

DIE GRÜNE ALTERNATIVE

THE GREEN PARTY OF AUSTRIA



The history of the birth of the Austrian Green Party "DIE GRÜNE ALTERNATIVE" is the history of a struggle for unification that lasted almost five years. But a long time before any green parties were founded, there was a strong ecological movement that created the pre-condition for a green break-through:

On 5th November 1978 (almost five months before the Harrisburg accident!), a majority of the Austrians (50.47%) voted against the use of nuclear power in a referendum (this was the only referendum held in Austria since 1945). Although the then Federal Chancellor Bruno Kreisky (1970 - 1983), the SPÖ government, the Union of Industrialists, the trade unions, the Communist Party, the electricity companies and many conservative politicians were in favour of nuclear power and spent millions on propaganda, a very active grass-roots movement emerged all over Austria, comprising peasants in Western Austria as well as leftist Viennese students, housewives as well as artists and university professors. Their arguments were more credible, and thus the nuclear power station of Zwentendorf (sited in the vicinity of the Danube, near Tulln, Lower Austria), which had already been built, never went into operation. In 1986, after the Chernobyl disaster, the Austrian government definitively gave up all plans to hold a second referendum and to undo the democratic decision of 1978 (according to opinion polls, 60% of the people had been in favour of nuclear power in March 1985, and only 11% in July 1986). In the 1978 campaign many anti-nuclear activists had some experiences with the arbitrariness of the powerful and thus became sensitive to the question of democracy. This was especially important in a country with a long tradition of uncritical belief in authorities, a victorious

counter-reformation in the 17th century (84% of the Austrians are Roman-Catholics) and a culture of denying and covering political conflicts (example: the "Waldheim affair" in 1986). In such a climate you tend to find a high level of "private" violence (murders inside families, alcoholism, 2,000 suicides per year,...) rather than publicly expressed protest.

In the late 70's, the first green candidates contested communal elections. Influenced by the victories of the German Greens in regional elections, a great number of "green" and "pseudo-green" parties was registered in 1981 and 1982, many of them founded by obscure individuals and right-wing extremists. In October 1982, the "Bürgerliste" (Peoples' List) of Salzburg, that had been the first green party in a municipal parliament in 1977 (5.58% of the vote and 2 out of 40 seats), increased its vote to 17.69% and gained 7 seats (plus one seat in the city council) in the parliament of Salzburg, the fourth-largest Austrian city. This list, founded by the popular actor Herbert Fux (a subsequent green MP), played an important rôle in the process of unification later on. The victory of "Bürgerliste" influenced the creation of the two main green parties of the following years: ALÖ, the Alternative List of Austria, was founded on 5th November 1982 at Graz by activists from social movements (ecological, feminist, peace, Third World, students' movements, etc.), whereas VGO ("Vereinte Grüne Österreichs", United Greens of Austria), founded on 2nd December 1982, represented the "bourgeois" wing of the ecological movement, interested mainly in environmental protection. These two parties contested the national elections of 24th April 1983 (in which SPÖ lost its absolute majority), but obtained no seats: ALÖ polled 1.36% of the vote, and VGO only 1.93%. VGO-leader Alexander Tollmann, a geology professor and speaker of the anti-nuclear power movement, who had expected 8%, was replaced by Josef Buchner, the green vice-mayor of the town of Steyregg (Upper Austria), who had fought against air pollution caused by the factories of the nearby industrial city of Linz. At Linz, the third-largest city of Austria, VGO holds its strongest position (5.5% of the vote and 3 seats in October 1985), whereas the Alternative List had its greatest victory in the municipal election of Graz, the second-largest Austrian city, in January 1983 (7.04% and 4 seats). In Vienna, the capital and largest city of Austria, the Alternative List won 2.50% of the vote (but no seat) in the municipal election of April 1983.

Although the new Socialist Federal Chancellor Fred Sinowatz (1983 - 1986), who formed a coalition government with the small, national-liberal 5%-party FPÖ ("Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs", Freedom Party of Austria), was not very successful and had to deal with various scandals (welcome of the released Nazi war-criminal Walter Reder by the Minister of Defence, "wine-scandal", deficits and oil-speculation losses in the nationalized industry,...), the green election results in the provinces ("Bundesländer") were modest. The Greens obtained no seats in Vienna (1983), Lower Austria (1983), Carinthia (1984) and Upper Austria (1985), because AL and VGO, or their affiliated groups, contested on separate lists. The first breakthrough on the provincial level was in October 1984 in Vorarlberg, a small

western-Austrian province with a strong anti-centralist mentality, where a common green-alternative platform gained 13% of the vote and 4 out of 36 seats.

In December 1984, a second large Austrian grass-roots movement, similar to that of 1978, developed and was successful. A lobby, composed of all three then parliamentary parties, industry and trade union leadership, tried to cut down an ecologically rare area of primeval woods alongside the Danube near **Hainburg** (a few kilometers from the Czechoslovak border) in order to build a large hydroelectric power station that would have caused danger to the beauty of the landscape, for some species of animals and for drinking water reserves. When the government started the clearing without even waiting for legal permission, several thousands of young people went into the woods and protected the trees with their bodies. Using tents and trunk-barricades, they "occupied" the woods for almost one month. After some smaller attempts to cut down trees, and after fruitless negotiations between government and ecologists, the police brutally attacked the non-violent environmentalists with truncheons and wounded 100 of them in the morning of 19th December 1984. But on the same day, approximately 40,000 (!) people spontaneously demonstrated in Vienna and protested against police brutality. The Chancellor had to stop the clearing, and two weeks later he postponed the decision on the construction of the hydroelectric power station. In summer 1985, an ecology commission set up by the government clearly spoke out against the project. "Hainburg" (as well as "Zwentendorf") became a symbol of the strength of the Austrian movement for environmental protection and democracy.

The Hainburg movement was a key event in the development of the Austrian Greens: many socialists drew close to them, not only because SPÖ-Minister of Interior Karl Blecha was responsible for the police attacks (and had accused the ecologists of being "paid by Khaddafi"), but also because Günther Nenning, president of the Union of Journalists and leftist SPÖ-member, was expelled from the party and the trade union because of his leading rôle in the ecology movement. He and some other well-known Hainburg activists founded a new group, BIP ("Bürgerinitiative Parlament", Peoples' Initiative for Parliament), in order to bring together the different wings of the green-alternative movement for the forthcoming national elections. This group indeed became the first dynamic factor of green unification.

The second factor was the candidacy of Freda Meissner-Blau for the presidential elections of 4th May 1986. Freda Meissner-Blau had been active in the womens', Third World and peace movement for many years. She played an important rôle in the anti-nuclear power movement, and particularly in the Hainburg struggle. In 1986 she left the Socialist Party. In the first ballot of the presidential elections she polled 5.50%, and thus caused the need for a second ballot, because Kurt Waldheim, the candidate of the conservative OVP ("Österreichische Volkspartei", Austrian Peoples' Party), gained 49.65% and failed to win an absolute majority. OVP tried to use antisemitic

prejudices for the election campaign, and in the second ballot on 8th June Waldheim obtained 53.91% and became new Federal President. His victory can be seen as the clearest symbol of a neo-conservative "Wende" (turn) in Austria, that was followed by similar changes in the Catholic Church, in SPÖ and in FPÖ.

After Waldheim's election, Fred Sinowatz resigned and Franz Vranitzky, banker and technocratic, right-wing Social Democrat, became the new Federal Chancellor. The policy of SPÖ became more and more similar to that of ÖVP. In September 1986, the move to the right followed in the small governmental party: the liberal FPÖ-leader, Vice-Chancellor Norbert Steger, was not re-elected at the party congress, and the young and successful Carinthian right-wing politician Jörg Haider (who has close contacts to extremely right-wing German-nationalist circles and even neo-nazis) became the new president of FPÖ, a party with a high rate of former NSDAP members. His demagogism made him attractive to protest voters who were discontented with SPÖ and ÖVP. Because of the defeat of the liberals inside FPÖ (and because he prefers a coalition with ÖVP), Vranitzky cancelled the coalition and announced advanced elections for 23rd November 1986. These events put pressure on the Greens to come to an agreement. In September 1986, a common VGO-AL platform won seats (2 out of 56) in the second of 9 provincial parliaments, Styria (with 3.73% of the vote). This success, and the assent of Freda Meissner-Blau to volunteer as top candidate for the national elections, enabled a unification of the green movement in a new party, "Die Grüne Alternative (GRÜNE)".

THE GREENS IN PARLIAMENT

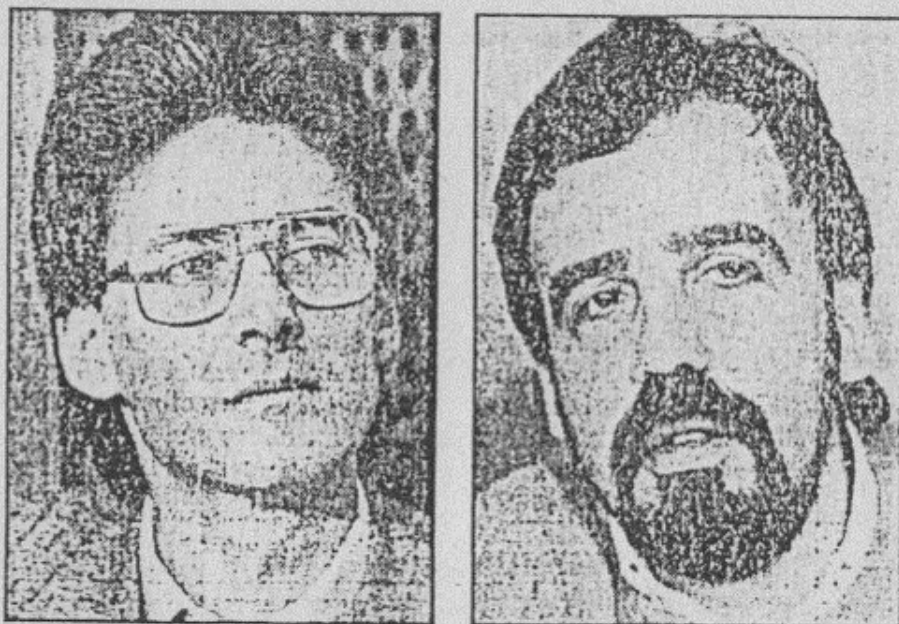
"Die Grüne Alternative" was founded and officially registered in September 1986. It ran candidates for the national elections in all provinces. Only in Carinthia, where the right wing of VGO split off (protesting against the pro-slovene policies of the new list) and in Vienna (where a radical part of the Alternative List campaigned separately) there were competing green lists that contested the national elections, but obtaining only 0.02% and 0.12% of the vote. "Die Grüne Alternative" polled 4.82% and won 8 seats (out of 183), in Vienna it outran FPÖ and became third-strongest force. The second winner of the elections of 23rd November 1986 was FPÖ, which obtained 9.73% and raised its seats from 12 (1983) to 18. Both big parties lost: SPÖ fell from 90 to 80 seats (43.12%), and ÖVP from 81 to 77 seats (41.29%). KPO, the pro-soviet Communist Party, polled 0.72% and remained outside parliament. Since 1959, when KPO lost its seats, there were always three parties in the Austrian parliament - in 1986, the Greens became a fourth, new element. They won their votes mainly at the cost of SPÖ (5 of the green MPs were SPÖ members sometimes in their life, at least for short periods).

Among the **8 green MPs** were the arms conversion expert and well-known peace activist Peter Pilz, the disabled social worker and wheelchair-driver Manfred Srb and the public prosecutor Walter Geyer (who had become well-known because of his investigation of a scandalous former Minister of Finance) from Vienna; Freda Meissner-Blau from Lower Austria; Karel Smolle as representative of the Slovene ethnic group in Carinthia; the Styrian ALO- activist Andreas Wabl; the actor and "Bürgerliste" member Herbert Fux from Salzburg; and VGO-president Josef Buchner from Upper Austria. Walter Geyer was "adopted" by the Tyrolean Greens.



The green MPs, from left to right: Karel SMOLLE (1), Herbert FUX (2), Josef BUCHNER (3), Andreas WABL (4), Freda MEISSNER-BLAU (5), Peter PILZ (6), Manfred SRB (7) and Walter GEYER (8).

The organizational structure of the party had to be developed in the months after the national elections: in all provinces local party groups were founded (the ethnic minorities have the status of a "10th province"), and from 13th to 15th February 1987 the 1st National Congress of "Die Grüne Alternative", which elected an executive committee, took place at Klagenfurt/Celovec (Carinthia). In May 1987, a party academy, called "Grüne Bildungswerkstatt", was founded. At the 2nd National Congress, from 13th to 15th May 1988 at Röthelstein Castle near Admont (Styria), a somewhat more centralized structure was decided upon. A new executive committee, consisting of 7 persons, was elected: Alexandra Bader (AL-activist and feminist from Styria), Jeanette Berger (ex-KPO member, Vienna), Eva Hauk and Werner Moidl (ex-VGO functionaries), Pius Strobl (ex-SPO youth functionary, Burgenland), Maria Unfried (ex-ALO activist, Upper Austria) and Johannes Voggenhuber ("Bürgerliste", city councillor at Salzburg from 1982 - 1987). Voggenhuber and Strobl are the two national secretaries of "Die Grüne Alternative".



Pius STROBL and Johannes VOGGENHUBER, national secretaries of "Die Grüne Alternative"

THE WORK OF THE AUSTRIAN GREENS

A deficiency of the Austrian Greens is their lack of a detailed and comprehensive programme. This is partly because of the very heterogeneous composition of "Die Grüne Alternative" which is the only progressive force in parliament (FPÖ is an oppositional party, too, but it criticizes the government for not being right-wing enough): "Die Grüne Alternative" comprises "euro-communists" (people that left KPÖ after the suppression of the "Prague Spring" in 1968) and Trotskyists (particularly in Vienna), ex-maoists and former SPÖ members as well as people coming from ALO, VGÖ and BIP, activists from local groups like "Bürgerliste" and KEL ("Koroška Enotna Lista", a Carinthian list of the Slovene ethnic group) and critical christians, activists from the Hainburg movement, peace activists and unorganized individuals. Thus, it's not easy to find common standpoints on certain questions, for instance the privatization of Austria's nationalized industry or the relation between parliamentary work and extra-parliamentary action.

In the course of 1987, a large majority of former VGÖ-activists fully identified themselves with "Die Grüne Alternative". But a small, right-wing minority tried to conserve the VGÖ-structure and demanded a third of the budget of "Die Grüne Alternative" (arguing that it's not a party but just an

"alliance"). When this condition was not accepted, the rest of VGÖ - which had almost nothing to do with the VGO as it was before 1986 - ran candidates against "Die Grüne Alternative" which it accused of being "radical leftist". VGO was not very successful because it has just a few dozen activists all over Austria, but SPÖ and ÖVP maintained the picture of a "green split". In Vienna, where the rest of VGÖ had been supported by SPÖ for that reason, "Die Grüne Alternative" polled 4.40% of the vote and failed to jump over the 5%-threshold in the municipal elections of 8th November 1987 (VGÖ polled 0.84%). But in the election of the 23 Viennese district parliaments that were held the same day, "Die Grüne Alternative" obtained 55 seats altogether, whereas VGO remained with no seats. When MP Josef Buchner declared that he would support further VGO candidates against "Die Grüne Alternative" (the party for which he had been elected to parliament), he was expelled from the green parliamentary group in December 1987.

A structural problem that came to light was the difficulty of coordination between the green parliamentary group, the party organization (with its provincial branches) and the Green Academy. In 1988, three common campaigns - dealing with the garbage problem, social security and the agricultural crisis - were developed and carried out.

Some issues the Austrian Greens worked on in their first two years:

ECOLOGY: A lot of proposals for new laws to protect the environment were put forward by the Greens in parliament. But the SPÖ-ÖVP coalition government (which was formed after the 1986 election), instead of doing something, passed a law that permitted even stronger air pollution than before (MP Walter Geyer protested against this law in a parliamentary speech that lasted 9 hours!).

NUCLEAR POWER: Despite the fact that Austria doesn't have nuclear power stations, there is a nuclear threat - only few kilometers from Austria's borders, the FRG is building a reprocessing plant in Wackersdorf (Bavaria), and Czechoslovakia is constructing the biggest nuclear power station in Central Europe at Temelin near České Budějovice. The Greens urge the Austrian government to make clear and strong protests against this nuclear madness. When the "Transnuklear"-scandal broke out in the FRG, the Austrian Greens organized a blockade of the nuclear research center in Seibers-

dorf (in the eastern part of Lower Austria), where radioactive waste from the Italian nuclear power station in Caorso had been stored illegally.

ARMS EXPORTS: Since the late 70's, Austria's nationalized industry rapidly expanded its arms production and exported weapons to all kinds of dictatorships in Latin America, North Africa and the Middle East. The green MPs Peter Pilz (who had already written a book about the Austrian arms production in 1982) and Walter Geyer were involved in uncovering the scandal of the illegal export of Austrian weapons to Iran.

MILITARIZATION: Despite international efforts towards disarmament, the Austrian army is increasing its armaments particularly under the right-wing Minister of Defence Robert Lichal (ÖVP). In 1985, Austria and the Swedish company Saab signed a sales treaty for the purchase of 24 "Draken"-interceptors. In June 1988, the first of these fighter planes were deployed at the airports of Graz and Zeltweg (Styria). "Die Grüne Alternative" actively took part in all protest actions and demonstrations and was the only party in parliament that opposed the "Draken" purchase. The next rearmament step will be the acquisition of missiles for the Austrian army.

ANTIFASCISM: During the presidential election campaign of 1986, the latent antisemitism of many Austrians broke out when the "Jewish World Congress" criticized the rôle that Kurt Waldheim, former UN General Secretary and ÖVP-backed candidate, played during his military service in the Nazi-"Wehrmacht" from 1942 - 1945 in the Balkans. Despite the fact that Waldheim ("I have just fulfilled my duty!") told lies and tried to hide his past, he was elected for president on 8th June 1986 after a narrow-minded and chauvinistic campaign by ÖVP. In March 1988, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the occupation of Austria by Nazi Germany, many antifascist events were organized and the retirement of Federal President Waldheim was demanded. In this antifascist movement of 1987/88 the Greens were very active.

NAGYMAROS: After the hydroelectric power station near Hainburg had been prevented by the Austrian ecology movement in the winter of 1984/85, the dam-builders moved eastwards: Austrian capital is financing the Hungarian-Czechoslovak project Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros that would cause an enormous threat to the Hungarian environment and drinking water reserves. "Die Grüne Alternative" protested against the Austrian "eco-imperialist" rôle, and several green MPs went to Budapest to demonstrate there. They also distributed leaflets to Hungarian tourists in Vienna in summer 1988. The Green Academy published a book on Nagymaros in both German and Hungarian, and maintains continuous contact with the Hungarian ecology movement.

SOCIAL QUESTIONS: Under Chancellor Vranitzky (SPÖ) the system of social security, that was built up under Chancellor Kreisky in the 70's, is being rapidly dismantled. Pensions have been cut, an extra sum has to be paid in case of a stay in hospital, studying conditions are aggravated, masses of workers in nationalized industry are being made redundant, poor people, immigrants, homeless persons and others are accused of being "social spongers". In 1987 a movement against this kind of policy emerged and organized a demonstration in Vienna with almost 50,000 participants (24th October 1987). "Die Grüne Alternative" is actively supporting the actions of this movement against social retrenchment. A documentation of the students' movement of autumn 1987 has been published by the Green Academy.

MINORITY RIGHTS: In Austria there are four main ethnic groups - the Slovenes in Carinthia and Styria (Southern Austria), the Croats in Burgenland (Eastern Austria), the Hungarians in Burgenland and Vienna and the Czechs in Vienna. There are also Gypsies in Burgenland and Vienna. The Slovenes (approximately 15,000 people) are under constant pressure, because in Carinthia - where FPÖ got more than 20% of the vote in the 1986 national elections - German-Nationalism is very strong and widespread. There was a recent attempt by SPÖ, ÖVP and FPÖ to create an "apartheid-like" school system in the bi-lingual regions in the South of Carinthia. Due to the fact that the Greens brought a Slovene into parliament (the first time in Austria since 1918), the demands of this ethnic group became debated more publicly than ever. There is now also more attention paid to the rights of the Croats since "Die Grüne Alternative" ran a Croat woman in the Burgenland provincial elections of 4th October 1987.

TRAFFIC: In 1988 the Minister for Economic Affairs demanded an additional 27,000 million AS for the construction of streets. The Greens launched a campaign against this demand and protested against plans to construct further highways ("Pyhrnautobahn", "Östautobahn",...). The burden caused to human beings and the environment of Tyrol (Western Austria) by the transit traffic between the FRG and Italy is unbearable. The Greens demand restrictions similar to those in Switzerland. They are also protesting against the shut-down of many local railway lines all over Austria and are fighting for a more attractive and more densely organized railway system with lower ticket prices.

GARBAGE PROBLEM: The amount of garbage and poisonous waste is becoming larger and larger. The government thinks it can solve the problem by building dumps and incinerators. The Greens demand a comprehensive concept of avoiding waste, recycling waste and of substituting environment-compatible materials for toxic materials.

EC - MEMBERSHIP: The SPÖ-ÖVP government, FPÖ, the industrialists and most of the mass media demand full membership of Austria in the European Communities and expect prosperity from the participation in the "internal market". The Greens oppose EC- membership because

- it would threaten Austria's status of neutrality (by involving Austria in a common west-European foreign and security policy and thus making it a part of a new "Euro-militarism"),
- it would cause higher unemployment in big industry as well as in small business,
- it would cause the death of tens of thousands of small farms,
- it would lower the standard of employees' rights in Austria, and
- because it would introduce EC ecology standards that are in most cases lower than those in Austria (quality of food, maximum limits for air pollution, transit of nuclear waste, etc.).

For "Die Grüne Alternative" Europe is not only Western Europe. Therefore, close contacts are held to ecology movements and independent peace groups in Central and Eastern Europe.

THE GREENS IN PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS

(UPDATED: AUTUMN 1988)

Province	Date of election	Party and % of the vote
Lower Austria	16th October 1983	VGÖ: 0.99%; ALNÖ: 0.59%
Salzburg	25th March 1984	GABL: 4.26%
Tyrol	17th June 1984	LAT: 2.92%
Carinthia	30th Sept. 1984	KEL/AL: 1.49%; VGÖ 1.13%
Vorarlberg	21st October 1984	AL/VG: 13.00% and 4 seats
Upper Austria	6th October 1985	VGÖ: 2.19%; GAL: 1.68%
Styria	21st Sept. 1986	VGÖ/AL: 3.73% and 2 seats
Burgenland	4th October 1987	GRÜNE: 2.20%
Vienna	8th November 1987	GRÜNE: 4.40%; VGÖ 0.84%
Lower Austria	16th October 1988	GRÜNE: VGÖ:

AL = Alternative Liste; GABL = Grünalternative Bürgerliste (common green-alternative list in Salzburg); GAL = Grünalternative Liste (affiliated to ALÖ); GRÜNE = Die Grüne

Alternative; LAT = Liste für ein anderes Tirol (common green-alternative list in Tyrol); VGÖ = Vereinte Grüne Österreichs.

"Pseudo-green" parties (like the extremely right-wing group "Die Grünen Österreichs") that contested several provincial elections in Austria, are not mentioned in the above list.

In the 1986 national elections, "Die Grüne Alternative" had following results: Austria 4.82% and 234,028 votes; Vorarlberg 8.83%; Vienna 6.09%; Salzburg 5.91%; Tyrol 5.76%; Upper Austria 4.87%; Styria 4.08%; Carinthia 3.78%; Lower Austria 3.59%; Burgenland 2.48%.

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN THE PROVINCE CAPITALS

City	Date of election	Party	%	Seats
Innsbruck	25th Sept. 1983	ALI	2.87%	1 of 40
Klagenfurt	17th March 1985	VGÖ	2.37%	1 of 45
		GAL	1.57%	0 of 45
		BREGENZ GRÜNT	3.04%	1 of 36
Bregenz	21st April 1985	VGÖ	5.51%	3 of 61
Linz	6th October 1985	GAL	2.68%	1 of 61
		no green candidate	—	—
Sankt Pölten	23rd Nov. 1986	BÜRGERLISTE	10.14%	4 of 40
Salzburg	4th October 1987	VGÖ	0.32%	0 of 40
		GRÜNES FORUM	5.00%	1 of 29
Eisenstadt	25th October 1987	GRÜNE	4.40%	0 of 100
Vienna	8th Nov. 1987	VGÖ	0.84%	0 of 100
		ALG	4.93%	2 of 56
Graz	24th January 1988	VGÖ	1.05%	0 of 56

Most of these local lists (except VGÖ) are affiliated to "Die Grüne Alternative".

THIS PAMPHLET WAS PUBLISHED BY THE "GREEN ACADEMY"

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Styria	Prokopigasse 2/1, A-8010 Graz	0316/70 21 53
Tyrol	Adamgasse 11, A-6020 Innsbruck	05222/20 881
Carinthia	Rosenthalerstr.1, A-9020 Klagenfurt	04222/51 53 26
Salzburg	Linzergerasse 23/3/6, A-5020 Salzburg	0662/76 337
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Ethnic Groups	Teinfaltstrasse 4, A-1010 Vienna	0222/53 31 504
Parliament	Dr.Karl-Rennerring 3, A-1017 Vienna	0222/48 04 690

AUSTRIA:

Area: 83,855 sq km (32,376 square miles)

Inhabitants: 7.55 million



PROVINCE	INHABITANTS	CAPITAL	INHABITANTS (1981)
Vienna	1.50 mio.	(Vienna)	
Lower Austria	1.42 mio.	Sankt Pölten	50,000
Upper Austria	1.28 mio.	Linz	200,000
Styria	1.18 mio.	Graz	243,000
Tyrol	0.60 mio.	Innsbruck	117,000
Carinthia	0.54 mio.	Klagenfurt	87,000
Salzburg	0.45 mio.	Salzburg (city)	139,000
Vorarlberg	0.31 mio.	Bregenz	25,000
Burgenland	0.27 mio.	Eisenstadt	10,000