

Ensure Climate Protection—Seize the Irrecoverable Opportunity!

Open Letter of Austrian Researchers in Climate and Air Quality to the Federal Government

(Decision: teleconference on 27 April 2020 — Signing: 29 April 2020 – see list of signatories and link to the original German version on Page 3)

Esteemed Members of the Austrian Federal Government!

In the Covid-19 crisis, you have set up a professional crisis management and did not shy away from drastic measures. Doing so it has become apparent that professional political guidance necessary for the common good is largely rated as positive by the population, and that readiness for adequate action does exist. In times of crisis, clear guidance is required, on the base of scientific expertise. You have shown that this is possible in Austria.

The first infection peak is overcome, however, the challenges have by no means become less. In terms of a foresightful, long-term risk management, the point now is – in the first place – to balance social hardships by targeted assistance measures, to restart the economic performance, and at the same time to limit a possible second flaring-up of Covid-19 infections.

A “*return to every-day life as usual*”, however, can and must not exist, in the light of the climate crises. Even though all of us long for a “*time after the crisis*” – as climate researchers we know that the big crisis is still ahead of us. If we don’t steer against the progressing climate change now, this will develop in a much more catastrophic way than all the scenarios presented in the context of Covid-19. Thus it is imperative to uncompromisingly drive forward climate neutrality until 2040, as anchored in your Government Programme, seriously and consequently. Political decisions required for that are not less challenging and cannot be postponed. Decisions have to be made now.

In the Covid-19 crisis it has become a matter of course to make decisions on the base of scientific evidence. We urge you to handle the climate crisis with the same professionalism. The scientific facts are much clearer than in the corona case. The coming five years are the time frame which essentially decides the future of mankind. Through consequent measures for the protection of climate, the climate crisis can now still be attenuated enough to avert large and irreversible changes and their catastrophic consequences.

If these measures are, however, postponed, and instead the fossil *lock-in* is further solidified by return to *business as usual*, you are gambling away irrecoverably the chance to protect humans from a further growth of the climate crisis into a climate catastrophe. The political responsibility for this is with you, and the directions you select now in recovering from the Covid-19 crisis are also decisive for the climate crisis.

In this temporal coincidence lies a big challenge, but the governmental controls required now anyway also offer a big chance. It is in your hands to overcome two global threats with one common strategy, by you making the right decisions. In this legislative period, you will thus not only decide upon the short-term overcoming of the crisis, but in particular also on the longer-term future of Austria. And not only that – you, the Austrian Government, are currently considered as one of the Europe-wide role models with respect to the management of the Covid-19 crisis. The EU looks upon Austria. Use this opportunity and demonstrate your farsightedness and paradigmatic role also in the climate crisis!

We therefore call upon you, on the basis of the state of knowledge in climate research and in line with your Government Programme “*Out of responsibility for Austria*”, to couple subsidies planned now as a consequence of the Covid-19 crisis with clear climate protection aims.

Specifically, this means in particular that planned financial assistance for economic recovery in the form of government aids must

1. couple aid to industry and manufacturing businesses with compulsory conditions for reducing greenhouse-gas emissions in the short term, and phasing them out in the medium term, in order to fulfill the climate goals and to make progress towards a circular economy;
2. link aid to the service sector with conditions aligned with the sustainability goals of the UN Agenda 2030 ("*Sustainable Development Goals*");
3. bind aid to the traffic sector to the strengthening of a climate-neutral and strongly emission-reduced public transport system (long- and short distance) and a fossil-free individual and freight transport fleet, as well as to a reduction of short-distance flights;
4. couple aid to the agricultural and forestry sector with clear conditions to increase storage of carbon in wood, grass, and soils, to promote biodiversity, and to increase the sustainable production of food;
5. organise aid to households in line with the sustainability goals of the Agenda 2030, to socially secure the people living in Austria, and to protect children from poverty.

Financial aids have to be transparent and as a whole designed in such a way that the areas needed to secure critical infrastructures are considered more strongly, and that the resilience of Austria to crises is raised through diversity of small and medium enterprises in all branches as well as through securing domestic production sites for all vital goods.

We also call urgently on you to press very actively on the level of the EU to impose the above-mentioned conditions also for financial assistance of the EU to member states and economic sectors. They need to become an integrated part of the *European Green Deal* of the EU, which can succeed only with the respective support by the member states, thus multiplying the effect of the financial aids.

These decisions have to be made now and don't permit any further postponement. As the Federal Government, you have the possibility now to demonstrate and further expand your competence in crisis management as shown in the Covid-19 crisis. In this way, Austria will confirm in the European and international context her already started lead role for dealing successfully with the great challenges. It is now within your unavoidable co-responsibility to avert the growth of the climate crisis into a climate catastrophe!

The signing researchers (see page 3) are the 22 members of the Climate and Air Quality Commission (KKL) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW) who are linked in this frame as leading and independent experts for service to the common good. On behalf of all members we assure you that from the side of Austrian science we are ready any time to support the Federal Government in coping with these major tasks.

Unanimous decision 27th April 2020 – Signed 29th April 2020 – the Coordinators of the Letter:

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Georg Kaser
Full Member of ÖAW and multiple Lead
Author for IPCC Assessment Reports on
Climate Change

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Gottfried Kirchengast
Leading Member of the KKL of ÖAW and
Representative of Science in the National
Committee for Climate Protection NKK

A reference document with leading participation of members of the KKL of ÖAW—providing in-depth scientific input for climate protection in Austria (in German):

Kirchengast, G., Kromp-Kolb, H., Steininger, K., Stagl, S., Kirchner, M., Ambach, Ch., Grohs, J., Gutsohn, A., Peisker, J., Strunk, B. (2019): **Referenzplan als Grundlage für einen wissenschaftlich fundierten und mit den Pariser Klimazielen in Einklang stehenden Nationalen Energie- und Klimaplan für Österreich (Ref-NEKP)**. CCCA Wien-Graz (<https://ccca.ac.at/refnekp>) – Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (ÖAW), Wien.

– **Executive Summary**, Sep. 2019, 18 pp.: <https://doi.org/10.1553/Ref-NEKP-Summary>

– **Vision 2050 und Umsetzungspfade**, Nov. 2019, 25 pp.:
<https://doi.org/10.1553/Ref-NEKP-Vision2050>

– **Ref-NEKP Gesamtband**, Nov. 2019, 204 pp.: <https://epub.oeaw.ac.at/8497-3inhalt>

(“Executive Summary” and „Vision 2050 und Umsetzungspfade“ may also be ordered as brochures, printed in high quality and sustainably, via KKL – contact karin.windsteig@oeaw.ac.at)

List of Signatories—linked as the 22 members of the KKL of ÖAW (status as per April 2020, including fields of expertise):

DI Dr. Markus Amann (IIASA Laxenburg, greenhouse gas and air quality research)

Priv.-Doz. Dr. Andrea Fischer (ÖAW Innsbruck, mountain research and climatology)

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Manfred Grasserbauer (TU Wien, environmental and ecosystem research)

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Univ.-Prof. Dr. Michael Hantel (Uni Wien, physical climatology and meteorology)

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Regina Hitzenberger (Uni Wien, aerosol physics and environmental physics)

Univ.-Doz. Dr. Robert Jandl (BFW-Bundesforschungszentrum für Wald, climate and soil research)

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Georg Kaser (Uni Innsbruck, glaciological and climate research)

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Anne Kasper-Giebl (TU Wien, air quality & aerosol and environmental analytics)

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Gottfried Kirchengast (Uni Graz—Climate Change Graz, interdisciplinary climate research)

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Helga Kromp-Kolb (BOKU Wien, climatology and meteorology)

Prof. Doz. Dr. Hanns Moshhammer (Med Uni Wien, climate & air quality and health research)

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Manfred Neuberger (Med Uni Wien, air quality & environment and preventive medicine)

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Marianne Popp (Uni Wien, biology–nature conservation–climate and plant physiology)

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Mathias Rotach (Uni Innsbruck, atmospheric physics and mountain meteorology)

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Günther Schaubberger (Vetmed Uni Wien, biometeorology & climate and environmental health)

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Eva Schulev-Steindl (Uni Graz—Climate Change Graz, climate, environmental and energy law)

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Peter-Johann Sturm (TU Graz, air quality–climate–environment and traffic)

Assoz.-Prof. Dr. Andrea Steiner (Uni Graz—Climate Change Graz, atmospheric and climate physics)

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Karl Steininger (Uni Graz—Climate Change Graz, climate and environmental economics)

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Bernadett Weinzierl (Uni Wien, atmospheric and aerosol physics and climate research)

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Wilfried Winiwarter (IIASA Laxenburg, materials cycles & greenhouse gases and air quality)

This open letter was discussed in a tele-conference of the members on 27 April 2020 and adopted unanimously, and signed on 29 April 2020 in the present form.

English translation: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Petra Seibert (Institute of Meteorology and Climatology, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Vienna), co-edited and approved by the letter coordinators on 1 May 2020. Original German version: https://wegcwww.uni-graz.at/publ/downloads/OffenerBrief-KlimaforscherInnen-an-Regierung_KlimaschutzSicherstellen_Apr2020.pdf

KKL: Climate and Air Quality Commission of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW)

NKK: National Committee for Climate Protection according to § 4 of the Climate Protection Act

CCCA: Climate Change Centre Austria – the Austrian climate research network

IPCC: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – the world climate council of the United Nations