUNIC Cluster Fund, under which EUNIC Global promotes Cluster projects, Clusters chaired by Austria regularly win awards for co-financing of up to 50%. Nine of the Clusters led by Austria contributed to the **new EUNIC programme “EuropeReadr”**, introduced by the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Participation in EUNIC offers considerable new potential for Austrian International Cultural Relations, both thematically and financially: on the one hand, funding received under the Cluster Fund significantly exceeds Austria’s annual contributions for EUNIC membership (11,500 euros) and the Cluster Fund (10,000 euros); on the other hand, the projects implemented jointly within the framework of EUNIC achieve a much broader-based impact than would otherwise be possible.

Although culture is primarily within the EU Member States’ scope of responsibility, the EU deals with specific cultural issues and cultural funding within the framework of the **EU Cultural Affairs Committee**. This includes, for instance, the **Creative Europe** programme, the joint **European Capitals of Culture** action, the **protection of cultural assets** and cross-cutting issues related to culture (such as gender issues). The main item on the agenda in 2021 was the COVID-19 pandemic and the mitigation of its impact on the cultural sector.

Of the 30 Austrian Cultural Fora, 13 are active in the EU – which also holds true for 38 of the 65 Austria Libraries and seven of the ten Austria Institutes world-

wide. They work pro-actively towards promoting cultural exchange, European multilingualism, 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 cultural workers.

Launched in Vienna on the initiative of Austria in 2001, the **Platform – Culture Central Europe (PCCE)** seeks to promote the culture of the Central European region and cultural cooperation between member countries (Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), celebrated its 20th anniversary under this year's Polish Presidency. Due to the pandemic, it was unfortunately only possible to organise one PCCE event, the concert "Cinema in Music - Central European Composers for the Cinema", held in Reykjavik on 6 December. This event featured soundtracks and film music by composers from the five member countries, including the Hungarian (and film prize-winning) composer Judit Varga, who lives in Austria.

At the 41st session of the UNESCO General Conference, Austria was **elected to the UNESCO Executive Board for the term 2021–2025**, winning 166 of 175 valid votes cast. Being represented on the organisation's Governing Body for the fourth time since its accession in 1948, Austria will be able to contribute to shaping UNESCO's agenda for the next four years. This vote also reflects the other members' appreciation of the numerous initiatives and projects launched by Austria in recent years. Austria is currently represented in a total of seven intergovernmental steering committees: in the Intergovernmental Council of the International Hydrological Programme, the Media Development Council, the Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the Bioethics Committee, the Intergovernmental Committee for Physical Education and Sport, the Governing Body of the International Coordinating Council of the Man and the Biosphere programme, and the Committee of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

Austria also seeks to contribute to visibly shaping the work of UNESCO through concrete projects, especially on the topics of human rights and human rights education, protection of World Heritage, the safety of journalists, gender equality, anti-discrimination, education as a tool to prevent violent extremism, "futures literacy", intangible cultural heritage, biodiversity, as well as water and river management, to name but a few.

The topic of protection of cultural assets against theft and destruction is regularly discussed with international experts in the context of the "**Palmyra Talks**", which also serve to raise public awareness of this important issue. This dedicated series of discussions is held in Vienna and hosted by the President of the Austrian UNESCO Commission, Sabine Haag at Kunsthistorisches Museum. The **International Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels** established in Graz under the auspices of UNESCO (modelled on the Euro-

pean Training and Research Centre for Democracy and Human Rights – **ETC Graz**) was opened in 2021 in the presence of Federal Minister Alexander Schallenberg and UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences, Gabriela Ramos. Thus, Austria is, for the first time ever, hosting a UNESCO Category 2 Centre, i.e. an institution that is closely linked to the objectives of UNESCO but legally independent.

7.6 Multilateral Scientific and Technical Cooperation

In 2021, Austria continued to place a special focus on multilateral scientific and technological cooperation both inside and outside of Europe in order to strengthen its position and consolidate its **role as a location for high-tech industry and research**. Austria thus also takes part in programmes launched by the **European Space Agency (ESA)** in Paris, led since 2020 by the Austrian Josef Aschbacher as Director General, the **European Organisation for the Exploitation of Meteorological Satellites (EUMETSAT)** in Darmstadt and, above all, the **European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN)** in Geneva. Currently, more than 100 Austrian scientists work in association with the CERN programme. Led by the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Research and the Austrian Mission in Geneva, Austria participates in the meetings of the CERN Council and the CERN Finance Committee. Austria contributes to the **European Southern Observatory (ESO)** and thus also to the network of leading **institutions for ground-based astronomical research (ALMA, Atacama Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array)**.

The Laxenburg-based International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) has been a long-standing and very relevant cooperation partner of the MFA in the field of Science Diplomacy. Furthermore, Austria's foreign policy interests are also represented through its involvement in the **European Molecular Biology Conference (EMBC)** in Heidelberg, the **European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF)** in Reading (United Kingdom) as well as the **European Space Policy Institute (ESPI)** in Vienna.

The **Central Institute for Meteorology and Geodynamics** (Zentralanstalt für Meteorologie und Geodynamik, **ZAMG**) represents Austria in the **World Meteorological Organization (WMO)**; Until November, Michael Staudinger served as President of the Regional Association Europe. His term in office also saw the implementation of the programme for reforming the WMO structure, adopted at the 18th World Meteorological Congress. Instead of the former eight thematic commissions, two technical commissions (infrastructure and services) were created, a Scientific Advisory Panel was set up, the Secretariat and Directorates were reorganised. At the 19th Extraordinary WMO Congress in October, progress on WMO reform, WMO support for the global water agenda and important resolutions on Earth system data exchange were adopted. Alongside the typical

issues, such as measurement standardisation, the following newly adopted tasks are relevant both from an Austrian and a global perspective:

The **Global Basic Observation Network (GBON)** creates a global grid of observations (ground stations, radiosondes, ship observations), as a necessary minimum for further improvement of forecasting models, predictions and warnings. Since most developing countries are not in a financial position to install and operate the GBON network, support is to be made available by a group of development banks and agencies under the **SOFF programme** (Systematic Observation Funding Facility) to ensure long-term funding for the necessary observation network. Austria participates in the SOFF initiative.

As a standardised global warning system, the **Global Multi-Hazard Alert System (GMAS)** is an extension of the European system Meteoalarm, which is currently managed by ZAMG for Europe. For many development cooperation projects, GMAS can be considered a practice-oriented approach that includes concrete and quantifiable targets.

ZAMG also represents Austria at the **European Organisation for the Exploitation of Meteorological Satellites (EUMETSAT)** and the **European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF)**.

7.7 Österreich-Bibliotheken (Austria Libraries)

The network of **Österreich-Bibliotheken** (Austria Libraries) was established more than 30 years ago on the initiative of the Directorate-General for International Cultural Affairs to strengthen cultural contacts with Austria and Europe in the countries of Central Eastern and South East Europe. The network currently comprises **65 Austria libraries in 28 countries**.

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 science satellites abroad, they have developed into active information and cultural centres that organise cultural and scientific events in cooperation with the Austrian Cultural Fora and Austrian representations abroad. Being an indispensable and integral element of Austria's international cultural policy, they provide important and sustainable impetus to fostering and sharing Austrian culture and philosophy. Numerous other libraries that collect and hold publications with a connection to Austria, consolidate and round off this group of institutions, forming a world-wide network of knowledge. Regular meetings foster networking among the Austria libraries. Further cooperation partners are the Principality of Liechtenstein and the Swiss Confederation.

Due to the COVID-19 crisis, the **number of events** organised was reduced by half. Nevertheless, it was possible to hold a total of 493 events attracting almost 32,000 attendants. However, the provision of traditional classical library services had to be discontinued at many locations, at times even completely. In 2020 – the figures for 2021 are unfortunately not yet available – about 33,000 people used the services provided by the Austria libraries, whose holdings have grown to include over 470,000 books and more than 21,000 audio and video media. In response to the pandemic, the libraries continued to significantly expand their internet and media presence also this year. A large number of virtual library tours, webinars, digital conference cycles and presentations of translations were organised and attended online. Furthermore, web platforms were created with cooperation partners, such as the Literature Museum of the Austrian National Library or the Frankfurt Book Fair. Alongside providing university lectures online, many events were moved to a wide variety of platforms, and social media channels were further expanded. The database of publications with reference to Austria (*Auslands-Austriaca*), accessible via the Austria Libraries' website already lists more than 17,534 publications (not including the external databases in Japan, Russia and Italy). The translations produced in the context of Austria Libraries frequently win translation awards sponsored by the Federal Chancellery, as well as prizes in their respective host countries.

The Austria Libraries at the Departments of German Studies abroad are mostly co-managed by **lecturers from the Österreichischer Austauschdienst (OeAD**, Austrian Agency for International Mobility and Cooperation in Education, Science and Research), who provide valuable services in communicating Austrian cultural, educational and scientific work. Some facilities that house Austria Libraries also award the Austrian German Language Diploma (ÖSD) and conduct the relevant preparation courses and exams. In long-standing cooperation with the “Kultur und Sprache” (“Culture and Language”) programme, facilitated by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, **Austria Days** are organised at selected locations abroad. Structured as short seminars, these events are held in close cooperation with local institutions, focus on topics specifically related to Austria and also provide in-service training opportunities for German teachers abroad.

The series “**Transkulturelle Forschungen an den Österreich-Bibliotheken im Ausland**” (transcultural research at the Austria Libraries abroad), which comprises more than 20 volumes, provides an important publication platform for academic staff at the Austria Libraries who work on common thematic research projects. Some libraries publish their own series. Furthermore, a **weekly “Kaffeehaus Feuilleton”** (Coffee House Feuilleton) provides regular, concise and up-to-date information on the cultural scene in Austria. Thanks to its archive function, this cultural service boasting more than 2,000 contributions provides an overview of the essential cultural topics and intellectual debates that cover the last fifteen years. The web portal www.oesterreich-bibliotheken.at informs interested

persons in Austria and abroad about the Austria Libraries' activities, facilitates networking among Austria Libraries and is visited by some 17,500 users per year.

7.8 The History Service Unit at the Foreign Ministry

The main tasks of the “**Historisches Referat Rudolf Agstner**” (History Unit “Rudolf Agstner), set up at the MFA’s Directorate-General for International Cultural Affairs, include the provision, collection and preparation of **information on bilateral relations and general historical contexts for headquarters and Austrian representations abroad**, and provides content-related service and support to International Cultural Policy in analysing historical contexts, for instance in connection with bilateral and other anniversaries.

Furthermore, the MFA’s own publications are supervised and projects on the history of Austrian foreign policy are developed, monitored and supported. This includes the continuation of the systematic publication of essential data on Austrian foreign policy for the years after 1945. The call for submissions for the project “**1938 bis 1945 und danach: Das Schicksal der Angehörigen des österreichischen Auswärtigen Dienstes – Dokumentation und Aufarbeitung**” (1938 to 1945 and beyond: the fate of members of the Austrian Foreign Service – documentation and historical reappraisal) was announced in September.

7.9 International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), Issues related to the National Socialist Past, and the Future Fund

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), an intergovernmental institution with a Permanent Secretariat in Berlin, was set up in 1998 on the initiative of Sweden. It was established with the purpose of becoming an international network promoting Holocaust education, research and remembrance at both national and international level. In accomplishing its tasks, it is able to draw on the support of renowned international experts from science and academia.

On 27 March, the regulation on privileges and immunities of the IHRA entered into force. After more than 12 years of related efforts, the Alliance now also has an international headquarters regime commensurate with its importance. So far, the IHRA has adopted three working definitions: **Holocaust denial and distortion** (2013), **antisemitism** (2016) and **antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination** (2020). As part of the virtual Athens Plenary in June, the IHRA’s Roma Genocide Committee was tasked with developing guidelines for education about the Roma genocide. This marked an important step towards the implementation of the working definition of antigypsyism.

Admitted in 2001, Austria held the ITF Chair in the commemorative year 2008 and has since been one of the central players within the Alliance. The Austrian delegation is co-led by the MFA and the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism. Austrian government representatives as well as 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 Mauthausen Memorial and the organisation “_erinnern.at_” participate in the permanent working groups and committees. Projects launched by Austria in the fields of Holocaust education, awareness-raising and research are highly regarded within the IHRA.

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, academic work and initiatives, which serve remembrance of the victims of the Nazi regime, are a reminder of the threat posed by totalitarian systems, dictatorships and tyranny, serve international cooperation and contribute towards the promotion of respect of human rights and mutual tolerance as well as towards strengthening European awareness. Since its establishment, the Future Fund has supported around 3,100 projects.

The MFA not only provides technical and administrative support to the Future Fund, but also cooperates closely with it on a number of international projects supported by the Fund. Such projects include, for instance, the **redesign of the exhibition at the Austrian memorial site in the former concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau**, which was opened on 4 October, and the **Intercultural Achievement Award (IAA)**. The Future Fund furthermore supported the publication of the classic “Pan-Europa” by Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi in Hebrew. Another project that was co-funded was “Internationale Lyrikstage. Zum 70. Todestag von Paula von Preradović – Hymnen Österreichs” (international lyric days. On the 70th anniversary of the death of Paula von Preradović – anthems of Austria” organised by the German studies department at the University of Ljubljana. By supporting the “Children Teaching Children” programme implemented by Givat Haviva in Israel, the Future Fund seeks to contribute to promoting mutual understanding between Jewish and Arab school children.

The “Werkstattgespräche” (workshop talks), organised in cooperation with the “Diplomatische Akademie Wien – Vienna School of International Studies” to present selected projects supported by the Future Fund, were continued. On 10 June, the volume of essays “Corona und die Welt von gestern” (COVID-19 and the world of yesterday) was presented, in which experts from various disciplines analyse the changes confronting society as a result of COVID-19. On 15 June, the biography “Vom Kaiserreich zur Republik. Österreich aus Sicht der drei Generationen Carl, Nicholas and Heinrich Pfusterschmid-Hardtenstein” (from empire

to republic. Austria from the perspective of the three generations Carl, Nicholas and Heinrich Pfusterschmid-Hardtenstein). The trilogy by Herbert Lackner “Als die Nacht sich senkte” (when night fell), “Die Flucht der Dichter und Denker” (the flight of poets and thinkers) and “Rückkehr in die fremde Heimat” (return to the foreign homeland) was presented on 19 October. At this year’s final event, held virtually on 1 December, two volumes under the heading of “Europa in Mauthausen” (Europe in Mauthausen) were presented; volume 1 dealt with “Mauthausen und die nationalsozialistische Expansions- und Verfolgungspolitik” (Mauthausen and the national socialist expansion and persecution policy) and volume 2 with “Deportiert nach Mauthausen” (deported to Mauthausen).

On 13 October, Federal Minister Karoline Edtstadler travelled to Sweden to attend the “Malmö International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism” to highlight the important role played by the IHRA in international discourse and to contribute towards promoting the IHRA’s issues of concern at international level.

On 11 November, the “Global Conference on Football’s Role in Combating Antisemitism” was held at the Austria Wien Football Stadium. In the context of this event, the related IHRA working definition was adopted by the Austrian Football Association (ÖFB) in the presence of Vice Chancellor Werner Kogler and Federal Minister Karoline Edtstadler.

8. The Austrian Foreign Service

With its worldwide diplomatic and consular representation network, the Austrian Foreign Service safeguards the interests of the Republic of Austria across the world and protects and supports Austrian citizens abroad.

The **Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations** and the **Vienna Convention on Consular Relations** form the basis for international diplomacy under international law. The provisions governing the Foreign Service of the Republic of Austria are laid down in the **Federal Law on the Organisation and Tasks of the Foreign Service** (“Statut” law) and the **Federal Act on the Exercise of Consular Functions**.

The alternating domestic and foreign posting of staff and posting across all foreign policy and consular functions as well as the use of modern state-of-the-art information and communication technologies ensure that the Foreign Service's comprehensive foreign policy mandate is fulfilled and facilitate the provision of a comprehensive range of services to Austrian citizens worldwide.

8.1 Working at the MFA

For staff working at the MFA, the **system of rotation** means regular transfers between **headquarters in Vienna** and the **representations abroad**. As an essential part of professional life, this system not only requires a high level of flexibility on the part of the individual employees and their families but also comprehensive organisational and logistical planning. Every year, several hundred MFA staff are transferred between headquarters and abroad and/or to new positions. At the end of 2021, the MFA employed a total of **1,064 staff**, of whom **517 (48.9%) worked at headquarters** and **541 (51.1%) abroad**.

Staffing at the MFA

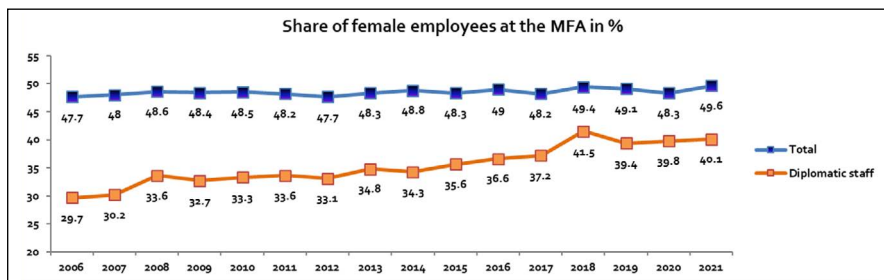
(as at 31 December 2021, excluding parental leave, leave of absence and secondments):

Career scheme	Men		Women		Total	Share of women in %
	Austria	Abroad	Austria	Abroad		
Diplomatic staff	110	133	80	81	404	39.9%
Consular and administrative staff	43	80	52	44	219	43.8%
Technical, clerical and support staff	75	82	149	115	421	62.7%
IT specialists	14	0	6	0	20	30.0%
Subtotal	242	295	287	240	1,064	49.2%
Total	537		527			

Austrian diplomatic representations employed a further total of **855 local employees** who were employed in accordance with the labour laws of the respective host country. Of the 855 local employees, 542 (63.4%) were female and 313 (36.6%) male.

As at the end of 2021, the MFA employed **40 persons with disabilities**.

In the **diplomatic service**, from which the largest number of senior functions is recruited, the **share of female employees was 40.1%**.



Furthermore, MFA staff also work in the **European External Action Service (EEAS)**, in international organisations and in other ministries and/or government departments.

In multi-stage statutory selection procedures for the Foreign Service (“Préalables”), the personal and professional suitability of applicants is assessed by selection committees in cooperation with experts. This rigorous selection of candidates is to ensure that Austrian diplomacy will continue to live up to the highest standards of quality also in future.

Recent university graduates, students, high school graduates, graduates from compulsory secondary or vocational schools are offered internships of up to 12 months to support MFA staff. In 2020, a total of 228 young people made use of this opportunity and completed internships in Austria and abroad. The COVID-19 pandemic also had a major impact on internships, with the number of interns posted abroad dropping by almost 50%.

Furthermore, 26 students, high school graduates and university graduates, completed a one-month internship (trial internship) to gain insights and some first-hand experience of the MFA’s tasks and working methods.

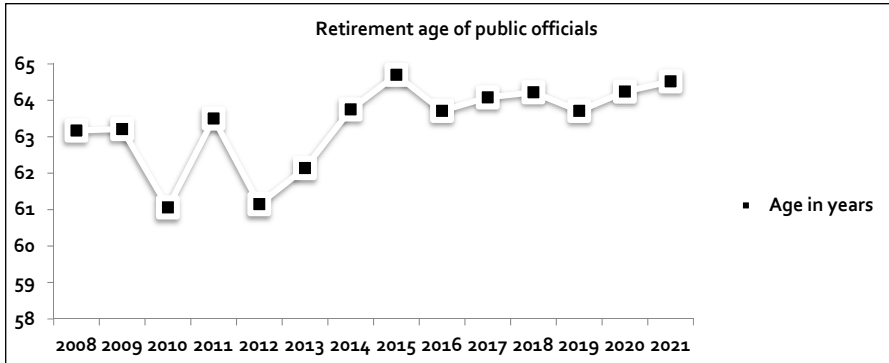
Internships in Austria and abroad (number of interns) from 01 January 2021 to 31 December 2021

Internships	Male	Female	Total
Austria	56	61	117
Abroad	36	75	111
Short-term internships	10	16	26
Total	102	152	254

Since 2009, the MFA has trained **apprentices as administrative assistants**. At the end of the year, a total of 24 young people were participating in such an apprenticeship programme. One further apprentice has been undergoing training as an IT specialist on app development and coding. Overall, a total of 25 apprentices were thus undergoing training at the MFA. Those apprentices who successfully complete their final apprenticeship examination will be invited to an internal admissions procedure at the MFA.

In 2021, the average **retirement age of public officials at the MFA** was 64.5 years, which is significantly above the Austrian average.

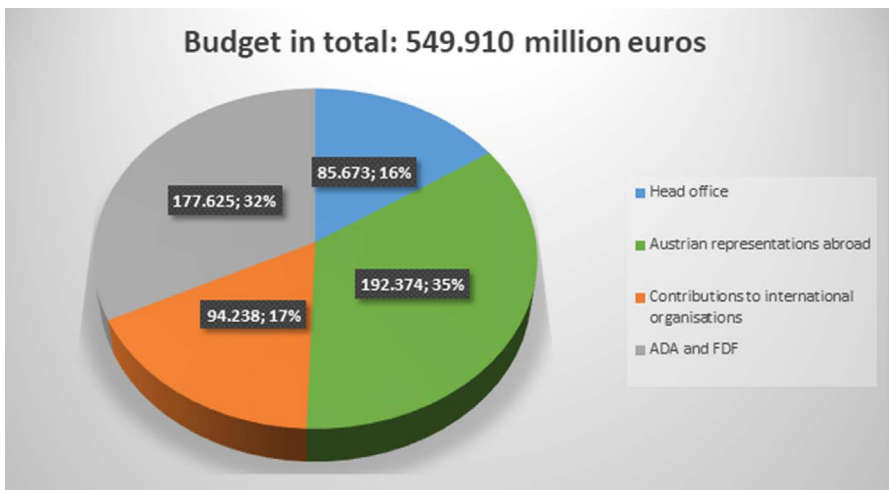
The Foreign Ministry's Budget



8.2 The Foreign Ministry's Budget

For 2021, the federal budget estimate for the MFA was set at 549.910 million euros, with some 85.673 million euros budgeted for head office expenses, including 1.7 million euros for international conferences. A total of 192.374 million euros was budgeted for operating the Austrian diplomatic representations including 5.469 million euros for cultural projects, 94.238 million euros for contributions to international organisations and 177.625 million euros for ADA and the Foreign Disaster Fund (DFD).

The Foreign Ministry's Budget 2021 in million euros



Budget 2010–2021 in million euros

Year	MFA budget	Share of MFA budget in federal budget in %
2010	440.902	0.62%
2011	427.100	0.61%
2012	409.361	0.56%
2013	402.654	0.54%
2014	418.777	0.55%
2015	409.141	0.55%
2016	427.993	0.56%
2017	551.914	0.71%
2018	502.628	0.64%
2019	508.417	0.64%
2020	495.996	0.45%
2021	549.910	0.53%

8.3 Global Infrastructure and Digitalisation

The MFA's real estate portfolio includes some 220 properties and more than 300 premises, used as offices for embassies, consulates-general, Cultural Fora and representations at international organisations as well as for residential and representational purposes. Real estate management covers all related management aspects, including questions regarding housing and accommodation, real estate acquisition and sale, adaptations as well as refurbishments.

The MFA's **facility management strategy** focuses on the principles of functionality, safety and economic efficiency. Great importance is attached to energy efficiency, the use of renewable energy and ecological aspects, which holds particularly true for refurbishment and construction projects as well as for new buildings. The MFA strives to constantly optimise its real estate portfolio and to reduce costs. With a view to tapping into synergy effects and to realising better utilisation rates for the existing space, the MFA undertakes ongoing efforts towards implementing joint accommodation and sharing premises both with other Austrian entities and with representations of other European states and the EEAS. In this spirit, there are currently six active co-locations with other states. A total of 105 Austrian co-users – such as other ministries, the Austrian Federal Eco-

conomic Chamber, Austria Institutes and an OeAD (Austrian Agency for International Mobility and Cooperation in Education, Science and Research) cooperation office – are accommodated in 59 locations worldwide.

2021 marked the starting point for the launch of the MFA's **internal and external digitisation initiative**. The COVID-19 pandemic required the rapid implementation of modern IT and communication processes. Building on these dynamic developments, the MFA kicked-off some important forward-looking **digitalisation initiatives**.

The following projects are of particular note in terms of their direct external impact:

- **The Portal für Auslandsservice und Sicherheit (PASS**, portal for the provision of MFA services abroad and safety and security-related matters): The software solution previously used for consular crisis management purposes was completely overhauled and its user-friendliness significantly increased. This new portal provides Austrians abroad and Austrian travellers with a simple option for **autonomous user registration** to stay in touch with the MFA either in the long term or while on a trip abroad, and/or to benefit from crisis-related information provided by the MFA as a **service** and/or to be able to turn to the MFA for help and assistance in the event of a crisis.
- **Digitalisation in the consular system**: The introduction of **e-ID**, also known as “ID Austria”, will become a prerequisite for **filing online applications for documents** such as citizenship and birth certificates. The diplomatic representation chosen as a pilot in this connection is the Austrian Embassy in Berlin, which already issues the “ID Austria” together with new passports. **Procedures under the Settlement and Residence Act** will also be digitalised.
- **Electronic application for citizenship for descendants of victims of the Nazi regime**: Applications for Austrian citizenship under Austrian Citizenship Act, section 58c, para.1 may now be filed online from around the globe.
- **Application for ID/legitimation cards**: The preliminary project phase for enabling international organisations and embassies to file applications for ID/legitimation cards entirely online has been successfully completed.

8.4 Austrian Missions Abroad and Honorary Consulates

Diplomatic and Other Missions of the MFA	As at 31 December 2021
Bilateral embassies	82
Permanent Representations at International Organisations	6
Consulates-General	10
Independent Cultural Fora	1
Other representations	2
Total	101

The MFA maintains 101 diplomatic representations worldwide. The MFA's global presence also enables it to draw on the 11 foreign offices operated by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA).

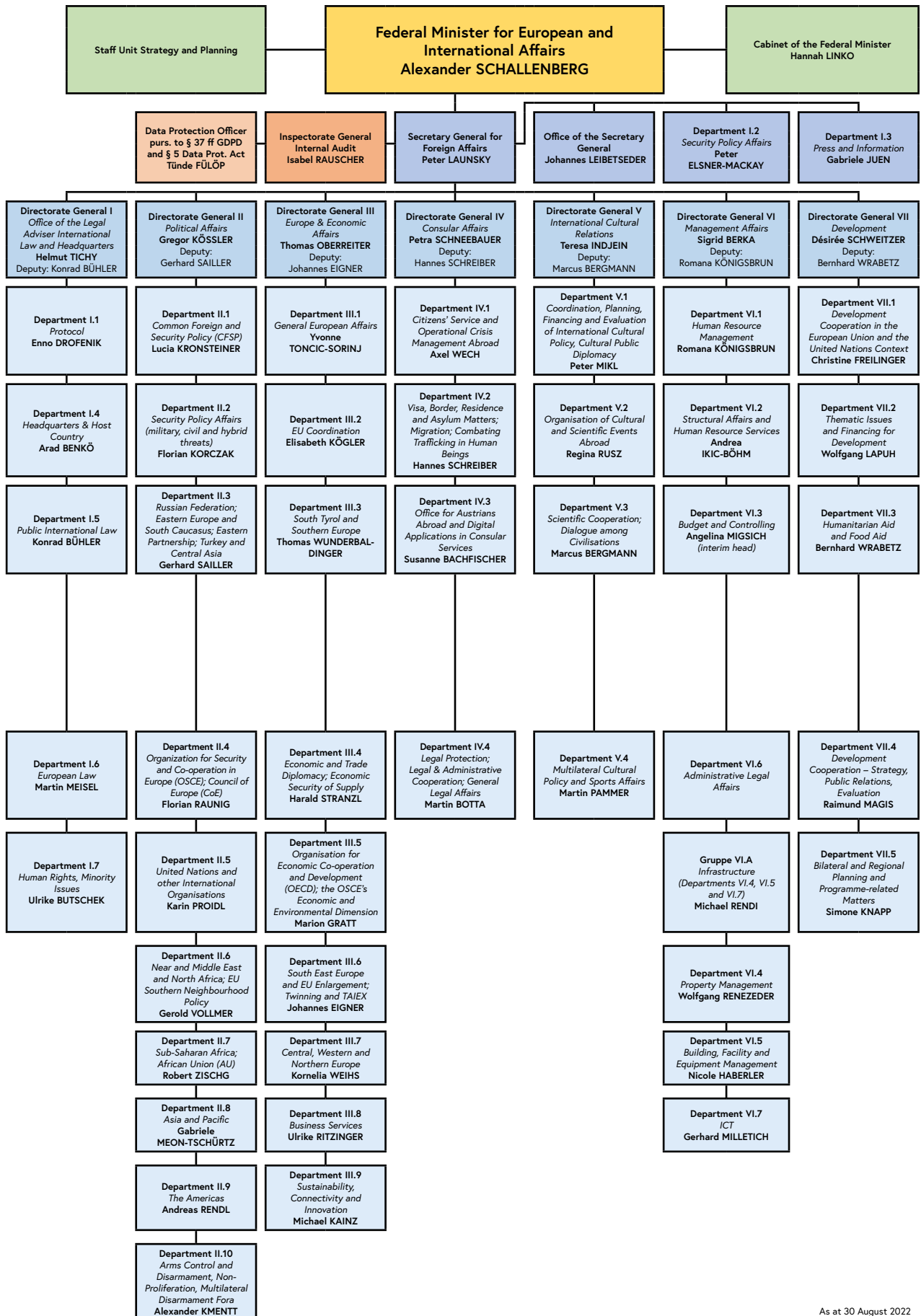
In addition, the Austrian Foreign Service receives valuable support from some 340 honorary consulates worldwide. These honorary functionaries are eminent figures with close ties to Austria, who work in their positions on an honorary basis, making available the necessary infrastructure for the provision of consular services from their own resources. Thanks to their commitment and dedication, they extend the network of Austria's international consular presence and contribute to the promotion of economic and cultural relations between Austria and the respective host country.

In 2021, numerous honorary offices were opened and some honorary offices that had been temporarily closed were reopened.

New offices were opened in Concepción (Chile), Belfast (United Kingdom), Casablanca (Morocco), Novi Sad (Serbia) and Tashkent (Uzbekistan). The honorary office in Szombathely (Hungary) was reopened.

The honorary consulates in Minsk (Belarus), Odense (Denmark), Birmingham (United Kingdom) and Székesfehérvár (Hungary), however, had to be closed permanently.

8.5 Organisational Chart



Organisational Chart

8.6 Austrian Diplomatic Representations and their Heads

As at 31 December 2021

ALBANIA	Austrian Embassy Tirana	Dr. Christian STEINER
ALGERIA Niger	Austrian Embassy Algiers	Mag. Christine MOSER
ARGENTINA Paraguay, Uruguay	Austrian Embassy Buenos Aires	Dr. Andreas MELAN
AUSTRALIA Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu	Austrian Embassy Canberra	Mag. Wolfgang Lukas STROHMAYER
AZERBAIJAN Turkmenistan	Austrian Embassy Baku	Mag. Bernd Alexander BAYERL
BELARUS	Austrian Embassy Minsk	Mag. Aloisia WÖRGETTER
BELGIUM	Austrian Embassy Brussels	Dr. Elisabeth KORNFEIND
BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA	Austrian Embassy Sarajevo	Dr. Ulrike HARTMANN
BRAZIL Suriname	Austrian Embassy Brasilia	Mag. Dr. Stefan SCHOLZ
BULGARIA	Austrian Embassy Sofia	Mag. Andrea WICKE
CANADA Jamaica	Austrian Embassy Ottawa	Mag. Sylvia MEIER-KAJBIC
CHILE	Austrian Embassy Santiago de Chile	Mag. Stephan VAVRIK

Austrian Diplomatic Representations and their Heads

CHINA Mongolia	Austrian Embassy Beijing Consulate-General Hong Kong Consulate-General Shanghai Consulate-General Chengdu	Mag. Dr. Andreas RIECKEN Karl ERNST Helmut RAKOWITSCH Dr. Martin ALLGÄUER
COLOMBIA Barbados, Ecuador, Guyana, Panama, Trinidad and Tobago	Austrian Embassy Bogotá	Dr. Gerhard DOUJAK
CROATIA	Austrian Embassy Zagreb	Dr. Markus Josef WUKETICH
CUBA Dominican Republic, Haiti, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Venezuela	Austrian Embassy Havana	Mag. Stefan WEIDINGER
CYPRUS	Austrian Embassy Nicosia	Mag. Dorothea AUER
CZECH REPUBLIC	Austrian Embassy Prague	Dr. Bettina KIRNBAUER
DENMARK Iceland	Austrian Embassy Copenhagen	Mag. Dr. Alice IRVIN
EGYPT Eritrea, Sudan	Austrian Embassy Cairo	Dr. Georg STILLFRIED
ESTONIA	Austrian Embassy Tallinn	Dr. Julius LAURITSCH
ETHIOPIA Djibouti, Congo, Uganda, South Sudan	Austrian Embassy Addis Ababa	Mag. Roland HAUSER
FINLAND	Austrian Embassy Helsinki	Mag. Maximilian HENNIG

The Austrian Foreign Service

FRANCE Monaco	Austrian Embassy Paris Consulate-General Strasbourg	<i>to be appointed</i> Dr. Alexander WOJDA, MA
GEORGIA	Austrian Embassy Tbilisi	Mag. Dr. Thomas MÜHLMANN
GERMANY	Austrian Embassy Berlin Consulate-General Munich	Dr. Peter HUBER Dr. Eva Maria ZIEGLER
GREECE	Austrian Embassy Athens	Mag. Hermine POPPELLER
HOLY SEE San Marino, Order of Malta	Austrian Embassy Holy See	Dr. Franziska HONSOWITZ- FRIESSNIGG
HUNGARY	Austrian Embassy Budapest	Dr. Alexander GRUBMAYR, LL.M.
INDIA Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka	Austrian Embassy New Delhi	Mag. Katharina WIESER
INDONESIA Timor-Leste	Austrian Embassy Jakarta	<i>to be appointed</i>
IRAN	Austrian Embassy Teheran	Mag. Wolf Dietrich HEIM
IRELAND	Austrian Embassy Dublin	Mag. Dr. Thomas NADER
ISRAEL	Austrian Embassy Tel Aviv	<i>to be appointed</i>
ITALY	Austrian Embassy Rome Consulate-General Milan	Mag. Jan KICKERT Mag. Clemens MANTL
JAPAN	Austrian Embassy Tokyo	Dr. Elisabeth BERTAGNOLI
JORDAN Iraq	Austrian Embassy Amman	Dr. Oskar WÜSTINGER

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KENYA Burundi, Comores, DR Congo, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi	Austrian Embassy Nairobi	Mag. Dr. Christian FELLNER
KOREA DPR Korea	Austrian Embassy Seoul	Dr. Wolfgang ANGERHOLZER
KOSOVO	Austrian Embassy Pristina	Mag. Christoph WEIDINGER
KUWAIT Bahrain	Austrian Embassy Kuwait	Mag. Marian WRBA
LEBANON	Austrian Embassy Beirut	Dr. René AMRY
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MALAYSIA Brunei Darussalam	Austrian Embassy Kuala Lumpur	Mag. Andreas LAUNER
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MOLDOVA	Austrian Embassy Chisinau	Mag. Stella AVALLONE
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MOROCCO Mauritania	Austrian Embassy Rabat	Mag. Klaus KÖGELER
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The Austrian Foreign Service

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NORTH MACEDONIA	Austrian Embassy Skopje	Dr. Georg WOUTSAS
NORWAY	Austrian Embassy Oslo	Mag. Wilhelm DONKO
OMAN Yemen	Austrian Embassy Muscat	Mag. Christian BRUNMAYR
PAKISTAN Afghanistan	Austrian Embassy Islamabad	Mag. Nicolaus KELLER
PERU Bolivia	Austrian Embassy Lima	Mag. Dr. Gerhard ZETTL
PHILIPPINES Palau	Austrian Embassy Manila	Mag. Bita RASOULIAN
POLAND	Austrian Embassy Warsaw Consulate-General Krakow	Mag. Andreas STADLER Mag. Philipp CHARWATH
PORTUGAL Cabo Verde	Austrian Embassy Lisbon	Mag. Christoph MERAN
QATAR	Austrian Embassy Doha	Mag. Karin FICHTINGER- GROHE
ROMANIA	Austrian Embassy Bucharest	Mag. Adelheid FOLIE
RUSSIA	Austrian Embassy Moscow	Mag. Dr. Werner ALMHOFER
SAUDI ARABIA	Austrian Embassy Riyadh	Mag. Georg PÖSTINGER
SENEGAL Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone	Austrian Embassy Dakar	Dr. Gerlinde PASCHINGER

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SINGAPORE	Austrian Embassy Singapore	Mag. Peter GUSCHELBAUER
SLOVAKIA	Austrian Embassy Bratislava	Mag. Margit BRUCK- FRIEDRICH
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SOUTH AFRICA Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Namibia, Eswatini, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Angola	Austrian Embassy Pretoria	Dr. Johann BRIEGER, MBA
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SWEDEN	Austrian Embassy Stockholm	Mag. Dr. Gudrun GRAF, MSc
SWITZERLAND	Austrian Embassy Bern	Dr. Maria ROTHEISER-SCOTTI
SYRIA	Austrian Embassy Damascus	Dr. Peter KROIS
THAILAND Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar	Austrian Embassy Bangkok	Dr. Eva HAGER
TUNISIA	Austrian Embassy Tunis	Mag. Ulla KRAUSS- NUSSBAUMER
TURKEY	Austrian Embassy Ankara Consulate-General Istanbul	Dr. Johannes WIMMER Josef SAIGER, BA, MA
UKRAINE	Austrian Embassy Kyiv	Mag. Gernot PFANDLER
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	Austrian Embassy Abu Dhabi	Mag. Dr. Andreas LIEBMANN- HOLZMANN

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UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN and NORTHERN IRLEAND Channel Islands and Isle of Man	Austrian Embassy London	Dr. Michael ZIMMERMANN
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA Bahamas	Austrian Embassy Washington Consulate-General Los Angeles Consulate-General New York ACF New York	Mag. Martin WEISS Mag. Dr. Michael POSTL Mag. Helene STEINHÄUSL Dr. Michael HAIDER
VIETNAM	Austrian Embassy Hanoi	Dr. Hans-Peter GLANZER
ARMENIA (based in Vienna) UZBEKISTAN (based in Vienna)	Austrian Embassy Armenia Austrian Embassy Uzbekistan	Dr. Alois KRAUT
LATVIA (based in Vienna)	Austrian Embassy Latvia	Mag. Doris DANLER
LIECHTENSTEIN (based in Vienna)	Austrian Embassy Liechtenstein	Mag. Georg DIWALD
LITHUANIA (based in Vienna)	Austrian Embassy Lithuania	Mag. Yvonne TONCIC-SORINJ
MALTA (based in Vienna)	Austrian Embassy Malta	Mag. Erika BERNHARD

Permanent Mission to the UN in New York	Mag. Dr. Alexander MARSCHIK
Permanent Mission to the UN Office and Specialized Agencies in Geneva	MMag. Dr. Elisabeth TICHY-FISSELBERGER
Permanent Mission to the UN, IAEA, UNIDO and CTBTO in Vienna	Mag. Dr. Gabriela SELNER
Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels	Mag. Dr. Nikolaus MARSCHIK

Austrian Diplomatic Representations and their Heads

Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels (Political and Security Committee)	Mag. Christina KOKKINAKIS
Permanent Representation to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg	Mag. Dr. Gerhard JANDL, BA
Permanent Representation to the OECD in Paris	Mag. Thomas SCHNÖLL
Permanent Delegation to UNESCO in Paris	<i>to be appointed</i>
Permanent Representation to the OPCW in The Hague	Mag. Astrid HARZ
Permanent Mission to NATO in Brussels	Dr. Elisabeth KORNFEIND
Permanent Representation to the Danube Commission in Budapest	Dr. Alexander GRUBMAYR, LL. M
Permanent Mission to UNWTO in Madrid	Mag. Christian EBNER
Permanent Mission to the UN, UNEP and HABITAT in Nairobi	Mag. Dr. Christian FELLNER
Consulate-General Guangzhou (China)	Branch Office of the Trade Delegate (Austrian Federal Economic Chamber)
Consulate-General Sao Paulo (Brazil)	Office of the Trade Delegate (Austrian Federal Economic Chamber)
Permanent Mission to the WTO in Geneva	under the authority of the Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs
Permanent Mission to FAO in Rome	under the authority of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism

8.7 Excursus: Diplomatic Academy of Vienna

Founded in 1754 under Empress Maria Theresa as the Oriental Academy, the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna (**DA**) is the oldest educational institution of its kind in the world. After its closure during World War II, it was re-established in 1964 under its current name as a postgraduate educational institution and was spun off from the federal administration in 1996, both organisationally and financially.

The legal position enjoyed by the DA and competitiveness at international level were significantly strengthened by the amendment to the Federal Act on the Diplomatic Akademie Wien – Vienna School of International Studies, which explicitly stipulates the **equivalence of the Master’s programmes offered at the DA** in cooperation with recognised Austrian and international universities to regular study programmes in accordance with the **European Higher Education Area’s Lisbon Recognition Convention** (also known as the “Bologna Process”). For the first time, the subject area of “culture” was included in the DA’s legal mandate under this amendment.

In the academic year 2020/21, a total of 209 students from 54 countries were enrolled at the DA and for the academic year 2021/22, a total of 217 students from 51 countries, from all continents, have enrolled. Students attend the following study programmes:

Programme	Number of participants	Thereof Austrians
57th Diploma Programme	25 (24 graduates, 1 with eligibility period extension of one year)	15
58th Diploma Programme	27	15
24th Master of Advanced International Studies (MAIS) programme; joint degree of the DA and the University of Vienna	63 (61 graduates, 1 with eligibility period extension of one year)	22
25th MAIS programme	76	27
26th MAIS programme (1st year)	63	22

Programme	Number of participants	Thereof Austrians
13th ETIA study programme- Master of Science in Environmental Technology and International Affairs (ETIA); conducted in collaboration with the Vienna University of Technology (TU Wien)	16 (10 graduates, 4 with eligibility period extension of one year)	8
14th ETIA programme	21	16
15th ETIA programme (1st year)	14	7
2nd PhD Programme (2017–21)	3	1
3rd PhD Programme (2018–22)	2	1
4th PhD Programme (2019–23)	1	1
5th PhD Programme (2020–24)	1	1
6th PhD Programme (2021–25)	1	0

Alongside **cooperation agreements** with Johns Hopkins University, SAIS Europe and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, the MAIS programme offers **exchange programmes** that extend over several months with Stanford University, MGIMO University (Moscow), Korea University's Graduate School of International Studies, China Foreign Affairs University and Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The COVID-19 pandemic has massively restricted international mobility and has made it difficult or impossible to implement the exchange programmes in the 2020/21 academic year. Furthermore, **study trips** could also not take place due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the context of **diplomatic training and further training programmes**, the DA offered special modules (Executive Training Programmes) and/or modules tailored to the needs of diplomats and other civil service officials for participants from the following country groups: South East Europe, Black Sea Region/South Caucasus, Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and the Middle East. Furthermore, special training modules were organised for the MFA. In cooperation with the Ban Ki-moon Centre for Global Citizens and the UNODC, the DA organised a training programme directed at "Young Women Leaders" from Latin America. In cooperation with the Ban Ki-moon Centre, the DA also contributed to developing and implementing a 20-week training programme on "Climate Adaptation" directed at young women from Africa. In addition, an eleven-week training programme was held for junior Saudi diplomats. Furthermore, training events were organised for the Free University of Brussels (winter and summer schools), the United Nations

University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies and Long Island University. Except for the courses held for students from Long Island University, all programmes were conducted online.

In the context of **conferences and meetings**, some 80 public events were held. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting restrictions, many events were held either in a hybrid format or purely online (mainly on Facebook and YouTube). The videos of events retrievable on the DA's YouTube channel were viewed almost 20,000 times. The list of speakers included the Presidents of the Republic of Moldova and the Republic of Kosovo, the Deputy Prime Minister of Montenegro, the Foreign Ministers of Iraq and Costa Rica, the French Secretary of State for European Affairs, ambassadors, representatives of international organisations, and renowned academics. Events and conferences organised by the DA marked further highlights and included "Austria's Foreign Policy in the Second Republic", "Equality in Progress: Empowering Women", "30 Years Dissolution of the Soviet Union - From the Perspective of the Signatories of the Belgrade Belovezhskaya Pushcha Agreement" (four of whom took part in the conference) and the 25th European Forum held by the Austrian Institute for Europe and Security Policy (AIES). In November, the DA contributed as a partner of the Federal Chancellery and the Federal Ministry of the Interior to organising an international conference on Belarus in Vienna. The DA online series "Diplomacy - Your Questions, Our Answers", as well as a series of events organised in cooperation with the Österreichische Forschungsgemeinschaft (Austrian research study group – working group on international relations and the series of Werkstattgespräche ("workshop talks", public debates and presentations on selected topics) with the Future Fund of the Republic of Austria were also continued. The DA furthermore launched a new online series of events under the heading "Big Rivers in International Politics".

The annual meeting of the **International Forum on Diplomatic Training** (IFDT), involving Deans and Directors of Diplomatic Academies and Institutes of International Relations chaired by the DA and the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy (ISD) at Georgetown University) took place in Abu Dhabi from 3 to 7 November and was hosted by the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy. The meeting was attended by some 45 participants representing more than 30 institutions from almost 30 countries.

The third issue of the publication series **DIPLOMACY – Austrian Journal of International Studies** was published in December on the topic of "Digital Diplomacy". With a view to strengthening the DA's international competitiveness and raising its international profile, further activities were undertaken in connection with the planned **extension** to the DA's building.

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