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11 How Austrian Christian Democrats Still Embrace Famialism

In contrast to Germany and the Netherlands, chapter five found that power resource theory continues to explain reforms of family policy in Austria. Bearing in mind the re-orientation of Dutch and German Christian democrats in opposition by the late 1990s, this chapter outlines that their Austrian counterparts still embrace famialism and explores why this is the case. To do so, section 10.1 analyzes the period when the social democrats (SPÖ) led a grand coalition with the Christian democrats (ÖVP). This was between 1987 and 1999. Section 10.2 studies the coalition between the ÖVP and the populist right wing party (FPÖ) from 2000 to 2006. Section 10.3 analyzes family policy developments under the current SPÖ-ÖVP government and concludes.

11.1 Family Politics until the Year 2000: The Politics of Compromise

Expanding gender-egalitarian social policy was difficult in Austria. The pattern of women’s labor force participation and opinions on working mothers resembled the Western German pattern very closely. Female labor market participation increased from 49 percent in 1980 to 62 percent in 1994, a few percentages ahead of the Western German rate; and in 1990 around 80 percent of the Austrian and Western German respondents claimed that a pre-school suffers with a working mother. Though previous SPÖ-dominated governments opted for equal rights with women’s groups standing at the forefront, the party was in a coalition with the ÖVP from January 1987 on. Hence, the SPÖ had to strike compromises to accommodate the ÖVP’s commitment to the traditional family ideal (Huber and Stephens 2001: 275).

To quote Franz Vranitzky, the SPÖ chancellor, ‘questions regarding family policy took much time during the coalition negotiations between the two major parties. We needed thorough discussions to arrive at a common position’ (in Schattovits 1991: 393). Whereas the government declarations of the previous SPÖ-dominated governments included several concrete proposals in family policy, the agreement between the SPÖ and ÖVP merely proposed two expansions of transfers (ibid: 394). Indeed, expanding transfers has been the lowest common denominator in family policy during the reign of the grand coalition (Obinger and Tálos 2006: 159).
Moreover, Johanna Dohnal, the SPÖ under-minister of women’s affairs from 1987 to 1991, noted that ‘several SPÖ politicians did not make it easy for the party’s women’s organization to push through their feminist demands’ (interview). According to chancellor Vranitzky, hardly any social democrat ‘publicly opposed demands from women’s groups but, in practice, one could have imagined much more support. The learning- and re-orientation processes took several years and succeeded step by step, though it was not exclusively satisfactory… For many within the party, let alone outside it, Johanna Dohnal was too radical… This was a good thing since she had to push through her demands within her own party and ÖVP colleagues opposed them anyway’ (Vranitzky 2004: 250-1).

As such, it did not help SPÖ women’s politicians that the ÖVP managed to establish and obtain the family ministry. According to Johanna Dohnal, the ministry was ‘explicitly used to kill a progressive, emancipatory women’s policy. And one has done so until today’ (interview). Social democratic politicians indeed blamed Marilies Flemming, a former chairwoman of the ÖVP women’s organization and the first family minister, for promoting conservative family policy. Within her own party, however, several politicians often perceived her as too social-liberal. Already in the early 1960s, Flemming met laughter from fellow partisans when she insisted on an equal division of household tasks between men and women. By 1975, she was among the few ÖVP politicians who supported an SPÖ proposal that changed authority relations in the family towards an individual arrangement (Stranzinger 1995: 150).

More so than the ÖVP women’s organization, the ÖAAB (Christian democratic employees organization) is a major player regards family policy within the ÖVP (interviews). Whereas labels like famialists and equal right supporters cut right across the ÖAAB (Müller 2006: 359), we shall see that most ÖAAB politicians continue to embrace famialism. In addition, the Catholic family organization and the family league are two important organizations with conservative views. Officially, these are not linked to the ÖVP but, in practice, they closely co-operate with the party in developing proposals. This has not really changed since 1987 (interview with ÖVP politician). The continued involvement of conservative family associations becomes more understandable if we note that secularization and women’s emancipation occurred at a slow pace and to a lesser degree compared to East Germany and the Netherlands. In 1999, for instance, 80 percent of all Austrians were Catholics.
Reforms under the Grand Coalition

The politics of compromise between the SPÖ and the ÖVP is visible in three “family packages”. A first major effort was the 1989 package. This contained provisions each of which in isolation would have been unacceptable to majorities within the two government parties (Huber and Stephens 2001: 275). Amongst other things, under-minister Dohnal, minister Flemming and female trade unionists managed to introduce parental leave for working parents instead of maternity leave (Stranzinger 1995: 151), a measure which had been put on the agenda by the SPÖ women’s organization since 1979 (Fix 1998: 28). However, this initially failed because the SPÖ-FPÖ government broke down shortly after the proposal had been developed (Obinger 2005: 205). Parental leave for employed clearly went against the demands to establish arrangements for all parents as demanded by most ÖVP politicians and representatives from the Catholic family organization (ÖVP 1986: 2; Schattovits 1991: 402-3). Furthermore, the leave period was extended from one to two years, though at a low replacement rate. In addition, the opportunity to take part-time leave was established during the second year.

The new legislation was preceded by lengthy discussions between minister Flemming and the ÖVP women’s organization on the one hand, and the party’s business wing on the other. However, the original demand for a three-year leave period with dismissal protection was blocked by the Economic Chamber and the Association of Industrialists (Stranzinger 1995: 151). In addition, under-minister Dohnal argued that she “and some others of course wanted an extension of the parental leave period whereby a man was obliged to take one year. This was already blocked within our own women’s organization at the time’ (interview). Like in Germany, five years after the introduction of parental leave fewer than 1 percent of those enrolled were fathers (Huber and Stephens 2001: 275).

In 1990, chancellor Vranitzky entered another term in office. Johanna Dohnal became the first minister of women’s affairs but financial and personnel resources remained far below those of other ministries (Rosenberger 2006: 746). Marilies Flemming continued as family minister but was forced to resign in 1991 due to
alleged corruption practices. She was succeeded by a fellow female partisan who was much more in favor of the traditional family ideal (interviews).

Nonetheless, a package, legislated upon in 1992, included some expansion in the direction of equal opportunities. The impetus for this package came from a ruling of the constitutional court that held lower retirement ages for women to be unconstitutional. The consequent need for the government to revise pension legislation was taken advantage of by minister Dohnal and women’s organizations in both the coalition parties and the trade unions (interview with Johanna Dohnal; Tálos and Kittel 2001: 118-21). They demanded additional arrangements to equalize material conditions for women and men in the labor market and in social policy. Arrangements included an expansion of leave to take care of six relatives from one to two weeks, pension credits for employed mothers raising children, and payment of family allowances to mothers rather than wage earners (Schattovits et al 1999: 472; Huber and Stephens 2001: 276).

Parallel to the equal opportunities package, the government implemented a family package (Rosenberger 1999: 765). Again, a ruling of the constitutional court provided the catalyst. The ruling established that a family’s existence minimum was not free of taxes for higher income groups. This was taken advantage of by the ÖAAB, the Catholic family organization and the family league. For years, these organizations had favored the introduction of child advantages independent of a family’s income and more generous tax cuts for wage earners. These proposals were incorporated by the ÖVP in general and the family minister in particular (Schattovits et al 1999: 453-5). Furthermore, the ÖVP demanded a special transfer for each parent who spends most time on children. It was assumed that this would be the mother since she had to make it explicit if the entitlement did not apply to her. All these proposals became law and were criticized for their negative effects on gender equality by the SPÖ in general and SPÖ women’s groups in particular (Rosenberger 1995: 390). Hence, like the 1989 package, the two rather divergent 1992 packages contained provisions each of which in isolation would have been unacceptable to majorities within the two coalition parties.

In addition, the SPÖ proposed to expand child care to bring women’s integration into the labor market on an equal footing with men (SPÖ 1990: 16; SPÖ 1994: 11). For years, the party’s women’s movement and female trade unionists had promoted this issue (Schattovits 1991: 405; Rosenberger 1999: 768). Between 1991
and 1995, women’s minister Dohnal led a campaign to achieve full coverage. When
the campaign started, 2 percent of all children up to the age of three were enrolled in
child care facilities. In addition, 53 percent of all facilities offered full day services.
The exception to rule was the social democratic bulwark of Vienna with a 93 percent
figure (Neyer 1993: 17-8). This becomes more understandable if we note that
providing child care is a responsibility of the Länder. Indeed, minister Dohnal’s
attempt shattered due to opposition from ÖVP Länder governors (Rosenberger 1995:
393). Moreover, minister Dohnal regretted that she ‘had proposed a law on the quality
of child care which was rejected by the ÖVP while it attempted to regulate things at a
national level’ (interview).

At the same time, politicians were particularly concerned with a recession
leading the deficit to climb from 2 percent to 5 percent of GDP between 1992 and
1994. Moreover, government forecasts indicated that it would reach about of 8
percent of GDP in 1997 without further fiscal action. To make matters worse, this
development coincided with Austria’s aspirations to join the EMU (Schludi 2005:
168-70). Not surprisingly, plans to trim the deficit played a crucial role after the 1994
elections. Chancellor Vranitzky and minister Dohnal resumed their positions. Martin
Bartenstein, a member of the ÖVP business league, became family minister.

In April 1995, some austerity policies were imposed, including restrictions on
family transfers. However, the previous chapter has shown that disagreements
between government members over the type and extent of welfare retrenchment led
Wolfgang Schüssel, ÖVP leader and former business league chairman, to pull the
plug out of the coalition in the summer of 1995. As a junior partner, the ÖVP was not
all that visible in the coalition and increasingly lost votes to the populist right-wing
FPÖ. In family policy, the FPÖ reached out to Austria’s large share of Catholics by
favoring familialism (Riedlsperger 1998: 33). Interestingly, Schüssel had rather
market-liberal orientations, but is conservative in family policy (Pelinka 2003: 199).
Accordingly, the ÖVP continued the course towards familialism, a direction appealing
to Catholic core constituents (Müller 1997: 281).

This strategy was not embraced by all in the party. For instance, a young,
female ÖVP politician observed massive setbacks in women’s policy. ‘Here, I have to
mention my own party. The way how one currently legislates family policy is a

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25 For more information about the FPÖ position in family policy, see Rösslhummer 1999 and Hauch
2002.
deterioration’ (in Kreisky 1995: 621). Notably, a group of ÖVP politicians argued that the ÖVP should re-orientate in the direction of equal rights to secure its future and started to set up a liberal platform in 1995 (Platform für offene Politik: 1999). Furthermore, a representative of the Economic Chamber pointed out that ‘there was some tension between demands of a business organization interested in high employment and budgetary restraints, and a party adhering to traditional views on the role of women in the labor market’ (interview).

After the December 1995 elections, the SPÖ again became the lead party in a grand coalition. Helga Konrad, also chairwoman of the SPÖ women, took office as women’s minister. Bartenstein continued as family minister. The government agreed to an austerity package with a reduction in parental leave from 24 to 18 months except in cases where the husband takes leave for at least six months. This was in line with demands of the SPÖ women’s organization. By contrast, Catholic associations and the ÖAAB vehemently opposed the measure and the package as a whole since these primarily hit families with one wage earner (DP 10.02.96; DP 03.08.96). In addition, the ÖVP noted that if the SPÖ would again not be willing to compromise on family policy, it would organize a public referendum (DP 03.08.96).

A 1997 ruling of the constitutional court demanding tax advantages for families provided a window of opportunity for those embracing famialism. In fact, the ÖAAB and conservative family associations continued to suggest tax advantages for larger families and families with a single wage earner (DP 22.08.95; DP 09.08.96). In January 1998, the ÖVP party executive went along with these demands (Rosenberger 1999: 765). A few months later, the government issued a third family package. It doubled child tax advantages and introduced a tax cut for each child in a family with three or more children. The costs hovered around € 900 million, the biggest transfer increase during the reign of the grand coalition (Schattovits et al 1999: 565).

The SPÖ, by contrast, had criticized the measures and favored special benefits for each child in a lower income family (Rosenberger 1999: 765). Once again, the politics of compromise became visible in the package as the SPÖ women’s minister, the party’s women’s organization and female trade unionists managed to introduce an educational benefit for mothers returning from leave. In addition, they obtained approximately € 90 million to improve child care facilities (interviews).

Finally, Austrian and German trade union representatives had pressed for an equal treatment of mother and father to be included in a European parental leave
directive. This already succeeded by June 1996. Like in Germany, however, the regulation with its emphasis upon equal opportunities was totally at odds with the preferences of a dominant coalition in the Christian democratic party. Hence, Austrian unions had used the EU level to push through a reform which might have met resistance at the national level. Before the directive was implemented, a child’s father could only take leave if the mother was entitled to leave but did not take it. This ran counter to the principle of equal treatment of mother and father. Although the change was not costly, implementation took until July 1999. In this case, however, postponement was mainly due to extra demands from trade unions and opposition from the Economic Chamber (DP 10.02.96; EIRO 1999; Falkner et al 2002).

11.2 Family Politics after the Year 2000: How a Change in Government Implied a Stronger Orientation towards Famialism

In family policy, the campaign of the October 1999 elections continued to be marked by considerable ideological differences. The SPÖ and the Greens refused to decide between ‘better’ and ‘worse’ forms of cohabiting and saw equality of opportunity for individual family members as an important value. Family policy was not separated from women’s policy, and especially child care was a central demand to reconcile work and family life (SPÖ 1999: 2-14; Greens 1999: 1-6). The SPÖ women’s minister even financed a tv campaign in which children had to say that they preferred a child care facility to staying at home (DP 29.09.99).

The FPÖ and the ÖVP, by contrast, saw the traditional family as their central focus in family policy (Obinger and Tálos 2006: 158). This had not always been the case within the FPÖ. In fact, a liberal wing embracing equal rights used to be dominant until 1986. Under the new chairman Jörg Haider, however, German-nationalists became dominant. Haider angered fellow partisans with strong emotional ties to the party’s secular tradition by insisting that Austrians should have more children to weaken the impact of immigration and reinforce the traditional family to transmit ‘German-Austrian values’ (Riedlsperger 1998: 33). In response, five politicians quit the party and established the Liberal Forum in 1993 (Kreisky 1995: 624). Accordingly, the FPÖ’s 1999 election program is silent on women’s rights and rather mobilizes conservative Catholics who were disillusioned with the ÖVP behind the FPÖ as the new party of traditional values (Riedlsperger 1998: 33). From a vote-
seeking perspective, this seemed quite a logical strategy. In 1999, for example, 70 percent of the Austrian respondents agreed with the claim that a pre-school child suffers with a working wother (World Value Survey).

In family policy, the central proposal of both the FPÖ and the ÖVP was a more generous and universal parental leave scheme, i.e. independent of labor market participation (FPÖ 1999; ÖVP 1999: 19-20). As most ÖVP and FPÖ parliamentarians had rather similar socio-economic policy preferences (Müller and Jenny 2000), it is not all that surprising that a FPÖ politician already announced by 1997 that her party wanted to co-operate with the ÖVP in family policy (DP 22.07.97). By then, both parties advocated more generous family transfers for large families and universal parental leave (DP 02.08.97).

According to an ÖVP politician, the ÖAAB, the Catholic family organization and the family league stood at the base of more generous and universal parental leave (interview). Indeed, family minister Bartenstein, a member of the business league, was not all that enthusiastic about it (DP 02.08.97). Furthermore, the business league’s chairman, also ÖVP MP, wanted that the ÖVP departed from its concentration upon family policy and paid more attention to employment and tax reform (DP 20.01.98). By contrast, party chairman Schüssel, the former chairman of the business league, argued in February 1998 that ‘he wanted to transfer a large part of the tax revenues which are currently invested in child care directly to parents in the form of a parental leave benefit’ (in Rosenberger 1999: 770). Notably, a group of ÖAAB women formed a minority in this league by opposing universal parental leave (DP 02.08.97). This is in line with Müller’s claim that labels like familialists and equal right supporters cut right across the ÖVP leagues (Müller 2006: 359).

Those opposing universal parental leave warned that it would bring women back home and further worsen the weak supply of child care (DP 02.08.97). Especially SPÖ women were vehemently opposed against the measure, but SPÖ chancellor Klima secured that ‘universal parental leave would not come as long as social democrats have something to say in this country’ (in DP 08.06.99). Not surprisingly, family policy, in addition to pensions, led to major disagreements between the SPÖ and the ÖVP (DP 16.12.99). Once the ÖVP formed a coalition with the FPÖ in February 2000, family policy and pensions provoked the biggest confrontations between the government parties and opposition parties (DP 10.02.00).
In family policy, more generous and universal social policy clearly was the spearhead of the first ÖVP-FPÖ coalition. This was welcomed by Schüssel, the new Chancellor, as increasing ‘freedom of choice’ for women (in Obinger and Tálos 2006: 32-3). To the regret of the former SPÖ women’s minister, the competencies for family policy and women’s policy were handed to the newly created economy and labor ministry as well as the social ministry (DP 10.02.00). The economics ministry was allocated to Bartenstein, the previous family minister, while the social ministry was occupied by an FPÖ politician with a background in handicraft teaching. This meant that the political influence of both the women’s movement and female trade unionists was considerably reduced (Rosenberger 2006: 748).

In March 2001, the government presented the core features of a family package26. Apart from increasing transfers for families in general and large families in particular, the intention was to universalize parental leave and to extend the period of leave for one parent from 18 months to 30 months while an employee would remain protected against dismissal for 24 months. In addition, leave benefits were to be increased and recipients were to be allowed to earn up to 14,600 annually without any benefit. For 2005, the government estimated that the parental leave arrangement would cost € 1.25 billion extra compared to previous legislation. This is remarkable if we note that, pressed by the Stability and Growth Pact, the government was determined to balance the budget. Indeed, the government ignored the opposition from the FPÖ finance minister.

By late June, the SPÖ and the Greens proposed various amendments. The former SPÖ women’s minister, for instance, favored an expansion of child care and various other measures to reconcile work and family life. This was turned down by the government parties since the necessary financial resources would not be available. By contrast, the president of the family league thanked the government for adhering to his organization’s demands.

A few days later, the final debates took place and the ideological differences between the government and opposition in family policy became clear. Like the SPÖ, the Greens complained that the government wanted to maintain the existing division of tasks between male breadwinners and housewives, and to support working mothers to retreat. Based on the lack of child care facilities, freedom of choice for women

26 Unless indicated otherwise, the following overview of the political process in parental leave draws on an excellent analysis by Obinger and Tálos 2006: 162-7, 174-5).
would be an illusion. The FPÖ female party executive regretted this ‘red ideology’ characterized by the thought ‘how do I enable women to give up their children as soon as possible’. An ÖVP politician complemented: ‘In reality, you SPÖ politicians want to send children to public child care immediately after birth… Hence, to see them far away from their parents – this makes your socialist world complete’.

Despite vehement criticisms from the opposition, the proposal became law on July 4th 2001 due to the support from the two government parties. Chancellor Schüssel labeled it a ‘major jump’ which made ‘Austria the most family friendly country in Europe’. Ridi Steibl, ÖAAB vice-chairwoman and ÖVP spokeswoman on family policy, noted that universal child parental leave had been a longstanding ÖVP demand which could not be implemented with the SPÖ. ‘The SPÖ says that this would force women home but this is absolutely false. They claim that it is more important when the child goes to a child care facility after birth than to give the mother money to stay at home. The SPÖ was always vehemently opposed against universal parental leave’ (interview). On the other hand, a female ÖVP politician admitted that ‘as a coalition partner, we have blocked some things. And I confess that regarding the family, women, cohabiting and life quality we have seen many things differently than they’ (the SPÖ: author’s information). Accordingly, we are happy that we currently have a coalition partner that brings its societal thoughts into action in our direction in this policy domain. As such, it is possible to change a lot here’.

Indeed, the parental leave scheme is a remarkable change in the direction of familism. As such, it reinforced the role of women as mothers rather than workers. Notably, it led to a stronger withdrawal of women from the labor market and higher female unemployment rates, without causing fathers to get more involved in the care of young children (OECD 2003; Lutz 2004; Angelo et al 2006; DS 13.04.07). One problem for working mothers is the discrepancy between the 30 months of entitlement and the 24 months of job protection. By early 2004, 50 percent of the women on leave did not know about this discrepancy (Wrobleski 2004: 2). Last but not least, chancellor Schüssel argued that the new parental leave scheme offered greater freedom of choice in child care matters. However, child care places for children under three are very scarce. In 2002, there was a shortfall of 90,000 of such places (OECD 2003).
The second Schüssel government, formed in February 2003, continued the course towards famialism. For instance, the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition denied that there was an imperative necessity to expand child care as pointed out by the opposition parties and international organizations like the OECD and the EU. Accordingly, it did not take any action in this field. In addition, the government questioned any negative employment effects of the new parental leave scheme (EIRO 2004). Furthermore, in July 2004, it implemented a tax reform with disincentives for women to be employed. Despite budgetary constraints, the reform included increases in family transfers. Moreover, it introduced both a child benefit and tax advantages for families with one wage earner. To be fair, the other partner was allowed to earn € 6,000 per year. However, if this is exceeded, a family no longer is entitled. Hence, the measures supported a specific family model of a male wage earner and a female partner who is employed for not more than a week per month (Angelo et al 2006: 63-4; Obinger and Tálos 2006: 176).

Last but not least, in late May 2004, legislation was passed giving parents of children aged upto 7 rather than 4 a right to work part-time. Here, the interests of small firms played a major role as economics minister Bartenstein, a member of the ÖVP business league, ensured that enterprises with less than 20 employees were excluded. Furthermore, an employee has to be employed for at least 3 years (Obinger and Tálos 2006: 170). Accordingly, 77 percent of all employees between 20 and 45 years are not entitled (Wrobleski 2004: 3).

The SPÖ and the Greens criticized that this was unfair and would create two classes of parents. In addition, the SPÖ, with the support of the Greens, proposed to include a right for a so-called daddy month. However, the government parties turned this down because of a lack of money. Moreover, Ridi Steibl ÖAAB vice-chairwoman and ÖVP spokeswoman on family policy, argued that it would demotivate business to employ men in fertile ages (Obinger and Tálos 171-2). Despite the SPÖ’s criticisms, the party voted in favor of the bill. As one female SPÖ politician put it, ‘it is a step in the right direction, although a way too small step’ (in ibid: 172). Politicians from the coalition parties, judged it to be a ‘landmark to reconcile work and family life’ and a part of the government’s ‘successful balance in family policy’ (in ibid).
However, not every one within the ÖVP agreed. For example, the director of the party’s ‘uninfluential scientific institute’ called for a more societal liberal course (interview with ÖVP-insider). He recognized a ‘remarkable step of thoughts back in time… which can be characterized as the return of a conservative agenda in societal- and cultural political debates’ (Burkert-Dottolo 2004: 576). The course towards famialism, a direction appealing to Catholic core constituents, was not embraced by a federal ÖVP governor either. He ‘also wanted people to join us who do not believe’. In family policy, ‘one can identify the ÖVP’s outdated family image. I have the feeling that only half-hearted measures are taken in order to reconcile work and family life. He mentioned the right to part-time work as one example. ‘Here, a society of several classes emerges. Either a measure applies to everyone or it applies to no one’. In addition, he called for the party to finally discuss the issue of modern forms of co-habitation (in DP 15.05.04).

Last but not least, we have seen earlier that there was some tension between demands of affiliated business organizations interested in high employment and budgetary restraints, and a party adhering to famialism. For instance, the Economic Chamber and the Association of Industrialists supported an expansion of child care in the early 2000s (interviews with business representatives; Fuchs et al 2006). To quote a representative from the Economic Chamber, ‘compared to pensions, the ÖVP certainly went less in the direction of employers in family policy… But one should not forget that there were major reforms in pensions and health care between 2000 and 2006. Family policy also was an issue for us but far less important’ (interview).

11.3 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the ÖVP still embraces famialism and has explored why this is the case. In line with my proposition on organizational change, we have seen that secularization and women’s emancipation occurred at a slow pace and too a small degree in comparison to Germany and the Netherlands. In other words, the ÖVP faced relatively small contextual challenges in family policy. Once the party returned to government in 1987, subsequent electoral defeats occurred at the expense of the populist right-wing FPÖ. This did trigger a coalition of pragmatists to become dominant by 1995. However, leading politicians within both the FPÖ and the ÖVP continued to embrace the traditional family ideal, a strategy appealing to Austria’s
large share of Catholics in particular. This clearly facilitated the coalition negotiations on family policy. By contrast, negotiations with the SPÖ proved difficult due to, amongst other things, its continued support for equal rights. Accordingly, the change in government from a SPÖ-led grand coalition to the ÖVP-FPÖ government in 2000 implied a much stronger orientation towards familialism, despite increasing fiscal austerity.

Under the SPÖ-led grand coalition, formed in January 2007, the history of the politics of compromise seems to repeat itself. The SPÖ women’s minister, for instance, insisted on an expansion of child care places and wanted the federal government to become responsible in providing child care. However, most ÖVP politicians and all ÖVP governed Länder refused to co-operate on both issues (DS 03.05.07; DS 07.04.08). Instead, the ÖVP wished to implement a tax system whereby tax obligations would again be based on the joint income of both parents rather than on the earnings of individual family members. Here, the SPÖ blamed the ÖVP for promoting the traditional family ideal (DS 31.10.07).

This is not to say that nothing changes in the ÖVP. One ÖVP state governor, for example, joined the longstanding demand of ÖAAB women to abolish the ceiling of € 14,600 a year on additional earnings on top of a child care benefit entitlement (DP 07.05.07). Furthermore, Martin Bartenstein, the re-installed economics minister and member of the ÖVP business league, answered the demands of affiliated business organizations to push for an expansion of child care for children aged up to three. The SPÖ party executive was particularly pleased and argued that ‘it is good sign that the ÖVP is prepared to pick up SPÖ initiatives’. He ‘praised the ÖVP’s learning process and the preparedness to fling of ideological ballast’ (in DS 11.03.07).

However, we have seen above that most ÖVP politicians were not amused. For the moment, the re-orientation process thus still has to take place. But if my theory has any predictive power, failure to dominate government can do the trick for equal right supporters against a background of secularization and women’s emancipation.