



Member Interview



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Q: Today, we have a very special guest, Mr. Andreas Pflieger is the new Deputy Commercial Counselor in Abu Dhabi, and we are very happy to welcome him as a new member to the Austrian Business Council. Andreas, welcome to the United Arab Emirates.

Andreas: Thank you so much. A pleasure to be here today, pleasure to be speaking with you. And the Austrian Business Council, thank you for taking the time.

Q: You are the Deputy Commercial Counselor. Now I live here for quite some time and we had this position not occupied for quite many years. What is the reason that this position has again been activated?

Andreas: That's a very good question. I think one of the very obvious reasons is Expo 2020 Dubai happening in 2021, which is of course, a huge event that is very important for us as the Austrian Trade Trade Commission as well as for the Austrian International Business Community. A World Exposition is always a great opportunity to present yourself on the global stage to meet business partners, potential business partners, potential clients from all over the world, and do it all in a very efficient manner at the World Exposition. So, I think this was one of the main motivations to reintroduce a Deputy Commercial Counselor to our office here. I think the last one was here about 10 years ago. It's also a reality of organizational constraints. How many people do we have, whether we need people, how much business is going into the region? So, yeah, I'm very happy to be here and looking forward to the next three years working in the region.

Q: I think next year. Mr. Richard Bandera, our Commercial Counselor, currently, he's going to leave the U.A.E. I don't know how many years he was here, but I think five, six, seven years, quite some time. Does this also play a role that you have been assigned here.

Andreas: Yes, that's also part of the reasoning. Richard, if I remember correctly, is now in his seventh year in Abu Dhabi as commercial counselor. He's done a great job of supporting the Austrian business community, of building a great relationship with the Austrian Business Council and with yourself, Werner. You were actually one of my first meetings in Dubai after I arrived approximately a month ago. And it was very useful for me to speak with you and other business representatives to hear what's going on in the region.

So, yes, Richard will be leaving Abu Dhabi after the World Exposition. That's the plan. Anyway, as you know, things can always change last minute, but that is the plan. And then, of course, it also makes sense to have a deputy here who can preserve a lot of the knowledge, who can maintain the network and the system of commercial accounts that in arriving here in an efficient and effective manner. So, he can support the business community as soon as possible and as well as possible as well.

Q: Andreas, let's talk a little bit about yourself. Can you tell us about your career? Where did you start off? Where have you been born? So maybe a little bit of your private life and your professional life?

Andreas: Absolutely, yes. So I'm the youngest of three children born in a small town outside of Linz in Upper Austria. My mother was a teacher and my father was a car salesman. And yeah, I grew up a very happy child with two older siblings. I'm the youngest of three in rural upper Austria, lots of hiking in the summers, lots of summer camps, lots of Boy Scouting and all that kind of thing. And I really enjoyed growing up in Upper Austria, and my parents always included us children in all of their travels.

They always loved to travel, went to Italy, went to Turkey and went to Greece, you know, all kinds of places. And they always encouraged us to come with them if we wanted to and explore as much as possible. And that's something that I always love doing. Even as a small child. There so many stories of me that my mom shares with me. We arrived in a new holiday resort in a new country somewhere in the five or six years old. I would say, OK, can I go explore now and then I was just off exploring the surroundings.

So, I think that left an impression on me from very early on. I went to school in Linz to an international school which again reinforced this idea of building an international career. I then studied in Austria for a while. I studied in England, did my undergraduate degree in the south west of England, came back to Austria for part time studies while I worked in Vienna in public relations and events management, and after that studied in Sweden for a little bit and then finally joined Austrian Federal Economic Chambers and I spent one year as a trainee in Vienna, which is the regular program. And then you get sent abroad as Deputy Commercial Counselor for ideally three postings of three years in a row. And my first posting was a surprise. I was the only one in our group of ten trainees who said, you can send me anywhere you want. Only other colleagues had a slight geographical preference. Some of them wanted Asia, some of them wanted Europe. And I really had an open mind and ended up in Kiev in Ukraine, which was very interesting. So, I spent two years there from August 2016 till August 2018. Very interesting time. I also got to witness the UEFA Champions League Final there, which was a great experience. The last one, Cristiano Ronaldo playing for Real Madrid.

And after Kiev, I moved on to Johannesburg, South Africa, which was also very interesting, very different, a very different market. Austria has a very different standing in South Africa than it does in Ukraine. The economy is at a very different point of development, and it's a fascinating country with lots of challenges on its plate, but also lots of opportunities. And then I spent the next two and

a half years based in Johannesburg, supporting the Austrian economy there, which was also a very, very interesting and fulfilling time. And actually, I ended up getting married in South Africa, had met my now wife already in Austria before I went abroad.

But then Covid-19 struck and unfortunately, we couldn't go through with our wedding as planned in Austria. So, we had a very 2020 wedding in September with only two witnesses in attendance and our families watching it resume in a video call, just like we are having right now. But we're still planning a big celebration with family and friends, hopefully later this year, maybe next year. And yeah, and then we got the opportunity to move on together to the Middle East.

And we arrived in Dubai. We landed in Dubai about a month ago, spent the first two weeks in Dubai meeting Austrian companies, getting acclimated a little bit. And then we moved on to Abu Dhabi about three weeks ago and we're settling in here nicely. I think Abu Dhabi fits our lifestyle and our personality. It is a little bit better than Dubai. Dubai is a very intense city. We enjoyed our time there immensely. But I can imagine that living there is quite exhausting, especially with traffic and the way the roads are built.

But definitely, a great experience to see Dubai and then move on to Abu Dhabi, absolutely.

Q: So Dubai and Abu Dhabi are quite different to the Ukraine and South Africa. What are your first impressions?

Andreas: My first impressions are very positive. First of all, I love hot weather. I've always liked the hot weather better than the cold weather, which is a bit atypical for an Austrian anyways. So that's definitely something I appreciate here.

And the other thing that is very obvious from the beginning is that the level of organization and the pace of business is extremely advanced and very high here. There is a great, great deal of pace in everything that people do. Things move very quickly. Also getting arriving in an administrative sense, all the documents you require, all the ID cards. I've never been to a place where everything gets processed so quickly.

So, I think this just shows that Dubai and Abu Dhabi are very goal oriented, very focused on achieving positive outcomes for the population, which is a large part of the expats, but also nationals and creating an environment that is extremely conducive to business. And actually, one of my first experiences in my first week here already or second week here was a participation in two major trade shows. Overall, we had 30 Austrian companies who travelled from Austria to Dubai to take part in these trade shows, and they were all so surprised that they could do it. There were lots of phone calls with them asking, is this actually possible? What is what is the situation? How can we actually enter the country? Is it safe to do business? And it's great to come into a place where you can tell that the government and business are working together on creating an environment that enables business and enables people to travel safely and conduct their business safely.

Q: Andreas, I can promise you, you will have some quite exciting times ahead. Again, welcome very much to the United Arab Emirates. We wish you a lot of success and I hope that we can have the opportunity to meet very often in person with you.

Andreas: Absolutely. Likewise. Thank you so much Werner for taking the time. I look forward to meeting all the members of the Austrian Business Council, hopefully sooner rather than later, and definitely at the latest than Expo 2020 in Dubai. So, thank you so much for taking the time.