

Talks to form Austria's first far-right govt stall

AFP – Talks to form Austria's first far right-led government stalled on Wednesday, with the negotiating parties airing disagreements over key posts.

The far-right Freedom Party (FP0e) – which topped national polls for the first time ever in September – has been negotiating with the long-ruling conservative People's Party (OeVP) since early January.

But since last week cracks have appeared, with radical FP0e leader Herbert Kickl insisting his party wants to hold both the interior and finance ministries – which the OeVP has rejected.

In a statement on Wednesday the OeVP said it wanted to have the interior ministry, with asylum and migration issues moved into a separate new ministry.

The FP0e, in turn issuing a statement, rejected the OeVP's proposal as “fraught with numerous constitutional problems” and “doomed to failure”.

Protocols from the negotiations leaked over the weekend showed numerous outstanding issues, including on EU policy and asylum seeker treatments.

If the talks are successful, a far right-led government would be a first though the far right has been part of government already several times in the Alpine EU member.

– ‘Like Trump’ –

But in its demands aired publicly on social media, the FP0e – since 2021 under Kickl – went “all out, showing little willingness to compromise”, according to political analyst Thomas Hofer.

“Kickl tries to approach it a bit like Trump, really wanting to fulfil his campaign promises one by one and work through them,” Hofer told AFP, adding the demands Kickl has put on the table “can never be accepted by the OeVP”.

Should talks fail, snap elections are likely, according to analysts, with the FP0e polling well ahead of rivals.

The FP0e stands at more than 35 percent in voter opinion polls – up from the almost 29 percent they gained in September.

The OeVP, which came second with 26 percent in September, has slumped to some 18 percent and is now trailing in third place behind the Social Democrats in voter opinion polls.

After elections, the OeVP tried to form a government with the Social Democrats and a smaller liberal party, the NEOS, but those talks collapsed in early January.

Both SP0e and NEOs this week said they were ready to talk to the OeVP once again to prevent an FP0e-led government.

Tens of thousands have protested in Vienna against the negotiations, expressing fears an FP0e-led government would chip away at the rule of law, as well as minority and other rights.

AFP