

# Between Instrument Tinkering and Policy Renewal: Reforms of Parental Leave in Germany and Austria<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

Both German and Austrian family policies, while traditionally being strongly familialistic, have in recent years been subject to ongoing restructuring. This article studies the reforms of parental leave policies, which have been conducted during the first decade of the new millennium in Germany (2001 and 2007) and Austria (2000, 2002, 2008 and 2010). It finds that while the introduction of the income-related parental benefit has implemented a system shift within the German scheme, the numerous Austrian reforms have introduced quite far-reaching, but always additional elements to the existing scheme—leading to a kind of ‘muddled modernization’. Discussing possible explanations for this differing reform outputs, the article identifies the availability of new ideas and the entrance of new actors as decisive and applies this as an analytical lens in studying the reform processes in both countries.

## **Zusammenfassung**

Die traditionell stark familialistischen Familienpolitiken Deutschlands und Österreichs waren in den letzten Jahren Gegenstand fortdauernder Restrukturierungen. Dieser Beitrag untersucht die Elternzeitreformen, die im ersten Jahrzehnt des neuen Millenniums in Deutschland (2001 und 2007) und Österreich (2000, 2002, 2008 und 2010) durchgeführt wurden. Es wird gezeigt, dass die Einführung des einkommensabhängigen Elterngelds einen Wandel des deutschen Systems bewirkt hat, während die zahlreichen Reformen in Österreich zwar recht weitreichende, aber immer ergänzende Elemente ins bestehende System integriert haben—was letztlich zu einer Art „muddled modernization“ führte. Bei der Diskussion möglicher Erklärungen für diese

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divergierenden Reform-Outputs werden die Verfügbarkeit neuer Ideen und der Eintritt neuer Akteure als entscheidend identifiziert. Mit diesem Analyserahmen untersucht der Beitrag die Reformprozesse in beiden Ländern.

## 1 Introduction

Both Austria and Germany have been marked by the catchy term of being strong male breadwinner countries: They are traditionally characterized by low levels of mothers participating in the labor market, by women's derived rather than individual rights within the social insurance systems, and by deficient childcare facilities (Lewis and Ostner 1994). Their family policies have developed a strong bias towards financial transfers and tax reductions, while services play only a minor role. This article focuses on parental leave policies, which are highly interesting cases to study: Firstly, they are—together with childcare policies—at the heart of the specific motives, which family policies follow and “how public policies treat care” (Daly and Rake 2004: 51). Secondly, leave policies are crucial for tensions between work and welfare: On the one hand, there is evidence that female (full-time) employment rates are higher in countries with paid parental leave and childcare subsidies (European Commission 2005: 5). On the other hand, there is evidence that long leaves lead to deteriorations in labor market skills and have negative effects on female career paths and earnings (European Commission 2005: 80). Thus, parental leave arrangements can be both: a help and a barrier for the reconciliation of work and family life. Germany and Austria used to provide long and low-paid parental leaves, thereby fostering career breaks of mothers and their possible (part-time) re-entry into the labor market afterwards.

However, while family policies in Germany and Austria suffered from low power and prestige for decades (Badelt and Österle 2001: 162), they have recently gained tremendous importance. What is more, family policies in both countries have been constantly restructured during the last years. With regard to these policy changes, the decisive question has been raised, to what extent they preserve the traditional system characteristics and to what extent they adjust and abandon to the point of break with

them. To answer this, Hall's (1993) distinction between first, second and third order changes is introduced in Chapter 2 and then in Chapter 3 applied to the parental leave reforms conducted in Germany (2001, 2007)<sup>2</sup> and Austria (2000, 2002, 2008, 2010) in the first decade of the new millennium. However, since Hall's categories lack causal hypotheses, Chapter 2 also discusses potential explanations for the varying reform outputs. Then in Chapter 4, following the reform stock-taking of Chapter 3, the reform processes are studied closely. This analysis shows that it is important to focus on the politics of the reform processes and on the entrance of new actors and ideas to understand why policy outputs remained policy tinkering or implemented policy renewals. Chapter 5 discusses results in comparative perspectives.

## **2 Between instrument tinkering and policy renewal**

This chapter recapitulates Hall's (1993) distinction between first, second and third order policy changes (2.1) and subsequently discusses probable explanations for varying reform outputs (2.2).

### ***2.1 Stock-taking varying policy outputs***

When analyzing policy change, the question on the *scope* of the reforms is decisive: Do they constitute systemic changes; are they marked by path-dependencies? And when are changes "big enough to be a system shift" (Hinrichs and Kangas 2003)? Hall's (1993) concept of social learning has lately been applied to family policy to answer such questions (e.g. Seeleib-Kaiser 2002). As Pfau-Effinger (2006) argued, Hall's approach allows for the useful inclusion of social actors and welfare ideas into the path-dependence approach (North 1990): These are the forces bringing social institutions and arrangements about. Ideas and ideologies are of particular importance when analyzing family policies, since these are more normative than other social policies; deriving from the correspondence between family policy and what is defined to be or ought to be a family (Lüscher 1999).

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<sup>2</sup> Reforms are specified by the year of introduction throughout this article.

Hall's concept provides for this normative character, since it emphasizes the role of ideas and paradigms<sup>3</sup> in policy-making. 'Policy learning' is defined to take place if policy changes as a result of a "deliberate attempt to adjust the goals or techniques of policy in response to past experience and new information" (Hall 1993: 278). If either instrument settings are altered or new measures introduced due to dissatisfaction with existing policies, this is not perceived as 'learning' as long as the underlying goals remain unaltered. These are called first order changes (adaptation of existing instruments) or second order changes (introduction of new instruments) respectively. Only if policy instruments are renewed in response to an altered guiding interpretative framework and corresponding goals on a given policy field, Hall speaks of third order, fundamental policy changes. These can be conceptualized as system shifts, since they break with the paradigms that have guided policy-making in the past.

According to Hall's approach, a paradigm change takes place in different stages. Initially, the present paradigm loses legitimacy, e.g. due to political, societal or economic crises, which it cannot explain—these are called 'anomalies' by Kuhn (1962), on whose concept Hall builds. What starts then is a stage of policy experimentation, a search for alternative explanations. Policy-making reacts to the accumulating 'puzzles' or 'anomalies', which are not comprehensible in the hitherto existing paradigm: "Ad hoc attempts are generally made to stretch the terms of the paradigm to cover them, but this gradually undermines the intellectual coherence and precision of the original paradigm" (Hall 1993: 180). As these attempts result in policy failures, they further delegitimize the previous paradigm. Then the discussions extend into a broader political and societal arena. Throughout this stage of political, academic and public debate, a new paradigm prevails and, in a final step, is institutionalized.

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<sup>3</sup> Hall (1993: 161) defines a policy paradigm as follows: "Policymakers customarily work within a framework of ideas and standards that specifies not only the goals of policy and the kind of instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing. [...] I am going to call this framework a policy paradigm."

## 2.2 *Explaining varying policy outputs*

From a policy analysis point of view, it is not only important whether policy changed over a certain time. From a process-related perspective it is always also crucial to ask what *caused* this change (Schubert 1995). As it turns out, latest family policy reforms in Germany and Austria are tricky, but highly interesting cases in this respect. The two countries could be called least likely cases to implement system-shifting reforms: Both are ‘conservative welfare states’, with traditionally familialistic family policies and large Catholic populations<sup>4</sup>, where political parties would be “expected to ‘avoid blame’ for unpopular political initiatives” (Weishaupt 2009). Besides, both countries are ascribed a low reform potential—due to, amongst others, social partners possessing informal veto positions and two big welfare state parties competing with each other (Obinger 2009). All the more, Germany (2005-2009) and Austria (2007-2010) were governed by grand coalitions during decisive years of the investigated period: Far-reaching reforms should not be expected under such circumstances, since family policy concepts of Social Democrats and Conservatives have in both countries *traditionally* differed substantially to the point of ideologization.

And yet, as Chapter 3 will show, substantial policy changes *were* conducted in both countries—and that, in fact, exactly during the years of grand coalitions. It will also be shown that the parental leave reforms of Germany and Austria differed substantially. These developments are in need of explanations.

One explanatory factor often given for modernizing and recalibrating reforms of welfare policies, is that of post-industrial problem pressures (cf. Bonoli 2001). Yet while socio-economic challenges in the context of demographic and familial changes have surely contributed, they do not offer satisfying explanations from a policy analysis point of view. Firstly, because “objective conditions are seldom so compelling and so unambiguous that

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<sup>4</sup> Whereas Austrian Catholics are about 5.5 million people (ca. 67 percent of the population), the German Catholic population of about 25 million (ca. 30 percent) is only slightly higher than the Protestant one (also ca. 30 percent).

they set the policy agenda or dictate the appropriate conceptualisation” (Majone 1989: 23). And secondly, since these challenges are highly similar for Germany and Austria (e.g. with regard to birth rates, female employment, childcare) they would not explain differing policy outputs. The same holds for structural and institutional approaches, which, however, lose explanatory power in face of speedy and significant policy changes anyway.

Power resources approaches too do not adequately grasp for family policy: On the one hand, the field is characterized by a pronounced fragmentation and weakness of family organizations (Gerlach 2005). On the other hand, those facing new social risks are a highly heterogeneous and weakly organized group (Bonoli 2005). Finally, also the ‘parties matter’ thesis does not seem to be of any help, at least at first sight: According to it, one should find more regressive family policies with conservative parties in power, and more progressive family policies with social-democratic parties in power. However, as will be seen, no far-reaching family policy changes were conducted by Germany’s red-green government; their family policy was marked by a surprising continuity with the preceding conservative-liberal government’s (Bleses 2003). Right to the contrary, the system-shifting reforms were implemented by a grand coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD and under the aegis of a Conservative family minister.

This might be related to a ‘Nixon-goes-to-China’ strategy, i.e. only as being a Christian-democrat, family minister Ursula von der Leyen might have been able to push the reform through against conservative resistances (Henninger and von Wahl 2010). This phenomenon is also addressed by Ross (2000), who argues that under the ‘new politics’ of welfare state restructuring, the effects of political parties are contingent and sometimes counterintuitive. While Ross shows this in her article for leftist parties’ governing agendas towards welfare state retrenchment (as heralded by Giddens’s slogan ‘beyond left and right’), something similar seems to be at work here with conservative parties’ governing agendas towards welfare state modernization.

However, while this helps to understand why conservative parties in power might have better *opportunities* to implement progressive family policy changes, the question is still why they

want to do so. This shifts the focus towards the ideas and preferences of the relevant actors in the policy processes. Analyzing the *actors* and *ideas* in the policy-processes thus shapes up as promising to explain policy outputs. Howlett et al. (2009) have taken up these two explanatory factors and combined them with Hall's distinction between first, second and third order changes. They suggested to fine-tune Hall's terminology and distinguish between policy changes relating to the *ends* of policy-making and those relating to the *means* to achieve them. Combining these thoughts with the research on policy subsystems, they state that a "principal factor affecting the propensity of a policy subsystem to generate policy options involving substantial changes is a subsystem structure that allows new actors and new ideas to enter into policy deliberations" (Howlett et al. 2009: 136).

**Table 1:** A model of policy formulation modes

		<i>Entrance of new actors</i>	
		<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Availability of new ideas</i>	<i>No</i>	Closed policy subsystem: <b>program instrument tinkering</b> , with instrument settings within existing paradigm	Resistant policy subsystem: <b>policy experimentation</b> , working with new instruments within existing paradigm
	<i>Yes</i>	Contested policy subsystem: <b>program reform</b> within existing range of policy instruments	Open policy subsystem: <b>policy renewal</b> ; inclusion of alternative instruments

Source: Howlett et al. 2009: 137

Howlett et al. (2009: 136) argue that "proposals for policy and program changes tend to arise from new actors in existing policy processes, while changes relating to instrument types and components tend to develop among existing actors as their preferences change." They assume that in subsystems where no new actors enter the field and existing actors do not develop any new ideas, policy reforms remain limited to 'instrument tinkering', i.e. instrument settings within the existing paradigm being changed. If new actors enter the field, but underlying ideas remain largely unaltered, they expect 'policy experimentation', i.e.

applying new policy instruments within the existing paradigm. Otherwise, if actors remain the same, but develop new ideas, Howlett et al. anticipate ‘program reform’, i.e. policy changes within the existing range of policy instruments. The most far-reaching policy changes they expect in situations where policy subsystems are open both to new actors and new ideas: Then they see propensity for ‘policy renewal’, the inclusion of alternative policy instruments in pursuit of new policy goals.

As Howlett et al.’s (2009) theoretical approach is compatible with Hall’s concept, but integrated causal hypothesis, it will be used as an analytical lens when studying the German and Austrian parental leave reform processes closely in Chapter 4. It goes beyond the scope of these case studies to test the causal hypotheses summarized in Table 1. Rather, they will be reviewed in the Conclusion and the question be discussed, to what extent the approach helped to explain differing reform outputs in Germany and Austria. Before, Chapter 3 discusses the parental leave regulations of both countries prior to 1999 (3.1) and then applies Hall’s categories of first, second and third order changes to their reforms conducted in the new millennium (3.2).

### **3 Reforms of parental leave in Germany and Austria**

#### ***3.1 Parental leave schemes prior to 1999***

In Germany, the first paid maternity leave (*Mutterschaftsurlaub*), limited to employed women, was introduced by the social-liberal government in 1979. In 1986, the governing coalition of Christian Democrats (CDU) and Liberals (FDP) reformed this towards a parental leave (*Erziehungsurlaub*). The official aim was to introduce a twofold ‘freedom of choice’: Firstly between work and family life, and secondly between mothers and fathers, either of whom was entitled to go on leave (Kolbe 2002: 357). Originally only providing for ten months, the leave was expanded to three years during the following years. Two of these years were paid with a maximum amount of 307 Euros per month (*Erziehungsgeld*), which could be reduced depending on income. Thus,

childcare was recognized and paid for the first time. This recognition, however, remained symbolic in two respects. Firstly, the sum was nowhere high enough to constitute for income from employment (Gottschall 2003: 12), which required a complementary breadwinner and/or part-time work while being on leave (allowed up to 19 hours per week). Secondly, income limits were never adapted from 1986 to 2001, so that the percentage of receivers actually qualifying for the maximum amount of 307 Euros decreased from 83.6 percent to only 48 percent during that time (Pettinger 2000: 246). The measure thus was catered to low-income families and socio-political motives prevailed. The long leave duration fostered career breaks and while both parents were eligible to take the leave, the proportion of fathers never reached more than 2 percent until the end of the 1990s. The underlying goal of the leave scheme was re-familialising, since it financially acknowledged familial childcare, supported sequential (and not parallel) reconciliation, and focused on giving mothers the freedom of choice *not* to work at least for the first three years of the child (cf. Gerlach 2010: 269; Ostner 2006: 182). Accordingly, childcare facilities for under three-year-olds were not expanded and concurrently to the parental leave in 1986, pension rights for childrearing (*Kindererziehungszeiten*) were introduced to substitute income losses of leave-takers<sup>5</sup>.

In Austria, employed mothers could take twelve months paid leave dependent on their former income from 1961<sup>6</sup> (*Karenz-geld*). The governing Social Democrats (SPÖ) altered this in 1974 by introducing two flat amounts: a basic one for married and a 50 percent higher one for single mothers. The original

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<sup>5</sup> The German Constitutional Court acted as reform-initiating with its 1992 and 1996 judgments that employed and non-employed mothers are equally entitled to pension rights for childrearing. This led to the pension reform law of 1999, which made childrearing pensions rights *additively* creditable to rights from paid employment. The reform thus created incentives for parallel reconciliation, so as to acquire pensions rights from both—childrearing and paid employment. For a more detailed discussion see Gerlach (2000).

<sup>6</sup> Between 1957 and 1961, employed mothers already had the right to take an unpaid maternity leave for six months.

leave scheme thus was restricted to employed mothers, too. Then, also similar to Germany, non-employment related elements were firstly introduced in the pension insurance at the end of the 1980s in form of pension entitlements for childrearing. In 1990, the grand coalition of SPÖ and conservative ÖVP agreed on a so-called ‘family package’: With this modernizing compromise, a right for fathers to take the leave was established on behalf of the SPÖ, while expanding the parental leave from one to two years on behalf of the ÖVP. While both parents were now entitled to go on leave, mothers remained the first addressee, e.g. by stricter eligibility criteria for fathers (Schöffl 2000: 23). In 1995, a kind of ‘father’s quota’ was introduced: Parents could now only take the whole 24 months of leave if either of them took at least six months. What looks at first like an incentive for shared parenthood, has been rated a pure cost containment measure<sup>7</sup> (Obinger and Tálos 2006: 160; Austria Interview No. 15/BMSK<sup>8</sup>).

Thus at the end of the 1990s, both Germany and Austria offered parental leave schemes, which were quite generous in international comparison, but re-familialising in intention: They fostered long leaves and career breaks on low-paid levels, set no incentives for shared parenthood and thus largely fit the characteristics of ‘male breadwinner models’. These were also the conditions, when the EU parental leave directive<sup>9</sup> was adopted in

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<sup>7</sup> As an interviewee put it: “In Austria the introduction of the partner’s months was a pure savings measure, because, as they said, actually they only wanted to pay for 30 months. However, three years are better and then they just made it 30+6, since in the end, fathers are hardly ever going to take it anyway.” (Austria Interview No. 15/BMSK)

<sup>8</sup> In the course of the PhD project, 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted with experts from policy-making, administration, social partners and family organizations. All interviews and other documents cited throughout this article are own translations.

<sup>9</sup> In 1996, a Council Directive enacted this directive (96/34/EC), as formulated in the first such framework agreement between European social partners in late 1995. It endowed both male and female workers with an individual right to three months of parental leave and the right to return to the same or an equivalent job thereafter. The leave, parts of which should be possible to take until the child’s eighth birthday, is not required to be paid, while the directive’s text strongly recommends to make it so.

1996; initiating and conditioning following reforms of the German and Austrian parental leave schemes.

### ***3.2 Parental leave reforms in the new millennium***

Both Germany and Austria did not fulfill the two-year time limit for implementation set by the EU. This might come as a surprise, since both countries had already far developed leave arrangements prior to 1996. Yet their schemes, as just described, revealed the features of what Haas (2002: 91) calls ‘child-rearing leave’, defined as “job-protected leaves that typically last several years until a child is four or older, and are usually unpaid or paid at low level”. The schemes’ focus was not on parallel, but subsequent reconciliation of work and family life. Although fathers were entitled to take the leave, it was not their *individual* right as demanded by the directive (Falkner et al. 2002): Especially contradicting to the male breadwinner logics was the fact that fathers should have a right to go on leave when there was a non-employed partner at home anyway.

In Germany, the red-green coalition implemented the directive within their parental leave reform of 2001 (*Elternzeit*): Both parents were now allowed to take leave simultaneously and up till the eighth birthday of the child. The reform went farther than the directive demanded in setting some incentives for shorter leaves and re-commodification: Firstly, leave-takers were now allowed to work 30 instead of 19 hours weekly. Secondly, a legal right to part-time work was introduced. Thirdly, parents were entitled to choose a so-called budget variant, i.e. the possibility, to take parental leave for 12 instead of 24 months, then being accompanied by a monthly payment of up to 450 Euros. Apart from that, however, the reform kept the old system and did not show fundamental changes to the underlying goals and ideas: The payment remained very low and childcare infrastructure was not expanded to facilitate parallel reconciliation. The overall payment for the budget variant was remarkably lower, so incentives for shorter leave were ambiguous. Accordingly on the outcome level, the quota of fathers going on leave did not increase.

In Austria, the directive was implemented in 2000 by the governing grand coalition. Somewhat contrarily to this lagged implementation, only minor additional changes were launched. Then in 2002, the black-blue coalition of conservative ÖVP and right-wing FPÖ undertook a far-reaching reform: It replaced the employment-related leave with a universal childcare allowance (*Kinderbetreuungsgeld*). This was now—as had been the German scheme since 1986—open to all parents, independent of a former employment (e.g. housewives, students), and followed ‘cash for care’ logics: The maximum duration of the leave was prolonged to 30+6<sup>10</sup> months and accompanied by a monthly payment of 436 Euros. The re-familialising intentions of this reform were further enhanced by the fact that within their seven years in government, the black-blue coalition not once undertook measures to increase childcare facilities. And while the leave (for one parent) was prolonged to 30 months, the dismissal protection remained at 24 months. This created an incentive to let the dismissal protection deadline pass and thus lose the right to return to one’s workplace—the more so as many women were not even aware of this gap between the dismissal protection and parental leave. These underlying motives showed impacts: The percentage of mothers returning into paid employment before the child is 27 months old decreased from 54 percent to 35 percent<sup>11</sup> (Lutz 2003).

All in all, the policy changes of both the German (2001) and Austrian (2000 and 2002) parental leave reforms did not exceed *second order changes*: Both countries adapted their parental leave regulations—Germany setting discreet re-commodifying incentives with the budget variant and Austria even emphasizing re-familialising incentives with the childcare allowance—, but the underlying logics of both reforms did not break with the familialistic character of the leave schemes.

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<sup>10</sup> The latter is the number of partner’s months (also in the following).

<sup>11</sup> Re-entry of mothers of children born May/June 2000 (old leave) versus children born July/August 2000 (interim regulation for childcare allowance).

In Germany, the next reform was conducted by the grand coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD, which replaced the pre-existing leave by a parental benefit (*Elterngeld*) from 2007. The benefit paid during parental leave was transformed into a wage replacement of 67 percent of the former net income, up to 1,800 Euros per month. While the old leave regulation from 1986 showed strong socio-political motives and focused on low-income families, the new income-related parental benefit is meant to reduce opportunity costs of leave-takers and was introduced with an explicit focus on high-qualified, well-off parents (Gerlach 2010: 272). In case of formerly non-employed leave-takers, the minimum amount is 300 Euros.<sup>12</sup> With Scandinavian leaves serving as example, ‘daddy months’ were established as well: Either parent has to take at least two months of the leave, or its length is shortened from 14 to twelve months. Thus, there is a strong focus on a more equal share of employment and family responsibilities between both parents. With the shortening of paid leave from two years to one year, the aim of an earlier return into the labor market is discernible. Correspondingly, there are strong efforts to expand childcare: The aim is to create places for 35 percent of under three-year-olds until 2013.<sup>13</sup> From then on a legal entitlement to childcare from the age of one year will be in place.<sup>14</sup> The new parental benefit fully replaced the old leave scheme. There-

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<sup>12</sup> In an austerity program, the parental benefit for long-term unemployed was abolished in June 2010. Concurrently, the replacement rate for leave-takers whose net income lay above 1,240 Euros was lowered to 65 percent.

<sup>13</sup> According to the Federal Statistical Office, 23.1 percent of children under three years of age were visiting a daycare facility in March 2010 (Western Germany: 17.4 percent; Eastern Germany: 48.1 percent). Still in 2002, there were childcare places for only 9 percent of under three-year-olds.

<sup>14</sup> There are plans, however, to accompany this entitlement with a rather re-familialising childcare allowance paid to parents, who care for their children at home. While family minister von der Leyen originally strongly opposed these plans, the Bavarian CSU and conservative forces within the CDU managed to push them through ‘in exchange’ for the legal right to childcare. For a more detailed discussion of this process see Ahrens and Blum (2009).

by, the reform implemented a system shift in transforming the goals and incentives from a familializing scheme into one focusing on shared parenthood, quicker re-commodification and the provision of de-familializing childcare services.

Meanwhile in Austria, the black-blue coalition had been replaced by a grand coalition of SPÖ and ÖVP in 2007. From 2008, the leave scheme was reformed towards a more flexible model (*Kinderbetreuungsgeld neu*), aiming at increased ‘freedom of choice’. Parents could now choose between the classic variant of 30+6 months paid with 436 Euros, a middle variant of 20+4 months paid with 624 Euros, and a short variant of 15+3 months paid with 800 Euros per month. Leave-takers were now allowed to work up to an annual income limit of 16,200 instead of 14,600 Euros. After eight years stagnation, the expansion of public childcare facilities also hit Austria’s political agenda for action: In November 2007 there was an agreement that the central state will allocate an annual amount of 20 million Euros to the nine federal states from 2008 to 2010, of which 15 million have to be used for creating public childcare places for under three-year-olds and five million Euros have to be used for language teaching. The federal states must at least reduplicate these financial resources. The goal was announced to create a total of 6,000 to 8,000 additional childcare places (Frauenministerium 2007). The introduction of the two new leave variants clearly focused on modernization, yet the reform lacked the very elements constituting a system shift within German parental leave policies, i.e. the wage replacement rate, equally wage-replaced ‘daddy months’ (enabling parents to do without the male income for a few months) and the abolishment of the old leave scheme.

Only two years later, however, a new grand coalition conducted yet another reform of parental leave. From 2010, there is a fourth variant of 12+2 months, paid flat-rate with 1,000 Euros. The actually more interesting one, is the new fifth variant, which is also 12+2 months, but *income-related*. Leave takers receive 80 percent of their former net income, with a minimum amount of 1,000 Euros and a maximum of 2,000 Euros per month. Also the income limit for leave takers was adapted: For the flat-rate variants, it is either still set at 16,200 Euros annually or one may

now instead choose a relative limit of 60 percent of the former income. For the income-related variant the income limit for primary leave takers was set at only 5,800 Euros annually.

This new fifth variant and its foci are very similar to the German parental benefit: Both cover 12 months plus two partner's months, are income-related up to a high maximum amount (1,800 Euros in Germany and 2,000 Euros in Austria). They thus set incentives for a quick re-entry into the labor market, a higher share of fathers as leave-takers and support women with middle to higher incomes. However, differences between the schemes of both countries are decisive as well: While the German 2007 reform completely did away with the former parental leave, the Austrian 2008 and 2010 reforms introduced many additional variants and choices, but let previous regulations unaltered. An interviewed expert described this course of action as follows:

This is so typical of Austria: No one is allowed to be worse off. Some may be better off, but for everybody else things have to stay at least the same. No politician has the heart to say: I'll make a cut and start anew, because I think this was not ideal. [...] This is what Germany did with the child-raising allowance [*Erziehungsgeld*], as this was paid for two years and now the 300 Euros are only paid for one year—that was a real cut. (Austria Interview No. 11/BMWFJ)

The German minimum amount for formerly non-employed parents is only 300 Euros (cf. footer 12), while in Austria—being naturally the same amount as in the fourth, flat-rate variant—it is 1,000 Euros. While in Germany a system shift has been implemented, the Austrian reforms are marked by stronger path-dependencies: There are new instruments, a general direction towards more flexibility and the 2010 reform introduced a regulation quite similar to the German one. However, it is remarkable how the reforms implemented over the last years always introduced new elements while letting the old regulations unaltered. This led to a kind of 'muddled modernization': a scheme combining varying conservative and progressive ideas, thus setting rather different incentives or, putting it positively, possibly offering choice between these. In Hall's terminology, Austria has reached a stage of experimentation, stretching the terms of the old paradigm, but not *breaking* with it.

## 4 The Politics of the Reform Processes

In the last chapter, the reforms were taken stock of and placed between system shifts and path-dependencies. The question now is as to *why* the reform processes led to these results. Chapter 2.2 considered different explanatory factors and identified the entrance of new actors and ideas in reform processes as decisive. Against this background, the parental leave reform processes of Germany (4.1) and Austria (4.2) are studied.

### 4.1 Reforms of parental leave in Germany

Germany's belated implementation of the EU's 1996 directive with the 2001 parental leave reform has been ascribed to the political unwillingness of the pre-1998 conservative government (Falkner et al. 2002). The leave in effect since 1986 was highly consistent with familialistic male-breadwinner norms. And although the rather minor requirements deriving from the directive cannot be counted as system-shifting, they still did not fit the conservative family model. Its final implementation by the red-green government showed notable 'over-implementation', i.e. it was accompanied, as described above, by further reforms of the pre-existing scheme. Nonetheless, several observers expressed their surprise that the reform remained far behind expectations. Policy analyses arrived at similar conclusions (Bleses 2003): Following the coalition treaty of the red-green government (as well as the 'parties matter' thesis), more far-reaching reforms in family and parental leave policies should have been expected.

According to the policy formulation modes (Table 1), the 2001 reform ranged between *instrument tinkering* and *policy experimentation*: With the introduction of the budget variant, the increase in hours of permitted part-time work and the right to reduce working hours, instrument settings were altered and slightly new incentives set. Yet neither were new instruments introduced nor new goals taken as a basis. As the coalition of SPD and Greens had replaced that of CDU/CSU and FDP in government from 1998, new actors were in charge. On the face of it, however, the reform process was quite closed with regard to the en-

trance of other actors or availability of new ideas: A public hearing<sup>15</sup> was held in the parliament's permanent Committee on Family Affairs on May 15<sup>th</sup> 2000. Twelve experts were invited, among them representatives of social partners, family organizations, administration and economic research institutes. Virtually all of the invited experts, while in principle content with a reform of the leave scheme, criticized the draft law. Naturally, their criticisms tended in different directions, e.g. the representative from the conservative German Family Organization (DFV) found fault in that the budget variant set incentives for a shorter leave and leave-takers were allowed to work up to 30 hours, which was too close to full-time work. The Federation of Trade Unions' (DGB) spokesperson, on the other hand, appreciated the budget variant, but criticized how parents lost money when choosing it. The representative from the Confederation of German Employers' Organizations (BDA) quite contrarily criticized the introduced right to part-time work and reasoned that the state was not able to increase the father's involvement in family work anyway, as allegedly shown by failed attempts to do so. Many speakers harshly criticized the lack of childcare facilities as hindering work-life-balance and making the new budget variant a 'care-trap'.

At large, the government did not take up these criticisms pronounced at the public hearing<sup>16</sup> and implemented the law the way it had planned. This may have been fostered by the experts' criticisms tending in different directions and even 'ideologically close' family organizations not speaking with one voice (e.g. the conservative German Family Organization disapproved of the budget variant, while the Catholic Family Organization (FDK) basically agreed with it). Yet from today's point of view, it could be argued that new ideas were indeed present in the 2001 reform

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<sup>15</sup> During policy formulation, the Bundestag committees can hold public hearings of experts or interest groups. Generally, invited respondents deliver written statements previously and give oral presentations at the hearing.

<sup>16</sup> As an exception, the Family Ministry draft foresaw a right on part-time work in companies with at least five employees. Finally it was made '15 employees', probably conceding to employers. (Deutscher Bundestag 2000)

process (and taken up, so to speak, with a time-lag): Namely, it is striking that many experts at the public hearing recommended a Scandinavian-type parental leave with its income replacement and ‘daddy months’ (e.g. representatives from the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW), the Single Parent’s Association (VAMV)). The DIW-speaker even forecasted: “I know where the resistance lies. [...] But in the long-run there is scope to reach such comprehensive changes, since the voices calling for it are becoming louder.” (Deutscher Bundestag 2000: 20)

This forecast proved correct: In July 2004, family minister Renate Schmidt leaked information that there were plans to introduce a Scandinavian-type parental benefit; a few months later the consultancy Prognos AG published a feasibility report concerning a transfer of the Swedish model (Kühn and Palme 2005). The polling firm Allensbach conducted an opinion poll in 2005, where interviewees showed rather taken with the idea of an income-substituting leave and 56 percent of men considered it a real incentive to take leave for up to one year’s time (Allensbach 2005). However, family minister Schmidt only scheduled implementation for after the federal elections due in 2006. Though there would have been enough time for implementation in the ongoing legislative period, the SPD potentially wanted to save the popular instrument for their election campaign; and possibly also feared conservative opposition in face of progressive reform elements as the partner’s months (Leitner 2008: 218).

The result of the brought forward 2005 elections, however, was not a third term for the red-green government, but a grand coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD under Chancellor Angela Merkel. Yet surprisingly, the new conservative family minister von der Leyen keenly took up the parental benefit idea, the grand coalition already fixed it in its coalition agreement and put it into effect from January 2007. To what extent can this system-shifting reform—constituting a *policy renewal* in Howlett et al.’s terms—be explained with the entrance of new actors and the availability of new ideas in the reform process?

In 2003, family minister Schmidt initiated the formation of (both a national and local) ‘Alliances for the Family’ of diverse

actors<sup>17</sup> from politics, social partners, private industry, civil society and social sciences. The expressed aim was to enlist in a dialogue on family-friendly business culture, sustainable family policies<sup>18</sup> and launch initiatives to reach these goals (BMFSFJ and Bertelsmann Foundation 2004). Family organizations—as the major five<sup>19</sup>, which are not clearly related in terms of political parties—were virtually not integrated. It has been stated that the Alliances refer to a new awareness of the economy for questions of family-friendliness and work-life balance (Richardt 2004), in face of demographic changes and accompanying skills shortages. Employers, long considered a monolithic bloc opposing the extension of social services, suddenly gained importance as new family policy actors (Gerlach 2006: 17). Some interviewees ascribe the Alliance a high importance in putting family policy on the political agenda for action:

Renate Schmidt geared this right from the start towards bringing together this Alliance for the Family—BDA, DGB and the chairman of IGBCE—to change the mood towards the family. [...] And they accomplished this by joining forces; and it wouldn't have worked out otherwise, since previously questions of reconciliation of work and family life were always questions for women only. (Germany Interview No. 16/DGB)

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<sup>17</sup> In the national Alliance were e.g. the Family Ministry, the Bertelsmann Foundation, the Confederation of German Employers' Organizations, the Federation of Trade Unions, the German Chamber for Industry and Commerce, Roland Berger Strategy Consultants and the BASF Corporation.

<sup>18</sup> The 'sustainable family policy' concept was developed by the political economist Rürup and colleagues as a modernizing strategy in response to demographic changes (Rürup and Gruescu 2003): Its goals are sufficient birth rates and higher female employment, accessible by measures as better childcare facilities, flexible working hours and a more equal share of care work. For a more detailed discussion see Ahrens (2010) in this volume.

<sup>19</sup> These are the German Family Organization (DFV), the Protestant Action Group for Family Issues (EAF), the Catholic Family Organization (FDK), the Association of Single Mothers and Fathers (VAMV) and more recently also the Association of Bi-national Families and Partnerships (IAF).

The Alliance for the Family and its affiliated political-economist concept of ‘sustainable family policies’ advocated the idea of a Scandinavian-type parental benefit very prominently.

On July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006, a public hearing took place in the parliament’s Committee on Family Affairs, with largely the same interest groups invited as in 2000. Virtually all representatives approved of the reform bill and only few points were subject to disputes or demands for revision.<sup>20</sup> However, from the coalition agreement on the parental benefit to final decision making, there were heated *internal* debates within the CDU/CSU, which led to some revisions. The coalition agreement (2005) stated that the scheme provides twelve months of leave, divisible between both parents, but exclusively reserve two months for either partner. These plans were borrowed one-to-one from SPD-blueprints, instead of arriving at a compromise solution midway, e.g. also disbursing the benefit to single-earner households (cf. in the following Ahrens and Blum 2009). In the heated debate following this decision, Ramsauer, head of the CSU regional committee, called the partner’s months a ‘swaddle course’ enforced on fathers and considered them a punishment for parents with other living arrangements (Süddeutsche 2006). This criticism was shared by many politicians within the CDU, well up into the parliamentary group. The reform wing within the CDU was dependent on its party’s votes, since the oppositional parties, for different reasons, voted against the bill. Therefore, the reform could only be pushed through by a concession to the CDU/CSU itself, negotiated again in the coalition committee on May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006: The two partner’s months were ‘bought’ at the price of expanding the maximum duration of the parental benefit from twelve to 14 months.

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<sup>20</sup> As an exception, there is evidence that family organizations achieved that 300 Euros per month are paid to parents who were not employed before the leave, which employers’ organizations opposed. The only one fundamentally criticizing the reform was the FDK representative, who stated that the scheme focused too much on employment and showed a disrespect of family work (Deutscher Bundestag 2006: 10). Yet again, not even the Catholic organizations agreed, as the Central Committee of German Catholic’s (ZdK) president approved of the reform (Deutscher Bundestag 2006: 13).

Summing up, the policy renewal in German parental leave policies was indeed accomplished by both an availability of new ideas and the entrance of new actors: The governing CDU/CSU resolved from a male-breadwinner leave scheme and supported fundamentally new ideas with the parental benefit. As seen above, this did not go without internal conflict still seething today in the conservative party. However, the new *ideas* and the corresponding policy instrument were pushed through by *new internal actors* within the CDU/CSU, namely family minister von der Leyen and supporting Chancellor Merkel:

For us as a party, this has been a paradigm change, and it would have been much more difficult to follow a different family minister [...] She has seven children and knows the balancing act between job, family, and childrearing. [...] And the Chancellor supported her without reserve. Whenever anything happened, Merkel came to her defence and said: "We are going to do this!" (Germany Interview No. 25/CDU)

Often attributed to these leading actors, the plans were originally developed under family minister Schmidt, so the SPD could hardly raise objections against them in the grand coalition. As Leitner (2007: 23) put it, cross-party consensus was achieved by an economic argumentation on the policy dimension. This is related to the entrance of *new family policy actors* involved since the Alliance for the Family. With regard to the parental benefit, the ultimate interests of these new actors coincided with the old actor's ones, though of course emphasizing different rationales: Basically, employers pondered on re-commodification, trade unions on work-life balance and family organizations on acknowledging family work as equivalent to paid employment.

#### ***4.2 Reforms of parental leave in Austria***

Austria's parental leave reform in 2000 showed, in contrast to Germany, only minor 'over-implementation': The focus was not on altering the existing scheme, but on implementing the requirements from the EU's directive.<sup>21</sup> Against this background,

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<sup>21</sup> Speakers in parliament repeatedly referred to this political necessity, e.g. a member of the Green party told the conservative parties about the individual right for fathers to take the leave: "Maybe you've been asleep, but

the overrun time-limit until implementation of the directive cannot be traced back to an extensive policy formulation phase. Rather, the most important employers' association (WKÖ), due to its compulsory membership, had not been allowed to take part in the European social partners' negotiations on the directive (Leiber 2005). The WKÖ then, joining the European Association of Small and Medium-sized enterprises (UEAPME), sued the directive to the European Court of Justice. The governing grand coalition put its negotiations with the social partners on ice until the Court rejected the case in June 1998. Afterwards, informal negotiations were taken up again and government and social partners reached an agreement on implementation after time-intensive discussions (Falkner et al. 2002). In contrast to Germany, the social partners are no new family policy actors in Austria, but have traditionally played an important role.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the reform process leading to an *instrument tinkering* showed also the characteristics of this policy formulation mode, as it included traditional actors and ideas of corporatist decision-making structures.

The decision making process of the 2002 childcare allowance reform showed a different picture. The grand coalition had been replaced by a coalition of conservative ÖVP and right-wing FPÖ, both of which promised a universal childcare allowance during their election campaigns. During the 1990s—similar to Germany before 1986—the income-related leave payment limited to working women had increasingly come under conservative criticism. On suggestion of IEF-director Schattovits, and assigned by the Ministry's Advisory Board for Family Policies<sup>23</sup>, the Austrian Institute for Family Studies (ÖIF) conducted a feasibility study on a so called childcare check (*Kinderbetreuungsscheck*) in 1998.

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we have to do it. Maybe you didn't understand or didn't read the EU directive closely enough, but we *have* to do it" (Österreichischer Nationalrat 1998).

<sup>22</sup> This is related to the strong 'Austro-corporatism' and also to the funding structures of the Austrian Fund for Equalization of Family Burdens (FLAF), which mainly rests on employees' and employers' contributions.

<sup>23</sup> This is not, like in Germany, a board of academic experts, but of interest groups, i.e. family organizations, social partners, and the nine federal states.

It was designed as a package of three elements: a cash benefit, an independent social insurance, and vouchers on public childcare after the child's fourth birthday. Different variants were suggested with regard to the payment height and lengths.

Until 1999, ÖVP, FPÖ, the Greens and most family organizations supported this childcare check, while the SPÖ, its family organization and the trade unions nixed it (Schöffl 2000). Yet then the ÖVP and its family minister Bartenstein turned mainly for financial reasons<sup>24</sup> away from this model and instead favored now the (similar but cheaper) 'paid leave for everyone' (*Karenz-geld für alle*). The FPÖ and especially chairman Jörg Haider<sup>25</sup> stuck to the childcare check (Rille-Pfeiffer and Kapella 2007: 15). In a heated public debate, there was an increasing rivalry between the two models of 'FPÖ's childcare check' and 'ÖVP's paid leave for everyone'. After September 1999 national elections, SPÖ and ÖVP could not find a coalition agreement in months of negotiations. Then ÖVP and FPÖ formed a coalition and agreed on the 'childcare allowance' in their coalition agreement. Yet this agreement was followed by tenacious negotiations in 2000/2001, of which the FPÖ was seen as the winner by many observers, and the childcare allowance (despite being closer to the 'paid leave for everyone' than the 'childcare check') as their success:

There were coalition negotiations and the FPÖ said: We will only build this coalition [...] if this idea is realized. Then some convincing had to be made, there was an agreement and the trade-off was (since the ÖVP was not very amused about the childcare check for budgetary reasons) the income limit. And the FPÖ said: Okay, let's introduce this childcare check, but with an income limit. (Austria Interview No. 7/BMSK)

Thus, this 2002 reform, which can be rated as *policy experimentation* within the overall familialistic system, originated in a

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<sup>24</sup> Bartenstein stated in parliament: "The childcare check is a family policy vision, which financially will only be achievable in the long run. A first step will be the paid leave for everyone." (Österreichischer Bundesrat 1998).

<sup>25</sup> Jörg Haider also started two pilot projects in his homeland Kärnten and from 2001 introduced the instrument there (Rille-Pfeiffer and Kapella 2007).

quite closed policy formulation mode: Originally, the childcare check idea was an innovative outside-initiation in the early 1990s, but later policy formulation was limited to the government. The ÖVP/FPÖ-coalition deliberately broke with corporatist decision-making structures. Yet even though no informal negotiations took place, social partners in Austria have the right to be consulted on legislative proposals, which concern their interests (*Begutachtungsrecht*). Also consulted were family organizations, which are—in contrast to the German family organizations’ having no clear party affiliations—closely related to the political parties.<sup>26</sup> Within this consultation process, also many actors actually supporting the childcare allowance harshly criticized its exact design, e.g. the income limit and the discrimination of single parents<sup>27</sup> (e.g. IEF 2001; KFV 2001). The criticisms were not taken up. Yet not only outside, but also inside government formerly important actors were excluded: When taking office, the black-blue coalition abolished the Federal Women’s Ministry. The unit for women’s affairs then became part of the Ministry of Social Security (BMSK), but, despite having mandate and resources, did not take “part in the child care allowance debate and did not advocate feminist goals” (Sauer 2006: 34).

For the 2008 reform, which introduced the three different variants of the childcare allowance, a new SPÖ-ÖVP-government under Chancellor Gusenbauer was in charge. This *program reform* indeed originated through outside initiation: In 2005, an ‘alliance’ of the Friends of Children, women’s associations from the SPÖ and the trade union went public with a reform concept of the childcare allowance. These actors proposed this flexibiliza-

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<sup>26</sup> The Austrian Family Association (ÖFB) is close to ÖVP, the Friends of Children (*Kinderfreunde*) to SPÖ, the Liberal Family Association to FPÖ. The Catholic Family Association (KFÖ) is of confessional bound, thus close to ÖVP. The Catholic Church also engages in family policy via the Institute for Marriage and Family (IEF), a lobby of the Bishops’ Conference.

<sup>27</sup> Austrian single parents could, unlike German, not take the partner’s months. Since the 2010 reform, single parents can take the partner’s months when meeting very harsh eligibility criteria.

tion as a first step towards an income-related leave, and deliberately used the term ‘freedom of choice’ in this strategy:

At first, we discussed this internally: How should we operate? In effect, we want the income-related leave, but now there is this childcare allowance. We agreed: As a first step, prospects are better for flexibilization. That is, so to speak, to attack the opposition with their own arguments by saying: Okay, we want ‘freedom of choice’, parents should be able to choose. [...] And this worked out. And we managed, within social partnership, to win employers for this. (Austria Interview No. 2/BAK)

They argued—as was confirmed by studies during the following years, e.g. issued by the BAK (Riesenfelder et al. 2006)—that the proportion of fathers taking the leave was still marginal and that women had postponed their re-entry into the labor market because of the childcare allowance.

This prepared the ground, and in the wake of October 2006 national elections, the flexibilized childcare allowance was, pushed by the SPÖ, put in the coalition agreement with the ÖVP. The written statements of the consultation stage are striking in that nearly all actors criticize some points of the draft<sup>28</sup>, but none disapproves categorically or makes suggestions for an alternative scheme. This seems to be a consequence of the reform-oriented actors being content with reaching their strategic interim solution; and the conservative actors, while not actively supporting the flexibilization, finding no arguments *against* it, as it left the old system intact and ‘simply’ added additional variants. With the Social Democrats in government again, social partnership recovered, but was not fully revived.<sup>29</sup> The social partners developed a reform proposal deviating from the government’s one (AK 2007) by proposing a total of four variants. Following the consultation stage, the government proposal, which had originally only foreseen the short (15+3) and long variant (30+6), inte-

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<sup>28</sup> Criticized were particularly the low income limit, the lower overall payment for the shorter variants, the discrimination against single parents, and the deficits in public childcare facilities (e.g. BÖFV 2007).

<sup>29</sup> This was related to Chancellor Gusenbauer’s fractured relationship to the social partners: While being himself employed at Lower Austria’s Chamber of Labor, he had discarded unionist from the electoral lists for parliament.

grated also a medium variant (20+4) demanded by social partners and proposed the bill to parliament. Investigating the policy formulation mode, this program reform rested on the availability of new ideas, as the alliance of the Friends of Children and women's associations within the SPÖ and the trade union successfully set the flexibilization on the agenda from the outside. Yet the decision-making process itself was marked by traditional actor configurations, with the SPÖ and the social partners striving for modernization against a rather reform-reluctant ÖVP.

Without a government change, this leave would probably have lasted several years, but only half a year after its introduction, on July 7<sup>th</sup> 2008, vice-chancellor Wilhelm Molterer (ÖVP) announced: 'It's enough' with this coalition. Result of September 2008 elections was again a grand coalition, led by Chancellor Werner Faymann (SPÖ) and vice Josef Pröll (ÖVP). Surprisingly, the Conservatives announced demands for an income-related parental leave during the election campaign (which not even the SPÖ had done). Similar to Germany, renewed personnel around Pröll (who explicitly strived at modernizing his party) and later State Secretary of Family, Christine Marek (ÖVP), were important *new internal actors* to push these ideas through:

Marek played a decisive role in this and, due to her own experience as a single mother, [...] brings in a new perspective which former ÖVP-politicians simply did not have, since they were just starting from this traditional image of family. (Interview Austria No. 12/Green Party)

Marek then conducted negotiations for Family and Women Affairs with Barbara Prammer (SPÖ) and like in Germany, the Social Democrats would not oppose these plans, while the Conservatives now claimed credit for them. While this shows how new individual actors enabled the 2010 introduction of an income-related childcare allowance, the *new idea* itself (though having been advocated by certain actors as Social-Democratic women for years) was inserted from the outside. Namely, the German 2007 introduction of its income-related parental benefit and the strategic exploitation of a former SPD-policy by minister von der Leyen served as a clear example for the Austrian Conservative party, as many interviewees state, e.g.:

The German family minister von der Leyen was even invited by the ÖVP in the run-up to the elections. She gave a speech on the parental benefit, its implementation and effects—and then the ÖVP jumped on the bandwagon. (Austria Interview No. 7/BMSK)

Criticized in its intentions by many family organizations (KFV, ÖFB) and strictly opposed by right-wing FPÖ and BZÖ, the ÖVP pushed this modernizing reform through. Like in Germany, economic argumentations gained importance, as social partners strongly supported the reform and the family portfolio had been assigned to the Ministry of Economics after 2008 elections. These new configurations and the policy transfer from Germany opened a ‘window of opportunity’ for the introduction of an income-related childcare allowance, which, however, left traditional policies in place in a scheme of ‘muddled modernization’.

## 5 Conclusions

To sum up results, studying the parental leave reforms conducted in the first decade of the new millennium has shown, how both Germany (2007) and Austria (2008, 2010) implemented modernizing reforms of their leaves. After the ‘interim solution’ of 2008, Austria’s 2010 reform was clearly inspired by the German parental benefit and driven by similar underlying goals: supporting shared parenthood, women with higher income and/or wish for quick re-commodification. However, it differed substantially in introducing the income-related leave scheme of twelve plus two partner’s months as *additional* into the pre-existing scheme, leaving all else unchanged. Thus, Austrian parental leave policies are, in comparison to the German system shift, more marked by path-dependencies, combining progressive and conservative elements, but possibly also offering more ‘choice’.

**Tab. 2:** Reforms between instrument tinkering and policy renewal

		<i>Entrance of new actors</i>	
		<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Availability of new ideas</i>	<i>No</i>	<b>instrument tinkering</b> Austria (2000)	<b>policy experimenta- tion</b> Germany (2001) Austria (2002)
	<i>Yes</i>	<b>program reform</b> Austria (2008) Austria (2010)	<b>policy renewal</b> Germany (2007)

Source: Own figure based on Howlett et al. 2009: 137

With regard to explanations, all problem pressure, structural and power resources approaches have been found to offer unsatisfying answers. Having identified (changing) *actors* and *ideas* as promising explanatory factors in Chapter 2.2, Howlett et al.'s (2009) approach (cf. Table 2) was applied in the case studies of Chapter 4. Reviewing it, two reflections should be made. Firstly, regarding the approach itself, the connection between 'actors' and 'ideas' should be studied more closely in future studies, e.g. asking under what conditions 'old actors' take up 'new ideas'. Also, the causal hypotheses of the approach should be tested. Though they largely applied in our case studies, it is at least arguable that 'new actors' are essential to conduct policy renewal or that 'new ideas' are needed for pure instrument tinkering. Secondly, regarding its explanatory power for parental leave reforms in Germany and Austria, the focus on new actors and ideas in the policy-making process has proven useful to understand differing reform outputs in Germany and Austria. While something more seems to be needed to achieve a 'full' explanation, actors and ideas<sup>30</sup> in the reform processes build an important block.

The 'parties matter' thesis offers quite interesting insights, but quite to the contrary as usually expected: While no far-reaching reforms were implemented by the German red-green coalition, grand coalitions under the aegis of the Conservative parties brought about family policy modernization in both countries. Both in the CDU/CSU and the ÖVP, new ideas have been pushed

<sup>30</sup> For example, the focus was on explaining reform outputs and it went beyond the scope to study in detail the origin of the new ideas and actors.

through to guide their family policy-making; also connected with strategic elements of claiming credit for policies originally developed by Social Democrats and glancing at new electorates—female and urban. However, more far-reaching changes with regard to the entrance of new actors into the family policy processes are discernible in Germany, as represented by the ‘Alliance for the Family’: Employers and trade unions have established themselves as new, important family policy actors during the last years; their ultimate interests with regard to leave policies coinciding with those of many traditional actors. In Austria, on the other hand, this development is less pronounced, while family organizations—via their linkages to the political parties—and the Catholic Church play a more important role than in German family policies. Regarding ‘Nixon goes to China’ logics in family policies, it would be interesting to study what is the rule, and what is the exception that proves it. That is, whether there are, across Europe and during the last years, more progressive policies with Social Democrats and more traditional policies with Conservative parties in power—or just the other way round. German and Austrian reforms of parental leave proved to be quite contingent and fascinating cases in this respect.

### List of Abbreviations

AGF	-	Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Deutschen Familienorganisationen
AK	-	Arbeiterkammern
BAK	-	Bundesarbeiterkammer
BDA	-	Bundesvereinigung der Deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände
BMFSFJ	-	Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend
BMSK	-	Bundesministerium für soziale Sicherheit, Generationen und Konsumentenschutz
BMWFJ	-	Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft, Familie und Jugend
BÖVF	-	Bund österreichischer Frauenvereine
BZÖ	-	Bündnis Zukunft Österreich

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CDU	-	Christlich Demokratische Union
CSU	-	Christlich Soziale Union
DFV	-	Deutscher Familienverband
DGB	-	Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund
DIW	-	Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung
EAF	-	Evangelische Aktionsgemeinschaft für Familienfragen
FDK	-	Familienbund der Katholiken
FDP	-	Freie Demokratische Partei
FLAF	-	Familienlastenausgleichsfonds
FPÖ	-	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs
IAF	-	Verband binationaler Familien und Partnerschaften
IEF	-	Institut für Ehe und Familie
IGBCE	-	Industriegewerkschaft Bergbau, Chemie, Energie
KFÖ	-	Katholischer Familienverband
ÖFB	-	Österreichischer Familienbund
ÖIF	-	Österreichisches Institut für Familienforschung
ÖVP	-	Österreichische Volkspartei
SPÖ	-	Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs
VAMV	-	Verband Alleinerziehender Mütter und Väter
WKÖ	-	Wirtschaftskammer Österreich
ZdK	-	Zentralkomitee der deutschen Katholiken

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