
Austria: presidential elections on 9 October. Churches call to vote. “Stability, social cohesion, solidarity”

Austria will go to the polls on 9 October to elect a new president. About six million voters will have to choose from six candidates, including the incumbent president, Alexander Van der Bellen, who is running for a second term. The news dominating the headlines is that the young leader of the Beer Party, Dominik Wlazny, also known by his stage name of Marco Pogo, will also be running. Two candidates, however, seem to have a lead in the presidential race: the outgoing President, backed by a left-wing coalition, and Walter Rosenkranz, the candidate of the far-right FPÖ party. “A high turnout significantly contributes to the legitimacy of elected bodies and to the political and social stability of the country”, the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches in Austria said in a statement, calling on citizens to exercise their right to vote. “Great challenges” arise from the climate and energy crises, the war in Ukraine, the pandemic, and inflation, which “could push even more people into poverty”. “Political stability, social cohesion, and the pursuit of the common good, as well as of justice and solidarity” are therefore essential. The Churches also reflect on the fact that “free elections in a free society cannot be taken for granted”, as the referendums in Ukraine’s occupied territories have shown. Even in some European countries, however, the statement concludes, we note “with great concern a backsliding in democracy and limitations of fundamental rights and freedoms”.

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