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Policy Oriented Executive Summary – The Austrian Contribution

A proactive, forward-looking and long-ranging migration policy can be an important element of a comprehensive population and economic policy. But it has to make clear the purposes that it is designed for. There is a difference in the migration policies for potential countries of origin and destination. The following recommendations are formulated against the Austrian background:¹

1. In Austria (and in almost all European countries) a reproduction of the population “under its own steam” is not possible anymore. Therefore there are going to be more deaths than births in the long run. The native population is shrinking. In the future, the speed of this shrinkage is going to grow as the number of children born per year will decrease without immigration and the number of deaths will increase. This is the foreseeable consequence of the present age structure in Austria. Because of this, Austria needs a family policy, a much better compatibility between career and family, but also immigration. A pronounced growth in the number of births cannot be expected due to the given age structure of the population, even if the family policy is highly effective. The only alternative to an ageing society that stabilizes its labour force and population size by means of immigration is an ageing society without immigration and a clearly shrinking population.
2. Austria is not only in need of immigration but also of a proactive migration policy to enable the country to attract qualified and motivated immigrants. In the future there will be intensified competition for them, and Austria can only take part successfully in this

¹ The suggestions for a proactive immigration policy from the point of view of receiving countries are based on an expert opinion provided by H. Fassmann and R. Münz for the German Council of Experts for Immigration and Integration. Fassmann, H. & R. Münz, 2004. Gesellschaftliche Akzeptanz von Zuwanderung. Ausgangslage – pro-aktive Migrationspolitik – Maßnahmen zur Erhöhung der Akzeptanz. Vienna, unpublished manuscript.

competition if the prerequisites are in place. Policies have to define procedures that are based on transparent criteria about who is allowed to come and stay. Such an approach points out the requirements the potential immigrants have to meet but also is an inward indication of who is allowed to immigrate and who not. A rational migration policy that is not fixated on everyday political controversies and that is endowed with explicitly formulated goals is useful and should replace the tendency of “muddling through” of the previous migration policy. If it is generally understood that such a proactive migration policy (contrary to the current situation) makes selections in a qualification- and demand-oriented way, the often expressed fear that it is most of all those who immigrate who want to profit from the social overhead in a welfare state (and thus are a drain on the taxpayers’ pockets) will become smaller. Qualified, talented and motivated immigrants are not interested in obtaining transfer benefits from the state but in attractive earned incomes.

3. Austria needs a migration policy that is oriented to the model of classic immigration countries. There, immigration is generally accepted as a permanent process and is not of a temporary nature, but aims instead at longevity. Immigrants come, stay and turn into an integral part of the receiving society. All classic immigration countries attempt to only let those individuals who fit the best according to the demand of the labour market or other criteria (readiness to invest, qualification, family connections) into the country. This intensifies the societal acceptance of legal immigration.
4. Following this example, migration policy could and should define upper limits for immigration for certain periods of time. These upper limits should comply with economic necessities and social appraisal. They always are politically defined and therefore normative. Science can therein only help in an analytical way. A steered migration policy that takes into account qualifications and social acceptance of different immigrant groups and is based on the needs of the labour market brings about positive total effects. The classic immigration countries have shown some possibilities with their migration regimes clearly aiming at the “versatility” and “integrability” of immigrants.
5. Every migration policy remains fragmentary without integration policy concepts. The guest worker research from the 1970s and 1980s clearly indicates the deficits and unintended side-effects of the rotation policy. The assumption behind the rotation of foreign workers who only perform their jobs and for the rest of the time remain at the edge of society as the “marginal man” turned out to be naïve. For much too long, as we can see today, they were living between two societies, between their regions of origin and destination. The concept of a migration project limited in time and a return after a few years hampered an unambiguous life perspective. Therefore migration policy should offer a clear life perspective for immigrants and also include concrete integration measures so that migrants do not remain at the fringes of society, a mere underprivileged mass on the labour market forming the new underclass of tomorrow.
6. Integration policy should neither aim at perfect assimilation nor cultivate diversity for its own sake. Cultural “planation” diminishes the ethnic and social capital of the migrants, a diversity policy avoids the crucial question about the limits of ethnic autonomy. Integration policy should aim at a structural harmonization which should not have to be

done actively by the immigrants only, but which should be offered by the receiving society and thus be a task of an extensive integration policy. Courses of education should be open for everybody and also be attended by everybody. Language and qualification courses for newcomers as well as disadvantaged migrant groups already present in the country should be provided. Housing markets have to be open and the supply of housing for immigrants must not be restricted to a few segments. In the same way, actual and normative determinations on the labour market have to be avoided.

7. Forced migration, flight and expulsion have to be dealt with and evaluated differently in ethic and political terms. A migration policy that defines upper limits, selects potential immigrants according to comprehensible criteria and controls overall migration cannot include the immigration of asylum seekers. The right to asylum represents a human right which is beyond the scope of migration policy. To register and identify those who are in need of protection arises as a result. Consequently, those who are not really in need of protection have to be referred to other possibilities of immigration, otherwise the migration regime undermines itself.
8. It is impossible to formulate and implement a successful migration policy against the will of the native population; it needs a certain acceptance. What is necessary is a broad societal consensus about the chances and problems of immigration and the prerequisites for an effective integration policy. This necessitates clarification, a sensitisation of the public to the economic and social benefits of immigration, a rational discourse about possible problems and a political will to articulate socio-political goals. It has to be communicated that:
 - from a liberal perspective, geographical mobility is a value in itself which corresponds to an increase in personal freedom;
 - the growing mobility of labour is a more or less unavoidable consequence of a globalised and in many ways networked world;
 - with a migration and integration policy conceptualized in a methodological, scrupulous way, the benefits of migration will prevail.

