



Nominated for the

Eyesore of the Year 2013



for misguided environmental policy

Nikolaus Berlakovich, Austrian Federal Minister for Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water (Ministry of Life) was in the focus of media attention in May 2013. The reason for this was his instruction to an official to vote in Brussels against a pesticide ban envisaged by the Commission. The pesticides concerned were "neonicotinoids" (clothianidin, imidacloprid and thiametoxam), which are used against corn pests (corn rootworm) and suspected to be co-responsible for the death of bees. This was confirmed by a scientific committee of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). In addition, he refused to release information regarding the amount of pesticides used in Austria with reference to the rule of confidentiality. This led to significant protests, requests to resign, an extraordinary meeting of the National Council and a motion of no confidence of all opposition parties. He was identified as an agricultural lobbyist and called "Minister of the farmer", "protector of the Bauernbund (Austrian farmers association)" or "killer of bees".

In 2012, the minister started to promote the more than questionable biofuel E10 (gasoline with 10% ethanol content). The objective was to raise the share of this agrofuel to 50 percent of the total sales. The negative effects of biofuels are serious: land for food production is running short, thereby increasing food prices; tropical rain forests are being cut down to make room for palm oil plantations. The oil of these plantations is among other washing the diesel "green".

In September 2013 Greenpeace published a study which revealed the fact that the domestic diesel contents already up to 60% of palm oil. Berlakovich rejected the efforts at EU level to reduce the prescribed biofuel percentage. In June 2013, Austria voted against at the European Environment Council meeting.

Furthermore, the Austrian Federal Minister Berlakovich did nothing to stop the decline of the reuse system of beverage containers. For many years the reusable proportion steadily declined. From 1994 to 2009 it fell for mineral water from 96 to 18.1 percent, for soft drinks from 57 to 14.1 percent.

To counteract this, a working group set up by Berlakovich developed the "eco-bonus model", which was presented in December 2010. The proportion of reusable packaging used for beverage containers was intended to be increased again to at least 50 percent within six to eight years. But Berlakovich, in agreement with the Chamber of Commerce, rejected the plans. This is the declaration of bankruptcy of the Austrian environmental policy.

Apart from this, the Court of Auditors criticized the public relations activities of the Minister. In 2010, 94% of the advertisements published by the Ministry had a picture of Berlakovich without any material content. The expenses of the homepage of the Ministry of Life amounted to 4.4 million euros. Many advertisements were given to the "Bauernbund" (farmers association).

NeSoVe considers, that the policy of the Ministry of Life shows a fundamental subordination of environmental requirements to economic considerations. Also the predecessors of Nikolaus Berlakovich, Josef Pröll and Wilhelm Molterer, had worked in this direction.

Thus, the fall of the reusable packaging system is primarily their fault, because they relied on an "innovative" solution instead of setting up quotas in 2000.

The Ministry has not responded to NeSoVe's request.

NeSoVe considers that the environmental policy of the Ministry of Life is shaped to profit compatibility. Social interests are subordinated. NeSoVe came to the same conclusion in the framework of the discussions on the development of the Austrian National Action Plan for CSR. The Ministry of Life was promoting a neo-liberal, business led model of social responsibility: voluntary self-commitment rather than binding rules in the interest of the social and ecological needs of the society - defined by democratically legitimate

institutions. Therefore, business subsidies are the main focus point of the CSR Action Plan, jointly presented by the Federal Ministry of Life and the Ministry of Economic Affairs in May 2013.

Not to mention that the Ministry of Social Affairs has been sidelined. The process and content orientation for this action plan have been strongly criticized by NeSoVe.

NeSoVe considers the need for a paradigm shift in environmental policy. Environmental concerns need to take precedence over profit perspectives. We see this as the responsibility of the Ministry of Life.

In particular, we call for:

- Comprehensive restrictions and prohibitions of environmentally harmful (agricultural) chemicals.
- An immediate limitation of the biofuel share of the energy used in the transport sector to 5% and a medium-term elimination of biofuels of the "first generation".
- Legal measures to support or reconstruct of the reuse system of beverage containers with mandatory quotas.

