



# Civil Peace Service Austria

## Preliminary result of the Campaign #ZivilerFriedensdienstÖsterreich

by Thomas Roithner & Pete Hämmerle

Similar to Germany, the debate regarding Civil Peace Service in Austria (Ziviler Friedensdienst, ZFD) has been going on for 30 years. In 1999 Germany succeeded in the introduction of this Foreign Policy Instrument, whereas its implementation in Austria has yet to happen.

Austria has had varied experiences with Civil Peace Services. From 1993 to 2004, around 120 volunteering women and men were able to do their Civil Peace Service in the former Yugoslavia through the Austrian Peace services (ÖFD). The networks still exist today. Peace service can also be conducted within the framework of Austrian Service Abroad (Auslandsdienst). Many Austrian experts were involved in the German Civil Peace Service. Now the time has come for Austria to implement a Civil Peace Service following the German example, in which professional and appropriately trained peace and conflict consultants are employed.

### Conceptual Ideas

The Civil Peace Service – referring directly to a concept introduced by Thomas Roithner and Pete Hämmerle on June 3rd, 2020 – is an independent instrument of Austrian foreign policy, conceived as a joint effort of the state and civil society. Via the ZFD, local partner organizations in conflict areas are supported at eye level through the deployment of peace experts, who assist them with questions regarding violence prevention, civil conflict transformation, and peace-building.

The goal is to strengthen civil (societal) capacities for dialogue,

reconciliation, and cooperation, as well as advocate for peace processes. The ZFD is applicable in different conflicts, contexts, and fields of activity. The ZFD acts exclusively on a non-violent basis and applies different methods of civil conflict management and human rights protection with special consideration for gender aspects (in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and following resolutions on Women, Peace and Security). The goal of this instrument of active peace policy is not only to overcome or reduce direct violence, but also to promote processes of social justice, gender justice and equity, the right to socio-political participation and cultural development, and the strengthening of political, social and cultural human rights worldwide.

Possibilities of deployment range from the prevention of violence to the unarmed protection of endangered activists and organizations; from measures of mediation to the elimination of the consequences of war and reconciliation work. Another aim is to strengthen the organizational basis of partners. The concept of ZFD in Austria shall be based on the German model.

The ZFD differs from existing voluntary services (commemoration, social, and peace services) and humanitarian or classic expert deployments (development workers) in the sense that trained and experienced Peace Consultants in conflict areas work directly on the causes, processes and consequences of violent conflicts using non-violent, civil methods (working on conflict) in close cooperation with local partner organizations (local

ownership). ZFD is not a "learning experience" for volunteers, but a professional deployment of Conflict Consultants with appropriate training, qualifications and remuneration. ZFD is an instrument independent of military and civil service.

Deployments are based on local needs in crises and conflicts, as well as on the expertise of the sending organizations, and are in coordination with the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs (BMEIA). With the work of Civil Peace Consultants and the jointly designed program, the instrument comes into practice.

The ZFD is not a substitute for the foreign, security and peace policy instruments of the state or international organizations, but rather a valuable, civil, society-based supplement. A number of related strategy documents of the Republic of Austria underline the indispensable role of civil society in conflict management.

Anchored by the governmental program, Austria is politically committed to being an "international pioneer in the protection of human rights and in peace policy, and as a place of dialogue" and "active neutrality policy" as an "independent Austrian contribution to peace and security in Europe (...) and in the world." The ZFD would also strengthen "the implementation of the UN Agenda 2030 (...) by systematically involving stakeholders, especially civil society, academia and the private sector." Furthermore, the future commitment to "civilian crisis prevention and conflict resolution projects," which are anchored in the context of the EU, will be added.



### The campaign

In the 2017 edition of the journal "International", the authors complained about a shortage of skilled experts, referring to Civil Peace Consultants. The concept was addressed to the government and President Alexander Van der Bellen was named as patron for the development phase. The (early) parliamentary elections in 2019 offered an opportunity to bring this foreign policy instrument back into discussion.

### Civil Society Legislative Proposal

In the summer of 2019, civil society proposed a "federal law for the development and implementation of the Civil Peace Service". The legislative proposal was accompanied by a detailed explanatory statement (Roithner, Hämmerle 2019:27). Parliament – according to the proposal – may decide:

§1: Civil Peace Service (ZFD) is an instrument which contributes towards civil crisis prevention and peace-building by sending trained Civil Consultants.

§2: The implementation of ZFD is in the responsibility of non-govern-

mental organizations from the fields of peace policy and development policy, which have joined together for this purpose to form an independent consortium ZFD.

§3: The Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs is in charge of governmental responsibility and financial support.

§4: The Federal Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs is entrusted with the implementation of this federal law."

### "I am a peace servant"

In the intensive campaign under the slogan "I am a peace servant," parliamentarians and candidates for the parliament of Social Democratic Party (SPÖ), NEOS (liberal party), Green Party (Grüne), Communist Party (KPÖ), Der Wandel and non-party members of parliament publicly spoke out in favor of developing and implementing a ZFD in Austria and supported the above drafted law.

The Green Party also included the proposal in their election program. Important voices from science, culture, religion and peace activism supported the campaign during the election and the actor and cabaret

artist Josef Hader declared himself a "peace servant".

### Big Sister

In Germany, the Civil Peace Service has existed since 1999 (Evers 2000). In the past 20 years, about 1500 peace consultants have been deployed to more than 60 countries. As of 31st of December 2019, 350 peace service personnel were active in 45 countries (Civil Peace Service 2020). The ZFD Germany is supported by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) with an annual budget of 55 million Euros.

In Germany, nine organizations form a so-called "consortium ZFD". The task of the consortium", per self-definition, "lies in the advancement of the content of ZFD, in the exchange of experiences, in the improvement of the administrative framework, and in the presentation of common concerns to the BMZ and the public."

The Consortium is formed by Aktionsgemeinschaft Dienst für den Frieden (AGDF), AGIAMONDO, Brot für die Welt, EIRENE Internationaler Christlicher Friedensdienst, Forum Ziviler Friedensdienst, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationaler Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), KURVE Wustrow – Bildungs- und Begegnungsstätte für gewaltfreie Aktion, peace brigades international (pbi) and Weltfriedensdienst (Ziviler Friedensdienst 2020).

FOR Austria, it is envisaged that sending-organizations will develop a joint ZFD program within the framework of the Coordinating Committee (KoKo ZFD).

The political support for the Austrian campaign by ZFD Germany – the consortium, the sending-organizations, and the many committed individuals with theoretical and practical background – has contributed significantly to the success of





#ZivilerFriedensdienstÖsterreich so far. International partners are an enormous tailwind for further work in the introduction and realization of the Civil Peace Service in Austria.

**Government program 2020**

The Civil Peace Service was debated during the government negotiations between the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the Green Party, and the following passage was included in the Foreign Policy chapter (Federal Chancellery 2020: 181) of the government program:

"Examination of the establishment of a mediation facility in the BMEIA and the establishment of an Austrian Civil Peace Service within the framework of activities of the BMEIA, respectively, in relation to existing structures and appropriate resources."

**Resolution for a Civil Peace Service**

The Members of Parliament Ewa Ernst-Dziedzic (Green Party) and Reinhold Lopatka (ÖVP) jointly submitted a motion for resolution with Gudrun Kugler (ÖVP), Faika El-Nagashi and Michel Reimon (Green Party) on the 27th of May, 2020 (Republic of Austria 2020). Parliament stated: "The Federal Government, especially the Federal Minister for European and International Affairs, are requested to start planning the establishment of an Austrian Civil Peace Service as soon as possible with the full involvement of civil society." It was proposed that it be assigned to the Foreign Policy Committee.

In the justification of the motion for a resolution (27.5.2020), Austria's role in the protection of human rights as well as its position as a place for dialogue, as intended in the government program, was emphasized. Similarly, explicit reference was made to Austria's com-

mitment "to projects for civil crisis prevention and conflict resolution", and that "the German model can serve Austria as an example". The ZFD should serve "as an independent instrument of an active Austrian foreign policy for civil prevention of violence and crisis as well as active peace-building in conflict and crisis regions. Civil society cooperation between Austrian peace and development organizations together with local partner organizations and the promotion of this cooperation by the federal government is essential. The aim is to enable sending organizations and their Peace Consultants to provide long-term support to the local population, local experts and partner organizations in building and strengthening constitutional and democratic structures of dialogue, reconciliation and cooperation, thus promoting inclusive and sustainable peace processes and the protection of human rights."

In the vote, the motion for a resolution by Ewa Ernst-Dziedzic, Reinhold Lopatka and colleagues was carried by a majority of votes (People's Party, Social Democrats, Green Party, NEOS).

Around forty representatives of civil society and think tanks took part in the networking and exchange meeting in the Vienna Hofburg on July 6th, 2020, at the invitation of the Green fraction in Parliament represented by Ewa Ernst-Dziedzic. Security considerations were the decisive factor in postponing the meeting from spring to summer to abide by social distancing procedures. The results of the consultation are the basis for further cooperation of civil society actors. The meeting was based on contacts and preparations by the International Fellowship of Reconciliation – Austrian Branch, some of which had been cultivated over many years (Hämmerle, Roithner 2010:

15). Since the preparation of a first draft for discussion, the cooperation has been greatly intensified in terms of implementation and concrete possibilities, and regular contacts with various political stakeholders have been strengthened.

**Parliamentary Debate Civil Peace Service**

In the parliamentary debate on July 8th, 2020, Ewa Ernst-Dziedzic (2020), member of parliament, also justified the importance of the instrument of Civil Peace Service with Austria's "neutral mediating role" and its support of peace processes. Civil Peace Service "is thus an adequate response to current challenges". The Civil Peace Service in Germany, which has been working successfully for over 20 years, can point to a track record of over 1500 deployed peace consultants. "We are at the beginning in Austria, but I am very glad that this starting signal has now been given", said Ernst-Dziedzic. What is important to her is the significance of civil society, which had met two days before her speech in parliament.

In the same debate, Reinhold Lopatka, Member of parliament of the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), emphasized that the government's program is entering "new territory ... because for the first time the establishment of an Austrian Civil Peace Service is planned as part of the activities of the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs". Lopatka, together with MP Ernst-Dziedzic, would like to "set the ball rolling with this resolution". According to Lopatka, Peace Service in Germany has "proved its worth" and he sums up: "Austria as a neutral country, as a country that has rightly always seen itself as a bridge-builder, could make a significant contribution to more peace on this planet with this service".



In the course of the campaign the Social Democratic (SPÖ) MP Petra Bayr also voiced her thoughts on the Civil Peace Service via the Austria Press Agency. Bayr, spokeswoman for global development, clarifies: "The fact that Austria actively participates in peace policy has been a long tradition since Bruno Kreisky. A legally anchored Civil Peace Service would be an important development in our foreign policy." Petra Bayr also bases her demand on the German model: "In several European countries there is a possibility of sending Peace Consultants on civil peace missions in conflict regions. In this regard, there is a gap in Austria. I therefore appeal to the future government to become active and set up the instrument of a Civil Peace Service. Austria has a responsibility in the world. By sending Civil Peace Consultants we can fulfill this responsibility to some extent" (APA OTS, 2.9.2019).

### Exciting interim results

In the first half of 2020, numerous positive intermediate steps were taken towards the introduction of a Civil Peace Service in Austria. The hashtag #ZivilerFriedensdienstÖsterreich (Civil Peace Service Austria) on social media platforms provides further information about the current developments. Additionally, achievements of the civil society campaign can be viewed at [www.versoennungsbund.at/zfd](http://www.versoennungsbund.at/zfd) as well as [www.thomasroithner.at/cms/index.php/zfd](http://www.thomasroithner.at/cms/index.php/zfd). A pioneer project for Austria is gaining momentum.

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