

Austria 2016

Declaration of the Social Partners Bad Ischl, September 2006

60 years of social partnership in Austria have made a decisive contribution to the success of our country. 60 years of co-operative action have made Austria one of the most prosperous and stable countries in the world today.

EU expansion and globalisation, new technologies and new methods of communication present new challenges to our society. On the one hand there are new opportunities; at the same time, the need to adapt creates new uncertainties. The most important task of the social partners in the next ten years will be to support those people affected by the inevitable changes, to minimise the risks they face as much as possible, and to take advantage of the great opportunities presented.

Austria cannot compete on the basis of price. Our strengths are rather to be found in our talent, creativity and innovation. These are enhanced by our peaceful social order and security, well-developed infrastructure, excellent educational system, high productivity and stability. Austria's success in future will thus depend upon our promoting and making optimal use of these strengths. Exploiting this potential in the best possible way to create opportunities for all players, and inspiring confidence, courage and optimism in a world of uncertainty, will be the task of the social partners in the coming decade.

The social partners stand for involvement in all aspects of economic and social policy through fair co-operation and partnership with all responsible decision-makers. They see themselves as co-architects of the future and, as such, will strengthen their expertise, practical orientation and ability to act in such important areas as education and continuing education, economic policy, the labour market, and social security.

The social partners are fully aware of their special responsibility towards those people affected by the process and speed of change. Therefore, in addition to the promotion of economic growth and sustainable competitiveness of the Austrian economy, high priority is assigned to solidarity and ensuring social cohesion.

Beyond these aims, the social partnership should work to facilitate a linking of the various decision-making structures, whether within enterprises or on a regional, European or international level, to ensure sustainable development.

Objective

The central objective of the Austrian social partnership is to secure and enhance the prosperity of all levels of the population by strengthening Austria's competitive position as a location for business. A sustainable growth policy should ensure full employment by the year 2016.

Measures

- Austria has a good system of education and further education. This should be further developed in the direction of more transparent, standardised structures in which acquired skills and knowledge can be fully recognised. Particularly the streams of secondary education and vocational training should be better linked and connected with systematic life-long learning. No matter the starting point, all streams should be made open and combinable, thereby counteracting socio-economic discrimination. Every part of the educational system has quality standards to fulfil. The talented should be developed, the less talented fully supported. More equitable opportunities should be achieved through increased support and openness toward later decisions on education streams and the availability of all-day schools.
- Steady economic growth through growth-oriented economic policies and more active labour market policy should provide additional opportunities for employment. Ensuring the supply of required skills, also through continual in-company and outside training, is the primary goal.
- In view of the transformation in the organisation of work and the resulting changes in working contracts and conditions, labour law and workers'

participation should be revised. The aim should be to codify labour law so as to eliminate the current fragmentation in this area.

- Demographic changes represent a special challenge for the social partners. The future of our society lies in the younger generation, whose complete integration in high-quality employment is essential if it is to earn fair wages and fully participate in society. Equal opportunities for women should be encouraged through more involvement in gainful employment and improved earnings prospects as well as the related development of role models. Keeping older employees in work, ensuring a pension system fair to all generations and providing care for the aged are further fields of activity.
- In the area of technology and science, Austria must focus on strategic priorities and concentrate on applied research. The social partners will participate in the design and implementation of technology and infrastructure. In addition, there is an urgent need for measures to increase the number of students choosing the technical and natural sciences.
- The core of social partnership has always been a functioning wage policy on the basis of collective agreements which are binding for entire industries. The collective bargaining autonomy of the social partners should in future also extend to include innovations even at the workplace level, for example, in the areas of wages and salaries, education and working time.
- On the issue of retail opening hours, the social partners declare their support for keeping Sunday as a day of rest for employees. Reasonable exceptions should be allowed on a regional level in co-ordination with the local social partners.
- Quality of life depends upon adequate local availability of private and public goods and services, especially for everyday needs. It is therefore important to implement regional development plans and strengthen the local supply of such goods and services and the mostly small and medium-sized enterprises generally responsible for providing them. Business and agriculture are working more closely together to this end.

- Any strategy for sustaining the natural basis for our quality of life requires a healthy system of agriculture. Its best chances lie with producing high-quality foodstuffs which can be marketed not just domestically, but also internationally. Agriculture and forestry will also play an important role in the future by providing renewable raw materials and bio-fuels. The Austrian countryside is moreover an attractive location for tourism and recreation and thus offers favourable opportunities for the collaboration of business and agriculture.
- In the coming decade, tens of thousands of enterprises will pass on to the next generation. Hundreds of thousands of employees will be affected. The social partners will be called upon to support their constituents through the processes of generational change.
- A common goal of the social partners is to ensure that Austria is able to maintain its world-leading standards of public health and social security. These should continue to be provided through the self-administrating social security institutions with funding on the basis of solidarity.
- The social partners will strengthen their co-operation at European level. If Europe seeks to be a concern that its citizens will take to their hearts, it needs to be not just a Europe of markets, but also a Europe of people.
- A significant part of our wealth is earned outside the borders of Austria. This means that securing and expanding our international competitiveness, as well as supporting our businesses on non-Austrian markets, is a crucial activity for the social partners.
- Globalisation should enable not just global competition, but also global solidarity. A global social partnership which jointly develops a global ethos along the lines of shared social responsibility, supports Fair Trade, backs a global Marshall Plan and involves the social partner organisation the ILO (International Labour Organisation), should be aimed at, and its development should be given a particular push from Austria'

Instruments

The social partners are prepared to do their part to implement a strategy of full employment through economic growth. One of the foundations of this strategy will be the White Paper issued by WIFO in autumn 2006, which the social partners will use as a compass for their work.

Thereafter, the WIFO or the Advisory Council for Economic and Social Affairs will be commissioned to carry out periodic evaluations of the White Paper's implementation.

In those areas where the social partners act through the self-administrating institutions, the partners agree to seek consensus in all decisions. In cases where employees and employers are not able to reach agreement, the leaders of the representative social partners will act as mediators.

The presidents of the social partners will meet at least twice a year and take strategic decisions. At least four times a year the secretaries general will come together to take operating decisions. The social partner offices agree to co-operate closely on both national and international, and especially European, levels.

The Advisory Council for Economic and Social Affairs will study special issues and work with experts to devise solutions for implementation.

To re-instate a regular platform for discussion between the social partners and the federal government in the spirit of the former role of the Parity Commission, a dialogue on economic, educational and social policy between the social partners and the government should take place at least twice a year.

Bad Ischl, 6th September 2006