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Austria Freedom Party Politician Gives to Tory-Linked European Group

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A politician from Austria's nationalist Freedom Party and her entourage have emerged as unlikely donors to a pan-European political group that includes the U.K. Conservatives and Poland's Law and Justice party.

A consultancy managed by Barbara Kolm, a libertarian economist whom the Freedom Party installed in the Austrian central bank's General Council, as well as four individuals with links to the consultancy or to Kolm's research institute donated to the Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists in Europe, or ACRE, according to a filing to the European Parliament.

The donations are unusual because Kolm's Freedom Party, junior partner in Chancellor Sebastian Kurz's coalition, is part of the Europe of Nations and Freedom group in the European Parliament. No Austrian lawmakers are members of ACRE's faction.

Four of the five donations were 18,000 euros (\$20,340), the maximum amount allowed for individual donations under European law, and one was 16,000 euros, for a total of 88,000 euros, according to the filing. That's a tenth of what ACRE spent in 2018, according to Austrian newspaper Wiener Zeitung, which first reported the donations.

'Free Markets'

Kolm didn't respond to calls and emails asking for a comment on the contents of the article. Wiener Zeitung quoted her as saying that the donations were given to ACRE because the group "supports the debate about free markets" and that she and the other donors shared similar values.

An Austrian Central Bank spokesman said the issue is Kolm's private matter and has no relation to his organization. Conservative Party and PiS representatives didn't pick up calls seeking comment.

The filing names Triple-A, a group of three Vienna-based companies all headed by Kolm, and one Triple-A staff member as donors. The two auditors of Kolm's research institute Austrian Economics Center also appear as donors. The fifth is related to the Austrian Economics Center's general office manager, according to Wiener Zeitung.

In addition to Triple-A and the Austrian Economics Center, Kolm also heads the Friedrich August von Hayek Institut, a libertarian think tank. The Vienna-based institutes both name as their partners conservative U.S. institutions such as Americans for Tax Reform, Cato Institute, the Heritage Foundation and the Atlas Network.