

Austria's Foreign Policy after the Cold War

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Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, the foreign policy orientation of Austria, a permanently neutral state, has undergone a drastic change. Austria started to distance itself from the conventional interpretation of neutrality. In 1992, Austria took part in the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, a forum for discussing security issues with NATO member states, and in 1995 Austria also joined the European Union and signed the Partnership for Peace Treaty with NATO.*¹ It seems that Austria has given up foreign policy assets resulting from its neutrality and decided to lean fully towards the West.

At the same time, Austria took the initiative in starting a regional cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe.*² This has become known as the "Central European Initiative" (CEI, hereafter). It seems that Austria, using its experience and knowledge of having been the center of the old Hapsburg empire as well as having been located between the East and the West during the Cold War, is now trying to find a new role in Central and Eastern Europe.

The purpose of this paper is to determine where Austria's neutrality will go and to examine the meaning of the CEI for Austria in the post-Cold War period. As the change in the interpretation of its neutrality and the active participation in regional cooperation are two of the most important characteristics of Austrian foreign policy after the Cold War, the existing article will also examine Austria's role in the New European Architecture.

Austria's Foreign Policy during Cold War

Austrian foreign policy from 1955 to 1989 can be characterized by its neutral policy and "small state strategy". Austria regained its full independence in 1955, based on the Austrian State Treaty and the Declaration of Permanent Neutrality. The latter was attached to the State Treaty under the pressure of Moscow, which demanded that Austria become a permanently neutral state like Switzerland.*³ From the beginning, however, Austria adopted a different type of neutral policy than Switzerland. Austria became a member of the United Nations in the same year of its full independence and became a member of the Council of Europe in 1956. Austria actively participated in several UN peace-keeping operations; Congo in 1960-63, Cyprus in 1964, the Middle East since 1967, and so on.

At the same time, Austria, as a neutral state, could serve as a meeting place for East-West dialogue. The summit meeting between Khrushchev and Kennedy was held in June 1961. The negotiations on Conventional Forces in Europe as well as the CSCE process have taken place, and have been followed up, in Vienna. Austria defined its foreign policy of active participation in international organizations as an "active neutral policy". These efforts contributed to the high prestige of Austria's neutrality in the international community.

Austria's foreign policy could also be seen in the context of the strategy of a small industrialized state.*⁴ Small states can work efficiently in international conferences or multilateral negotiations where all of the participants are likely to be regarded as equal partners. The famous N + N group within the framework of the CSCE was known as supporting and sometimes stimulating the CSCE process.*⁵ Austria also made every effort to invite multilateral organizations to establish their headquarters there. In 1957, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) settled in Vienna, OPEC followed in 1965 and UNIDO in 1967. As a result, Austria enjoyed a good reputation in the international community during the 1960's and 1970's and in

1971 Kurt Waldheim, former Austrian ambassador to the US, was symbolically elected Secretary General of the United Nations.

Austria's New Foreign Policy Initiatives since the Middle of 1980's

Since the middle of the 1980's, when drastic changes in East-West relations began to break out, Austria has lost many of the advantages that it had enjoyed during the Cold War. Although Austria still maintained an active role in international organizations like CSCE, the viability of an active neutral policy gradually diminished and Austrian foreign policy became focused primarily on European integration. This tendency was strengthened when the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPO) and the Austrian People's Party (OVP) formed the grand coalition government in 1987 and conservative OVP leader A. Mock became Foreign Minister.

The major reorientation of Austrian Foreign Policy was defined as "realistic neutral policy", a foreign policy based mainly on Austria's national interests. According to this new concept, Austria started to reconsider its integration into the EC. More than 50% of Austrian foreign trade was with EC countries and it was quite realistic that Austria would be further integrated into the EC as a member. Furthermore, the Soviet Union did not seem to object to Austria's application to the EC, as they once did before. One of the big obstacles left was the neutrality of Austria. The EC had decided to develop integration also in the field of security (CFSP). In its application for EC membership in 1989, therefore, Austria included a clause to safeguard its neutrality.*⁶

The rapid developments in Europe after 1989 allowed Austria to adopt a more flexible interpretation of its neutrality. During the Gulf crisis, Austria took part not only in the economic sanctions against Iraq, but also allowed the US-led alliance against Iraq to transport war materials across Austria (Austrian parliament even passed an amendment to the War Materials Law,

which allowed exceptions to its neutrality in case of a UN decision).^{*7}

With such a realistic and flexible interpretation of neutrality, and the support of two-thirds of Austrian people for EU entry, as shown by the 1994 referendum, Austria finally joined the EU in January, 1995. Austria also became an observer of the West European Union and signed the Partnership for Peace treaty with NATO.

All of these developments seem to indicate that after the Cold War the focus of Austria's foreign policy orientation will lean completely towards West European integration.

Austria from its historical background, however, has a lot of experience, knowledge and connections with its neighbours in Central and Eastern Europe. Austria's concern in this region is dominated by economic and security factors. During the Cold War period, Austria, using geographical advantage, prospered in the notorious "triangle trade" with Eastern Europe. Now after new democracies have started to liberalize their economic systems, there is another opportunity for Austria to develop foreign trade with Eastern Europe directly and more openly. In fact, Austrian trade with these countries has almost doubled during the past two years.

At the same time, there is a danger of ethnic conflicts in Central and Eastern Europe, which is known as a region of multi-ethnicity. These potential sources of conflicts had been contained by the existence of serious global conflict between the East and West during the Cold War period. After the resolution of this global tension, there is a greater potential for accidental ethnic conflicts in this region than before, as we have seen in the former Yugoslavia. Regional stability is a prerequisite for Austrian economic prosperity with Central and Eastern Europe. In the search for stability in this region, Austria took the lead in 1989 in establishing new regional cooperation, which later became known as the Central European Initiative.

Regional Cooperation: Central European Initiative

The Central European Initiative (CEI), originally called "Quadrangonale", was founded in 1989 by Austria, Hungary, Italy and the former Yugoslavia. After several changes of its name ("Pentagonale", "Hexagonale"), the present name was adopted in 1992. The CEI is a framework for regional cooperation between fifteen countries in both Western and Eastern Europe. The purpose of the CEI is the coordinated implementation of joint projects within Central and Europe, on the basis of existing bi- and multi-lateral relations.

The main fields of cooperation are determined by the Conference of Foreign Ministers (every six months) and the Conference of Heads of Government (every year). The Committee of National Coordinators, consisting of high officials of member countries, is held quarterly and acts as a link among the working groups and among member countries. The CEI Center for Information, Documentation and Projects was recently established in Trieste.

There are 16 working groups within the CEI Energy, Media, Disaster relief, Small and medium-sized enterprises, Culture, Education and youth exchange, Agriculture, Statistics, Telecommunications, Tourism, Environment, Transport, Migration, Science and technology, Minorities, Vocational Training, Reconstruction of Bosnia Herzegovina and Croatia. In order to create a more concrete image of this cooperation, it is necessary to list some examples of their activities:

Energy (chair state, Hungary): the main emphasis is on large-scale infrastructural projects for supplying energy (e.g. oil and gas pipelines); Disaster relief (Italy): an agreement on forecasting, preventing and relieving the effects of natural and technological disasters was drafted; Small and medium-sized enterprises (Hungary, later taken over by Slovenia): this group promotes cross-border cooperation and exchanging of information; Culture, education and youth exchange (Slovakia): Exhibitions (Year of Baroque in Central Europe, 1992) and youth

and student exchanges are intended to promote an understanding of the common culture and history of the peoples and nations in a more integrated Europe; Statistics (Austria): a brochure entitled "CEI in figures" was issued in 1994 with data on demographic, economic and social developments in the member countries; Environment (Austria): this group concentrates on waste disposal, nuclear safety, renewable energy, biological diversity, and the harmonisation of environmental data. Through its activities in these fields, the group aims to help solve transborder environmental problems on a multilateral level. The Central European Data Request Facility was set up by the CEI in Vienna, with the Regional Environment Center for Central and Eastern Europe in Budapest, to supply comprehensive information and carry out research on the protection of the environment; Transport (Italy): its aim is to establish corridors for road and rail transport, to promote combined transport systems, to link the Adriatic region with the Central European transport system and to increase cooperation in air and water transport; Migration (Hungary): the problems of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants should be eased by an exchange of information on population movement; Minorities (Hungary): the main function of this group was to draw up a CEI Instrument on the protection of minority rights. This was finalised in the autumn of 1994 and has in the meantime been signed by a majority of the member countries. In the future this group will concentrate on working out common CEI positions on minority questions for submission to international fora.*⁸

Originally, the purpose of the CEI was to provide a loose framework for mainly economic cooperation between member states having different politico-economic systems but belonging to a certain historical region with a common cultural and historical heritage. Since then, however, the main scope and character of the CEI have gradually changed. First of all, the CEI has become a framework for pragmatic cooperation through specific projects, especially in those areas where member states share keen interests: environmental questions and infrastructure

issues. The epistemic community, in the form of working group activities, is playing an important role in the development of this cooperation. Secondly, the CEI has functioned as a support mechanism for the European integration process: the EU has developed a structured dialogue as the main instrument for promoting political integration of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In this regard, the CEI could serve as an important platform by identifying and presenting common positions and interests among member states. Thirdly, the CEI has provided an opportunity for regular political dialogue: minority issues are especially important in this respect, because they constitute a potential threat to the regional stability of the CEI.*⁹ The proposal of making the CEI area a Nuclear-Free Zone has also been put forward by Ukraine President Kuchma.*¹⁰

For Austria the CEI could improve its security environment. After the Cold War, the main threat facing Austria is not a military one but a non-military type of threat. This non-military security problem includes a whole range of destabilising factors: the large-scale organised international crime, the mass flow of immigrants and refugees, the spread of arms and NBC weapons, and environmental problems. Clearly such issues cannot be dealt with efficiently within the framework of traditional strategies of power politics alone. Given such new security circumstances, cooperation in various fields in the CEI framework will strengthen the security of Austria and contribute to the stability of the region. At the same time, Austria, as an EU member and as a leading member of the CEI, can play a pivotal role in helping Central and Eastern European countries join EU. This is a new opportunity for Austria to compensate for its loss of power and to maximize its national interests in the post - Cold War period.

Concluding Remarks

Since the end of the Cold War, Austrian foreign policy, based on its neutrality, has undergone a fundamental change. Austria is still a *de jure* neutral state under the Constitutional Law.

But, in 1995 Austria joined the European Union, which has been discussing further integration, including the CFSP. Austria is also participating actively in the PFP as well as the NACC, especially in the field of peace-keeping operations. Austria, therefore, in effect gave up its neutrality.*¹¹ In the latest Austrian foreign ministry's yearbook, there is no longer any reference to neutrality.*¹² Consequently, Austria will take part in the process of establishing the New European Architecture, with almost no security constraints.

The "Small state strategy", on the other hand, still survives in the form of active participation in regional cooperations as well as the OSCE. The Central European Initiative offers a new opportunity for Austria to compensate for the reduction of its power resulting from the loss of its neutral and geopolitical advantage during the Cold War. Austria can now become a main coordinator of Central Europe through the CEI by supporting the stable region-building process and by helping to prepare Central and Eastern European countries for formal membership in the EU.

The change in the interpretation of Austrian neutrality and its active participation in regional cooperations are two important aspects of Austrian foreign policy in the post-Cold War period. The former is essential in order for Austria to be integrated further into the West. Austria can enjoy economic prosperity by joining the EU. The latter is important in order for Austria to maintain regional stability in Central and Eastern Europe, a multi-ethnic region. Austria can improve regional stability as well as regional economic development by actively supporting regional cooperation. Regional cooperation could be basis for mutual understanding as well as inter-regional trade activities, thus increasing transparency across borders.

The end of the Cold War has shifted Austria's position in Europe. It is usually estimated that Austria's peculiar role as a neutral state in East-West conflict has ended and that Austria will become just one of the small members of the EU. The new environment, however, provides opportunities and challenges for

Austrian foreign policy.

Notes

- 1 Bundesministerium für auswärtige
Angelegenheiten,
*Osterrelchische aussenpolitische Dokumentation: Texte und
Dokumente* Nr. 4, August 1995:116-123.
- 2 Concerning this regional cooperation at the beginning, see
Hanspeter Neuhold (ed.), *The Pentagonal /
Hexagonal
Experiment: New Forms of Cooperation in a
Changing
Europe*. Braumuller/Wien, 1991.
- 3 Vojtech Mastny, "Kremlin Politics and
the Austrian
Settlement", *Problems of Communism*, July -August (1982): 37-
51.
- 4 The concept "small state strategy" is from Helmut Kramer,
"Foreign Policy", Volkmar Lauber (ed.),
*Contemporary
Austrian Politics*, Westview Press, 1996: 156-173.
- 5 Hanspeter Neuhold (ed.), *CSCE: N+N
PERSPECTIVES*,
Braumuller / Wien, 1987.
- 6 Andreas Lernhart, *Austria and the European
Community:
Neutrality and Membership*, Signum/Wien, 1990,p. 13, 16. In
the application form, it reads: "...Austria is
making this
application on the assumption that its
internationally
recognized status of permanent neutrality...will be maintained
and that, as a member of the European Community by virtue of
the Treaty of Accession, it will be able to fulfil its
legal
obligations arising out of its status as a permanently neutral
state and to continue its policy of neutrality as a specific
contribution towards the maintenance of peace and security in
Europe...", Bundesministerium für auswärtige Angelegenheiten,
*Osterreichische aussenpolitische Dokumentation: Texte und
Dokumente*, January 1990:68.
- 7 Masayoshi Kamohara and Yoshikazu Hirose," The Neutrality in
the post-Cold War period: Austrian Foreign Policy in Transition
(Reisen no Shuen to Churitsu)", Yoshikazu Hirose (ed.), *The
International Politics of Europe in Transition
(Yoroppa*

- Henkaku no Kokusaikankei*), *Y^eYso-sh.oboY*/Tokyo, 1995.
- 8 *Austrian Foreign Policy Yearbook: Report of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs for the year 1994*:30-31.
- 9 *Osterreichische aussenpolitische Dokumentation: Texte und Dokumente* Nr. 6, Dezember 1995: 61.
- 10 Jakub Karpinski, "Kuchma on Security", *OMRI DAILY DIGEST*, No. 125, Part H, 27 June 1996.
- 11 The neutrality of Austria has become an integral part of its national identity since 1955. Many Austrians feel that neutrality is a substantial element of Austrian identity. Therefore, they prefer keeping its neutrality over EU membership. See, Hanspeter Neuhold, Paul Luif (Hrsg.), *Das aussenpolitische Bewusstsein der Oesterreicher: Aktuelle internationale Probleme im Spiegel der Meinungsforschung*, Braunmiiller / Wien, 1992, S. 91-94. See also, Andreas Barz, "Das Ende der Neutralitat: Die neutralen Staaten im Wandel der Weltpolitik", *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, *BAlA*% /92, S. 4.
- 12 The Austrian Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Austrian Foreign Policy Yearbook 1995*.