
AUSTRIA'S FAR-RIGHT PUTS INTO QUESTION INTERNATIONAL RIGHTS CONVENTIONS

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Austrias far-right Interior Minister Herbert Kickl was accused by the opposition of threatening the rule of law Wednesday (23 January) after he appeared to call into question Austrias commitment to international rights conventions.

In comments on Austrian public television on Tuesday evening Kickl, from the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ), was asked if his proposals for harsher procedures for asylum seekers would contravene the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and other international commitments.

Kickl replied that in his opinion there were some strange legal structures □ sometimes many years old and developed in totally different circumstances □ which prevent us from doing what is necessary, adding: I would like to take those rules on.

I believe in the principle that law should follow politics and not the other way round, he said.

The opposition Social Democrats (SPÖ) said in a statement Wednesday that Kickl had launched a grave attack on the rule of law in Austria and had shown by calling into question Austrias commitment to the ECHR that he was himself the biggest threat to democracy.

Some members of the cabinet hailing from the centre-right Peoples Party (ÖVP) □ which has governed in coalition with the FPÖ since December 2017 □□□□□ moved to distance themselves from Kickls remarks.

Justice Minister Josef Moser emphasised that in a state of law, the law is always supreme.

President Alexander Van der Bellen, a former head of the Green party who has often voiced disagreement with the government, said in a tweet that the ECHR has had constitutional status in Austria for 59 years.

Calling it into question would mean the end of the fundamental consensus underlying the Second Republic, Van der Bellen said, referring to Austrias post-war system of government.

Kickl is the former general secretary of the FPÖ and is considered the brains of the party.

In recent weeks he has repeatedly expressed his frustration that certain international conventions could thwart his plans to speed up deportations of refugees and asylum seekers convicted of criminal offences, including to Syria.

Chancellor Sebastian Kurz has also said he wants Austria to be a pioneer in encouraging EU rules to be changed to make it easier to deport asylum seekers convicted of criminal offences.

Kaynak/Source: