



Media Release

A huge leap forward in Austria: 'Neos' party votes for legalization of cannabis

Vienna, October 29, 2014 – Public discussion of cannabis legalization has leaped to a new high in Austria after the neoliberal newcomer in parliament, the Neos party, has voted to push the issue at its annual general meeting last weekend.

Party chairman Mat(thias) Strolz, who was first surprised that his economy oriented party showed a majority interest in cannabis, came out after a two day hiatus, fully supporting the decision.

„We support self responsibility and liberty. Legalization makes sense“, said Strolz in a first statement on Tuesday. Recommending a step-by-step policy towards legalization, the Neos fully support „grow your own“ as a first move that would especially Austria's legion of cannabis patients who nurture their medicine in grow closets at home. A next step towards regulation may be the distribution via pharmacies, Strolz said further, lifting the spirits of tens of thousands currently criminalized cannabis patients who still face jail if they get caught with their medicine of choice.

„Decriminalization would immediately benefit one in 8 Austrians. It is estimated 500,000 Austrians light up regularly and another 500,000 occasionally“, said Toni Straka, chairman of the Hanf-Institut (Austria).

The Neos are the first party to officially jump the legalization bandwagon after a first parliamentary citizens initiative to unhinge cannabis from current drug laws. With so far almost 27,000 signatories the initiative jumped into third place of the most successful citizens activism in Austria's history. Cannabis will certainly stay on the agenda in Austria. At the annual convent of Austria's coalition leader, the Social Democrats (SPOe) in late November, there will be a ballot on cannabis legalization too.

„Counting the costs in monetary and human terms, I would not be surprised to see more politicians discovering that legalization could bring Austria 150 million Euros in savings of prosecution costs and simultaneously raise taxes well above 100 million Euros annually“, Straka said, pointing towards the enormous economic benefits of legalization.

It would also help cannabis patients. Lacking exact data due to prohibition, a comparison with data from Colorado is base for Hanf-Institut's estimates of potentially 200,000 patients who may be eligible for medical cannabis.

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