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MASTER THESIS

POLITICS OF CIVIC EDUCATION IN AUSTRIA:

An ongoing debate

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Abbreviations

ÖIF	Österreichischer Integrationsfonds <i>Austrian Integration Fund</i>
BMBWF	Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung <i>Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Research</i>
BMEIA	Bundesministerium für Europa, Integration und Äußeres <i>Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs</i>
BMI	Bundesministerium für Inneres <i>Federal Ministry of the Interior</i>
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

All translations from German to English have been conducted by the thesis' author.

Abstract

The present master thesis deals with the Austrian integration politics after the summer of 2015, when approximately 80,000 refugees crossed the country's borders in order to apply for asylum. In an attempt to foster integration, the federal government introduced so-called Values and Orientation Courses that were supposed to inform newcomers about the host country's norms and customs as well as historical, political and practical information regarding life in Austria. The courses' content ranges from the fundamental values of the Austrian constitution such as democracy and the rule of law to the importance of human dignity and basic knowledge regarding education, health and economy. In 2017, the participation in these courses was legally anchored, thereby becoming a mandatory element within the country's integration politics.

This thesis is meant to a) present the courses' content, b) replicate the public debate around their introduction as well as implementation and c) contribute to the discussion by looking into the liberal, secular and Christian moral as well as philosophical roots of Austria's civic education politics. While the government and the courses' supporters argued that the Values and Orientation Courses were an important element in guaranteeing social cohesion and prosperous coexistence, critics questioned their validity, backgrounds, intentions as well as effectiveness with regard to the integration process.

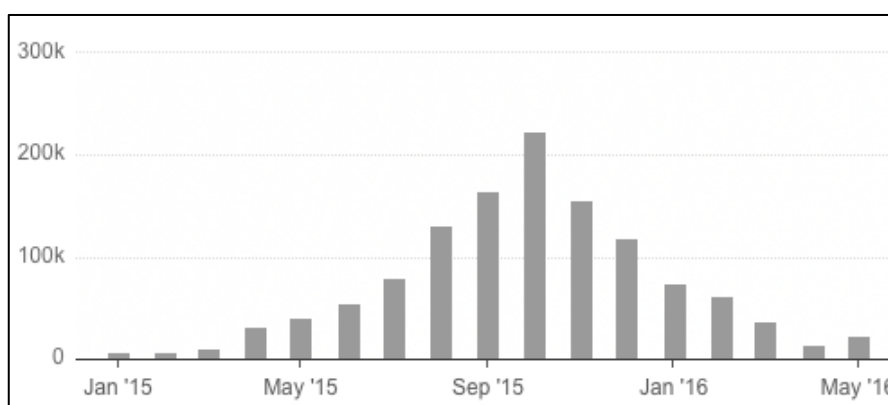
The three-angled approach to this topic shall enable an overarching analysis that represents both the complexity as well as controversy of civic education policies in 21st century Europe.

The number of words lies at 23862 excluding bibliography and cover page.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

It is the refugee crisis of 2015 that Bulgarian policy advisor Ivan Krastev describes as Europe's 9/11, a summer that would change everything for many years to come (cf. Krastev 2018). While the Mediterranean Sea and land arrivals in the year of 2014 lay at a total of 225,455 people, altogether 1,032,408 persons arrived at the shores of Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Malta and Spain during 2015. The influx reached its peak in the months between July and November 2015: while 131,768 people made their way to Europe in August, the months September and October counted 164,774 and 222,800 newcomers (cf. UNHCR 2019).



Graph 1: Monthly Sea and land arrivals to the Mediterranean (cf. UNHCR, 2019)

The majority of the people looking for refuge in 2015 were of Syrian (378,000), Afghani (193,000) and Iraqi (127,000) origin, accounting for 29%, 15% and 10% of all asylum applications in Europe that same year (cf. Pew Research Center 2016). In order to deal with the overwhelming influx and chaos, the European Union implemented an Emergency Relocation Scheme of 120,000 refugees from the main destination countries Greece, Italy and Hungary to other member states in 2015, at this point already officially speaking of a “refugee crisis” (European Commission 2015).

While this consequently enhanced asylum applications in various European countries, many member states were already faced with thousands of people who had illegally and uncontrollably made their

way to their borders even before the European Union attempted to master the unprecedented situation within its territories. In 2016, 373,652 people arrived at European shores, and only 2017 and 2018 would see a decrease in refugee influxes to pre-2015 heights of 185,139 and 141,472 new arrivals to Europe per year (cf. UNHCR 2019).

Next to the numerical challenges that the so-called European refugee crisis and its aftermath have been posing to the European Union since the year of 2015, there is another dimension that represented an equally substantial obstacle to member states as the unforeseen stream. When taking a closer look at the countries of origin, it becomes obvious that the majority of refugees and asylum seekers share nationalities from mostly non-Christian countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Morocco, Algeria or Iraq (cf. UNHCR 2019). This circumstance, combined with Europe's self-recognition of having become the victim of a 'crisis', 'flow' or 'flood', a discourse further strengthened by both the media and many political leaders, heavily influenced and shaped public opinion regarding the cohabitation and reception of these 'strangers': "This rupture brought about by the arrival of the 'other' creates anxiety and fear in the European mind [...]. This can be seen in the way migration into Europe has been portrayed as an 'invasion' of different cultures and a 'clash of civilisations'" (The Guardian 2020). The second dimension with regard to the happenings and aftermath of the summer of 2015 can hence be summarized as follows: "If we look at the West against a global background, the striking thing about our situation is that we are in a competition of beliefs, whether we like it or not." (Siedentop 2014)

When taking a closer look at the policy responses of various member states regarding migration and integration, it becomes obvious how Europe has been trying to deal with the two aspects of the problem. With regard to the numerical issue, there was an overall decrease in the number of accepted asylum applicants within the European Union since the peak of 213,740 in the fourth quarter of 2016: the same time frame in 2018 only saw a figure of altogether 53,835 positive asylum applications, with some countries even imposing national refugee limits (cf. Eurostat 2020). The second challenge is a more complex one since it deals with the aspects of peaceful cohabitation as well as the creation and maintenance of a functioning multicultural society: in other words, social and cultural integration.

This is why various European countries not only insist on vocational trainings and obligatory language courses, but have increasingly introduced so-called civic education measures which “express the idea that successful incorporation into a host society rests not only on [...] civic engagement (political integration), but also on individual commitments to characteristics typifying national citizenship, specifically [...] liberal and social values” (Goodman 2010). Altogether 23 European countries have come up with so-called civic education courses within their national integration programs in order to familiarize ‘newcomers’ with the habits and rules of the country of destination, with some member states even making participation mandatory in order to receive social benefits (cf. European Web Site on Integration 2019).

While the specific content and framework of these courses lies with the respective member states, the European Union’s 2016 Action Plan on Integration argues that “an understanding of the laws, culture and values of the receiving society is the foundation for further learning and the gateway to employment and social inclusion.” (European Web Site on Integration 2018) The fact that the European Union only implemented politics of civic education in connection with migration and integration after 2015 further indicates that values and beliefs are experiencing a political re-instrumentalization in connection with the simultaneous arrival of thousands of people with assumed different worldviews than those of liberal and secular Europe.

But what are these “liberal and social values” (Goodman 2010) actually about? What do these civic education measures look like in detail, and what are they meant to transmit? Do they actually manage to foster integration and a socially coherent European society? Since national integration policies are the responsibility of every European Union’s member state, he is also incumbent upon civic education measures of any kind, which is why a respective analysis has to be done within a country-specific context.

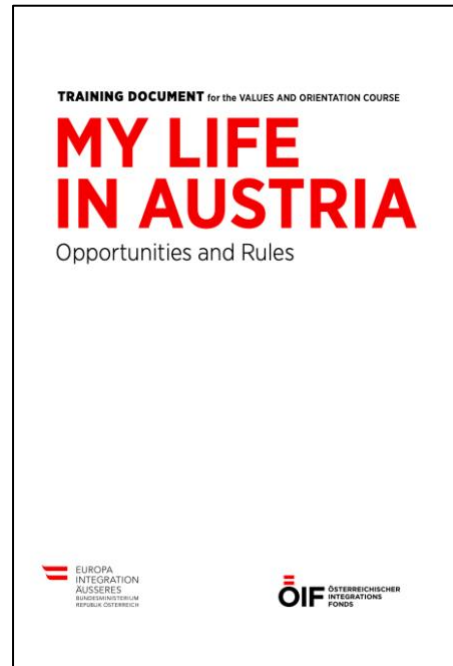
One country that serves as a good example in this regard is Austria: in January 2016, the federal government adopted the ‘50 Action Points Plan for Integration’ constituting the official strategy for

the integration of refugees. The objective was to “integrate persons entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection quickly and to enable them to make a living as soon as possible. In this context, acquisition of German language skills, joining the labour market and communication of the Austrian value system play a key role.” (BMEIA 2016) The Action Plan’s concept was already presented in November 2015, the same year the country was faced with a record of altogether 88,340 asylum applications, three times as much as in 2014: while 2016 still saw 42,285 requests, it would only be in 2017 that the number approximated the country’s moderate level of 24,735 applications (cf. BMI 2018).

With regard to civic education, the country introduced so-called ‘Values and Orientation Courses’: mentioned in the Action Plan from the outset, they were first implemented in the federal provinces of Tyrol and Vorarlberg in February 2016, and consequently rolled out in the other remaining seven provinces of Austria (cf. Standard 2016). They consist of altogether eight hours of civic education aimed at giving “an overview of life in Austria, the country's fundamental values of coexistence and important knowledge for everyday life.” (European Web Site on Integration 2016) The basis for these courses are the ‘Co-existence in Austria’ brochure (see Graph 2) and the ‘My Life in Austria’ training document (see Graph 3). The courses themselves were developed by the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BMEIA), the curriculum was written with the assistance of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) by lawyer and philosopher Dr. Christian Stadler who joined the Expert Council for Integration at the Ministry in 2011: “This product is based on the values of the judicial culture which is enshrined in the Austrian Constitution.” (BMEIA 2018).



Graph 2: Co-existence in Austria (cf. BMEIA, 2018: 1)



Graph 3: My Life in Austria (cf. BMEIA, 2018a: 71)

But the federal constitution of Austria, written in 1920, strictly speaking knows of no written-out values or human dignity: “In Austria, the transcendental preconditions for social values needed to be discovered by critically reflecting on the constitution. [...] We managed to identify the values within our legal culture.” (Standard 2017) According to the Austrian government, who is the political string-puller behind the Values and Orientation Courses, the country is characterized by a liberal, pluralistic, tolerant and neutral society that legitimately calls for the respect of certain guidelines from each and every citizen:

Austria is special because people live together peaceably here. Different worldviews can be freely expressed in a place where people feel safe. The fact that these opposing worldviews can coexist in the same space only works thanks to the shared foundation of values based on our Federal Constitution. It is therefore important to emphasize these social values and to establish a connection between the principles of living together and how we actually live together on a day-to-day basis. It is essential that all citizens respect and support this fundamental consensus so that we can all live together harmoniously. Accepting our values is an important step towards integrating yourself into our society.

(BMEIA 2018)

In June 2017, the government introduced the Integration Act, a new law that, among other things, legally anchored the participation in the Values and Orientation Courses and further tied their positive completion to social benefits for refugees in general. This step affirms the existence and importance of official 'social morals' derived from a liberal and, theoretically, 'value-free' constitution on the Austrian government's side (cf. BMEIA 2017).

It comes as no surprise that there were mixed responses regarding the content and implementation of the Values and Orientation Courses within the Austrian public, civil society and media. Questions arose over the origin of the propagated national values and social beliefs, whether or not they were actually a valid representation of the Austrian society, and if these policies weren't rather a hypocritical form of paternalization especially in connection with simultaneously limitations on various non-Western and religious, mostly non-Christian practices in the country (see Chapter 3). While the Christian crucifix for example enjoys a privileged position as a cultural and traditional symbol in public spaces such as classrooms, the individually used Muslim veil in public functions is frowned upon, based on the argumentation that universal individual rights are being violated (cf. The Independent 2017).

In 2019/2020, the Values and Orientation Courses are still being implemented and are considered a vital part of Austria's integration politics (cf. The Expert Council on Integration 2019). The discussion around what they represent and aim to transmit as well as their effectiveness is also still ongoing, which is why it would be interesting to contribute to the dialogue by looking into the philosophical and moral roots of the propagated values in order to further reflect on the topic. This, together with a replication of the Austrian debate over the civic education measures that have reignited discussions over beliefs and attitudes of the majority society and minorities living together in the modern European state, shall be the scope of this master thesis.

1.2 Research Interest, Research Question and Hypothesis

In order to better understand and reflect on this competition of beliefs that flared up across Europe after the summer of 2015, the ongoing debate in Austria over the Values and Orientation Courses for refugees serves as a promising case study and representative example for other countries. This is why the first step of analysis is to outline the concept, context and nature of the Austrian civic courses, introducing the replication of the public debate around their existence and implementation in a second step. It is hereby vital to take a) the government's justification, b) the public and civil society's support as well as c) their critical voices into consideration, and important to note that the Austrian integration system differentiates between recognized refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection and asylum seekers. The focus of this analysis will lie with the first two groups, since they already received international protection and are therefore legally entitled to rights such as access to education, work and social welfare; the latter are still in the midst of their asylum process (cf. UNHCR Austria n.d.). They will be referred to as 'refugees' for reasons of simplicity.

Only once the ongoing debate's status quo has been adequately elucidated this thesis will be able to contribute to the public discussion by conducting an in-depth analysis of the moral and philosophical origins of the propagated values as well as evaluating the course's effectiveness with regard to successful integration. After all, countries like Austria only introduced their civic education measures because the government felt the need to define social values and norms with regard to its citizens' cohabitation with minorities from other religious and cultural backgrounds after the summer of 2015.

In this sense, the Values and Orientation Courses are clearly meant to be orientation guides on the one hand and catalysators of integration on the other, which is why it is so important to not only describe the courses' content and public's reaction to it. A look behind the propagated values' conceptual backgrounds shall give a better idea about what these norms possibly stand for:

Western beliefs privilege the idea of equality. And it is the privileging of equality – of a premiss that excludes permanent inequalities of status and ascriptions of authoritative opinion to any person or group – which underpins the secular state and the idea of fundamental or ‘natural’ rights. Thus, the only birthright recognized by the liberal tradition is individual freedom.

(Siedentop 2014)

The addition of a moral, philosophical and historical take on the analysis shall thereby enable a broader reflection on the Values and Orientation Courses’ content and validity. This automatically means that one has to take a closer look at the concepts of liberalism and Christianity since they both played an important role in the development of the Western beliefs that many European countries hold dear up to this day:

With the concomitant emancipation of the individual from traditional religious communities, and of the political state from the religious order, religion was relegated to the private sphere of society and protected as an individual human or fundamental right. [...] Yet this process [...] also posed the question of how to integrate the individual into the secularised society. It is evolving nation-state with its emphasis on national identity that fulfilled this task. [...] National belonging displaces religious belief as the new form of social integration.

(Augenstein 2008)

Historically speaking, European liberalism underwent a secular development in which Christianity as well as cosmology and theology survived, but their political involvement did not: “Something unprecedented happened in the polemical battle between Christian political theology and its modern adversary; an authentically new way of treating political questions, free from disputes over divine revelation, was born.” (Lilla 2008) Religion hereby subsequently became a publicly less important, more private matter, and “[t]he secular age, then, is characterized by the fact of pluralism – an irreducible pluralism of beliefs, values, commitments.” (Laborde 2012)

It is important to be aware of these philosophical and historical backgrounds in order to evaluate the Austrian civic education courses’ content as well as to understand the government’s motivation behind the introduction of the Values and Orientation Courses. After all, Europe’s competition of

beliefs stems from the underlying “danger of taking this primacy of the individual as something ‘obvious’ or ‘inevitable’, something guaranteed by things outside ourselves rather than by historical convictions and struggles. [...] [D]oes this establish that human equality is decreed by nature rather than culture?” (Siedentop 2014)

In order to find an answer to this question, the first research question reads as follows:

1. *Do the Values and Orientation Courses truthfully represent Austria’s values?*

- *Hypothesis 1:* *Yes, the Values and Orientation Courses show that Austria is characterized by liberal and secular values.*

While this question primarily deals with the courses’ validity and their conceptual background, their introduction has further been connected to theoretically having a positive impact on migration politics, requiring a second analysis that looks into the Values and Orientation Courses’ effectiveness and actual contribution to the integration process.

According to the Austrian Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “integration is a reciprocal process that demands efforts from both migrants as well as the majority society. As integration affects all of us, it is a challenge addressed to society as a whole, to ensure our peaceful, shared existence in a society at ease with its diversity.” (BMEIA 2020) But what role do the Values and Orientation Courses play in this regard, do they actually have a positive impact on integration?

Up to this day, the Austrian government has only released one two-page evaluation implemented by the consulting firm think.difference in 2017 (cf. ÖIF 2017). Apart from that, the only studies regularly available are the yearly BMEIA Integration Reports informing about course numbers and attendance figures, generally stating that the “quality of the values and orientation courses is evaluated, among other things, by interviewing the participants and external assessment. The knowledge gained is continuously incorporated into the further development and optimisation of the existing range of courses.” (The Expert Council for Integration 2019) But the numbers per se do not serve as a significant

mean to measure the effectiveness of the courses, especially since the government has legally anchored their completion in 2017, which automatically leads to secured demands.

In taking a closer look at the content and conceptual background of the Values and Orientation Courses this thesis shall further be able to draw conclusions regarding the following second research question:

2. *Do the Values and Orientation Courses play an important role for social and cultural integration in Austria?*

- *Hypothesis 2:* *Yes, the Values and Orientation Courses give refugees important information about beliefs and life in Austria.*

1.3 Methodology

The interdisciplinary approach of analysis within this master thesis is meant to touch upon the debate regarding the civic education courses in Austria which were developed in the months after the summer of 2015. The so-called Values and Orientation Courses hereby served as a first political response to the new challenges in the areas of migration and integration in Austria after the record year where nearly 89,000 refugees applied for asylum (BMI 2018).

In a first step, the courses themselves as well as the government's justification for introducing these policy measures shall be represented. This introduction is followed by replicating the public discourse and feedback from civil society and the media regarding the introduction of these courses which ranged from outcries of support to critical voices and outspoken rejection. In a third step, the analytical part of this thesis shall highlight the moral and philosophical origins and backgrounds of the courses' content, referring to the historical and conceptual elements of liberalism, secularism and Christianity in connection with the emergence and development of the modern European nation state:

The problem of analyzing and understanding the value-ingredients of the normative rules of institutional life, [...], is a task worthy of the co-operative efforts of scientific investigators and theorists from several interrelated fields of science and philosophy. [...] These sociological explorations in value, ethics, morality, and religion, however various in other regards, are among the most significant trends in modern intellectual development, representing a great endeavor to restore the congruity of our pattern of culture by bringing the mores, value-system, and ethos of Western civilization into harmonious relationship with the collective needs and vital requirements of modern man in his revolutionized [...] environment.

(O'Donnell 1951)

The structure of this analysis follows a deductive approach: after explaining the background and scope of the situation in both Europe and Austria in the introductory paragraph, the country's civic education policies in the form of the Values and Orientation Courses shall be presented (Chapter 2). In Chapter 3, the public discourse around the introduction and existence of these courses shall be replicated, with focus on the government's justification and main idea behind its integration policies, the media's as well as civil society's reactions and critical voices. In order to contribute to the already existing discourse, Chapter 4 and 5 shall have a more moral and philosophical focus in dealing with the concepts of liberalism and Christianity, separately captured and analysed in their respective historical and secular context. In Chapter 6, the previous Chapters 2 to 5 shall be connected in discussing a) the analysis about the origins of the Austrian values, b) the courses' effectiveness with regard to social and cultural integration and c) the differentiation between assimilation and integration. Chapter 7 finally answers the two research questions and gives a possible outlook as well as resumé of this analysis.

Chapter 2: Civic education in Austria

Although Austria has been continually adjusting its political, legal and institutional systems with a view to promoting integration in recent years, the refugee crisis, [...], has confronted Austria with extraordinary additional challenges regarding the maintenance of public security and the essential functioning of state-run institutions. [...] Refugee migration from the Middle East and Northern Africa to Central and Northern Europe, which can hardly be controlled by the provisions of asylum and foreign nationals law, puts the institutions of the state to the test and challenges their ability to function under stressed conditions.

(Migration Council for Austria 2016)

In order to deal with these new challenges, the Austrian government started implementing new migration policies that were meant to foster social inclusion, facilitate integration and respond to challenges after the summer of 2015: “The loss of state control and a 'green light' policy has justifiably unsettled much of the population. This in turn has led to a loss of confidence in the capacity to govern in current politics. Regaining this trust must be our objective for the coming months and years. This requires long-term strategies.” (The Expert Council for Integration 2016)

This is why the Austrian government implemented the 50-Point Action Plan towards the end of 2015, introducing a mandatory integration program for the following years to come.

2.1 Values and Orientation Courses

The Action Plan included the introduction of the Values and Orientation Courses for refugees and subsidiary protection status holders in all of Austria’s nine provinces at the beginning of 2016. The courses are exclusively offered by the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF) which is a partner and fund of the Austrian Republic located in the BMEIA overseeing all national integration services:

The integration act (Integrationsgesetz), which was amended in June 2017, obliges refugees and subsidiary protection status holders who have been granted protection status after 31 December 2014 and who are aged 15 and older, to participate and successfully complete these courses. [...] According to the integration act, protection status holders have to sign an

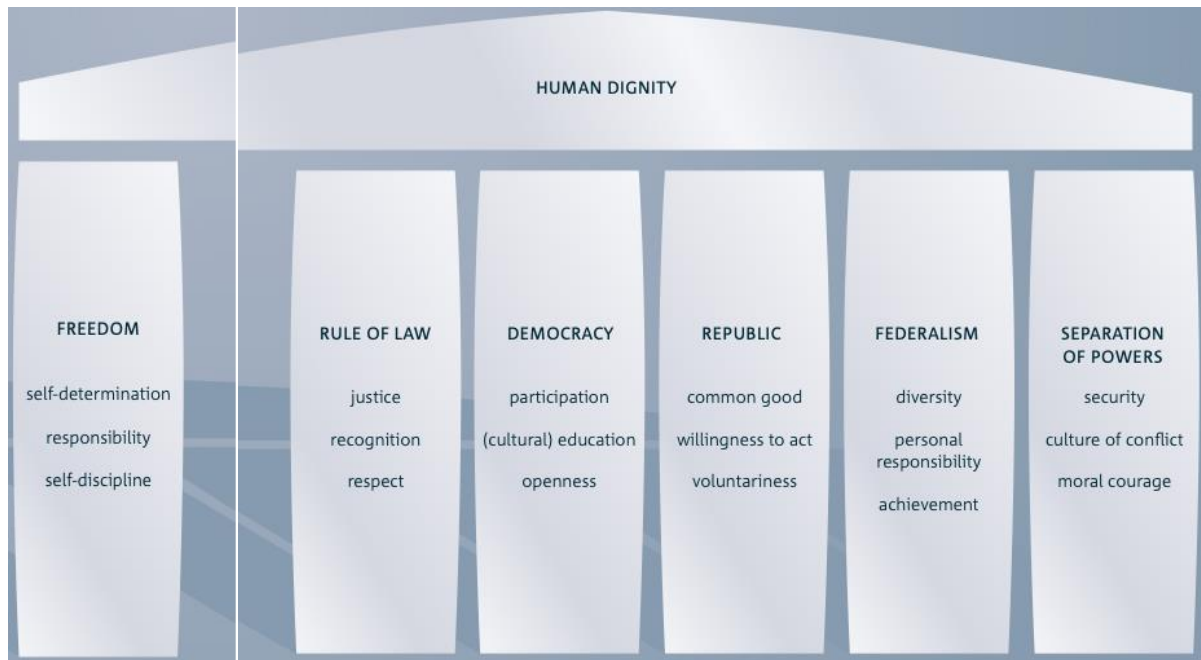
‘integration agreement’, in which they declare to accept the Austrian values and their cooperation and participation in integration measures, among others social orientation courses.

(European Training and Research Centre for Human Rights and Democracy Graz 2018)

After the record year of 2015, value guidance became one of the major issues regarding integration policies in Austria, and the non-participation in these courses was legally tied to the reduction or total annulment of social benefits from the state (cf. European Web Site on Integration 2019).

Each Values and Orientation Course is set up as an eight-hour-seminar-format for a linguistical homogenous group of women and men between eight and twenty participants, taught in German by a male or female lecturer and consecutively translated by a female or male interpreter into the languages most frequently spoken by the target group: Arabic, Dari/Farsi, Somali, Pashtu, Russian and English. Refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection from the age of fifteen have to complete at least 80% of the course in order to receive the certificate of participation necessary to apply for social benefits (cf. ÖIF 2019a). The course implementation is completely incumbent upon the ÖIF, which guarantees area coverage through its nine integration centers and its provincial branch offices. The Values and Orientation Courses are cost-free on the participant’s side who are only responsible to pay for their journey to the course location (cf. European Training and Research Centre for Human Rights and Democracy Graz 2018).

With regard to the course content, the ‘Co-existence in Austria’ brochure represents the basic framework of the Values and Orientation Courses and “provides a detailed overview of our fundamental values in the context of integration for the first time” (BMEIA 2018a). It speaks of one basic idea, which is human dignity. The six guiding principles are: freedom, the rule of law, democracy, republic, federalism and the separation of powers. With regard to the legal culture, altogether 18 values have been derived from the wording of the Austrian constitution (see Graph 3):



Graph 3: One idea, six principles, eighteen values (cf. BMEIA, 2018: 34-35)

The training document ‘My life in Austria’ is based on said brochure and values, divided in altogether eight chapters or classes accompanying the eight-hour course format: language and education, labor market and economy, healthcare, housing and good neighborliness, principles of coexistence and legal integration as well as diversity of coexistence and cultural integration (see Graph 4). This document only supplements the actual Values and Orientation Courses and “provides details on the contents shared in classes, be it on interacting with neighbours, equal treatment of men and women or on more practical aspects, such as the separation of household waste. [...] [T]hey are key to making a good start here in Austria.” (BMEIA 2018a)

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»MY LIFE IN AUSTRIA« – Opportunities and Rules		

Graph 4: Austria explained in eight chapters (cf. BMEIA, 2018a: 72-73)

2.2 'Co-existence in Austria'

According to the 'Co-existence in Austria' brochure the country's core value is human dignity. No matter gender, education, age, origin, appearance or religion, everyone deserves respect since it is considered a human birthright:

Discrimination and racism have no place in Austria. Women and men have equal status. [...] The state, too, must also uphold human dignity and, as a result, equality of treatment for all citizens. This is why the equality of everyone before the law is the foundation of all decisions taken by judicial courts and authorities in Austria. [...] Just as the principle of human dignity is a fundamental pillar of our constitutional system, it is also the basis of our social co-existence. (BMEIA 2018)

Under this umbrella term, the brochure takes the following six principles from the Austrian Constitution as columns or pillars for its value framework: 1) freedom, 2) rule of law, 3) democracy, 4) republic, 5) federalism and 6) separation of powers (cf. BMEIA 2018).

Freedom is hereby derived from the liberal principle in the constitution, associated with the individual having the right to decide upon how to lead his life, to free speech and freedom of religion, but only under the premise that orderly co-existence is respected. This calls for self-discipline, responsibility and self-determination: “Naturally, individual freedom also has its limits. These are defined by law. The state safeguards civil rights and liberties by punishing those who violate these rights, but it must have good reason to intervene in matters of personal freedom. Such reasons are few and clearly defined.” (BMEIA 2018)

The rule of law is being introduced with the standards of fair play, recognition of other people’s achievements, justice and equality before the law: “Respecting that people remain equal in their diversity is the cornerstone of the justice system in Austria. [...] In the interests of the common good, everyone must respect and recognise the uniqueness of their fellow human beings. By achieving this on a personal level [...], you help justice prevail throughout society.” (BMEIA 2018)

Self-determination also plays an important role in upholding democracy, since being an active member of society turns this virtue into co-determination: “For there is no democracy unless citizens express their opinions and play their part, together with others, to make and shape decisions and to take their share of responsibility for decisions that affect us all. This requires [...] a fundamental understanding of [...] – our (new) home. We can call this (cultural) education.” (BMEIA 2018) This also calls for a critical, open and curious mindset in order to be able to form an opinion.

The republican principle is linked to cooperation, solidarity, willingness to help and mutual assistance, which in turn enable social cohesion and peace, since working for the community’s benefit also benefits the individual: “Cohesion and cooperation from the grassroots to the top of government

define the essence of a republic. [...] If you stand up for the rights of others and are prepared to act in solidarity then you will be contributing every day to the common good in Austria.” (BMEIA 2018)

Federalism enables the individual to ask for help when needed, but it is everyone’s personal responsibility to try to achieve as much as possible by himself: “Federalism is fuelled by the idea that all parts of the state – including you, as the smallest individual part – try to do your job as best they can. [...] I am willing to do my best and contribute actively to the common good.” (BMEIA 2018)

Furthermore, diversity is held high, meaning that everyone can live their own lives according to their culture and tradition.

Finally, the principle of separation of powers is tied to moral courage and public safety. While the former is the responsibility of each and every Austrian citizen, the latter primarily lies with the state and must not be taken in one’s own hands: “Security also needs people who are prepared to stand up for it. It requires a culture of conflict – you have to be prepared to address conflicts peacefully, not violently, to assert your individual rights the rights of others – even if you fear being at a disadvantage by doing so.” (BMEIA 2018)

2.3 ‘My Life in Austria’

Unlike the ‘Co-existence in Austria’ brochure, the ‘My Life in Austria’ training document serves as official course material for refugees taking part in the Values and Orientation Courses. One page of the booklet is written in German, while the opposite page contains the content’s translation corresponding with the Mother tongue of the target group as mentioned in 2.1.

The introductory remarks highlight the importance of the German language, acquirement of professional qualifications and understanding of fundamental human rights as cornerstones for having a successful life in Austria:

It is thus essential that you understand these fundamental values, respect them and put them into practice. We want you to understand why these values are so important to us. You must acquire the ability to share our value system. We expect you to make a positive contribution to life in Austria. [...] The rules based on which people in Austria deal with one another may differ from those in your home country. Although you might not be used to our laws and regulations, they must be observed by everyone who immigrates to Austria.

(BMEIA 2018a)

After a swift overview of Austria's facts and figures, the booklet gives a short history of the happenings and developments during and after the Second World War, highlighting that "positive economic development was possible thanks to hard working men and women in Austria. This included many immigrants who make an important contribution to Austria's prosperity." (BMEIA 2018a)

The first chapter introduces the importance of German and education in Austria. The latter is open to all, mostly financed by the state and mandatory for children, since it fosters critical thinking, improves chances in the job market and enables a good life. Gainful employment in the future also guarantees taxes that in return contribute to the education system's quality, which also includes gender equality both on the teaching and studying side: "In Austria, girls and boys have the same rights and obligations in the education system. They are free to attend the same schools and to pursue any profession they are interested in." (BMEIA 2018a)

The second chapter deals with the country's economy, labor market and welfare system, which are all strongly linked to individual performance, solidarity and the prohibition of discrimination both on the employer's and employee's side: this again includes gender equality. Insurance is also mandatory (cf. BMEIA 2018).

The healthcare system is consequently also linked to the population's contribution in taking care of their taxes and social security in chapter 3: doctor's "religion or whether they are male or female is irrelevant." (BMEIA 2018a)

Chapter 4 deals with good neighborliness, housing and property rules as well as good relations within a community. Hours of nocturnal disturbance, prevention of noisy activities on Sundays and public holidays and considerate waste disposal areas are as important as informal neighborhood rules: “If you meet your neighbours in the garden, in the street or in the house, you show your respect by greeting them or talking to them briefly.” (BMEIA 2018a)

Chapter 5 resembles the ‘Co-existence in Austria’ brochure the most by explaining the rules for coexistence, the principles of the Austrian constitution and the importance of human dignity, fairness and respect. This for instance means that torture is prohibited and protecting lives is considered the police force’s main task so that individuals do not have to fear for their lives, but also that freedom of speech and the equality of men and women are of vital importance. But “[t]here are also limits to the freedom to decide about one’s own life. Freedom also goes hand in hand with mutual responsibility and people’s obligations.” (BMEIA 2018a)

The sixth chapter finally deals with diversity, social interaction and cultural integration, explaining the individual’s right to free choice of belief, tradition and personal freedom, as long as it complies with national laws. State action is hereby “not determined by religious rules, scriptures or ideas. [...] In Austria, everybody may choose his/her religion freely, practise it in public, not disclose his/her religion or give it up. From the age of 14, everyone may decide for himself/herself in favour of or against a religious confession.” (BMEIA 2018a) In the closing remarks, the importance of volunteer work and informal rules of intercultural interaction such as shaking hands, punctuality and acceptable noise levels when in bigger groups are being explained (cf. BMEIA 2018a).

After representing the concept and scope of the Values and Orientation Courses, the debate around their introduction and implementation on both the government’s and non-governmental side will be replicated. This shall enable the reflection on the ongoing discussion and give room to a rather moral and philosophical search for the roots of the Austrian values in order to comment on their validity as well as their effectiveness regarding social and cultural integration.

Chapter 3: The Austrian value discussion

3.1 The government's rationale

As already briefly highlighted in the introductory part of chapter 2, the year 2015 marked a turning point in Austrian integration politics, and the federal government felt the need to react to the events that had changed the demographic of its country in a very short amount of time: "Immigration from culturally remote regions of origin increases the degree of heterogeneity in society and sometimes puts the prevailing standards and values into question. Immigration may constitute a particular challenge for social cohesion and social peace." (Migration Council 2016) In the months after the peak of the refugee crisis, Austria highlighted the importance of integration being a two-way process, "whereby the adaptive capacity of the people who are allowed to stay in Austria must be greater than the capacity of the majority society. The fundamental values of Austrian society are not negotiable and are therefore to be complied with." (The Expert Council for Integration 2016) This is also why the compliance with the content transmitted in the Values and Orientation Courses was legally anchored in 2017 since values should not be regarded as something merely abstract that is not internalized and adopted: "The recipe of the integration minister: German classes and mediation of basic values, boundaries – and: 'Don't be too tolerant if these limits are being exceeded'." (Kurier 2017)

In order to understand where these boundaries lie and how the cohabitation in Austria works, the Values and Orientation Courses were initiated. The government assigned philosopher and lawyer Christian Stadler to "put into words what is necessary for this republic to function. [...] According to Stadler, he looked into the idea of man, the conception of statehood and the country's legal culture. [...] Somewhere in between he found a quote by liberal Friedrich von Hayek stating that a society that does not live by its values and traditions was unable to be liberal." (Profil 2013) This train of thought also reflects itself in the accompanying course materials, and while it seems as if the 'Co-existence in Austria' brochure represents the country's actual code of values, the 'My Life in Austria' training

document could rather be categorized as behavioral recommendations, code of conduct or 'etiquette' guide:

The refugee immigration of 2015 brought a population to Austria, for which life in a liberal, secular constitutional state based on the rule of law and democratic structures is something new. [...] It is necessary to provide information and orientation [...] about the cultural system that society in Austria is subject to. [...] It is therefore important to clearly and bindingly communicate the basic values mapped in the legal system to the refugees and to explicitly address and reflect on the rule structure of social coexistence with them. The refugees must – just like all other people living in Austria – understand and adhere to the relationship between freedom and responsibility, but also the reflected handling of the individual scope of conduct.

(The Expert Council for Integration 2016)

The Values and Orientation Courses are therefore regarded as a basic summary of the most important rules and norms in Austria and a vital prerequisite for successful integration:

Some of its content is being treated as if it was banal or obvious. But this is exactly what the value discussion is about, some form of reaction, coming to the surface because certain matters of fact are all of a sudden being put into question. It is an expression of uneasiness and insecurity, as if something wasn't right.

(Standard 2017)

With the arrival of thousands of refugees from different cultural backgrounds, the government quickly perceived that there was a need for organization and control with regard to the cohabitation of its now even more multicultural citizens. Only by defining what values Austria stands for the country was able to develop policy measures that would explain and assist the newcomers in starting a new life in their new 'home'.

In order to do this without a moralizing undertone, the Values and Orientation Courses received a course setting that is aimed at active participation and interaction in order to make refugees reflect upon and discuss about the content: "The course participants should be supported in orientation in the Austrian daily life, its occupational structures and societal values. [...] Lectures and discussions

alternate with each other; women and men participate in the same courses. [...] Teaching is based on a communicative-pragmatic and intercultural approach.” (European Training and Research Centre for Human Rights and Democracy Graz 2016) The taught content itself is nevertheless standardized and uniform, since it is meant to convey the basic constitutional values that every living person in Austria needs to comply with: “Many refugees in particular were influenced by socialisation and values experiences in their home regions that diverge from some fundamental aspects of the Austrian society.” (The Expert Council for Integration 2016)

One governmental example in this regard would be the concept of solidarity:

Course participants receive the information that solidarity is a value found in both Austria and Syria, but the understanding of the concept there is a different one than here. In their country the focus is family based, but in Austria, we are talking about a systematically organized solidarity, for instance social security. Our symbol for solidarity is the e-card.

(Standard 2017)

Another important example definitely is the topic of religion, since this does not have the same dominance and significance in Austria in comparison to the countries of origin. Each and every person’s individual freedom is not and must not be restricted by religious traditions or rules, if so, then only by autonomous and voluntary acceptance: in 2015, then-integration minister Sebastian Kurz stated that “we have to exemplify what there is room for in Austria, and what is not. [...] The Burka, the Niqab, and the full-face veil are symbols that don’t have space in our country since they represent a counter-society.” (Presse 2017) In combination with the introduction of the Values and Orientation Courses, the government further argued for a “context-oriented Islam of a European notion, which is consistent with the Austrian constitution and European values [...]. The focus is on an Islam that values the principles and rules of a pluralistic and secular society.” (The Expert Council for Integration 2016)

Claiming awareness to the controversy around this topic and the simultaneous importance of measures against hostility and racism, the government included pillars such as cooperation with representatives from different religious institutions as well as the principle of religious neutrality and

diversity in their politics of integration. But “diversity without elements of shared interest exposes a society to a risk of fragmentation and the weakening of social cohesion. Migrants often adhere to standards and values of their countries of origin that deviate from those of a liberal society with a neutral attitude towards religion” (Migration Council 2016), which is why the approximation and identification with the secular and pluralist Austrian society is an absolute necessity. This way, political Islamism as an “antidemocratic ideology” (The Expert Council for Integration 2016) shall be preventively targeted, while Islam as a religious belief must not be condemned: “In view of the growing heterogeneity of society, greater attention has to be paid to religious neutrality not only in the enforcement of legislation, but in all spheres of public life. This is indispensable in a secular state in which all religions are [...] to be of equal value and subject to the rule of law.” (Migration Council 2016)

The federal government hereby also acknowledged the host society’s necessity to take an equally active part in the two-sided process of integration, emphasizing the importance of proactiveness and openness to many-faceted identities:

The immigrants are just as responsible for successful integration as the population already present. Both sides of the immigration society act within an integration policy framework established by politics, which can promote or impede processes. [...] [T]he following [...] applies to the host society: 'Making room' is a prerequisite for 'taking a seat'. The integration process cannot function without a mutual willingness for openness and without a mutual acceptance of the 'others'.

(The Expert Council for Integration 2016)

And while Austria always pointed out that there was no such thing as a static cultural concept that refugees have to assimilate to, it at the same time also admitted to the unsymmetrical distribution of efforts required to make the integration process work. This automatically justified more directly targeted policy measures and higher requirements on the refugees’ or minority’s side:

People who have never lived in a functioning democracy first need to learn how a free society works. [...] Social peace and social cohesion in Austria and Europe are at stake. [...] Migrants who were socialised in societies with values other than our own should be given special attention as a group to be engaged in dialogue. [...] The fundamental rules of a democratic and liberal society are essential pillars of social peace. Everyone can be expected to know and observe these fundamental rules.

(Migration Council 2016)

3.2 Voices of support

The fact that Austria gradually developed from a country that accommodated guest workers to a state with regulated immigration reflects itself in the rather late definition of and focus on clear integration policies. Civic education, language and vocational trainings were hereby not the only pillars that received a fresh face in 2015, but also other elements such as intercultural dialogue: “A significant milestone in this regard was the revision of the 1912 Islam Law in March 2015, which played an important role in improving Islam’s legal situation in Austria.” (Wohlfarth and Kolb 2016)

The year of 2015 hereby brought many changes to Austria’s integration politics, including civic education: “Everyone gets upset and demands Austrian values once girls are prohibited to attend sports classes. Someone therefore has to be the first to think about what this actually means.” (Profil 2013) To a great extent, the Values and Orientation Courses were hereby regarded as both a mean of self-definition and guidance for the host society as well as the refugees: “We have to raise awareness among our youth regarding the basic values of our constitution and introduce them to immigrants. After all, the latter have no chance to be aware of them. [...] We now have a far-away culture with different world views, survival strategies and hierarchical structures.” (Standard 2017)

With regard to the courses’ reception on the participants’ side, the Austrian consulting firm think.difference with research focus on integration, migration, culture, education, radicalization and identity conducted an evaluation on the Values and Orientation Courses in cooperation with the ÖIF

(see 2.1). think.difference took part in altogether six courses, did a questionnaire survey on 88 survey participants as well as guided interviews with ten course participants:

The participants' memory of specific topics is significantly higher than that of abstract content, for instance history and geography as well as the job market and economy. The course offer is generally positively accepted which indicates a correlation with the participants' desire to learn and integrate himself. The participants support the early completion (soon after their arrival) of the Values and Orientation Courses and believe to have learned a lot about Austria.

(ÖIF 2017)

This circumstance was especially attributed to the informal and interactive course character, and "the eight hours are didactically very well structured, [...]. They enable a dialogue at eye level." (Standard 2017) The fact that the Austrian government associated the positively connotated elements of contribution, personal effort and performance on the refugees' side in the migration context created the framework for pragmatic and de-ideologized integration policies: "Integration through contribution indicates that newcomers are welcome and will receive support in Austria, under the condition that they will naturally have to adapt and adjust more than the majority society." (Wohlfarth and Kolb 2016)

These measures had an especially positive impact on the sentiments of the host society: "The interest in understanding how society functions in this country is huge. [...] 'It is important to know the house rules: where do I register my child for school, which administrative office do I have to go to in this regard' – there is a literal hunger for these kinds of tips." (Standard 2017a) Since the beginning of 2017, the ÖIF is conducting the so-called Integration Barometer, an annual survey on 1,000 Austrian citizens and their experiences regarding the cohabitation with people with and without migratory backgrounds. In June 2016, already 55% of the respondents believed that the Values and Orientation Courses play an important role in the integration of refugees (cf. ÖIF 2017).

A great part of this approval can be traced back to the fact that the Values and Orientation Courses are considered to not only inform refugees about the different habits, traditions and norms in Austria,

but to also motivate newcomers to respect, acquire or, ideally, internalize said values: “Once people from different cultural backgrounds enter into dialogue, it gets easier to convince them of a respectful togetherness based on an European model.” (Pfeiffer and Peter 2016) The Values and Orientation Courses’ scope is hereby confrontation, discussion and interaction between both the host society and the newcomers regarding the European culture of freedom, equality and pluralistic lifestyles:

This doesn’t mean total assimilation of migrants at the end of the integration process, but the acceptance of our basic values and behavioral norms, which can go hand in hand with the refugees’ maintenance of values and beliefs from a different culture as long as it complies with the legal and moral rules of the host society. Muslims hereby don’t have to abandon their religion and culture or build parallel societies, you also wouldn’t say that about Chinatowns in the United States or London. [...] The promotion of integration does not endanger the structure of the state, it rather strengthens the democratic constitutional framework as well as social cohesion.

(Die Furche 2016a)

This circumstance received even more support with the connotation of the Values and Orientation Courses as a preventive measure in “ideologically battling [...] ‘political Islam’.” (Presse 2017) The idea is to explain the national principles of democracy and freedom not only to a collective, but to separate individuals who will then contribute to the development of an advanced and secular Islam:

The European values are accomplishments of the Enlightenment, rule of law, separation of state and religion and the equality of women and men. We have to self-consciously defend these values. [...] Refugees need to be acquainted with the values of living together, [...]. There especially is a need for respecting the rule of law as well as a strict and consequent implementation of existing laws in order for cohabitation with people from Muslim countries to work.

(APA 2019)

In order for this development of acceptance and internalization to take place peacefully, the informal and yet informative character of the civic education courses is considered a democratic and socially coherent mean to transmit the most important cornerstones and values of the Austrian society. The

aim is hereby not to make participants abandon their cultural backgrounds, but the courses clearly state that “we will not bargain over already negotiated conditions, and we will make sure to protect and enforce them.” (Zeit 2019)

The acknowledgment and application of these values will assist in better understanding the host society and facing less obstacles in finding ones way into the Austrian way of life: “Many newcomers are unsure, know too little about the traditions and life in Austria; the same goes for the country’s history, the reconstruction after the war or the equality of men and women. [...] There are plenty of success stories that could serve as best practice examples.” (Die Furche 2018) The courses are considered to offer some form of starting point for cultural orientation, secure social peace and give people the chance to actually get access to the center of society:

People from Syria may be scared of the police. The Values and Orientation Courses explain being scared of the police is no necessity in Austria. [...] Orientation can be extremely useful, especially with regard to the health and school system. In Austria, it is for example common to go to general practitioners instead of the hospital when merely minor ailments need to be treated. [...] It makes sense to offer such information. Many people are not aware of these important things and are being left alone with their doubts.

(SJOE n.d.)

The courses serve as a point of contact in this regard, which is also why former refugees or immigrants work as the Values and Orientation Courses’ interpreters (see 2.1) to provide further assistance and act as role models for the course participants. Some of them even work as so-called Integration Ambassadors for Together:Austria, another project implemented by the ÖIF since the year of 2011: here, successful people with migratory backgrounds visit schools and associations and tell their stories in order to motivate and inspire children as well as young pupils (cf. ÖIF n.d.).

3.3 Critical responses

The concept of the Values and Orientation Courses as well as their content received major criticism from the outset, starting from the fact that the values had been decided upon by a federal ministry that was imposing its beliefs on a very specific, not at all random group of people:

One cannot ignore the colonial memory of the underdeveloped 'other' and the European self-image of a supposed superiority and progressiveness. A shelter of values so to speak. [...] The Europe of human rights and gender equality? How cynical. It seems as if the Values and Orientation Course authors know a lot about the democratic deficits of their course participants. A generalized allegation? [...] How does one legitimize the prescription of values? This can only be argued if values are not considered negotiable. This is again profoundly undemocratic.

(Augustin 2017)

Psychologist and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl was also frequently referred to in this regard in having said that values should be lived and exemplified instead of taught (cf. Heyse and Ortmann 2016), a circumstance that political scientist Bernhard Perchinig further emphasized in considering "the fact that the government assigns one single individual to ultimately define 'Austria's values' a 'democratic imposition'. Modernity lives from contradictions, not similarities: 'Democracy is a process that is supposed to be secured by rules of procedure, no canon of values based on natural laws.'" (Profil 2013) The fact that the course format involves only eight hours was equally considered insufficient regarding the broadness and complexity of the topics, which is why the ÖIF introduced further voluntary workshops that were thematically adapted to the respective modules in the 'My life in Austria' training document (cf. Erwachsenenbildung.at 2016).

Next to the allegations of paternalization, also euphemism and glorification of the Austrian culture are being criticized: "[I]t points out that tolerance towards LGBTI people is a core value in Austria, while this is not the reality. [...] Further critics state that the courses provide detailed information about the behavioral rules and duties [...] to newcomers but do not provide information about their rights and how to enforce them." (European Training and Research Centre for Human Rights and Democracy

Graz 2016) The assumption of a homogenous Austrian society in which each and every single individual is a) aware and b) lives by the propagated values was considered highly questionable: “We claim that equality is of utmost importance in our country, but the participants then leave these courses and are met with discrimination and racism. This is hypocritical.” (SJOE n.d.) Furthermore, it draws a picture of two opposing sides of the integration medal that increases the idea of ‘us’ and ‘the other’ where one side has to be right, and the other wrong:

Democracy is no institution for re-education. You can offer people something, but it is an illusion to think that everybody will be blinded by the free and democratic light of human rights. Some have different ideas of a good life. It is presumptuous to assume other attitudes as temporary or educable.

(Zeit 2019)

The media even spoke of the Values and Orientation Courses’ focus on the retaliation of hospitality with the scope of explaining refugees on how to be good Austrian citizens (cf. Standard, 2016a).

This critic was also extended to the trainers and lecturers that are giving the standardized courses. According to the Beutelsbach Consensus from 1976 which laid out minimum standards of political education in Austria and Germany, overwhelming the pupil is prohibited, controversial subjects need to be treated as controversial and weight must be attributed to the pupil’s personal interests: “The Consensus is especially important [...] when democracy is understood as a zone of constant renegotiation. [...] The integration agreement is a huge contradiction [...] since the lecturers are being forced to teach predefined ‘values’ and hereby limit the learners’ power of judgement.” (Kovacic 2018) This once again shows how sensitive and delicate questions of beliefs are: “While the importance of language skills and the job market can be more easily agreed upon, the prerequisite of accepting values and ways of living different from one’s own is a true political minefield.” (Wolffahrt and Kolb 2016)

This romanticized idea of the reciprocal character of integration has also received major criticism since no part of the Austrian integration policies seems to have a macrosocial component: “According

to the government, assimilation is not the aim, but at the same time there are only demands on refugees to be found: they are supposed to learn German, they shall participate in value courses. This picture of unilateral effort with regard to integration is simply wrong.” (SJOE n.d.) The extension of the terminological conception of integration with the pillars of job performance and productivity, which quickly transformed into the most important flagship, further encouraged the criticism of only putting very specific areas of contribution at the hierarchical top of the political integration pyramid:

This has assumed special status in Austrian integration politics, sending a clear double message: a) integration and successful ‘arrival’ in the country of immigration is no ‘act of mercy’ on behalf of the majority society, but a logical consequence of one’s own efforts; b) integration requires adjustment performances especially on the immigrants’ side.

(Wohlfarth and Kolb 2016)

While this might combine with the popular political slogan of integration not being a one-way street, this circumstance clearly implies that the Values and Orientation Courses encourage more unilateral and biased requirements for refugees than true incentives for intercultural exchanges: “In principle, there is nothing wrong in discussing values, but it has to be done from an overall societal standpoint. Who says that people living in Austria comply with these values?” (SJOE n.d.)

The lax use of the term ‘values’ was also regularly challenged in this regard, since it implies desired beliefs and ethical positions within a society such as religious, political, moral or material values that are meant to offer direction or orientation. Their manifestation is supposed to be delegated to formal or informal societal organizations who then translate these ‘values’ into rules that people live by. Critics therefore argued that ‘values’ were less part of the Values and Orientation Courses than ‘norms’:

Norms can be understood as rules that society agreed upon, they are legally anchored or generally accepted without the need to be written down. Norms enable the expectation of certain behaviors in specific situations, while the difficulty lies within the fact that the majority of them is simply assumed or taken for granted by thinking that everyone is aware of and

agrees with them. Upon closer inspection, even seemingly homogenous societies show different understandings of values and therefore also norms.

(Kovacic 2018)

This in turn correlates with the questioned 'knowledge' that is explicitly being conveyed within the Values and Orientation Courses, including the Eurocentric and idealized picture of a society that enjoys and thrives on fixed and perfectly functioning norms and rules:

Austria's liberal and democratic political system builds upon values and principles that are not disputable. This identity-forming disposition of the Republic of Austria and its legislation is to be respected. [...] This is problematic, because values are always disputable in a democracy, [...]. Laws are being amended in accordance with the societal changes in values and beliefs. [...] Discrimination, homophobia, discrimination of women and extremism can only be found outside of Austria. [...] Only the people that come to Austria have these deficits.

(Semiosisblog 2017)

Civic education that aims at orientation and practical information needs to be "separated from the value dimension which has to be tackled on a macrosocial basis, not unilaterally. [...] Supporting the idea that our values are in opposition to others and that only Austrian ones need to be studied automatically paths the way of racism and stereotypes." (SJOE n.d.)

With a final regard to the sole implementor of the Values and Orientation Courses, the Austrian Integration Fund, fell into disrepute as the branch of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding a state affair in which the Austrian Court of Auditors accused the ÖIF of having sold numerous buildings below market value, primarily to company-related buyers up until the year of 2011 (cf. Kurier 2015). In combination with its monopoly regarding national integration policies and its teaching assignment, the organization was heavily criticized: "How can the ÖIF teach and impose the education of 'values' if the fund itself is involved in a real estate scandal? [...] Is this democratic?" (IG Arbeitsbedingungen DaZ DaF Basisbildung 2019)

As chapter 3 has shown, the value discussion is very complex, controversial and multi-faceted since integration itself is a sensitive area that deals with cultural similarities, differences and opposites.

Since 2015, this competition of beliefs reflects itself even more due to Austria's new politics of civic education:

This is less about spiritual or ethical roots, but about categories of identity instead of nationality. The politization of [...] identity doesn't have anything to do with religious beliefs but the construction of collective belonging, also in competition to the 'West'. [...] The phenomenon of hollowed identities which construct their enemy stereotypes through separating themselves from the 'other' is something that we also see in the majority society. [...] Today, our society is strongly characterized by these hollowed identities that know what they are not, but don't really know what actively makes them what they believe they are.

(Die Furche 2018b)

With regard to the Values and Orientation Courses, this is especially interesting: as already stated in 1.1, the value content was derived from a theoretically 'value-free' constitution by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs. One of the most important elements with regard to civic education is hereby the unfatigued emphasis on the liberal, secular and pluralist nature of the Austrian political system (see 3.1):

Liberal empire brought the rule of modern law and property rights. It brought the humanizing aims of Christian missionaries with their gospel of personal respect. [...] One home is national, the other global or universal. [...] They want, above all, people to be able to take their gods, attachments, and ideals with them wherever they go and not abandon them in the soil they leave behind. At the same time, they want people to be able to cut their roots and adopt foreign gods and attachments as assimilated immigrants in freely chosen new lands. [...] The liberal wanderer's dream of a universal home is a very old dream. It was a Roman dream and a Christian dream.

(Fawcett 2014)

Interestingly enough, neither the reference to this dream nor any form of Christian heritage can be found in the Values and Orientation Courses, only pillars such as freedom of and neutrality towards religion (cf. BMEIA 2018a). But how did these even become Austrian values, and where did they come from? And how does this reconcile with the fact that "[r]estrictions on religion [...] continued to

climb in 2016, [...]. In European countries, Muslims were targeted most frequently.” (Pew Research Center 2018a)

In order to better understand the moral and philosophical roots behind the propagated Austrian values it is therefore necessary to generally look deeper into the ancestors of Western ideals and secular beliefs such as personal freedom, gender equality and tolerance. This automatically leads to the historical as well as the evolutionary and cultural backgrounds of liberalism, Christianity and their common byproduct, secularism.

Chapter 4: Liberalism

There is no canonical description of liberalism. What we tend to call *liberal* resembles a family portrait of principles and institutions, recognizable by certain characteristics – for example, individual freedom, political participation, private property, and equality of opportunity – that most liberal states share, although none has perfected them all.

(Doyle 1986)

Especially contemporary liberals would happily argue that those virtues are everything but God-given, possibly quite the opposite, and rather consider them the biggest accomplishment of the enlightened and free human mind. This immediately introduces the most distinctive characteristic of liberalism, the heart piece of today's Western civilizations and most important starting point regarding their historical development, the free individual: "Nowadays it feels natural for liberals to talk of the kind of respect due to men and women from the powers of state, market, or society in terms of cherishing and defending individuals. By a simple slide, it then feels natural to talk of liberalism as characteristically individualist." (Fawcett 2014)

4.1 Liberal thinkers and the importance of the individual

When taking a trip down liberalism's memory lane, this was not always the case: "Once we look closely at the beliefs and practices which shaped Greece and Rome [...] [w]e find ourselves entering a mind-set that generated a conception of society in which the family was everything. [...] At the core of ancient thinking we have found the assumption of natural inequality." (Siedentop 2014) By definition, the family or ancient city as the highest form of reason and unequal distribution of rationality does not sound liberal at all. So how come that liberalism's great thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and David Hume were able to make their intellectual case for the exact opposite?

Individuals are really ordinary and familiar things. [...] Liberals did not invent people. They were inventive in thinking up how the commonplace notion of an individual, used of people, could be deployed in politics. [...] [T]he new standard was not simple, but imposed three distinct requirements on power: nonintrusion, nonexclusion, and nonobstruction.

(Fawcett 2014)

With the emergence of a more commercial society in the Middle Ages, different kinds of relationships and attitudes towards authority were developed as well. Liberals grew to regard themselves and any other person within a society as said individuals, as agents with opinions and rights in opposition to an established power. During the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century, Europe experienced fundamental changes with regards to attitudes towards government, the natural world and the self (cf. Siedentop 2014).

These developments were promoted by various liberal advocates: while John Locke believed that the transition from the state of nature to the civil state was enabled by a pact that legitimized the power of the people, Baruch Spinoza argued for a representative form of government, and “[b]y the eighteenth century, “individual” stood alone. [...]. The term [...] served to separate each from an implied larger whole – an estate, a corps, the public, society. It served to favour them with a kind of moral or constitutive primacy.” (Fawcett 2014)

The individual’s freedom hereby equaled social progress: one would only be able to reach and benefit from its full potential in a world that knew of no external limitations. Everybody is entitled to beliefs and attitudes that must not be interfered with by other people’s ideas or ideals. The aim was to improve the chances in people’s lives and at the same time respect the autonomy of each and every individual, creating the foundation for political elements such as the rights of citizenship or a rational rule of law that is based on consent and majority will:

In contrast with the older idea that truth could only be held by a privileged individual or class, liberalism proclaimed the ability of the individual to discover truth. [...] Thus, an optimistic belief in change and in an individual's capacity for truth led liberals to espouse ideas like free speech, [...] and self-representative government.

(Garry 1992)

Society itself started to be considered as socially and economically open to progress and improvement, and who could be a better game changer when deemed necessary than the very people living within said society. And not just a few eligible ones:

No good reasons existed to exclude anyone from the recognition due to human dignity. So the West's moral tradition taught. That tradition shifted the burden of argument from includers to excluders. They and not the includers had to justify themselves and show why denying someone's worth was reasonable.

(Fawcett 2014)

One of the most pivotal thinkers in this regard was Immanuel Kant: in demanding civil equality and moral freedom for the rational citizen, other philosophers subsequently joined him in turning nonobstruction, nonexclusion and nonintrusion into overarching civic respect for every last person within a liberal society. Human life and the individual in general hereby experienced an overall moral elevation, a process that was further enhanced by the ideas of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, such as free speech, civil liberties and religious toleration. But "[h]istorians have shown that early modern toleration was not a philosophical achievement but, rather, a pragmatic and often grudgingly negotiated social practice" (Laborde 2017).

While tolerance is popularly considered a liberal virtue, theoretically enabling the peaceful existence of natural enemies, liberals themselves were able to take the idea from the developments within sixteenth-seventeenth century Western Christendom. Before the Reformation, Protestants and Catholics unsuccessfully coexisted as two forms of religions in one society: "Toleration was enforced at times as a suspension of the problem, being regarded at first, very often, as an interim measure – an attempt to reach a modus vivendi until the healing of the church." (Butterfield 1931)

All these developments around the deeply rooted clerical tensions and long-lasting clashes especially pathed the way for the transformation of the religious society of the Middle Ages to the secular society of the modern times.

4.2 The winner of The Great Separation?

Next to the fights over authority and power with other civil powers over questions such as reason, revelation, common decency and divine duty, a secular government performing as an arbitrator appeared as the ultimate peace negotiator and guardian of society's welfare regarding the tensions about which form of Christianity was true:

Secularism historically entailed a large-scale transfer and concentration of coercive power: from the church, and divinely appointed authorities, to an absolute sovereign, which later grounded its sovereignty in democratic authorization. One momentous implication was that, henceforth, the identity of individuals as citizens was to prevail over the identity of individuals as believers, when the two conflict. Citizenship trumps religious commitment.

(Laborde 2017)

Politics hereby became its own intellectual realm, with a new understanding of society, the state and the public sphere, and Enlightenment rationality furthermore increased secular distinctions between reason and science on the one hand and superstition and ritualism on the other. With the simultaneous beginnings of the modern nation state, loyalty to God became less important than loyalty to the laws of the sovereign, who from now on was responsible for political justice and his reasonable individuals: by separating politics and religion, “[l]iberal thinkers [...] could [...] make the case for toleration of many doctrinal differences, on the grounds that they masked fundamental agreement on moral matters and need not threaten public life. These arguments were humanistic; they did not depend on any particular view of divine revelation.” (Lilla 2008)

This was only possible because the power within the liberal nation state should become limited and peacefully divided. Public laws were meant to govern relations between political institutions and

citizens, guaranteeing inalienable rights and protection of said rights from any interference by the state or other individuals to the latter. While belief ceased to be a private matter in this process, religion was treated with a liberal approach:

Toleration spanned a gap between what was legally forbidden and what was morally acceptable. [...] Toleration was only possible when certain moral offences were legally permitted. [...] In the religious sphere, [...] toleration worked in the direction of growing acceptance. As religious indifference spread, [...] the space of unacceptability shrank. There was less and less to tolerate, as people cared less and less about each other's religion.

(Fawcett 2014)

This secular indifference was music to the liberal ears, further fostering Enlightenment's and modernity's triumph over religious questions and Christianity as the highest moral institutions. Thanks to the Renaissance and the Reformation, scepticism towards clerical authority and arguments for religious toleration in combination with the efforts for uniformity of Christian belief grew, and modern philosophers such as Immanuel Kant played their part by "invoking fundamental or 'natural' rights. [...] The result was that liberal secularism in Europe came to be understood as essentially antireligious. [...] It was that moral conviction which led to 'rights' becoming fundamental to the discourse of liberal secularism." (Siedentop 2014)

While politics might have won the public sphere, both Christianity as well as churches survived, but the religious influence on politics faded: from the seventeenth and eighteenth century onwards, the political focus entirely shifted to human nature and their needs. This would separate Western political philosophy from theology and cosmology once and for all: "It remains the most distinctive feature of the modern West to this day." (Lilla 2008)

The idea of human worth consequently saw its institutionalization in the liberal individual receiving a democratic voice and thereby also some indirect form of authority. Implementing tolerance automatically meant that people could themselves decide upon which values to cherish and what they considered right or wrong:

Liberals stood up for the whole as well as the part, for the big battalions as well as the little guy, for the weight of majorities as well as the claims of minorities, for standards of right and truth as well as private conscience and personal choice. [...] Politically, they came to accept universal suffrage. Economically they came to accept fairer shares. [...] Ethically, liberals came under pressure to compromise with democratic society.

(Fawcett 2014)

Liberals believed that their civic ideals would pay sufficient attention to fairness, the common good and freedom, and that education and economic progress would bring an end to intolerance or hatred. But tolerant indifference to everything turned out to be endangering and fostering liberal beliefs and ethics at the same time. Democratic politics longed for equality, but could also pose as nourishment for popular intolerance, which is why liberals opted for constructing “a rational and peaceful political community on the basis of a law of nature that enjoins citizens to cultivate certain habits of self-mastery. [...] Liberal individualists make a deal with their more ordinary fellow citizens in the name of civility or peace: tolerance for discretion.” (Kautz 1993)

By the end of the 19th century, this arrangement developed into the political concept of liberal democracy, and in 1945, Austrian philosopher Karl Popper defined the paradoxes of democracy, freedom and tolerance as the framework of an open society. The common element is that all three of them are the most powerful antidote against themselves: due to its institutional circumstances, a democratic society can a) vote the current government out of power, and b) ultimately vote for itself to no longer exist. The same logic is true for the second paradox: unlimited freedom will ultimately undermine freedom itself. And thirdly, the paradox of tolerance: “If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them.” (Popper 1966)

This automatically meant that liberalism had already defined its basic rules as well as limits, a process that would be legally reinvented and redefined in reaction to the long-lasting joint venture with imperialism, namely the colonial empires that existed up until the late 19th century:

The first task was to draw up a credible list of widely recognized rights. [...] Its four columns stood for the prime values of dignity, liberty, equality, and brotherhood. [...] The draft did presume that rights were recognized [...], that they were in some sense out there, independent, and binding on us whether observed or not, [...]. The Declaration of Human Rights was drafted in something of an intellectual vacuum about the nature of the civic and political rights it recognized or called into being.

(Fawcett 2014)

The liberal society was hereby characterized by some sort of binding morale, something that, according to Immanuel Kant, could be defined as universalist standards of justice and human reason that had nothing to do with a higher religious calling, but with knowledge, initiative, taking responsibility, voluntary activity and 'solidarity'. The term was taken from Roman law, serving to combine "Jacobin equality, Christian charity, and socialist fraternity into a serviceable modern ideal."

(Fawcett 2014)

4.3 Liberal Values

Liberalism came to be understood as a political concept that aimed at reforming society by letting its people choose who they wanted to be, and thereby also improving the environment around them. This perfect picture, based on the idea of rational, moral, tolerant and free individuals, suffered due to liberalism's 19th and 20th century affinity for imperialist tendencies: "They took it for granted that 'civilized' peoples should if they could raise up 'backward' peoples, and, to their minds, that educative mission justified a temporary tutelage. [...] Liberalism entailed imperialism, and in its cruelest aspects." (Fawcett 2014)

While the age of colonialism and missionary work marks one of liberalism's darkest chapters, it turned out to be an important lesson with regard to liberty and its limitations, or in other words, hypothetical neutrality: does individual freedom automatically imply that in the liberal world, anything goes?

The liberal state protects individuals' moral powers (notably their ability to form and live by a conception of the good); and it itself does not endorse any such conception of the good. [...] Liberals are not committed to value-free neutrality (or separation or abstention). [...] Roughly, liberalism is based on the idea that all individuals should enjoy as much freedom as is compatible with the freedoms of others, [...]. This is not an ethically neutral ideal.

(Laborde 2017)

In order for liberals to come to the inclusion that liberty also needed legal limitations in order to a) function and b) not uncontrollably get out of hand, they started to philosophically reflect on the "higher 'whys'. [...] [T]here grew [...] an acceptance across the world that the rule of law included high standards in the proper treatment of people. It was no longer [...] an excuse for maltreatment, discrimination, or abuse that they were permitted under a country's laws or excused in its courts."

(Fawcett 2014)

Liberals could hereby draw from and rely on their beliefs in individual consciousness and respect for the moral law when defining the ground rules, rights and limitations of their political concept. This way, the liberal citizen was automatically educated to on the one hand value humble behaviour, and on the other feel justified to develop certain expectations and a sense of entitlement in return:

[W]e [...] know when we violate that law, and therefore we feel ashamed, humiliated. This is all to the good, Kant insists, because it establishes a kind of virtuous cycle in our minds, lending support to the good principle within us. The more the moral law humiliates us and makes us feel guilty, the more respect we feel for that law and the more control it will exercise over our inner moral compass.

(Lilla 2008)

Wouldn't it all the more thereby only be logical for liberalism to have a very strong political and moral attitude of what it considers right, human, good and just?

This is where the ultimate liberal and secular virtue of tolerance comes into play, by definition already ambivalent due to it always playing along the contradictory lines of acceptance and rejection: “[I]t was the tolerance of religious diversity, [...], that created the conditions for a political unity in the early-modern European states.” (Augenstein 2008) John Locke was among the liberal frontrunners in defending the idea of religious tolerance, but his arguments were aligned with the superiority of the liberal state and its secular legislative: “[W]ho upon pretence of religion do challenge any manner of authority [...], I say these have no right to be tolerated by the magistrate [...]. [N]either Pagan nor Mahometan, nor Jew, ought to be excluded from the civil rights [...] because of his religion.” (Locke and Popple 1955)

Once the separation of church and state became a liberal necessity, religion was regarded as a “culturally mediated yet universal feature of the human condition; a set of convictions, held by individuals, that constitute multiple paths to spiritual salvation or flourishing. [...] [T]his is a distinctively modern and Western notion.” (Laborde 2017) Thinkers like Immanuel Kant and Jean-Jacques Rousseau played a vital role in this new approach regarding religious belief in the liberal world, and ideally, “post-Christian man [...] would worship in his own way, [...]; he would think of the church as a social institution devoted solely to bringing comfort to others; he would make no public claims for his faith and would preach tolerance far and wide.” (Lilla 2008)

With individuals like these, liberals believed that neither faith nor morals should be imposed by a tolerant nation, mainly because it wouldn't be necessary:

If all of us are complex beings with irreconcilable goals, [...] [i]n attacking others for their values and attachments you might be attacking something half acknowledged in yourself. That powerful, attractive argument echoed the preliberal argument from ignorance in favour of religious toleration. It drew on subsequent liberal tradition of accepting “difference” and not excluding dissenters or outsiders.

(Fawcett 2014)

But just as freedom and liberty, tolerance turned out to be neither unconditional, nor unlimited, especially when keeping in mind that the concept had manifested itself during a time that indifference towards religion spread and ethical disharmony and civic harmony were considered combinable: “It comes as a secular ideal. It is the re-assertion of the rights of society and the rights of this world against religions which by their warfare and by the absoluteness of their claims were acting in defiance of social consequences.” (Butterfield 1931)

This train of thought was only possible because after the Great Separation, religion itself was cast away into the liberal individual’s private and personal life, thereby no longer being deemed a necessity in politics. Due to the Reformation, religious conflict was also believed to have become merely a thing of the past, but liberals realized that “[w]elcome acceptance of others was growing as exclusionary hatreds spread. [...] [M]odernity seemed to lend prejudice new strength. [...] Should they open-mindedly ‘tolerate intolerance’ or use the powers of state to curtail racial and confessional prejudice? (Fawcett 2014)

This has become especially difficult in a time when liberalism has spent decades educating its individuals to treat questions of belief and faith either with tolerance or indifference:

Religion [...] operated as a normative ‘black box’, the content of which the state could try to ignore. It is when this box is thrown open by the egalitarian impulse of the secular age that the need for new ‘strong evaluations’ re-appears. Yet those strong evaluations are inherently problematic in a world where there is no publicly validated religious or moral faith, and where the state is expected not to take sides between different ways of conceiving and living the good life.

(Laborde 2012)

It seems as if it is nearly impossible to fully understand liberalism and its historic as well as spiritual development once the question of Christianity is not dealt with on an equally analytical basis, especially with regard to the recurring competition of beliefs in Europe.

So, what happened on the other side of the realm?

Chapter 5: Christendom

When referring to the Christian roots of Europe in a proposed constitution for the European Union became an issue in 2001 – 2, there were strong voices in support, [...]. There were also strong voices opposed, [...]. Yet far the most widespread reaction was one of embarrassment, an uneasy wish that the question would go away. With the defeat of the proposed constitutional treaty in referendums, the question has gone away. But the embarrassment remains.

(Siedentop 2014)

The role of Christianity was without a doubt one of the most important features in the history of the West: in 21st century Europe, it is considered a completely separate agent or institution that exists in the private sphere of voluntary association and individual conscience. Secular traits and freedom of religion are seen as widely accepted liberal virtues within the modern state: “However, such argument overlooks the fact that the normative ideal of a strictly secular public sphere is itself the expression of a distinctively [...] national-republican tradition that is infused with Christian values.” (Augenstein 2008)

5.1 The transcendent God and the importance of the individual

Among the many thinkers that shaped liberalism, especially Thomas Hobbes and John Locke introduced the idea of the individual’s natural right justified by the fact of being human:

The conviction itself was old, being present in the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions. The idea of human worth as something cashable in this life was once supposed to have fallen away in medieval Christian thought and been rediscovered with a bang in the Renaissance, popularized in the Reformation, and given democratic voice soon after.

(Fawcett 2014)

Theism considers divine power as something remote from the world and present on earth at the same time, which makes moral responsibility instead of obedience the main requisite for the connection

between God and human. Questions of divine relation, cosmological speculation and authority in Christian political theology hereby become a subjective matter, since Christians believed that salvation is brought to all individuals believing in Him:

At the very core of Christianity is this doctrine of messianic incarnation: God became man. [...] [O]ur relationship with God is governed by love and grace, not by law, and is infused with the constant presence of the Holy Spirit. [...] It assumes that man, as a natural creature, is capable of good and therefore of improving himself and his social surroundings. [...] He is God's free creature, not his puppet. He is called through his free will to imitate Christ, who is his moral exemplar. [...] [T]here is only one door issuing from man to God, and it exists in the heart.

(Lilla 2008)

According to the bible, God's breath of life to man also placed a divine image in him. While religious belief in ancient Greece and Rome focussed on many gods, the domestic sphere and ancestors, the story of Jesus' sacrifice revealed the one God's true will, playing a crucial role in replacing the importance of the Greek and Roman family with the individual's moral agency and "experience of grace" (Siedentop 2014).

With God's potential presence in every rational believer's faith, Christianity managed to kill two birds with one stone. On the one hand, rationality was argued to be the offspring of humility instead of the aristocratic and privileged status of polis citizens. This promoted the idea of human equality and individual freedom through the "universal availability of a God-given foundation for human action, the free action of love" (Siedentop 2014); on the other, it united all its godlike individuals to one big community by appealing to mankind's flaws such as sin and guilt:

Christianity gives an account of alienation and reconciliation that is unique among the religious traditions. [...] [I]t [...] places responsibility [...] squarely on the shoulders of sinful man. [...] What is unique to Christianity is the conviction that Christendom is the universal agent for reconciliation, [...]. Christianity conceived of itself as an unprecedented form of human community defined by its members' inner conviction.

(Lilla 2008)

The metaphor of the uniting divine core and simultaneous imperfect nature of the Christian individual served as a strong mean of linking mankind's conflicted inner self, thereby also opening up the possibility of human's moral equality: "That [...] marks [...], freedom of conscience. But it also introduces moral obligations that follow from recognizing that all humans are children of God. [...] [A] new basis for human association, a voluntary basis – joining humans through loving wills guided by an equal belief. [...] That [...] is the human capacity to think and choose, to will." (Siedentop 2014)

One problem yet remained to be solved with regard to the idea of the rational and free Christian individual living in a world abandoned by God: if man is theoretically 'good' and capable of self-improvement, what good is divinity?

[I]mprovement [...] takes place gradually, through effort in the world. That is why man should embrace worldly activity—in work, study, politics, family, church—and help to infuse all of them with the Holy Spirit. [...] [M]any Christian thinkers over the centuries have emphasized the significance of Christ's departure and the persistent corruption of the world he left behind. To the extent that man is a natural creature, they argue, he is still governed by sin; that human stain can never be blotted out. [...] It is vanity to think we can somehow approach God by learning more about the world or by reforming ourselves and our political institutions to bring them into line with what we take to be biblical morality.

(Lilla 2008)

The ultimate solution for the explication of the importance of believing in the divine nexus and Him should eventually be found in the conception of the Trinity, a morally loaded symbol which would represent the mystical and overarching union between the remote, the immanent and the transcendent picture of God (cf. Lilla 2008).

5.2 The loser of The Great Separation?

Christianity's popularity and success saw its ultimate breakthrough when it took the Roman empire towards the end of the third century, with the church acquiring wealthy beneficiaries and acting as a

socially inclusive welfare organization for anyone in need, no matter the position in society: “In this way [...] its ‘universality’ – could be proclaimed [...]. The equality of souls in search of salvation was at the heart of Christian beliefs. It was the dominant moral fact about the movement that created the church.” (Siedentop 2014)

In the ninth and tenth century, the Christian civic notables were so prominently accepted that they were considered a vital characteristic of Western Europe’s identity. With the increasing power of the clergy, individuals came to be thought of as souls instead of citizens, a social and moral category in itself that would have both legal appeals and extensive consequences for civic government: “These fragments of identity mark the beginnings of the modern Western world. [...] [T]hey began to make up a new picture of society and government. It was a picture that would later give the terms ‘authority’ and ‘public’ a new meaning. Government would [...] be conceived as rule over individuals.” (Siedentop 2014)

By the eleventh century, this would cause tensions between secular rulers and the papacy, since the church considered its divine sovereignty as legitimization for its moral authority and liberty, making way for the transformational struggle regarding investiture of church personnel:

On the one hand the church won independence, which represented a victory of the spiritual principle over the secular. On the other, the victorious church reshaped itself along secular lines by developing class distinctions (clergy/laity), lusting after property, breeding corruption, and pursuing megalomaniacal dreams of worldly empire in the Crusades.

(Lilla 2008)

This would lead to the Gregorian Reformation, with pope Gregory VII refusing to let the Emperor interfere in the appointment of church personnel. He wanted to protect the church’s right “to govern itself – [...] – and to pronounce freely on moral issues. [...] [T]he government of individuals, whose moral status as children of God gave them an equal claim to concern and respect. [...] [C]anon law developed around [...] a theory resting on the assumption of moral equality.” (Siedentop 2014)

The Canonists would drastically change twelfth-century European government and society by drawing from and thereby also changing ancient Roman civil law. This should also have an impact on habits and social attitudes regarding the concepts of natural justice and individual rights within society:

It provided the recipe for a new type of society, a society that would be restless and progressive – a society that would [...] challenge the ‘privileges’ of the church itself. [...] Such rules projected and privileged the image of society as an association of individuals, each endowed with conscience and free will. By creating ‘universal’ claims and thus fostering the habit of comparison, canon law also provided a model for the growth of secular authorities able and willing to promote such claims.

(Siedentop 2014)

Especially the papal sovereignty as a meta-role within the societal community of moral subjects appealed to secular rulers wanting to expand their jurisdiction, and once Christianity found itself in the midst of religious violence and wars, the church’s reign over Europe and its authority were starting to be challenged: “[A]rguments were [...] framed in universal terms regarding the nature of the mind, the rules of inference, the passions of the soul, the dynamics of human interaction, [...]. But they were also developed [...] to help Europe escape [...] political and religious violence.” (Lilla 2008)

The canonist and also Christian claim of regarding individuals as equals and moral subjects of reason from ‘within’ found its way into the laws and ideas of modern liberalism, translating into norms such as rationality, conscience, the idea of dignity and freedom: “If Christianity declared all men equal in the sight of God, should not they be equal in the sight of the law? [...] [T]hese moral intuitions provided the basis for [...] secularism: the identification of a sphere resting on the ‘rightful’ claims of individual conscience and choice, a sphere of individual freedom protected by law.” (Siedentop 2014) And with the herald of the Enlightenment, the realms of politics and religion were finally started to be treated as separate spheres: while the latter became to be considered a more private matter, “toleration worked in the direction of growing acceptance.” (Fawcett 2014) Consequently, also freedom of religion and the idea of government’s indifference towards its individuals’ choice of faith and belief became to be considered secular virtues (cf. Butterfield 1931).

The sixteenth-century Reformation hereby played an important role regarding “the eventual creation of a humanist alternative to faith.” (Taylor 2007) Often considered a continuation and result of the Renaissance, it “might also be looked upon as a reassertion of religious authority in the world, a revolt against the secularisation, the laxness and the sins of the time.” (Butterfield 1931) While Europe treated problems in the political life as a divine question for over a millennium, thinkers like Thomas Hobbes opened the floor for intellectual problems to become a matter of politics:

Theology and cosmology were not extinguished by the Great Separation, they were simply isolated from a political philosophy that drew its principles solely from a new reading of human nature. [...] [A] consensus began to grow around ideas of religious diversity, freedom of conscience, toleration, limited government, and separation of powers—liberal ideas, as they would later be called. [...] The Great Separation did not presume or promote atheism; it simply taught an intellectual art of distinguishing questions regarding the basic structure of society from ultimate questions regarding God, the world, and human spiritual destiny.

(Lilla 2008)

But while religion might have lost the institutional power struggle to politics, Christianity indirectly won at the moral level in arguing for equal liberty, inherent divinity and freedom regarding all humans, thereby sustainably shaping Europe’s future: “The church had projected the image of society as an association of individuals, an image which unleashed the centralizing process in Europe. [...] Secularism is Christianity’s gift to the world, ideas and practices which have often been turned against ‘excesses’ of the Christian church itself.” (Siedentop 2014)

5.3 Christian Values

The herald of the Renaissance is said to have brought an end to religion’s leading position and religious tyranny in Europe, thereby enabling people to value different things than their antique predecessors:

Throughout most of its history Christianity considered itself to be the ultimate human community—the one, holy, and apostolic church. [...] In the modern age, then, the church relinquishes its independent status and in return sees its basic principles infuse every aspect

of modern life. The church is present, one might even say omnipresent, though it has no authoritative position within the state structures.

(Lilla 2008)

While the power struggle against politics might have been lost on an institutional basis, it is not entirely true that the Renaissance guaranteed clerical peace, taking Western states' confessionalization and the colonialization into consideration. But modern-day liberal Europe seems to believe that the tensions and importance of Christianity have been overcome since the Reformation of the church as well as the secular heritage of the Enlightenment:

Here Christianity is redefined as compatible with, even supportive of, secular democratic values such as tolerance, the separation of church and state, and gender equality. Christianity is readily available for reinterpretation in cultural or civilizational terms, with no reference to matters of theology, belief, or ritual.

(Laborde 2017)

This train of thought is only possible because the liberal idea of individual conscience as well as the existence and acceptance of universally accepted moral law are coherent with the Christian individual's divine spirit and the idea of 'brotherhood' or 'community': furthermore, "[t]he world is God's creation, [...]. There is thus no reason why *the world* should not be the locus of Christian ethics, nor why Christian ethics should not be at home in 'secular worlds'. [...] It is widely recognised that Western society is in a post-Constantinian, if not post-Christian, phase" (McDonald and Harvey 1955).

Even though liberal Europe has a certain tendency to embrace Christian amnesia when it comes to its genesis, it is obvious that one needs to understand that the liberal and secular world the West considers to be living in today does not only stem from modern sciences and ideas about human nature, but also from post-Christian ethics and moral beliefs: "[L]iberalism rests on the moral assumptions provided by Christianity. It preserves Christian ontology without the metaphysics of salvation." (Siedentop 2014) The underlying assumption hereby resembles Immanuel Kant's argument of religion's noble, rational and moral roots:

[R]eligion was a permanent human need and [...] Christianity, properly reformed, was the religion most suited to man's moral improvement. By reinterpreting reformed religion as collective moral practice and placing its doctrines well within the bounds of reason, he also gave religion his moral and rational blessing. One can understand, then, why Christian theologians would soon seize upon his works as if they were life rafts floating on the high seas of secular modernity. Kant taught them a new way to speak, translating Christian concepts of sin and eschatology into modern terms of moral inclination and historical progress.

(Lilla 2008)

Far more than a handful of the basic contemporary principles that European liberal democracies hold dear today are rooted in thoughts developed under canon law and derived from Christian theology and Christian ethics, such as "the promotion of 'wholeness', both personal and social. It is concerned with understanding and accepting, with caring for the victims of life's harshness, with conciliation and reconciliation. It is concerned to promote community and, in particular, supportive community."

(McDonald and Harvey 1955)

These concepts were born out of the deep conviction that humanity consisted of equal godlike individuals that were no different to the other because of any kind of affiliation with a certain class or social status:

[T]he individual [...] is the creation of a self-consciousness that undercuts merely social identities, statuses conferred by the conventional terms of a language. [...] For Augustine (and Kant), none of us can ever claim to be a success in moral terms. We all fail, and it is this failure – tragic, but also humbling – that contains a powerful egalitarian message. [...] [I]mportant is the fact that Christian insistence on the equality of souls suggested, [...], a new image of reality.

(Siedentop 2014)

Every individual is able to grow morally due to the fact that he is aware of the personal responsibility for his actions, the strength of his willpower and the ability to feel and be empathetic. These virtues can also be found in Christian charity which "emphasises two core moral beliefs as commanded in the

Scripture: that God allows each man to worship in the way he sincerely believes to be right and that Christianity should be upheld by love and persuasion.” (Augenstein 2008)

But while this sounds like the perfect transition to the Christian support for religious tolerance, this would only rather unwillingly become a virtue after the Reformation, since toleration was a political, not necessarily an ecclesiastical decision. Religious persecution and violence against other minorities of belief continued also after Christianity had officially taken the Roman empire:

The founders of the medieval European national states [...] adopted Christianity as the official religion of their realms with the expectation thus to secure political unity. [...] Medieval religious uniformity received its death blow at the time of the Reformation. Although it was not the intention of the Reformers to destroy the unity of Christendom, they actually did so. [...] A variety of Christian churches came into being. [...] Because they themselves had to suffer persecution and public condemnation of various kinds and because they represented minorities in Christendom, the Reformers re-asserted the principle [...] that faith cannot be coerced. Thus they came to advocate religious tolerance.

(Pauck 1946)

In the beginning, only Christian denominations were granted limited and conditional concessions instead of true general freedom of religion (cf. Augenstein 2008). But there was nevertheless a wave of confessional variety taking over Europe, also stemming from the experiences of seventeenth-century wars of religion, with mainly Protestant radicals and other non-conformist minorities fighting for tolerance and recognition. This would change the general religious environment under the influence of humanism and the Reformation (cf. Pauck 1946).

It is nevertheless important to take the spiritual importance and historical influence of Christian beliefs about man's nature, his entitlements and obligations of this earth into consideration, because “its implications for politics are tremendous. When we cast our eyes over human history, we see that every civilization known to us has been founded on religion, not on philosophy. In healthy societies, religion has helped to forge the social bond and encouraged sacrifice for the public good.” (Lilla 2008)

The manifestation of religious neutrality nevertheless gave many modern, secular states a fresh and, what is more important, even irreligious self-image. But “in most nations the tradition did not cease to be effective. Most western countries continued to regard themselves as Christian nations-and they still do. But ever increasingly they tended to maintain unity by the appeal to non-religious principles.” (Pauck 1946) And while this does not make the conceptual and historical link between liberalism and Christianity a nuisance or a thing of the past, it is not necessarily always being touched upon, especially not in connection with integration politics.

With these fundamental characteristics in mind, what conclusions can now be drawn regarding the Austrian value discussion?

Chapter 6: Contributing to the dialogue in Austria

The Republic of Austria made its first steps to parliamentarism and general citizens' rights in its Revolution of 1848/49 and officially implemented limited power and individual freedom in the 1867 December Constitution or Constitutional Act on the Fundamental Rights of Citizens: "[T]he State Basic Law on the protection of the rights of citizens from 1867 contains traditional civil liberties and builds the classic catalogue of fundamental rights in Austria, which was adopted into the democratic Constitution in 1920." (Lachmayer 2019)

The country is considered a liberal and democratic republic where the first secular tendencies and politics of religious tolerance already appeared in October 1781 with Emperor Joseph II introducing the Patent and Edict of Toleration among his enlightened politics of Josephinism. He hereby granted religious minorities such as Protestants, Greek Orthodox and Jewish worship in the private sphere, a regulation that would heavily influence the 1867 State Basic Law in introducing "a denominationally neutral system in ecclesiastical matters." (Potz 2008) Together with the European Convention on Human Rights, ratified in 1958, and the Recognition of the Adherents of Islam as a Religious Community from 1912, these laws represent the basis for both fundamental rights and religious freedom in Austria (cf. Köchler 2013).

By definition, secular elements as well as values and beliefs can only indirectly be found within the Austrian constitution. The country's government serves as a protective agent in this regard, since freedom of religion itself is guaranteed through individual and corporal rights for private persons and religious communities (cf. Standard 2017). Denominational neutrality is nevertheless considered a constitutional Austrian principle:

[H]owever, one has to stress that this does not mean that the state – though neutral towards religious and philosophical beliefs – were not allowed to set measures of promotions in favor of churches and religious societies as socially relevant factors. The distinguishing characteristics, however, have to be of secular and not of religious nature. [...] Such

deliberations are to be consistent with a modern substantial comprehension of fundamental rights.

(Pötz 2008)

Austria is a liberal democracy that regards itself as secular in the sense that state and religion are considered two separate entities which share a relationship based on constitutional provisions, thereby promoting a pluralistic society: however, “[t]he more diverse a society shaped by migration is, the more important is the existence of a strong common social foundation [...]. It is equally important to create awareness of this among all the people living in Austria and to communicate this concept in particular to the new immigrant members of society.” (Migration Council 2019) This is also one of the reasons why the Values and Orientation Courses were created.

6.1 The Austrian values’ origins

When Austria introduced its civic education courses in 2015 it simultaneously put its national values into writing for the first time. While the course content consciously highlights the country’s liberal and secular elements, its Christian roots are not specifically referred to. But in the 2019 Integration Report, this heritage is highlighted under a separate thematic section regarding religion:

Historically, Austria is a country characterized above all by Christianity. [...] These imprints can be seen [...] in many traditions that are of more or less religious origin. All this helps make up the culture of a country and contributes to the sense of belonging of the people who live in it. Even in a neutral state such religiously shaped traditions can and should be lived and passed on. However, they are not static, but – like society as a whole – are subject to constant change.

(Migration Council 2019)

When looking at the civic education course materials, this does not become clear: none of the principles and values anchored in the Austrian society seems to have had a Christian influence. Is it because this consciousness is something that is also not necessarily present in the majority society,

since “practices that are Christian are often regarded as religiously and culturally neutral” (Zupancic 2015)?

Assumptions of this kind are only possible when taking a closer look and the time to understand the beginnings and conceptual similarities between liberalism and Christianity, something that doesn't seem to be overly present in contemporary Northern and Western Europe: “Here, classical secularization theory not only describes a striking and unparalleled decline in religiosity but, [...], it also informs the self-understanding of many Europeans, who equate modernity with secularity and see religiosity per se as backward.” (Brubaker 2016) This again only manifested itself because Western Europe is the product of a historical combination between law and religion as the “moral guarantees offered by the Christian faith could and should become a matter of social justice as well as of grace. That sense would provide one of the foundations of modern secularism.” (Siedentop 2014) Christianity hereby underwent a process of culturalization that allowed it “to be privileged [...] in a way that it cannot be privileged as religion, given the liberal state's commitment to neutrality in religious matters.” (Brubaker 2016)

The fact that civic education, and therefore also the question of values and beliefs, became one of the most important pillars with regard to Austrian integration politics after 2015 makes this circumstance especially delicate and challenging:

Religion is a sensitive topic. Nearly forgotten until the expansion of political Islam and due to lacking religious knowledge hardly even publicly present anymore, belief has once again become a political matter, [...]. But can a society that is not even aware of its own religious roots or doesn't want to admit to them anymore truthfully teach believers of other religions its Christian motivated values such as human rights?

(Die Furche 2016a)

While the lack of reference to Christianity's importance in defining the Austrian values within the national civic education courses is a valid critique, one cannot merely reduce all liberal and secular elements present within the country to its religious heritage: “If liberal values are contestable, they

need to be challenged on their own ground – not on the dubious ground that they rely on an inaccurate or ethnocentric view of religion. [...] [I]t does not mean that liberalism is irremediably Christian” (Laborde 2017). This assumption would deny any liberal and secular accomplishment of modernity, but especially with regard to the competition of beliefs in 21st century Europe this circumstance is important to acknowledge:

“[L]iberal thought is the offspring of Christianity. [...] Liberalism became a doctrine which paved the way for a far more systematic separation of church and state – that is, for secularism. [...] The foundation of modern Europe lay in the long, difficult process of converting a moral claim into a social status. It [...] gave rise to the [...] principle of ‘equal liberty’. [...] [F]reedom became the bond between God and man. [...] This was the secular translation of the Christian idea of the ‘soul’. And we are living with its consequences even now.

(Siedentop 2014)

Why is it so vital to be aware of this, especially with regard to civic education and integration politics in Austria? The most fitting answer would be critical self-reflection: “We have to increasingly deal with the question of ‘Who are we and what makes us the way we are?’, because only once I know who I am I will not restrain myself from opening up to the ‘other’ because I fear the loss of my identity.” (Die Furche 2018b) At the end of the integration process, this shall enable the maintenance and cultivation of multiple identities in accordance with different cultures as well as a constitutional rule of law. And “[w]hile the ‘values’ of the modern West all derive in some way from Christian revelation, the society in which we live is no longer shaped by a clear Christian social ideal. Nor has that ideal been replaced by a new unifying one.” (Lilla 2008)

But if that is the case, does this automatically mean that there are no shared beliefs that the West can be defined by anymore (cf. Siedentop 2014)?

What characterizes European identity in the age of globalization and confrontation with different cultures and religions? What holds free societies together, [...]? Which Europe are those that want to protect it from migrants using fences, walls and fear for their own identity

talking about? It for sure is the commitment to democracy and human dignity, both manifested in the European Constitutions and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which, at times incompletely realized, sets standards for state action and social cohabitation [...] up to this day. It is the synthesis of a Christian image of humanity and an enlightened legal culture that Europe is offering to the world society as a history of success and peace for decades already.

(Die Furche 2016a)

The conceptual imperfectness is hereby also of importance: “Of course the free secular legal state lives on moral and ethical preconditions that he himself is unable to guarantee” (Die Furche 2018a), which is why “no liberals (not even political liberals) claim that liberalism is uncontroversial” (Laborde 2017). But what does this say about the concept of one group ‘teaching’ values through civic education courses to another?

In order for the former to have the authority of conveying certain habits and behaviours to the latter, the host society itself needs to be able to show for the values it claims to stand for. Universality, undeniability and natural presence of these attitudes within every single person living in Austria hereby seems to be an idealization of the national beliefs and characteristics of the host society, since “[v]alues develop themselves individually and culturally, they do not fall from the sky. It is not true that the equality of men and women or the non-discrimination of sexual orientation has always been a value in Austria.” (Die Furche 2016)

Values hereby mutate into means of differentiation and self-description as well as rules of conduct which makes the debate around them “a discourse about which values are more valuable. [...] We claim the adaption to our values not only because we want and need this to happen, but also because it is for the good of others.” (Fritz 2017) This again only becomes obvious once the conceptual and historical roots of the Austrian values are reflected upon:

Liberals have no interest in seeing that all ways of life flourish equally well. It is neutrality among people holding controversial conceptions of the good, not among the conceptions themselves, that is demanded of the liberal state. [...] There are many policies adopted by states we think of as liberal that are not justified, and maybe not justifiable, on neutral grounds.

(Sinopoli 1993)

It seems as if these conceptions are specifically attached to religious characteristics with regard to integration politics, which gives the value discussion a certain tone of superiority and progress on the host society's side. The concept of a dominant or mainstream culture is especially ambivalent in this regard: "Before the law everyone is equal, but not within the dominant culture'. There is a certain form of hierarchy which makes autochthones [...] better [...] or a little more developed." (Die Furche 2018a) With regard to the morally charged refugee question that has been "dealt with so much self-righteousness" (Die Furche, 2016), civic education then has to be critically reflected upon: is "adult education in Austria an 'etiquette school' for 'uncivilized refugees' or a place of politically conscious, emancipatory education that is first and foremost characterized by meeting on an equal footing, discursivity and a clear humanistic attitude" (Fritz 2017)?

6.2 Austrian values: fact or fiction?

In connection with the Austrian government's assumption of entitlement and authority to teach the liberal and social values its country stands for, one needs to critically reflect on their actual existence and presence within the host society:

Those who want to teach values need to have them internalized and also be able to set credible examples, which is why the European population's value consciousness needs to be put into question. Are we even aware of the human rights and Western values that we now claim and want migrants to understand?

(Die Furche 2016a)

This question is especially important since civic education only became a political concept after the refugee crisis of 2015 when European countries felt the need to tackle integration differently. Values all of a sudden not only served as information or orientation for refugees, but also as a means of national and cultural self-identification for the host society: "Today's discourse is dictated by a stronger rhetoric of differentiation between 'us' and 'them' than some years ago. [...] [T]he construction of collectivist enemy stereotypes [...] plays an increasingly prominent role." (Die Furche 2018b)

Keeping values such as openness, respect, diversity and recognition as propagated by the Values and Orientation Courses (see 2.1) in mind, how can political statements and election posters with slogans such as 'Home instead of Islam' in 2006 ("Daham statt Islam") (Die Presse n.d.), 'More courage for our "Viennese Blood". Too much unknown does no good' in 2010 ("Mehr Mut für unser "Wiener Blut". Zu viel Fremdes tut niemandem gut") (Die Presse 2010) or 'Love of one's native country (here: Austria) instead of Moroccan thieves' in 2012 ("Heimatliebe statt Marokkaner-Diebe") (Die Presse 2014) by Austria's right-wing Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) be classified? After all, the biggest rise of religious restrictions and social hostilities towards religion in the last ten years has been taking place in Europe (cf. Pew Research Center 2019).

Bosnian-born justice minister Alma Zadic is continuously being targeted with hate messages on social media, and an "MP in Mr Kurz's Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), [...], once interrupted her by shouting: 'We're not in Bosnia here!'" (BBC 2020). A poem about migration published by an FPÖ deputy mayor in Upper Austria "compared humans to rodents. [...] 'Just as we live down here, so must other rats,' the poem states, telling them to 'share with us the way of life, or quickly hurry away' and saying that if you mix different cultures, 'it's as if you destroy them'." (BBC 2019)

On the Austrian labour market, people with migratory backgrounds experience discrimination in recruitment and equal payment (cf. Caritas 2019), and the Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey from 2018 states the following:

Police stops are often experienced as racial profiling. [...] [R]espondents were stopped at the highest rates in Austria (5 years: 66%, 12 months: 49%) [...]. One in four (25 %) respondents felt racially discriminated against when looking for work [...]. The highest levels were observed in Austria (46 %), Luxembourg (47 %) and Italy (46 %). [...] One in five respondents of African descent (21 %) felt racially discriminated against in access to housing [...]. The highest rates were observed in Italy and Austria (39 % each), Luxembourg (36 %) and Germany (33 %).

(European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2019)

A 2016 study on discrimination against 2,142 job applications by migrants in Austria further reads as follows:

This study has investigated employment opportunities of various migrant groups in Austria and found significant levels of discrimination against migrants. [...] The experiment found substantial discrimination against applicants with a Serbian, Turkish, Chinese and Nigerian background. However, discrimination it is most pronounced for applicants with an African background. [...] It turned out that companies are more quickly to invite candidates without migrant background – [...]. At the same time, companies turn down migrant applications more rapidly – [...]. This illustrates that discrimination is a more multi-faceted phenomenon than usually considered.

(Weichselbaumer 2017)

In 2018, Austrian Civil Courage & Anti-Racism-Work organization ZARA dealt with altogether 1,920 racist-motivated incidents, claiming cases of discrimination against police officers with migratory backgrounds, racist videos and statements on the internet and ethnic profiling in public places, stating that 86% of racist harassments are actually not even being reported:

In January 2018, Mr. E. discovers another postcard with the following text in his post: 'Why should we receive dirty N***** refugees? We have no interest in those scroungers from Africa. No-Thanks!' [...] Ms. N. wears a headscarf for religious reasons. In autumn, she worked as a dialogue worker for an NGO. On her first day of work, a woman approaches her and begins to insult her for no reason. Among other things, she calls her a 'criminal Muslim hoe' and tells her to go home. After that, the woman simply walks away.

(ZARA 2018)

With regard to gender equality, Austria is ranked 13th place within the 2019 EU Gender Equality Index, reaching 65,3 out of 100 points: “Its score is 2.1 points lower than the EU’s score. Between 2005 and 2017, Austria’s score increased by 5.8 points (+ 2 points since 2015). The country’s ranking has remained the same since 2005.” (European Institute for Gender Equality 2020) This shows that Austria is definitely on the right foot, but it would be an exaggeration to say that the country enjoys a hundred percent gender equality. The Referendum on women’s issues in 2018 with approximately 482,000 signatures shows that people in Austria do feel like there is room for improvement with regard to gender issues (cf. Frauenvolksbegehren n.d.).

While these examples and numbers do not specifically say anything about the existence or presence of the propagated values by the civic education courses among Austrian individuals, they do allow for an overall picture that definitely challenges the Values and Orientation Courses’ claim of its contents’ universality. According to Dr. Stadler, he phrased things after Plato in the way they should be, not how they were: “I specify benchmarks in order for all of us to work on reaching them. [...] There is something for everyone – those that are scared of losing our traditions as well as those that have a rather emancipatory thinking.” (Profil 2013) While obviously trying to appeal to the attitudes of the Austrian population at large, this statement unmistakably shows that there is nevertheless a wide spectrum among the host society’s values to be found:

Both sides of the immigration society must therefore develop something like a pluralism competence in addition to a receiving and integration competence, because over time, society becomes more similar and more diverse at the same time. Accordingly, integration continues to be seen as a two-way process, and it takes effort to make it work.

(The Expert Council for Integration 2019)

How can unilateral civic education contribute to the manifestation of these competences? According to the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Research (BMBWF), school is compulsory until the age of fourteen, which allows the country to argue that young pupils and students learn and internalize these values through their primary and secondary education (cf. BMBWF n.d.).

And what about the adult host society? “A lasting learning effect requires the values to be conveyed explicitly through information, setting a consistent example and actual implementation wherever possible in a liberal society, as well as an appropriate period for immigrants to internalize the new situation individually.” (The Expert Council for Integration 2019) But if there are no integration measures for adults within the receiving society, what does this say about the assumption of the values’ general validity and existence within said society, given this chapter’s controversial examples in this regard?

6.3 Civic education in Austria: integration or assimilation?

In connection with the introduction of the Values and Orientation the Austrian government always spoke and continues to speak of integration as a two-way process, even though the civic education courses are only intended and mandatory for refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection from the age of fifteen, but no members of the host society: “At the ‘end of the road’ there is neither a perfectly assimilated society, nor a patchwork of different social groups that has become alien to itself, but rather a plural coexistence that has to be negotiated again and again.” (The Expert Council for Integration 2019) In which way are the Values and Orientation Courses a promising and effective mean within this propagated two-way process, and are they able to contribute to successful integration or do they rather foster the “implicit undertone that fitting into ‘our’ society is the sole responsibility of those seeking to assimilate” (Ground Truth Solutions 2018)?

German sociologist Hartmut Esser’s concept of integration hereby subdivides social integration in four categories. While cultururation refers to newcomers becoming familiar with the language as well as norms and rules of the host society, placement deals with elements such as labour market participation and positioning within the country’s social structure; c) interaction “includes contacts, friendships, and partnership with members of the host society. Finally, identification covers the emotional feeling of belongingness to the host society.” (Bacher et al. 2019) Due to the unilateral

nature of the Values and Orientation Courses and the course's content that primarily aims at transmitting norms, rules and cultural habits, it is safe to say that Austria's civic education exclusively contributes to the first category:

[I]n Austria the politics of immigrant integration is primarily discursively constructed as pertaining to the cultural dimension. Whenever the topic is discussed and policies are enacted under the label of 'integration', they tend to cover civic integration and focus on language acquisition and civic education, thus emphasizing the sharing of values and norms as well as the cultural aspect of the need to use a common language.

(Permoser and Rosenberger 2012)

A further differentiation can hereby be made between integration and assimilation: whereas the former aims at the simultaneous integration in both the host society as well as the society of origin, the latter is considered as "integration in the host society and disintegration in the society of origin" (Bacher et al. 2019). According to the Austrian government, the Values and Orientation Courses are meant to contribute to the former, not the latter.

With regard to the values transmitted by the civic education courses, certain habits and traditions of the host society are hereby being politized and instrumentalized, for example waste separation or the handshake as a culturally important and locally common form of greeting (see 2.3): "Apparently this is a vital element of the Austrian values." (Fritz 2017) While some topics within the civic education courses pose less cultural dynamite, the same cannot be said about those that touch upon spheres such as religious beliefs and often non-Christian habits:

Devout Muslim men don't shake a woman's hand – and vice versa. This is a religious rule that the majority society could consider impolite. [...] Strangers are therefore indirectly dismissed as having a deficit related to their belief. [...] The majority society claims a gesture of courtesy which it itself at times considers stiff and formal as an absolute value.

(Semiosisblog 2017)

Due to the unilateral character of the courses they do not offer a platform for exchange in order for the propagated two-way process to actually take place, and even though the government may

rightfully defend a naturally unsymmetrical distribution of integration efforts (see 3.1), it seems more than questionable that the last chapter of the 'My life in Austria' training document speaks of interculturality:

In Austria, there are special habits and customs that are observed by the majority of people. Being able to recognize these habits and customs as well as learning how to use them will help avoid misunderstandings. [...] Simply ask your colleagues or Austrian friends. They will be happy to help you. The more you know about habits in everyday contact with people, the easier will it be to avoid misunderstandings and live happily in Austria.

(BMEIA 2018a)

But where does the propagated reciprocal character of the integration process come into play?

While tension due to cultural differences within the integration process should absolutely be expected, it seems as that this politization of beliefs may not be able to actually create collective belonging since “[v]alues don’t connect, values separate. They cause troubles because they define who we and who the others are.” (Die Furche, 2016) The Values and Orientation Courses hereby seem to not necessarily work against this trend since they don’t target the entire population, and they clearly incentivize to not only accept but ideally also adopt habits and values on a merely unilateral basis. In this sense, one could rather speak of assimilation than asymmetrical integration since there clearly is no “disintegration in the society or origin” (Bacher et al. 2019) on the host society’s side; the same cannot be said on the refugees’ behalf. Furthermore, the courses foster the underlying dynamics of differentiation between two opposing cultural camps instead of creating a cultural melting pot:

[T]he emphasis on cultural assimilation in Austria has a predominantly exclusionary character. [...] Assimilating into Austrian culture is conceived of as a unilateral requirement on the part of the immigrant, rather than as a two-way process involving adaptation on both sides. [...] A further major challenge will be to improve the perception of immigration and of immigrants among the majority population. [...] Of course, to improve this situation would need a more proactive and inclusionary attitude on the part of the government, as well as a concerted effort to communicate the benefits of immigration to the majority population.

(Permoser and Rosenberger 2012)

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The intention of this thesis was to contribute to the ongoing dialogue regarding the civic education courses within Austria's integration politics which have been implemented since the events of the summer of 2015. In this context, the concept and content of the Values and Orientation Courses as well as the public debate with points of views from the governmental and support and critique from the non-governmental side have been represented. Furthermore, liberalism, Christianity and their common byproduct, secularism, have been historically analyzed in order to understand their deeply rooted interconnectedness regarding their conceptual characteristics.

The idea behind these two approaches was to a) understand the political background of the current debate and b) take additional moral and philosophical roots of the problem into consideration, a topic that is especially important when thinking about the competition of beliefs that 21st century Europe is currently experiencing:

[M]any liberals now worry whether liberal democracy can continue to work. [...] Toleration and civic respect are under challenge. [...] Liberals are reacting now that others are trying to snatch it away. [...] Their foreigner-bating jingoism adds nevertheless to a fetid and illiberal climate of intolerance. [...] Liberals are torn. [...] They wish not to demean or stigmatize new citizens in their midst, but they want liberal ways upheld and defended.

(Fawcett 2014)

So, what is the role of Austrian integration politics and the still ongoing Value and Orientation Courses in the midst of all of this?

7.1 Answering research question 1

In order to find an answer to this question and contribute to the ongoing public debate, one dimension of this research primarily dealt with the courses' content. Here, the following first research question has been posed:

1. Do the Values and Orientation Courses truthfully represent Austria's values?

- Hypothesis 1: *Yes, the Values and Orientation Courses show that Austria is characterized by liberal and secular values.*

To answer this question, a closer look into the 'Co-existence in Austria' brochure as the most basic and guiding framework with regard to the country's civic education is especially important. The six principles mentioned are directly taken from the Austrian constitution, and while the eighteen values are slightly more abstract and vaguer than said principles: the whole of it represents a power mix of a liberal, secular and post-Christian welfare state. With regard to the brochure's content, only the religious inheritance is not clearly touched upon and therefore not officially taken into consideration: "Secularization is widespread in Western Europe, but most people in the region still identify as Christian. [...] The prevailing view in Western Europe is that religion should be kept separate from government policies." (Pew Research Center 2018) The conceptual basis of this understanding is deeply rooted in the self-image and historical development of the 21st century Western nation state: "The modern state is a secular state. Its responsibility is not spiritual salvation, but inner-worldly justice and peace, [...]. This re-theologizing of politics, [...], is very dangerous. [...] The generalized rejection of political liberalism is only undermining modernity." (Die Furche 2018a) In this sense, Hypothesis 1 can definitely be supported.

Nevertheless, two critical observations have to be made: Austrian civic education is characterized by strong elements of exemplification, euphemism and whitewash. The Values and Orientation Courses idealize both the Austrian society as well as life in the country, describing cultural and social best practices rather than the utter truth, which is important to remember since "[l]iberalism progressed from worse to better but never reached an ideal [...] state." (Fawcett 2014) In international comparison there are relatively strong hostile attitudes towards migrants and especially Muslims within the Austrian society to be found: "The rise in stereotypes is to a great part a consequence of the hardening public and political debate around migration. This includes the risk of a basic ideological separation within the country." (Haller et al. 2019)

Secondly, the admission or awareness of an at least indirect Christian influence on the country's values plays a vital role in society's understanding of its actions and self-reflection. This is especially meaningful when thinking about the competition of beliefs that is setting the tone in integration politics, since the culturalization of Christianity "allows minority religious practices, redefined as cultural, to be restricted in a way that would not otherwise be possible, given the liberal state's commitment to religious freedom." (Brubaker 2016) Developments like the non-theological connotation of the crucifix in Austria (see 1.1) play a vital role in this regard, especially because "culture is not intrinsically more inclusive than religion." (Laborde 2017)

7.2 Answering research question 2

The second dimension analyzed within this thesis was the civic education courses' contribution to the integration climate in the country:

2. Do the Values and Orientation Courses play an important role for social and cultural integration in Austria?

- Hypothesis 2: *Yes, the Values and Orientation Courses give refugees important information about beliefs and life in Austria and thereby foster integration.*

For this question, the 'My life in Austria' training document as well as the modus operandi of the Values and Orientation Courses are most significant: "We want you to understand why these values are so important to us. You must acquire the ability to share our value system. [...]. This document shall serve to provide initial guidance and an important overview of the social order in Austria – a social order you must observe." (BMEIA 2018a) While the civic education courses definitely offer important information regarding everyday life and the political, bureaucratic and institutional system in Austria and thereby manage to cover the objective of offering 'orientation' to refugees, this circumstance doesn't say anything about the contribution to the integration process: "Today, many speak of integration, but what they really mean is assimilation.' [...] 'Integrate yourself and don't

attract attention [...]” (Die Furche 2018) Even though the government admits to claiming unsymmetrical integration efforts (see 3.1), the Values and Orientation Courses are only to be frequented by refugees, not the host society, which doesn't correspond with the Austrian government's idea of integration being a process of reciprocity (cf. BMEIA 2020; also see 1.2).

Furthermore, “there is a difference whether civil society addresses or negotiates the topic of identity or if the state determines [...] what this identity should look like.” (Die Furche 2018a) Taking the example of the handshake as an absolute value, the courses are rather expressing a clear notion of behavior and attitudes that people living in Austria should internalize:

[R]eligious belief is no excuse to opt out of a common practice of civility that is universally respected in that country. But refusing to shake someone's hand (if this refusal is extended to men as well as to women) is not in itself morally abhorrent [...]. Generally, liberal rights include rights to do wrong [...], within the boundaries set by the basic rights of others—out of respect for reasonable pluralism. [...] There can be reasonable disagreement, [...], about how to interpret and weigh different rights, especially those that are [...] morally ambivalent claims.

(Laborde 2017)

Hypothesis 2 thereby has to be refuted: yes, the Values and Orientation Courses do explain life and give information about the norms, traditions and habits in Austria. But they are not able to contribute to cultural and social integration in that sense that they express openness or give room for the country's values to develop within a pluralistic and intercultural setting. Instead, “[t]he debate around ‘European values’ only started once the project of prosperity was in crisis and Europe looked for a new path within its integration politics” (Die Furche 2016), which rather indicates the courses' assimilation efforts or endeavours of protection than integration, which is “continuously being treated as an obligation and debt on the migrant's behalf.” (Haller et al. 2019)

7.3 Outlook

If the reflections within this master thesis show one thing, it is that “liberalism makes sense as a political practice, but becomes fragmented and hard to account for when taken for a [...] branch of moral philosophy” (Fawcett, 2014: 405). With regard to the challenging topic of integration in Europe after the summer of 2015 this automatically touches upon the complex issues of tolerance, liberal neutrality, competition of beliefs and religious confessions, whereby “[r]eligion is morally and politically salient only as one of the conceptions of the good, ethical worldviews, ways of life, and so on, that make up the pluralism of contemporary societies.” (Laborde 2017)

What has most recently become even more important in this regard are questions of national values, social norms and cultural habits within pluralistic societies. European integration has therefore been increasingly shaped by politics of civic education, Austria is only one of many examples in this regard. While the country’s Values and Orientation Courses are meant to give information and an overview to refugees in order to orientate themselves in their new home, they are also meant to maintain some sort of status quo and basic framework that Austria feels to be needing to maintain or protect (cf. The Expert Council for Integration 2016).

As shown within this analysis, this framework is not only characterized by liberal and secular elements:

[I]t is a fact seldom noticed by political theorists that religious ideas have a vestigial presence in the political culture of [...] pluralistic and secularized societies: much secular language is secularized religious language. [...] [O]ur theories of basic rights, of property and justice, of the respect due to the human person, are all rooted historically in theories of natural law and in conceptions that were specifically theistic and, indeed, Christian in approach. [...] Many religiously inspired concepts, stripped of their theological, communal, and authority-based claims, survive in the public reason of liberal democratic societies. [...] Human dignity has religious origins, and secular justifications.

(Laborde 2017)

This circumstance does not discredit these values or make them less liberal or secular, and it is also doesn’t make the country’s liberal or secular traits more or less liberal, secular or religious. But

especially with regard to the competition of beliefs that is setting the tone within European integration politics, the awareness and understanding of these basic characteristics as well as their historical and conceptual roots are vital:

The shared assumption of European political thinkers [...], is that the 'age of religion' is over in the West and that although private faith survives, political theology can never be revived. [...] They speak of 'modernity' or the 'modern age' in quasi-eschatological language, describing it as a rip in time that opened an unprecedented and irreversible epoch in human experience, with a unique logic, language, and mindset.

(Lilla 2008)

Especially the developments in Europe post-2015 challenge this assumption. While Austria doesn't necessarily re-theologize its integration politics because the country's national values might have a post-Christian influence, it nevertheless plays an important role in creating images of the self and the 'other' that need to be understood on a deeper moral and philosophical level:

[J]ust as "their" religiosity emerges from the matrix of Islam, so "our" secularity [...] emerges from the matrix of Christianity [...] In Northern and Western Europe today, this [...] presents itself as closely linked with secularity and liberalism. Once understood as antithetical to liberalism, secularism, and modernity, Christianity is increasingly seen as their civilizational matrix, and as the matrix of a whole series of more specific ideas, attitudes, and practices, including human rights, tolerance, gender equality, and support for [...] rights.

(Brubaker 2016)

Even though the internalization of this conceptual background is extremely important when thinking about politics of civic education, what is even more essential is critically reflecting on the consequences and effectiveness these could have for integration. It is one thing to define national values and put limitations on questions of belief, something that definitely gives the host society a feeling of security and control as well as newcomers some sort of guiding principles:

To say that the liberal community must tolerate every sort of religion (and even irreligion) is not to say that each of these opinions is equally respectable, or that the liberal community should never be permitted to choose sides in contests among religions or between religion and irreligion.

(Kautz 1993)

But it is yet another thing to assume that giving civic education courses to refugees is a sufficient mean to foster cultural integration and social cohesion. ‘Teaching’ values to only one part of the society and simultaneously expecting that the people on the receiving end have all the moral and civic equipment necessary to co-exist with the ‘others’ is no sustainable strategy that will ultimately improve or guarantee intercultural identities or pluralism: “Is the value debate a replacement of European realpolitik’s impotence?” (Die Furche 2016)

With regard to Austria, this might actually be the case, since the current concept of the Values and Orientation Courses rather seems to target the 2015-aftermath with public ‘pacification’ in trying to assimilate newcomers instead of integrating them: “The role of schools and additional education measures has to be discussed and encouraged even further. This is especially true with regard to an actively enlightening education and anti-discrimination policy which targets both students and adults.” (Die Furche 2018b)

Especially with regard to the latter, the current format of the country’s civic education policies doesn’t seem to create intercultural meeting points or incentives for actual dialogue since the majority society isn’t even an active part of the target group. It is illusionary optimistic, if not even simple wrong to assume that the propagated national values are a) present in every member of the society or b) a sufficient mean that gives people the capacity to peacefully co-exist with one another. There are actually higher changes that the current politics support the creation of parallel societies rather than effectively contribute to social and cultural integration:

Only intense and progressive public engagement as well as political education [...] can tackle prejudices and generalizations since perceived discrimination and social devaluation minimize and hinder the chances of a shift in values and young Muslims' acculturation. [...] [N]ational and local actions against racism and discrimination are necessary to guarantee long-term equal changes as well as social cohesion.

(Die Furche 2018b)

Civic education as a vital part of integration politics represents a promising concept, but it cannot be applied unilaterally in order to not foster but resolve this problematic struggle between different forms of cultural or religious beliefs. If integration truly is no one-way street, then it also needs to be treated that way in strategically and institutionally guaranteeing that a) a country's values are present in all members of society, b) these values continue to develop and be open to intercultural modifications, and c) all members of society are incentivised to take an active part in the reciprocal integration process.

Once upon a time, "liberal democracy was [...] a good kind of society to grow up in. To many elsewhere it was an enviable place to live." (Fawcett 2014)

But in order for post-2015 Europe to live happily ever after, many more pages in the handbook of integration need to be written.

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