

THE FORT WORTH HUMANIST QUARTERLY

A HUMANISTS OF FORT WORTH (HOFW) PUBLICATION

DECEMBER 31, 2016 VOLUME 3, ISSUE 4

Briefs

Annual Adopt-A-Highway cleanup set for April 1

Everyone is invited to help clean up our adopted highway on Saturday, April 1.

Meet Adam, event organizer, at 9 a.m. at 3750 South University Drive for this annual group effort. Your support is greatly appreciated.

HoFW to join January 21 Women's March on Austin to coincide with DC march

So far the Women's March on Austin estimates that a crowd of some 10,000, including women and like-minded men, plan to march in Austin to show solidarity with the national Women's March on Washington also slated January 21.

The mission of the organization is to counter the demeaning, demonizing language used against women and others throughout the election season. The national Women's March on Washington organization was established to support women's advocacy and resistance movements.

The national organization has called "on all defenders of human rights to join us. This march is the first step toward unifying our communities, grounded in new relationships, to create change from the grassroots level up. We will not rest until women have parity and equity at all levels of leadership in society. We work peacefully while recognizing there is no true peace without justice and equality for all."

Participants will meet at the Texas Capitol at noon. The route remains to be determined.

HoFW participants plan to stay at La Quinta. Doubletree downtown is another nearby hotel. A Tarrant County bus is now planned, since two buses in Dallas filled up. The cost is \$35 each. The Web link is:

<http://nddw.bmeurl.co/6AC6FD7>

Post-U.S. election trip to Vienna yields insights into EU trends

EU unity threatened by immigration, populism, global economy

by Wanda Foster

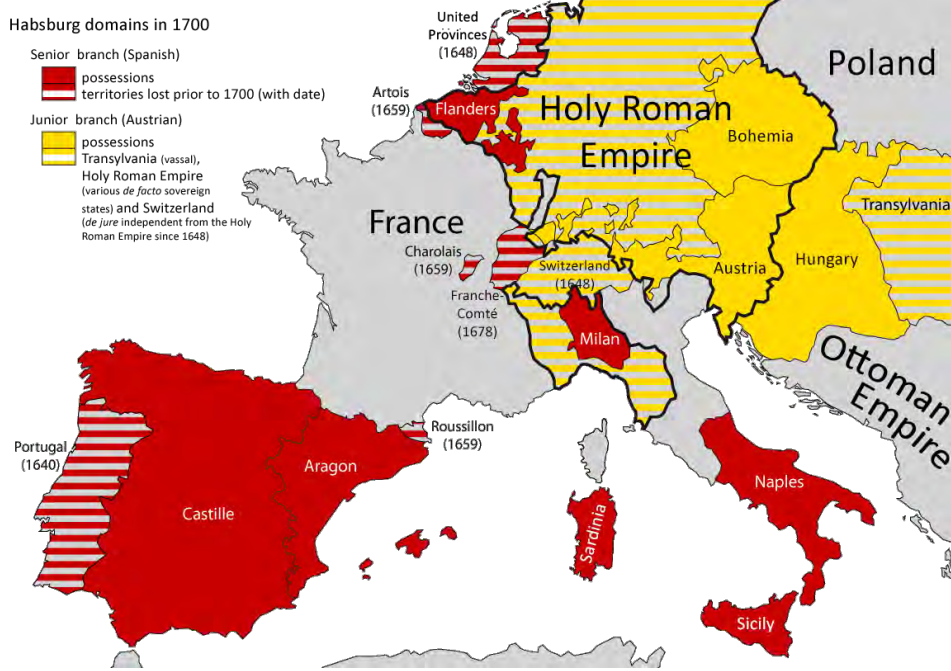
The British vote to exit the European Union (EU), referred to as Brexit, and the U.S. election of Donald Trump both have produced anxiety in Europe, heightening fears about the future of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Europe itself.

My recent 12-day trip to Vienna, Austria—a sudden holiday to flee our own family Thanksgiving during election season—opened the door to a new travel adventure to explore Austrian and European views, politics, culture, and language in this diverse, ancient European capital. Although Austria is a very small nation in modern times, throughout recorded history, Vienna, Austria's capital, has held an important position among great cities of the world. It has a diverse population with deep ties to central Europe and the east, as well as to western nations.

Archaeological artifacts show that the city was settled at least since the Neolithic period around 25,000 BCE. Initially, it started as a Celtic settlement, but through the centuries has evolved and modified to survive each change in government. It has served as a Roman encampment, the capital of the great Austrian Empire, including Babenberg and Habsburg dynasties, and as capital of the Austria-Hungarian Empire that followed. At one point, the city also was secretly the capital of the Holy Roman Empire when the Pope of the Catholic Church crowned princes in royal houses of Europe.

The map, upper right, shows a snapshot of the Austrian Empire in the 1700s during the Habsburg reign, which spanned more than five centuries and transformed Austria into a unique cultural center known worldwide for music, art, architecture, technology, and science, as well as a center of Austrian government. It shows the tremendous Austrian sphere of influence during the 1700s under Habsburg rule.

Today, Vienna's ancient core is designated as a United Nations Educational,



Broad Sphere of Austrian Influence. During the 1700s, Vienna's influence as the capital of the Austrian Empire and the secret capital of the Holy Roman Empire stretched across much of Europe and became a bridge between east and west. (photo courtesy of Wikipedia under Commons License)

Scientific and Cultural Organization World Heritage Site. Its diverse, well-educated population receives healthcare for a sliding scale tax which is almost free for a low-income person. One person I met paid €67 a month, the other €153 a month or about 5 percent of retirement income. College is free for students who pass their tests.

Besides allowing me to study Austrian life, art, and history, the timing of my visit also enabled me to watch the run-up to the Austrian national election. This was significant in Europe in that Austria was the first EU member state to hold a national election after Brexit and our own tumultuous U.S. election, which was watched with intensity throughout Europe.

My trip occurred between November 21 and December 2, and the Austrian national election was held December 4. Political analysts across Europe watched the event with considerable interest deeming it to be important to prognosticate about trends and potential outcomes in other EU member states in their own national elections.

The issues are similar in each case. EU member states all have experienced some shifting of political attitudes in response to the tide of immigration in the past 18 months, creating an atmosphere of rising political divisions similar to that experienced in the U.S., although perhaps with less intensity and public acrimony.

At the same time, the election of Donald Trump in the U.S.—despite all of his public attacks on minorities and immigrants—have left daily newspapers like *Libération* in France to dub Trump "the American nightmare." Despite their own immigrant backlashes and major terror attacks in the past year, even the French consider Trump a bridge too far. The publication has compared him to their most right-wing politicians, including Marine Le Pen, a conservative, extremist French attorney frequently called "Europe's next political earthquake." Such terms for her have been used even in mainstream media, such as Reuters and BBC. German and Austrian news, politicians, and ordinary citizens know a great deal about the U.S. election.

(continued on page 4)

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request filed

Request for prison data on hold pending outcome of attorney general review

The September *Fort Worth Humanist Quarterly* contained an article regarding Texas prisons and the difficulty with obtaining in-person media access to them for on-site research. The article cited a range of U.S. Supreme Court cases that upheld the prison system's right to give or not give some information to media organizations.

On November 21st, we submitted a list of some 35 additional questions to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice requesting release of a variety of data under FOIA. The questions pertained to medical and psychiatric treatment, definitions of treatment, conditions in the prison, and a variety of other top-

ics. We also requested information about grievances filed with the ombudsman, riots, and causes of death. Only three of the 35 questions were answered.

Question 18. How many guards are dismissed annually for delivering contraband such as provision of drugs and other denied materials to inmates?

Answer: 15

Question 20. How many guards have been dismissed for having sex with inmates?

Answer: 1

Question 23. How many civil or crim-

inal suits are in the courts in which civil rights violations or inhumane treatment are alleged by inmates?

Answer: 108 for living conditions and cruel and unusual punishment cases; 719 offender civil rights cases

All of the others were either deferred to private medical facilities or sent to Attorney General Ken Paxton for review and a decision regarding whether or not to release the information.

Also, we received a medical hospital source where we may possibly obtain additional information, but it is unclear whether or not a specific person can be found or data will be available.

Inside this Issue

Briefs	1
EU Immigration, Populism, Global Economy	1, 4
Prison Data and Freedom of Information Act	1
Book Review	2
Calendar: January - March 2017	2
Letters to the Editor	2
Austrian Freethinker Perspective	3

Book Review

***The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* by Louis Menand**

by Morris Meador

Two book clubs meetings, the first on January 28 and the second on February 25, will be devoted to discussing Louis Menand's Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America*. Published in 2001, the book was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for history in 2003.

The work has 384 pages and covers a challenging historical scope. Since no book club meeting was held the fourth Saturday in December, everyone will have additional time to obtain the book and start reading in advance. The book is important because it provides context for the time in U.S. history between the mid-1800s and early 1900s when ideas and institutions were being set that literally make our country what it is today.

The book is interesting because it relates the stories of four important men in American history who themselves led interesting lives and changed American thought in the areas of law, religion, ideology, and science. The four people are:

- Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., initially an officer in the Union Army who later became Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States and questioned some of the ideas that led to the Civil War
- William James, an American philosopher, psychologist, and physician known as the Father of Psychology
- Charles S. Peirce, American philosopher, logician, mathematician, and scientist sometimes known as the Father of Pragmatism
- John Dewey, an American philoso-

opher, secular humanist, psychologist, and educational reformer interested in educational and social reforms

These men were all acquaintances and even friends, who also competed with each other. For a short time, they held meetings and participated in an informal discussion group called The Metaphysical Club. The book is the story of their lives as they are affected by events going on around them, intellectual currents from Europe, and institutional rivalries among universities, graduate schools, and new fields of study just being established. In the course of telling this story, many other people emerge and are discussed.

A key philosophy emanating from their ideas came to be known as pragmatism. This new way of thinking helped enable the United States to develop into a modern country.

As Menand delves into these topics we find ourselves in the middle of a much more commanding and telling story than could be delivered by merely relating the stories of four people, as important as those people were. As the content develops further, it becomes clear that the story is more about development of ideas that were the products of this tumultuous time.

The book is divided into a prologue or introduction, five parts, and an epilogue. The prologue prepares the reader for the book by giving a short history outlining general thought in the U.S. during the Civil War and how a new way of thinking developed among the four main people and others around them.

The four subsequent parts of the book lay out key elements of the lives and stories of each of the four men and how each of them contributed to crea-

tion of pragmatism. The first three, Holmes, James, and Peirce, were contemporaries, while Dewey was a bit younger but was influenced by them.

The fifth part of the book discusses the achievements of the four men and explains how each achievement had an impact on all facets of society from the Civil War through the beginning of the Cold War.

In this part, Menand also offers a revealing look into the decline of pragmatic thinking, which he said ended only when an atmosphere of fear at the beginning of the Cold War began to gain precedence over pragmatism.

The final part, the Epilogue, ends each key person's story by telling about their final days and how each of them continued to hold fast to their pragmatic ways of thinking and how devoted they were to these ideas throughout their lives.

One of the main doctrines held by thinkers discussed in the book is that social aspects of society or society as a whole is more significant than the individual.

Menand writes: "They helped put an end to the idea that the universe is an idea; that beyond the mundane business of making our way as best we can in a world shot through with contingency, there exists some order, invisible to us, whose logic we transgress at our peril."

He also says that academic freedom and cultural pluralism are two of several key legacies of the people explained in the book. Their ideas become essential elements of our democracy in a nonideological age.

The richness of background materials about the Civil War, struggles between abolitionists and Unionists, and



the vigorous Republican government that was so active at this time after the war all contribute to making the story anything but boring and dry.

This book stayed on the New York Times Best Sellers list for a very long time, and critics gave it excellent reviews. One reason for this is that it contains so much interesting information and so many stories about so many people.

Themes in the book also trace the development of science in America. Harvard was originally a small religious college, where all coursework centered on religion. Later a department of science had to be created.

Philosophy was originally the study of the mind. When science started making inroads into religion, however, philosophy had to be redefined and added to through creation of psychology, sociology, and other disciplines. The first graduate school was not a part of an existing college, but was a new institution created to serve as a graduate and medical school: John Hopkins University in Baltimore. So much additional context is given that helps explain why the U.S. and U.S. education developed as it did.

The Metaphysical Club is a book that could be read several times in order to capture all of the diverse insights it offers. Our Humanist Book Club will find a wealth of ideas in this book for several discussions.

	January 2017	February 2017	March 2017 & April 1 Adopt-A-Street
Key HoFW Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regular Meeting, Wednesday, January 11, 7 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth, TX ▪ Women's March on Austin, Saturday, January 21, noon; Texas Capitol Building, 1100 Congress Avenue, Austin, TX; Travel independently or consider Liberal Ladies bus sign-up at https://www.facebook.com/womensmarchonaustin/?hc_ref=SEARCH&fref=nf ▪ Regular Dinner Social, Wednesday, January 25, 6:30 p.m. Location to be announced http://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Fort-Worth/events ▪ HoFW Book Club, Saturday, January 28, to 4:30 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth, TX (<i>The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America</i> by Louis Menand is the book to be discussed.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regular Meeting, Wednesday, February 8, 7 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth, TX, speaker to be announced at http://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Fort-Worth/events ▪ Regular Dinner Social, Wednesday, February 22, 6:30 p.m. Location to be announced at http://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Fort-Worth/events ▪ HoFW Book Club, Saturday, February 25, 3 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth, TX (<i>The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America</i> by Louis Menand is the book to be discussed.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regular Meeting, Wednesday, March 8, 7 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth, TX, speaker to be announced at http://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Fort-Worth/events ▪ Regular Dinner Social, Wednesday, March 22, 6:30 p.m. Location to be announced at http://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Fort-Worth/events ▪ HoFW Book Club, Saturday, March 25, 3 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth, TX (Book to be determined) ▪ Annual Adopt-A-Street Cleanup Events, Saturday, April 1, 9 a.m. Meet Adam and the team at 3750 South University Drive.
Other Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Metroplex Atheists, Wednesday Social, 6:30 p.m., most Wednesdays, J. Gilligan's Bar, 400 E Abram St., Arlington, TX; check the schedule at the following link: https://www.meetup.com/Metroplex-Atheists/events/2017-01/ ▪ Dinner Across Fort Worth, First & Third Fridays, 7 p.m. Check the link for details: Calendar - Freethinkers of Fort Worth (Fort Worth, TX) Meetup 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Metroplex Atheists, Wednesday Social, 6:30 p.m., most Wednesdays, J. Gilligan's Bar, 400 E Abram St., Arlington, TX; schedule at the link: https://www.meetup.com/Metroplex-Atheists/events/2017-01/#2 ▪ Dinner Across Fort Worth, First and Third Fridays, 7 p.m. Check the link for details: Calendar - Freethinkers of Fort Worth (Fort Worth, TX) Meetup ▪ International Darwin Day, February 12, to reflect on intellectual bravery, curiosity, scientific thinking, and truth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Metroplex Atheists, Wednesday Social, 6:30 p.m., most Wednesdays, J. Gilligan's Bar, 400 E Abram St., Arlington, TX; check the schedule at the following link: https://www.meetup.com/Metroplex-Atheists/events/2017-03/ ▪ Dinner Across Fort Worth, First and Third Fridays, 7 p.m. Check the following link for details: Calendar - Freethinkers of Fort Worth (Fort Worth, TX) Meetup

Letters to the Editor

All HoFW members and other readers who wish to write Letters to the Editor responding to articles that appear in this publication are invited to express their own views and provide feedback.

Our newsletter policy requires letters to reference a specific article that has appeared in one of the two most recent issues. We do not publish open letters or third-party letters.

Responders should limit their letters

to 150 or 175 words and provide the writer's email address. In addition, for those who require anonymity, please provide the name you would like published with the letter.

All letters should be exclusive to *The Fort Worth Humanist Quarterly* and should not be published in any other publication.

Anyone who would like to submit a letter can do so by emailing the editor

at the following address: vice-chair@hofw.org.

Space is limited, so we make no guarantee that all letters will be published. Letters may be edited or shortened to fit the space.

We request that all content show a respectful tone, even when the viewpoints expressed differ from those of the *Fort Worth Humanist Quarterly* or any other party.

FORT WORTH HUMANIST QUARTERLY

Chair: Sam
 Editor and Vice Chair: Wanda Foster
 Assistant Editor and Treasurer: Adam
 Secretary: Reed Bilz
 Reporter: James Blase

<http://www.hofw.org/>

This publication has been published quarterly since 2014.

© 2016 by the Humanists of Fort Worth

Opinion

Nontheist Perspectives of Austrian Freethinker

by Wanda Foster

Polite, soft-spoken, friendly, and intelligent—those are my own descriptions of life-long nontheist, Georg Barta, a 68-year-old native of Vienna, a member of the board of Freethinkers of Austria, the Freidenkerbund Österreichs (FDBÖ), and a retired engineering professor for University of Applied Sciences, St. Pölten (Lower Austria). He joined me for a short discussion, which turned into a 3-hour conversation about life, the universe, and everything, which coincidentally is the title of the third book in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

As we ordered beer, soup, and strudel beneath walls completely covered in thousands of beer cans, he told me about his life in Vienna. His English was fluent, only occasionally requiring consultation from his trusty German-English dictionary which he brought with him.

As a young man, he studied computer science at the Technische Universität Wien, one of the major universities in town, and for some time worked for Siemens, an internationally known German company. Originally, he wrote software and eventually left this job to form a software company with some of his colleagues, a job he held for about 20 years before the company closed, leaving him with a desire to do something completely different.

A watershed moment came in 1998 when he was 50 years old. A friend asked him what he would like to do, and for the first time he realized that what he really wanted to do was teach, so he took up a new career and views his time as a professor as some of the most fulfilling times of his life. He taught a range of computer science classes.

A lover of trains, Barta also managed a 5-year Railway Infrastructure Project, on behalf of the Lord Mayor of St. Pölten, a small town about 60 kilometers from Vienna a job he held between 2008 and 2013, when he officially retired. In that capacity, he hired and managed a range of experts and then helped build a train curriculum for bachelors-level and later master's level university students. He taught a range of software programming classes



George Barta, a Viennese Freethinker, shares his perspectives at Bier and Bierle, a pub near Elisabeth Strasse and Operngasse in Vienna.

ses for 15 years of his life and then also ran the Railway Infrastructure Project between 2008 and 2015, when he officially retired.

He was born in Vienna to a father of Jewish descent and a mother with a protestant upbringing. Both were nontheists throughout their lives, however, a fact he credits with helping him live a life free of some of the problems other Freethinkers in the FDBÖ have had to face as a result of undergoing required religious education.

Among the problems are those of people like his friend Sepp Rothwangl, who was brought up Catholic and was abused by a priest. Now he owns a forest where he forbids entry.

Others faced problems like those of his wife, who came from a very religious hamlet in a very small place with 200 people.

“Everybody knows everybody, and everybody checks everybody. She told me a lot of stories. I won't tell you all of them. But if she did not appear in church on Sunday in a mass, the priest would ask her parents or some other people what is with your daughter? Why didn't she come? So it was almost impossible not to go. She had the impression that she was the only person in the world, who did not believe these strange stories and these fairytales. Even as a child of 8, 9, and 10 years old, she couldn't believe these stories, but she had the impression that a lot of people did, so she thought something was wrong with her. Later, of course, she found out she was not the only one at least,” he said.

People who became stopped attending mass or were nonbelievers could have their names written by hand on a blackboard.

“It would become a shame to her parents,” she said.

As a result she has continued to stay on the church rolls to this day, even though she could stop paying a church tax if she officially removed herself from the rolls. Her mother is still alive, so she is unlikely to change remove herself until her mother dies.

He describes Vienna as a diverse City with citizens who originally came from other areas, including Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and even Southern Germany. Others came from Russia, the Balkans, and the Middle East. Except for the most recent immigration, he attributes much of this post-World War I immigration to the collapse of the old Austria-Hungary monarchy, which had a tremendous sphere of influence between 1867 and 1918.

The same year the empire ended, Barta's Jewish father moved to Vienna at the age of 11. In school, even public schools, have to study religion according to texts provided by the Catholic Church, a practice he opposes strongly. At the age of 14, students are permitted to choose not to participate in religious studies, so his father made that decision when he was 14.

His mother grew up Viennese in a protestant family, but she also was a nonbeliever. Barta feels that so many of the problems people experience in life come because people use religion to manipulate their minds before they



Stop Abuse. The Austrian Freethinker who owns this property posts this sign to forbid priests from entering. (photo by Sepp Rothwangl, owner of Austrian forest)

are old enough to make their own decisions, so he and his organization someday hope to eliminate any religious education in schools until children reach at least 14, so they can make up their own minds more easily.

He said the FDBÖ has many goals to accomplish to improve the lives of nontheists, but calls the group more impressive for of its age rather than its size. Originally formed in 1887, they were called konfessionslos, without confession, or Konfessionsfreiheit, free from confession. While the Austrian group only has some 20 active members, it has some 200 members other members who pay dues and another 200 who pay for the organization's quarterly magazine.

Despite broad membership in churches, he doubts whether or not most members truly believe.

“If you asked people do you believe in god, I think more than half would say, oh, I don't know,” he said.

One of the organization's major goals is to add separation of church and state to the Austrian constitution.

“In the Austrian constitution there is not a single word about division between state and religion—no word about that. We would like that. Even Turkey is a secular state,” he said.

Also, he is displeased with the special allowances given to the Catholic Church that give it tax money and allow it exemptions from key laws. While many churches of many types exist in Austria, he said only the Catholic Church receives tax money and special allowances not given to others.

Last year, he said a law was passed requiring shops to give a cash register receipt to purchasers, but neither the

Catholic Church nor political parties have to adhere to that ruling.

A treaty between the Austrian State and the Vatican approved about 1920 gives special privileges only to the Catholic Church.

“There are catholic private schools financed by the state,” he said. “This is a mystery. The teachers are paid by the state and are on the state payroll, but what they teach is not.”

Overall he considers that they do tend to teach subjects such as science and evolution, which might not be taught in some religious schools in the U.S.

He also objects to the Catholic Church, which he feels also is a state within the state, and he would like to see that change. During child sexual abuse scandals, he said the state set up a special commission to hear priests' cases and assigned very conservative religious members, who dealt with the issues without entering public courts. Changes were insufficient, he said.

Some additional FDBÖ goals include

- Humane treatment and full integration of refugees, a core value
- Repeal of blasphemy laws and of treaties giving the Catholic Church special dispensations
- Promotion of secular schools and allowing tax deductions for donations to these institutions
- Human rights and rights of self-determination at the end of life
- Positive attitudes regarding the human body and sexuality

In addition to serving as an active Freethinker, Barta and his wife like to travel to Norway and plan another trip up the fjords in the summer.

Western Europe's historic immigration levels produce cultural chasms across member states

(continued from page 1)

A household caricature, Trump is the butt of many jokes across many EU nations. In a 2015 article, the German newspaper, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, said “if a communist propaganda ministry had commissioned a gifted cartoonist to draw a typically American rogue, he would have invented a figure like 'The Donald.'”

In some cases, these political views also quietly or not so quietly reflect on American voters. In a subsequent publication, the newspaper added that “the same type of enraged German citizen who cries ‘lying press’—in the U.S. hoots with delight at Trump’s political improprieties.”

Austrians I spoke with in Vienna broached the subject of the U.S. election much more politely than political analysts, however, and only after receiving an invitation or suggestion to discuss the topic. They also watched the run-up to their own election more closely than usual, given the divided nature of the Austrian electorate. As in the U.S., cities like Vienna tend to vote more liberally than rural villages in the Alps, but all of the evidence at the time suggested that the final vote would be very close in all areas.

Three people were interviewed in preparation to write this article, including two natives of Vienna, Georg Barta and Anita Eicheinger, and legal resident Helen Ramos. Barta, a life-long nontheist and a member of the board of Austrian Association of Freethinkers (Freidenkerbund Österreichs) is a retired engineering professor. Eicheinger works in digital services at the Vienna municipal library (Wienbibliothek im Rathaus), and Ramos is retired from the United Nations, where she provided financial services in the UN’s Vienna office.

All three felt that a vote for a populist had potential to embolden right-wing conservative parties elsewhere, creating further challenges to EU policies and unity. On the other hand, a vote for a liberal candidate was viewed as providing some hope that the EU will be able to hold together despite cracks in the immigration and open border system established for member states.

The two candidates in the December 4 election were self-described liberal-centrist Alexander Van der Bellen of the Green Party and far-right religious conservative Norbert Hofer, representing the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ). After tight polls, Van der Bellen won 53.5 percent to 46.3 percent, giving some hope to many who feared a right-wing outcome. Van der Bellen was supported by intellectuals, the bourgeois, and many urban dwellers, while Hofer received support from religious conservatives, rural areas, and anti-immigration hard liners.

The issue of immigration has become something of a lightning rod giving new credibility to extreme voices. None of the three interviewees for this article expressed hard-line views, and none supported Hofer, although Eicheinger expected him to win during our November 30th discussion at a local pub, Jazzland, situated by the Danube in a cellar beneath a 10th century Catholic Church, the ancient Ruprechtskirche first mentioned in

city documents in 948. As we enjoyed American rhythm and blues and shared a beer, Eichenger said overall she is very happy with life in Vienna. She added that many people ignore elections because they consider the political class to be disconnected from ordinary people.

Barta, an educated liberal, was unhappy with either choice, but said he would vote for Van der Bellen because his opponent was totally unacceptable and too extreme on immigration and religion. He was put off by Hofer’s advertising, which contained a religious statement swearing before God to adhere to his right-wing agenda. As a Freethinker, Barta prefers to keep religion out of public life. He strongly favors equal opportunity laws but admitted he would not want to be forced to hire someone wearing a burqa, which he views as a religious symbol inappropriate for the workplace.

Ramos said mishandling of the immigration crisis contributed to the swing in public opinion, which divided Austria and many other EU member states. This problem was further exacerbated by slow wage growth and global competition for jobs. As for mismanagement, she pointed to cases in Germany when villages received more migrants than the town’s population. No housing was available, and the entire makeup of the community changed overnight, making it impossible for locals to absorb newcomers. She also recalled situations in Düsseldorf where immigrants received payments but had to live in public facilities with inadequate restrooms and living area for size of the population. Ultimately a few of the immigrants set fire to the facility causing some €10 million in damages and making some 300 residents homeless.

Vienna is not without its own complaints, which were not mentioned in these interviews. In November, immigrants reportedly set fire to an encampment in Vienna by throwing a Molotov cocktail. Throughout the month a range of immigration-related protests occurred on a variety of subjects, which ranged from keeping immigrants in Vienna and respecting their rights to disagreements among various Middle Eastern factions living inside the city.

As I traveled by tram a few blocks from the Austrian National Library to my apartment the evening of November 26, the police closed the street for a protest on behalf of keeping immigrants in the city and respecting their rights. Liberal local residents and the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (Kurdistan Workers Party) often called the PKK led the protest. In the same time frame, Turkish opponents of the PKK, who view it as a terrorist organization responsible for bombings in Turkey, held opposing demonstrations. Police schedule these groups in very different areas, but on occasion violence has broken out between Turkish and PKK factions.

For the November 26 protest, police closed the street to cars, but the tram I traveled in continued running on schedule toward and past the protest on the right side, so I was able to see some of the event. PKK orange, green, and yellow flags were promi-



Holiday Markets. Austrians flock to markets full of wooden stalls like this one at Schönbrunn Palace, which serves glühwein, a spiced hot wine, and other winter drinks. Others sell handmade glass ornaments and toys. (photo by Wanda Foster)

nently displayed. Unfortunately taking photographs was impossible given reflections created by tram windows.

Cultural Chasm and Future of EU

While Austria and Germany both have their challenges, public charities have responded with large outpourings of donations to help new residents. Still the gap between the Muslim culture and the local culture of Vienna is more like a chasm than a bridge. Viennese study Catholic religion at school, but many prefer to leave religion in the church, practice a liberal social life, and have egalitarian views of gender and a person’s place in society. Recently Caritas, a large Catholic charity, has complained that donors need to be sensitive to cultural differences of the newcomers and the fact that their clothing and dietary needs differ from those of local citizenry.

Cultural gaps are enormous. Austrians notoriously enjoy nude spas as a family past time in no way related to sexuality or physical image, while Middle Eastern immigrant women often are expected to cover portions or even most of their bodies regardless of the weather. Women who show skin anywhere may be blamed for enticing men and “forcing” them to “sin” sexually, which many Americans and Austrians view as ludicrous.

While both Austria and Germany are societies with low instances of crime, the police presence in Vienna was much more obvious than during my visit to Germany in the summer of 2015 at the height of the migration. The city and its Christmas markets are well-decorated for the holidays, and people walk and travel by public transit quite openly any hour of the day or night. Recently, however, the city has recently experienced some increase in criminal activity, including stabbings and rapes.

During the past 18 months, both Germany and Austria opened their borders to refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq primarily, but many others came along with them, including people from Pakistan, Kosovo, Somalia, Russia, Nigeria, and Algeria. The record also identified many stateless people of unknown origins who entered Austria at that time and applied for residency. The Asylum Information Database states that some 105,579 people from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq applied for legal residency between January and October 2015. Another 23,467 from other nations applied. Statistics for 2016 are

not yet available, but estimates suggest that another 30,000 people or more likely have entered Austria in 2016. Germany took in approximately 1.5 million people during the same time frame.

Austria is a much smaller and less populated country than Germany. It has only 8.6 million people compared to some 81.2 million in Germany, and the entire country covers an area of only 32,383.7 square miles compared to Germany’s 137,846 square miles. In contrast, the U.S. accepted only 25,000 refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq in the same period. Early in the year, President Barack Obama raised the total annual refugee acceptance limit for all countries to 85,000 and ultimately allowed 84,995 to refugees to enter. The largest number of U.S. refugees came from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Austria and Germany are not alone as they struggle to keep their borders open in line with the Schengen laws of the EU while attempting to manage the extreme influx. Most EU countries are facing difficulties dealing with the huge volume of immigrants in the past 2 years. Under EU law, member states in Shengen areas are legally expected to maintain open borders with each other, but some nations have tightened immigration restrictions and periodically close their borders to other states to help deal with historically high numbers. In April 2016 Austria began tightening borders with Italy and Germany to control the influx.

Greece, a nation most adversely affected by the economic crisis, was often first on the migrant journey, yet it lacked resources to deal with such issues. Ports of entry are supposed to register newcomers, but Greece often simply helped them on their way without registration, creating frustrations for the entire open border area. The complex EU government produces many new laws, which member states often breach. Countries express reservations about EU representation.

Many other elections are brewing in Italy, France, and Germany, all with right-wing and even fascist parties, such as in Italy, where two conservative parties and four fascist parties are in the mix. Member states will survive, but the fear is that the EU and its open way of life—so attractive to so many visitors—may crumble under the weight of immigration and the growing need to improve security.