

Vienna, 29 December 2023

Dear Advisory Board members and members!  
Dear friends of the Vienna Forum!

### ***Introduction***

The Vienna Forum reacted with great concern to the war of aggression led by Russia in Ukraine, the Hamas massacre in Israel and Israel's subsequent warfare in the Gaza Strip, but also to other civil wars and armed conflicts. In view of all these serious violations of international law, the anniversary year of human rights – 75 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Genocide Convention as well as 30 years of the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, among others – took a back seat, although it is to be feared that the current conflicts will bring with them further wars, terror and a substantial threat to democracy, the rule of law and human rights. The coming year will bring major political changes at European and national level, making it all the more important to continue our work on developing instruments to safeguard and implement democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

### ***Research projects***

- In 2023, the research project on '**Legal participation of civil society through petition rights before the Constitutional Court**' was completed and will soon be published with proposals for a reform of Articles 139 and 140 of the Federal Constitution.
- Studies on '**Political Participation of Civil Society in Austria**' and '**The Istanbul Convention on Violence against Women**' are nearing completion, while the project '**An Alternative to "Fortress Europe"**' through economic cooperatives in North African countries will take some time.
- The interdisciplinary study '**Clean Mediterranean Sea! – CMS!**' on the 'ticking bomb of plastic waste in the Mediterranean' is currently being supplemented – following a successful final conference with European and international participation in Slovenia – with a comparative legal analysis of 14 reports from countries bordering the Mediterranean and recommendations on measures to be taken to the UN, OSCE, EU and all Mediterranean states. It will comprise around 1,200 pages and is due to be published in open access format in the first half of 2024. Details at [www.humanrights.at/projekte/](http://www.humanrights.at/projekte/) and [www.cms-humanrights.com/](http://www.cms-humanrights.com/).

We would like to thank all members of our 'Young Team' (law students and graduates who are completing their year in court or internships) for making it possible to carry out these projects.

### ***Strategic litigation***

In cooperation with our advisor, lawyer *Eva Jana Messerschmidt* ([www.messerschmidt.lawyer](http://www.messerschmidt.lawyer)), the Vienna Forum conducts strategic litigation in cases of serious, exemplary human rights violations, in particular before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). For example, complaints were recently lodged with the ECtHR regarding inhumane residence conditions for refugee families on Greek Aegean islands and in the case of a serious human rights violation in the Turkish-occupied Kurdish part of northern Syria.

## **Centre polis – Learning politics at school**

One of *polis*' core tasks is to respond to current social developments in a way that depolarises and strengthens democracy and to support teachers in dealing with crisis situations quickly, comprehensively and with relief, thereby also strengthening the culture of discourse.

Civic education on democracy and human rights was therefore in high demand in 2023, a year that was heavily characterised by crises. A lot of work for the *polis* centre:

- 2023 was the hottest year since records began. Man-made climate change has led to heatwaves, forest fires, floods, droughts and much suffering. With an article on 'International Climate Policy', *polis* has produced a new basic booklet for the classroom.
- With the start of the Russian war of aggression on Ukraine in February 2022, the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel at the beginning of October 2023, the subsequent military conflict in the Gaza Strip and increasing anti-Semitism, 'War and Peace' became a teaching topic, supported by a *polis* article on the Middle East conflict.


European projects complement the activities of *polis*:

- The '**Lifelong Learning Week**' in Brussels saw the successful conclusion of the CITED project, which focussed on democratic school development and teacher training.
- The '**EU Democracy Rally**' project developed a training programme and a toolkit to support young people in shaping political campaigns.
- '**My Resistance, My Democracy**' combines remembrance learning with political education in youth work.
- '**Linking Citizenship and Employability Perspectives in Adult Learning (LICEAL)**' examines the added value that the promotion of democratic competences can have in adult vocational education.

As emphasised in the introduction, 2023 was a jubilee year for human rights. History and the present show that human rights must be constantly defended. Civic education is an important contribution to this.

Further information on the activities of the *polis* centre and its annual reports can be found at [www.politik-lernen.at](http://www.politik-lernen.at). The 2023 annual report will be published on 15 January 2024.

## **Funding and clients**

- We would like to thank the Swiss-Austrian *Hermann and Marianne Straniak Foundation*  for funding the research projects of the Vienna Forum.
- We would also like to thank the RD-Foundation Vienna and the Association for Democracy and International Law (MAF-DAD) Cologne for further funding.
- The Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research is the client for the national activities of the *polis* centre.

**The Vienna Forum would like to thank you for your support  
and wishes you a Happy New Year in every respect!**

*Hannes Tretter and Marion Wisinger, Chairman and Chairwoman of the Board*

Wiener Forum für Demokratie und Menschenrechte  
A-1010 Wien, Freyung 6/7/2  
Tel. +43 1 353 40 20  
Mail: [office@humanrights.at](mailto:office@humanrights.at)  
Website: [www.humanrights.at](http://www.humanrights.at)

Zentrum *polis* – Politik Lernen in der Schule  
A-1010 Wien, Helferstorferstraße 5  
Tel. +43 1 353 40 20  
Mail: [service@www.politik-lernen.at](mailto:service@www.politik-lernen.at)  
Website: [www.politik-lernen.at](http://www.politik-lernen.at)