



**The ILA study group on the Role of
Cities in International Law
City Report: Vienna**

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City Report on International Law: Vienna

1. Introduction

Vienna, geo-strategically located at the heart of Central Europe and famously seated on the banks of the 'Blue Danube', has secured its place among the global hubs of the world. Its population is currently just under two million, ranking it 6th largest city among the Member States of the European Union (EU) and the 2nd largest German-speaking city after Berlin by way of inhabitants. Vienna continues to rank highly in indices ranging from sustainability, to quality of life, to innovation. Its increasingly international demography,² the high density of international organisations, and its recurring presence in international relations make Vienna a natural candidate for a City Report within the ILA Study Group on the Role of Cities in International Law.

Vienna has always embraced and been embraced by the international. Its name probably features in more multilateral treaties and declarations than any other city in the world.³ Today, it provides the headquarters to around 40 international organisations or individual organs and offices. As prominent front-runner in liveability rankings, the City of Vienna is defined by its traditional focus on public infrastructure and affordable housing,⁴ agendas it seeks to promote at the international level.

While it indeed appears a natural choice for a City Report, Vienna is a hybrid administrative entity with both provincial and city status.⁵ However, while the status as a province weighs in from the constitutional and administrative perspective, Vienna is surely more visible as a city, also presenting itself as 'Stadt Wien' ('City of Vienna') in its public outreach. From this perspective, it may still serve as an illustrative example for the role of cities in international law. It will be necessary, however, in the broader project of examining the role of cities in international law, to consider that measures may result from the competences granted to Vienna as a federal province, not as a city.

² A third of Vienna's population are foreign citizens. See City of Vienna, Demographic information 2019 < <https://www.wien.gv.at/english/administration/statistics/population.html> >.

³ 1857 Vienna Convention on Money; 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations; 1963 Vienna Convention on Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage; 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations; 1968 Vienna Convention on Road Traffic; 1968 Vienna Convention on Road Signs and Signals; 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties; 1976 Convention on the Issue of Multilingual Extracts from Civil Status Records; 1978 Vienna Convention on Succession of States in respect of Treaties; 1985 Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer; 1986 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties between States and International Organizations or between International Organizations; 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

⁴ According to the City of Vienna, more than 60% of its inhabitants live in social or council-funded housing.

⁵ See Viennese City Constitution, Provincial Law Gazette No 28/1968.

The report will begin with **(II.)** a brief outline of the history of Vienna as a city in international law. It will then look at **(III.)** how the City of Vienna engages with international law, both generally and sectorally. Beyond international law, the report **(IV.)** lists the various cooperative efforts and initiatives of the City at both the bilateral, multilateral, and, specifically, Union level of international relations. Finally, **(V.)** two contentious issues in which the City of Vienna has clashed with the federal government regarding issues relevant to international law will be highlighted. These are the building project 'Heumarkt-Eislaufverein' threatening the status of the historic inner city of Vienna as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) world heritage site and the controversial discussion surrounding the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) which is headquartered in Vienna.

2. History

The collective memory of Vienna as a city in international law reaches far back into at least the late middle ages. The First Congress of Vienna that took place in 1515 left a long-lasting imprint on the power relations of Europe and the 1814/1815 Congress of Vienna proved a paradigm shift in interstate relations. Until 1918, Vienna had been an imperial centre. It took until the 1970s to consolidate the position as a capital of international scope again.

Following the Second World War, Vienna was able to capitalise on its geographic location at the border of Western and Eastern Europe and the politically neutral status of Austria as an attractive location for multilateral initiatives. During the Cold War, it quickly earned itself the notorious title of 'spy capital of the world', eternalised in Orson Welles' 1949 film noir 'The Third Man'. Even today, with Austria as a member of the European Union (EU), Vienna is still perceived as 'neutral turf'.

In 1955, Austria joined the United Nations (UN). Already in 1957, Vienna became the headquarters of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), in 1965 of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and in 1967 of the UN Industrial Development Agency (UNIDO). Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) Chancellor Josef Klaus offered Vienna as an additional headquarters for the UN and his successor, Social-democratic Party (SPÖ) Chancellor Bruno Kreisky, commissioned the Vienna International Centre (VIC) as its future location. On 23 August 1979, the Vienna International Centre (VIC) facility was handed over to the UN Office in Vienna (UNOV) which opened its doors on 1 January 1980. In due course, the city was able to attract many more international organisations.

Kreisky pushed forward Austria's position in the international arena during the 1970s. With visibility came exposure. Hosting such politically loaded organisations as OPEC, Vienna was confronted early on with the effects of international friction and terrorism, most prominently

with the hostage taking by Carlos the Jackal in 1975. Authorities reacted to these developments, implementing previously unknown domestic security measures.

The presence of the IAEA has helped put Vienna on the map when it comes to efforts concerning non-proliferation. Today, the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO PrepCom) which seeks to prepare implementation of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) also calls Vienna its home.

3. Engaging with International Law

The municipal authorities of the City of Vienna are well aware of the universe of international law. On issues implicating the interpretation of international law, they act in close coordination with the Austrian Foreign Ministry, particularly when these go beyond day-to-day affairs or might entail political implications.⁶ This coordination goes both ways, particularly concerning questions of municipal implementation of international norms.

Areas of particular interest for the City of Vienna are its relations with international organisations, human rights, and sustainability. As a subsidiary administrative entity of the state of Austria, the City of Vienna may become relevant in the identification of customary international law through any practice it sets or acts attributable under the law of state responsibility. It is equally responsible for the implementation of EU law.

3.1 Law-making

The City of Vienna has been a hub for many normative projects of international law and it has been said that what Geneva is for international humanitarian law or what The Hague is for the peaceful settlement of international disputes, Vienna is for general international law.

The Office of the Legal Adviser of the Austrian Foreign Ministry, supported by the City of Vienna, continue to lobby it as a venue for multilateral treaty conferences. Most recently, Vienna served as the venue for the since faltered 2015 'Iran nuclear deal' between China, France, Germany, Iran, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the EU.

But Vienna is not just a location for law-making. The City may enact provincial legislation and pass ordinances and decrees. While it also concludes 'international agreements' for the purpose of city-to-city cooperation and partnerships, these are void of any effect under international law in the view of the municipal authorities.

⁶ Depending on the issue, particularly the Departments ('Sektionen') I, II, III, V, and VII of the Austrian Foreign Ministry.

The City of Vienna also participates in the EU legislative process. Vienna is represented in the Committee of the Regions through its mayor and the Austrian Association of Cities ('Städtebund') to which it may appoint one person from the City Council. In this Association, Vienna is active in the interregional group on 'Regions with legislative power'. In 2010, the City Council created a committee tasked with ensuring compatibility of legislative proposals of the EU with the principle of subsidiarity (an important instrument to address the proper level of governance).

The domestic position of the Austrian provinces regarding European integration is guaranteed by the Austrian Constitution (Article 23d of the Federal Constitutional Law) and governed by an agreement between the federal government and the provinces in accordance with Article 15a of the Federal Constitutional Law.⁷ Coordination on EU-matter between the provinces is equally regulated by an agreement between the provinces themselves but has not developed any practical relevance so far. Instead, decision-making of the provinces regarding EU issues is placed within the framework of the Provincial Governors' Conference ('Landeshauptleutekonferenz'). In the past, Vienna has taken the lead in formulating binding statements to the federal government on the 'Protection of Services of General Interests',⁸ the 'Energy Union at the EU Level'⁹ and the 'EU Mobility Packages'.¹⁰

3.2 International Organisations

As a matter of policy, the City of Vienna seeks to facilitate the work of international organisations to foster multilateralism and strengthen its own position as an attractive headquarters site – something it actively lobbies. While the regular channels of communication between sending states, permanent representations, and international organisations run through the Austrian Foreign Ministry, many of these, particularly the UN, also engage directly with the City.

Legal and financial questions relating to international organisations are handled by the Austrian Foreign Ministry. At the same time, the city of Vienna has itself contributed substantively to the construction and facilitation of headquarters from its own budget. In turn, the presence of international organisations on Austrian territory creates around 18,000 jobs and directly contributes to its GDP at an estimated 1.3 million Euros per annum¹¹.

⁷ See Federal Law Gazette No 1992/775.

⁸ VSt-4763/6, VSt-4763/17, VSt-4714/8, and VSt-6896/1.

⁹ VSt-2934/6, 4601/82, 4697/384, 4778/4, 4857/4, 5469/10, 5521/3, 5761/67, and 6693/89.

¹⁰ VSt-5773/23 and VSt-7726/10.

¹¹ See Federal Ministry of European and International Affairs, Vienna – Official Seat of International Organisations & Institutions <<https://www.bmeia.gv.at/en/european-foreign-policy/international-organisations-in-austria/>>.

The most prominent 'guest' of Vienna is surely the UN to which it serves as one of its four main headquarters alongside Geneva, Nairobi, and New York. Of the wider 'UN family', the city is also host to

- the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO PrepCom),
- the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA),
- the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB),
- an office of the International Organization for Migration (IOM),
- the UN Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL),
- an office of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), particularly the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention,
- an office of the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (UNDPPA),
- an office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR),
- the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO),
- an office of the UN Information Service (UNIS),
- an office of the UN Liaison Office for Peace and Security (UNLOPS),
- an office of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA),
- the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC),
- an office of the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (UNOIOS),
- the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA),
- an office of the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS),
- an office of the UN Postal Administration (UNPA),
- the UN Register of Damage Caused by the Construction of the Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (UNRoD),
- the UN Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR), and
- the UN Women's Guild (UNWG) as a branch of the New York UNWG.

Other organisations and offices include

- a liaison office of the Council of Europe (CoE),
- a liaison office of the European Investment Bank (EIB),
- a liaison office of the European Patent Office (EPO),
- the European Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA),
- the Energy Community,
- the European Space Policy Institute (ESPI) of the European Space Agency (ESA),
- the Immediate Central Contact for The Hague Code of Conduct (HCoC)
- the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD),
- the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR),

- the Regional Resident Representative Office for the Western Balkans of the International Monetary Fund (IMF),
- the Joint Consultative Group (JCG),
- KAICIID,
- OFID,
- OPEC,
- the Open Skies Consultative Commission (OSCC)
- the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE),
- the Secretariat of the Wassenaar Arrangement (WA), and
- three offices of the World Bank Group, including of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the International Finance Corporation (IFC), and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA).

Austria enacted legislation to grant privileges to certain 'non-state international organisations' with tax exemptions granted to those recognised as 'quasi international organisations'.¹² The latter status is enjoyed by a number of organisations based in Vienna, including

- the Ban Ki-Moon Centre for Global Citizens, (BKMC),
- and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation Regional Office for Cooperation and Peace in Europe (FES ROCPE),
- the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime,
- the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO),
- the Multilateral Dialogue Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS),
- the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership (REEEP),
- Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL),
- the Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation (VCDNP), and
- Women Without Borders / SAVE – Sisters Against Violent Extremism.¹³

In addition to the regular privileges of diplomatic and consular staff, Vienna provides active support for employees of international organisations and missions by organising a 'Vienna City Welcome' twice a year to inform on municipal issues.

¹² Federal Law on the Granting of Privileges to Non-Governmental International Organisations, Federal Law Gazette No 174/1992.

¹³ Regulation of the Federal Government on Quasi-International Organisations in the 2019 Calendar Year (QuIOV 2019), Federal Law Gazette II No 348/2018.

3.3 Human Rights

Vienna considers itself a forerunner of human rights best practices that surpass Austria's overall engagement with human rights, particularly in the area of social rights. This impression is conveyed globally by the many delegations visiting the City of Vienna's own Human Rights Office.

Human rights are taken into consideration in all areas of provincial and municipal legislation and administration. The City of Vienna has long enacted its own legislation on equality¹⁴ and non-discrimination,¹⁵ implementing a number of EU directives.¹⁶

In 2014, the City Council decided to declare Vienna a 'Human Rights City', a process initiated in 2013 (and a term first brought about at the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna). Already since 2008, the City had participated at the conferences of the World Human Rights Cities Forum. It is now one of three Austrian Human Rights Cities alongside Graz¹⁷ and Salzburg. Since 2015, Vienna has its own Human Rights Office tasked with the implementation of the 'Declaration – Human Rights City'. Its activities include coordination and supervision of human rights measures as a cross-sectional agenda. The Coordinator of the Human Rights Office is also advisory board member of the Human Rights Cities Network.

Through the Coordinator of the Human Rights Office, the City of Vienna engages actively and autonomously with international organisations, particularly the UN and the EU. There is direct contact with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN Special Rapporteurs as well as with the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights.

In the area of provincial competences, the Human Rights Office cooperates and coordinates with the Austrian Foreign Ministry and the Office of the Ombudsman ('Volksanwaltschaft') on human rights issues.

3.4 Sustainability

During a visit by former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon in 2016, the mayor of Vienna signed the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Vienna is committed to their long-term implementation through its 'Smart City Vienna Framework Strategy 2019-2050'. It follows a first monitoring process initiated in 2011 and seeks to incorporate the SDGs at all levels of municipal administration. The goal of sustainability is also included as part of domestic legislation such as the Viennese Building Regulation.¹⁸

¹⁴ Vienna Equality Act, Provincial Law Gazette No 18/1996.

¹⁵ Vienna Anti-Discrimination Act, Provincial Law Gazette No 35/2004.

¹⁶ See § 48 Vienna Equality Act and § 11 Vienna Anti-Discrimination Act.

¹⁷ See on the pioneering role of Graz in this respect also the City Report on Graz.

¹⁸ § 1(1) of the Viennese Building Regulation, Provincial Law Gazette No 11/1930.

4. City Diplomacy

Vienna has long engaged in 'city diplomacy' at the bilateral, multilateral, and since the 1990s also EU level. This is coordinated by the Executive Group for European and International Affairs (MD-EUI) which also represents Vienna in its international activities. It works together with various other branches of Austrian government, ranging from the Austrian Foreign Ministry to agencies such as the Austrian Development Agency (ADA).

It is a long-standing practice that diplomatic visits to the Vienna City Hall include an entry into the 'Golden Book of the City of Vienna', a tradition instituted in 1954 by Mayor Franz Jonas. This is arranged in coordination with the Austrian Foreign Ministry which provides assistance regarding issues of protocol and other background information.

Beyond such gestures to loosen the diplomatic agenda, the City of Vienna might also take an activist position in certain areas such as its traditional focus on public infrastructure and affordable housing – recently trying to tackle challenges of digitalisation to affordable living such as the rental platform AirBnB – or in the area of human rights and humanitarian efforts. The current Viennese mayor takes a favourable view of initiatives such as the Visegrád Mayors' 'Pact of Free Cities' between Bratislava, Budapest, Prague, and Warsaw, to put counterweights to nationalist positions of the central governments.

4.1 Bilateral Activities

Vienna itself is active abroad, upholding a number of liaison offices in Belgrade, Berlin, Brussels, Budapest, Cracow, Ljubljana, Prague, Sarajevo, Sofia, and Zagreb. In coordination with the respective diplomatic missions, the City is also active on an *ad hoc* basis, a prominent example being the more than 30 cultural balls hosted each year around the world.

Regarding city-to-city cooperation and partnerships, those are traditionally restricted to specific purposes. Agreements concluded between Vienna and other cities are considered as declarations of intent to foster international relations, intended as 'tools' to exchange experience and know-how on municipal issues. There are currently 13 in force¹⁹ with more under negotiation. These future agreements will include express references to the SDGs to facilitate their implementation (specifically goal 11 to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, and goal 17 to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development).

The focus of these city-to-city cooperation agreements varies. Issues include cooperation on

¹⁹ With Athens, Belgrade, Bratislava, Brno, Budapest, Chengdu, Cracow, Hamburg, Ljubljana, Paris, Teheran, Trieste, Vancouver, Zurich.

- municipal autonomy and governmental best-practices,
- the economy, including cooperation and development, attraction of businesses, innovation and (information and communication) technology, and the creative industry,
- urban development and planning, architecture, revitalisation and preservation, living spaces, life quality, smart city strategies, and energy efficiency,
- culture and cultural heritage, including coffee house and wine culture, tourism and 'destination management', marketing, including 'city branding', and public relations, large-scale events and sports,
- environmental issues, including climate protection, resource efficiency, and sustainability, nature and park preservation, air quality and water protection, waste management, and environmental technologies, safety from flooding and natural disasters,
- (large) infrastructure projects, (urban) traffic and (public) transport, including rail and watercourses (Vienna as a port), as well as the management of parking space,
- public health, including issues related to population ageing as well as municipal aspects of social security, participation, and social solidarity, and integration,
- science and research, education and youth,
- open government data and analysis,
- general cross-border issues and cooperation, and
- the Danube Region Strategy and EU financed projects.

There is also specific cooperation for disaster prevention with the cities of Bratislava, Budapest, Cracow, Ljubljana, Mazowsze, Minsk, Moscow, Prague, Tallinn, Tel Aviv-Yafo, and Warsaw.

In addition, the individual districts of Vienna have concluded their own partnerships and, Vienna welcomes international delegations on an *ad hoc* basis beyond such institutionalised partnerships.

4.2 Multilateral Activities

Vienna is engaged in various multilateral government fora both as participant and host. Its contacts with international organisations can be considered close and there are direct lines between the City and the representatives of these organisations.

The City holds close relations with many of the UN family institutions and supports initiatives such as the UN International Day of Peace or the UN Urban Agenda. Through its Human Rights Office, Vienna works closely with the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) in its focus on cities. Vienna is a UN HABITAT Best Practice Centre. Together with UNIS, Vienna supports projects that promote the SDGs, reaching beyond Austrian borders to include its neighbouring states such



as the Czech Republic, Hungary, or Slovenia. It also cooperates with the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR).

The UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) together with the Organization for International Economic Relations (OIER) launched the first United Smart Cities Lab in Vienna and in 2018 it hosted the Smart City Days. Within the framework of UNIDO, Vienna is an 'activity-level partner' of the Bridge for Cities conference.

The City is engaged with United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and the former mayor of Vienna also served as president of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) from 2004 to 2010.

The Human Rights Office participates at the World Human Rights Cities Forum (WHRCF) in Gwangju, Korea.

The City of Vienna seeks to actively support international student initiatives such as the Vienna International Model UN (VIMUN) or the Diplomatic Academy Student Initiative Conference (DASICON).

Beyond forum diplomacy, Vienna has progressively championed a number of global causes through cultural and other events. The most prominent was surely the Life Ball hosted in Vienna to promote the global fight against HIV/AIDS but also gender equality and LGBTQ rights.

4.3 EU Activities

At the EU level, Vienna participates in a number of transregional fora and projects. The most important of these is the EUROCITIES network founded in 1986 of which Vienna has been a member since 1995. Short-term projects have included 'CITYKeys' to monitor smart projects, 'CLUE – Climate Neutral Urban Districts in Europe', 'MMWD – Making Migration Work for Development', 'RAILHUC – Railway Hub-Cities and TEN-T', and 'TRANSFORM – Transformation Agenda for Low Carbon Cities'.

The liaison office of the City of Vienna in Brussels is also part of the Capital Regions and Cities Network (CCRN) where urban and metropolitan dimension of EU policy are at the top of the agenda.

In 2011, Austrian EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn initiated an annual meeting of mayors of EU capital cities, focusing on cohesion policy, the urban agenda of the EU, migration, and institutional development and reform of the EU.

Vienna also participates in the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), successfully lobbying its participation in the 'Cross-Border-Cooperation (CBC)' even though the city itself does not directly border another EU member state. Within the ERDF framework, Vienna administers CENTRAL EUROPE, a transnational programme of nine EU-member states, since 2007 and spearheads one of four coordinating so-called 'Interact Offices' since 2002.

Vienna successfully tendered for one of two Danube Strategy Points (DSP) of the EU Danube Region Strategy.

Within the multi-level governance approach of the Urban Agenda for the EU, Vienna has been at the forefront of affordable housing. Together with Slovakia, it pushed forward the 'European Housing Partnership' which presented its final report in 2018. Twelve recommendations were made in this regard covering 'better legislation', 'better knowledge and governance', and 'better funding and financing conditions' to the European legislator.

5. Issues

5.1 Heumarkt-Eislaufverein

Vienna is the location of two world heritage sites designated by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO): its historic inner city and Schönbrunn Palace and gardens. Vienna coffee house culture was recognised as intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO in 2011.

The city recently risked the status of its inner city as a world heritage site with plans to construct a new high rise next to the inner district. Following a controversial public debate, the current mayor has emphasised that the preservation of this status is an absolute priority for the City of Vienna.

Whereas the Federal Chancellery and the Foreign Ministry are tasked with direct coordination with UNESCO, the substantive content is provided by the City of Vienna itself. Interestingly, as opposed to its interpretation of international human rights obligations, the City of Vienna seems to consider the obligations under the relevant UNESCO conventions only directly applicable upon the state of Austria, not upon lower administrative bodies.

Parliamentary enquiries within the Austrian National assembly have urged the Austrian Foreign Ministry to take measures to ensure that the City of Vienna complies with the requirements set out by UNESCO. To resolve the situation, Vienna has submitted a Desired State of Conservation (DSOC) Report to the Federal Chancellery requesting it be forwarded to UNESCO. A management plan is currently in the making and there are considerations to amend the Viennese Building Regulation together with the zoning and the development plan.

5.2 KAICIID

Austria put its reputation as a neutral safe haven of multilateralism on the line with a broadly publicised discussion about the termination of the headquarters agreement with the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID). The international organisation was founded in 2012 by Saudi Arabia, Austria, and Spain, with the Holy See serving as a founding observer. Its objective is to serve as a forum for interreligious and intercultural dialogue.²⁰

KAICIID, which carries the name of the late King of Saudi Arabia which also funds the organisation, had been a focus of criticism early on. Comments made by its Deputy Secretary-General, former Austrian Minister of Justice, Claudia Bandion-Ortner in 2014 on the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia led to her resignation and an on-going debate in Austria on Vienna as headquarters of the organisation.

The ensuing feud within the former government coalition of ÖVP and SPÖ in which (the SPÖ) Chancellor Werner Faymann had called for a closing of the Centre ended with an assessment by the (ÖVP held) Austrian Foreign Ministry that an immediate termination of the headquarters agreement would only be possible following a treaty violation by KAICIID. In 2019, against the background of a renewed public outcry against Saudi Arabia over the planned execution of an 18-year-old who had been sentenced to death when he was only 10, the Austrian National Assembly urged the Foreign Minister to take the necessary steps for the termination of the KAICIID headquarters agreement.

The position of the City of Vienna in this regard is that a distinction must be made between respect for the status of an international organisation and legitimate criticism of human rights violations. It is in this spirit – and possibly against the background of concerns that other organisations such as OPEC or OFID may terminate their headquarters agreements²¹ – that the mayor of Vienna expresses full support for KAICIID as an international organisation. Since Vienna has been traditionally governed by the SPÖ and the original push to terminate the KAICIID headquarters agreement was made by an SPÖ Chancellor, it may be said that the position of (an SPÖ governed) Vienna towards 'its' international organisations is of such resilience that it may run counter not just to the federal government but does so ignorant of political party positions if need be.

In mid-2020, there were unconfirmed news reports that KAICIID had decided to leave Vienna for Geneva. It remains unclear whether Austria will remain a member of the organisation.

²⁰ Article II of the Agreement for the Establishment of the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue.

²¹ Supposedly, there are already alternative facilities in Geneva in consideration.