

EPP TO DISCUSS AUSTRIAN PARTY'S MEMBERSHIP

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The controversial government alliance between the Austrian People's Party (OeVP) and Jörg HAIDER's Freedom Party (FPÖ) has led to a number of calls by EPP member parties to suspend or eject the OeVP from the EPP.

EPP President Wilfried MARTENS said today (Feb. 7): "I am now waiting for formal demands, and if necessary I will then start the procedure according to the rules". At least three of the EPP's 37 member parties, from three different countries, must support such a move for the procedure to begin.

The issue would then be put to the EPP Political Bureau on Thursday (Feb. 10), and voted on at the April 6 Political Bureau: the rules require at least a month's notice for such a decision. A simple majority is then enough to decide the issue for or against.

Since its foundation in 1976, the EPP has only once excluded a member party: the Portuguese CDS (now renamed PP) in 1993, when the party took an anti-European direction. Last year the Basque PNV, which refused to join the EPP Group in the European Parliament, was judged to have excluded itself from the EPP.

A total of 190 people have the right to vote at EPP Political Bureau meetings. Votes are roughly equally divided between ex officio members of the Bureau such as European Commissioners from member parties, and the parties themselves. Votes are weighted according to the size of the parties' vote in the last European Parliament elections. The OeVP has a total of seven votes, while the two largest member parties, the German CDU and the Spanish Partido Popular, command 18 and 15 respectively.