



Democracy Workshop

of the Austrian Parliament

No. 2161

Tuesday, 30 April 2024



Diplomacy and Politics

The importance of international relations for
democracy

Democracy!?

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Our topic was Austria, the USA and Democracy. Read more here!

We, a bilingual class from the school AHS Theodor-Kramer Straße, had the privilege of taking part in a Democracy Workshop in the national Parliament of Austria. We discussed the fundamental principles of democracy and then separated into smaller groups to brainstorm current political topics to talk about with special guests Victoria Reggie Kennedy, the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Austria, and Wolfgang Sobotka, the President of the National Council of Austria. In the workshop, we learned that democracy as a political system was first devised by the ancient Greeks in



Athens. Democracy derives from the Greek word `demos´ and `kratein´, meaning the rule of the people. This underlines the fundamental principle of the system being that the power comes from the will of the people rather than an unelected ruling body. The modern institution arrived in the United States in the 18th century. In our modern understanding of liberal democracy, we believe that equality of opportunities must be manifested through an equal voice in the political system. This means that each vote is of equal value, not depending on the background or social status of any one individual. This is for example manifested through representation of the masses by political figures, rather than a direct vote on legislation, as was done by the Athenians. For us, democracy means freedom,

a feeling of safety and something that you can rely on. Together we are and continue to be part of something bigger. However, we should not take the fact that we have a democratic

system for granted. We as the people have the responsibility of keeping up the system that gives power to the whole community.



Insight into our interview:

In our interview with President of the National Council Wolfgang Sobotka and U.S. Ambassador Victoria Reggie Kennedy, we discussed important topics pertaining to the theme of democracy. In particular, one of the most important inquiries was in regard to political education in schools and its necessity. President Sobotka answered that politics and political education should be part of almost every subject, however, he also said that there could never be enough education provided to students. Ambassador Kennedy agreed, adding to also be weary of the consumption and the spreading of disinformation.

AI, social media and its effects also were essential talking points that were touched upon. When asked about their opinion on whether AI and social media pose a threat to democracy, President Sobotka replied that there exists

a fine line between freedom of speech and regulation.

Newspapers have been regulated and have clear structures of responsibilities, unlike random users of social media. He says that more regulation might be needed in the future, especially to combat disinformation. Ambassador Kennedy elaborated, stating she also thinks more should be done to prevent disinformation in the form of deepfakes and AI.



Parliament & Diplomacy - Students Ask Politicians

Kian (17), Tim (17), Naqi (17), Yanik (17) and Uchizi (18)

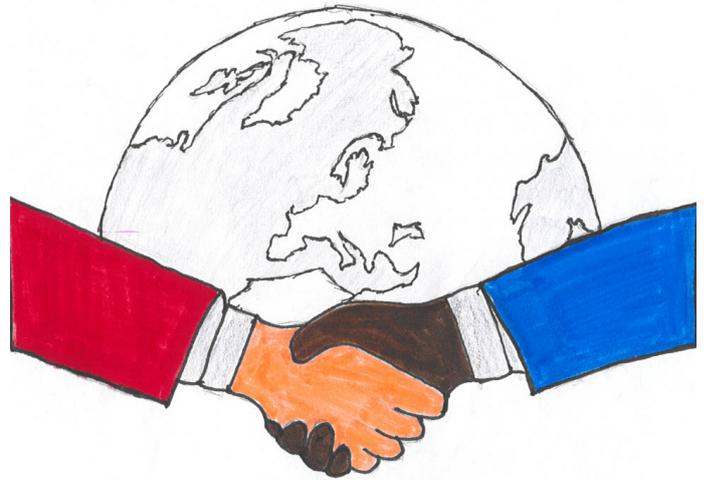
Diplomacy and Parliament - What might not seem related at first, is more interlinked than expected. In the following article, we will shine a light on the relationship between these two.

The Austrian Parliament consists of two chambers, the National and the Federal Council. Both work together to create the best Austria possible by making national laws and regulations. How do they make sure that everyone is heard? The National Council is elected by citizens and therefore represents their interests. The 183 members are voted for by the citizens during an election, which is held every five years. This year are the next elections. The Federal Council has 60 members, who represent the federal states of Austria. Every state sends a specific number of representatives to this council, depending on their population size.

The Austrian Parliament has two main tasks, which are the creation of laws and the control of the National Government.

Diplomacy

Diplomacy has the goal to foster good relations between different parties, like countries. It is the most important means of foreign policy action. Diplomats ensure a close and peaceful cooperation between different countries and governments.



Parliament not only works nationwide, but also is in constant exchange with international bodies, like other parliaments or embassies to foster diplomatic relations with them.

Students asked questions to the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Austria Victoria Reggie Kennedy, and President of the National Council Wolfgang Sobotka.

Democracy and laws dictate our everyday life. In our opinion, without politicians, lawyers and government officials, we could not sustain a thriving society. Officials such as President Wolfgang Sobotka and U.S. Ambassador Victoria Reggie Kennedy are two such people who contribute to maintaining such a society and such a system. We are very grateful that



they took some time out of their busy day to answer our questions regarding diplomacy, parliaments and Austrian politics in general. Communication. Common interests. Shared values. To Ambassador Kennedy, these are all key aspects that are necessary for her work, for which it is important to balance the interests of the American government, while respecting the Austrian government.

Representation and accountability to the Austrian people is important, whilst also considering the needs of our global society, elaborated President Sobotka.

Furthermore, we desperately need face-to-face communication, which both representatives advocate for. President Sobotka is a big supporter of this and even goes on to say that finding common ground and common interests is vital to achieve this.

Lastly, both Ambassador Kennedy and President Sobotka elaborated on different factors that are needed for a functioning collaboration between parliament and the respective embassies. These include considering opposing opinions, especially giving

light to recent conflicts around the world, such as the war in Ukraine, as well as being cautious about disinformation and the content one consumes on social media. As a famous politician once said, "You are the sum of the five people you consume on social media." The participants of the Democracy Workshop thank Ambassador Kennedy and President Sobotka for their time and their answers.

Our President of the National Council, Wolfgang Sobotka, and the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Austria, Victoria Reggie Kennedy, work closely to guarantee a strong diplomatic relationship between the United States of America and the Republic of Austria. This is especially important, since this relationship has lasted for a long time. Such relationships are key for a peaceful and sustainable future between the European Union and the United States. This relationship will in our opinion ensure good cooperation in future challenges. Therefore, this plays an important role in solving conflicts, such as the war in Ukraine, or in the Middle East. An important aspect of parliament is that they listen to the needs of the Austrian citizens, while still including international interests.



Politics and us

Delara (17), Nabihah (16), Ariadne (17), Shirin (16), Anandini (18) and Reem (16)

Politics has an impact on almost every aspect of our lives, even if we do not realize it.

However, in our opinion, sometimes it is hard to consciously differentiate between what is political, and topics or influences that should not be part of political decision-making, such as religious institutions and systematic oppression. Sadly, this is part of everyday reality.

On the surface, it may seem as though politics has a concrete definition, however, politics means something different to every individual. Many misunderstandings and conflicts have arisen due to politics and political opinions, and it will forever remain a sensitive topic since there will never be a definition everyone agrees on.

However, we can somewhat agree on what we believe does not belong to politics. Many, for example, believe that religion should not play a role in political decisions. Another example is corruption and dictatorship. Most of us are truly convinced that these factors only add harm to our political environment. Cancel culture plays a big role in our perception of political parties and their representatives. Over many years, especially through the pandemic, people have lost respect and trust towards other people and their opinions. Additionally, corruption and

lies that are spread make it even more difficult to create trust and sympathy. Another factor that influences the way we perceive politics is representation, which is lacking for different communities in our country. Many choose not to vote because of this and feel like their voice would not make a difference, or they do not identify with any of the parties standing for election.

We think the most crucial aspect of politics is to participate and stay informed. We have to pay attention to the things that we can actively do: most importantly showing respect towards other opinions, actively listening to each other and raising awareness. This is the only way to combat cancel culture and foster a safe space for all different perspectives.





Throughout our talk with Austria's President of the National Council Wolfgang Sobotka, and the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Austria Victoria Reggie Kennedy, we discussed many topics, including democracy, international politics and the duties of parliaments all around the world. We got to ask many questions regarding our topic "Politics".

Our first question was asking what strategies the Austrian Parliament has to equally represent diversity and diverse needs of the people of our country. President Sobotka explained that our many political parties have the duty of representing their own morals and opinions. Ideally, every person and opinion should be represented by one of the 5 parties represented in parliament. That is how the Austrian political system manages to represent as many people as possible.

Prior to our talk with the aforementioned politicians, we were discussing issues we think are relevant in today's politics, one of which was

the changes in Austria's political climate. Our main focus being the growing tendency of many young people falling into one of two political extremes. As a result, we asked the questions, "What are factors that play into the separation of opinions within the youth? What can we do against said separations?" Both politicians were concerned about the recent changes and agreed on the fact that in many cases, polarizing contents on social media and the lack of political education in schools are to blame. Many people have reduced their communication to solely interacting through social media, their phones and text messages, instead of discussing important matters face to face. In many areas, both politicians were in agreement with each other and so were we. However, it is important to mention that they tried to maintain and represent a neutral political stance.





Imprint

Publisher, media owner, producer: Parliamentary Administration

Basic direction: Raising awareness about democracy. Workshop Politicians

The opinions expressed in this newspaper are the personal opinions of the participants of the workshop.

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