

# The Movements for European Unity in Austria from 1970 to 1986

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## INTRODUCTION

Dealing with Austrian politics is always both a challenging and daunting task. This is especially true for the Austrian European policies. It is challenging because it allows insights into a deeply neo-corporatistic social structure with clearly identifiable players, and it is daunting because these players did their bargaining behind a veil, which was often decorated with Austrian coziness. But the off-stage political bargaining processes more often obeyed to the rationality of party politics, power maintenance and the making of ones mark - results of the division of political power between the two main parties. The Austrian neutrality always provided a welcomed yardstick against which successful politics had to be measured. This is not only due to the formal, legal status of the Austrian neutrality but to its intensive exploitation as a reference point for building an Austrian identity, especially in demarcation from Germany. For the years in question neutrality represents the overwhelmingly dominating force of Austrian foreign policy. In this article we will try to make this force a bit more understandable. The most important political event concerning the relation of Austria and the EEC were the negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement - but the discussion about these negotiations were mostly confined to technical and economical topics. We will go on shedding some light on the main players on the Austrian field: the Socialist Party, the conservative People's Party and the Freedom Party. The non-governmental organizations, trying to promote European unity, never had an easy task in Austria because the important positions were more or less occupied. They were banned to the role of spectators - sometimes throwing in either disturbing or helpful comments. Looking back at this 26 years we see an interesting metamorphosis: the development of Austria from an „Island of the Blessed“ to an Austria viewing itself - at first rather reluctantly - as being part of an emerging European Community.

### 1. THE STATUS OF NEUTRALITY

The Austrian status of neutrality is legally implanted in the Constitutional Law on Perennial

Neutrality from October 26, 1955. Politically, the neutrality status goes back to the Moscow Memorandum from April 15, 1955. Within a short time, the idea of a neutral state has become a constituent part of Austrian national identity. During the 1960's, the Soviet Union insisted on a formal neutrality of the Austrian state (if not of the Austrian people), and frequently delayed Austria's negotiations with the EC. French President Pompidou and his Foreign Minister Couve de Murville fully recognized Soviet concerns, as the Vice Chancellor at that time, Fritz Bock, reported (Boetticher 1976, p.3). The integration of Austria would strengthen the "German" block in the EC and thus eventually inspire German aspirations for a special role within Europe at the same time diminishing France's wish for an own hegemonic position. In the late 1970's, the newspaper Pravda pronounced the official Soviet position that even a purely economic cooperation with the EC would endanger the Austrian neutrality status (Europa – Stimme, Nov./Dec. 1970, p.5). In Austria, pro-integration organizations as the Austrian European Federalist Movement (EFBÖ) argued that a possible joining of the EC is by no means a hostile act against the Soviet Union, but an economic indispensability. Therefore, the reservations of the USSR could be dispersed on a diplomatic way.

Some jurisprudence specialists – the experts for international law Prof. Ermacora or Fried Esterbauer –nourished this argument. They consistently reasoned that a full-blown membership is possible with a neutrality proviso. In its periodicals, the EFBÖ strongly criticized the Austrian governments for their manipulation of the public discourse in favor of the neutrality argument: "All Austrian governments since 1955 have consciously cultivated this false interpretation of international law by means of their apparatus of power, the mass media and the bound diplomacy. They influenced the Austrian people by suggesting that their history and fate was found in a neutral isolation in a irrevocable form."(Boetticher 1974, 2)

## **2. THE TREATIES**

Austrian efforts to reach a separate treaty with the EEC had failed in the 1960's. France was against an integration of the EFTA countries, Italy had not solved the question over South Tyrol/Alto Adige, and the Soviet Union was reluctant of neutral Austria's integration into a distinctively "western" block. For Austria some sort of agreement became increasingly pressing because Italy and Germany provided the most important markets for the economy and Russian objections were met with hints to the membership in the OEEC.

Only with de Gaulle's retirement from politics and improving talks with Italy over the Pact on South Tyrol, negotiations were resumed. The Austrian Foreign Minister, Rudolf Kirchschläger, declared in Brussels that "Austria (is) profoundly interested in a collaboration on the technical-economical sector that goes beyond the trade sector" (Europa-Stimme, March/April 1991, p.4). However, the official line of the new social-democratic government Kreisky I. left no doubt that it aims at fully preserving the Austrian obligations of the State Treaty and the Law on Neutrality. After a good-will tour of Chancellor Bruno Kreisky to all EC capitals, the government presented to the Parliament two reports on European integration. Kreisky's general strategy concerning the European integration was supported by all three major parties, as a debate in the Austrian Parliament in mid-1972 showed (Europa-Stimme, May/June 1992, p.2).

Finally, negotiations resulted in the successful conclusion of Free Trade Agreements between the EC and the remaining EFTA-states (Austria, Island, Portugal, Sweden, and Switzerland). The Free Trade Agreements excluded the agrarian sector, and were not as comprehensive as the failed association agreement in the 1960's. The Agreement was by no means an association treaty, as the EC concluded with Greece or Turkey, because it did not aim at a full-fledged membership in the long run. It consisted of a global and an interim treaty with both the European Economic Area and the ESCS, the so-called Montanunion. After having been notified, the agreements commenced on January 1, 1994. By July 1977, they were implemented completely. Apart from the agrarian sector (see Riegler 1977), the results of the Agreements were generally positive for the Austrian economy.

During the early 1980's, a stronger co-operation of the EFTA countries with the EC became increasingly an option for resisting US-American influence. In Austria, it was particularly the conflict with the USA on the export of high-tech products to Eastern Europe. Together with the growing dynamics of the EC integration project, this led to the Declaration of Luxembourg in April 1984, which envisages a "European Economic Area" including both EC and EFTA states.

## **3. THE PARTIES**

From the general elections in 1970 until 1983, Austria can be characterized as a two-party system with a predominant party, according to Giovanni Satori's categories. From 1971 on, three strong social-democratic governments with Chancellor Bruno Kreisky designed the official policy of limited rapprochement towards the EC. In 1983, the social-democratic SPÖ lost the absolute majority, and formed a coalition with the (in the 1970's and early 1980's) traditionally pro-integration Freedom Party (FPÖ) under Chancellor Fred Sinowatz. From 1986 on, a big coalition between the SPÖ and the conservative People's Party (ÖVP) under Chancellor Franz Vranitzky set out for a re-evaluation of its position in Europe, resulting finally in the EU membership in 1995. 3.1. The Austrian Socialist Party (SPÖ)

Austrian politics in the 1970's and 1980's was highly personalized. The institutional framework of the state was complemented by a strong system of neo-corporatism in the so-called Sozialpartnerschaft. Within the social-democratic government, Chancellor Bruno Kreisky dominated particularly Austria's foreign policy. On the level of party programs, the SPÖ in the 1970's and 1980's articulated a generally accepted claim to modernize the country. Particularly between 1974 and 1983, the social-democratic government pursued an economic policy which was later labeled the Austro-Keynesianism. This succeeded by means of a mix of anti-cyclic activities and a number of fortuities. Despite a general economic crisis, Austria managed to maintain a high level of employment and social peace. (Kramer/Höll 1991,65) In the first two years of the SPÖ government, the relations with the EC were a focus of social-democratic foreign policy. However, after the Free Trade Agreements in 1972, Bruno Kreisky's focus shifted away from European integration to a more globally orientated policy. Kreisky did nothing more but

Pflichtübungen, "compulsory exercises", as Prassnegg (1985) called it. In

Kreisky's statement of government policy in 1976, e.g., only ten percent of the statement on Austria's foreign policy concepts were dedicated to European questions. When asked where he sees the limits of cooperation with the EC in 1977, Chancellor Kreisky answered clearly: "(The limits are) where the neutrality status of various states sets them; this includes e.g. the participation in supranational authorities". (Europa-Stimme, July/August 1977, p.3)

When Bruno Kreisky stepped down in 1983, the new social-democratic Chancellor Fred Sinowatz formed a new government together with the Freedom Party of Norbert Steger. In their statement of government policy on May 31, 1983, Fred Sinowatz and his Foreign Minister Erwin Lanz made clear that the State Treaty of 1955 and the Law on Neutrality would stay the foundations of their policy towards Europe. The new Foreign Minister Leopold Gratz stated it even clearer by saying that economically Austria wants to be as much a part of the European integration as possible, but that a EC membership is completely out of the question (Europa-Stimme, Nov./Dec. 1984, p. 2). However, Chancellor Sinowatz launched a diplomacy of increased state visits to Brussels and other EC capitals, what indicated a first policy shift in favor of the EC.

### 3.2. The Austrian People's Party (ÖVP)

After losing two elections in the early 1970's, the ÖVP could hardly formulate a persuasive concept contrasting the reform policy of Bruno Kreisky. Despite critics of the SPÖ's economic policy of Austro-Keynesianism, the ÖVP failed to formulate an alternative concept. Only in 1982 and during the election campaign in 1983, the party succeeded in presenting a fundamentally different economic policy. Ideologically, this concept was based on neo-conservative ideas, that is a mixture of neo-liberalism and traditional conservatism (Müller 1992,240-241). While the governing SPÖ regained a position of relative social conservatism and traditional values during the 1970's, the oppositional ÖVP moved towards a more international orientation, and opened the party up to new issues (see Müller 1991, 190,206). In the late 1970's, the ÖVP started to stiffly criticized Kreisky's global policy concept of so-called "neutralism" (Neutralismus), and demanded a reorientation towards Western Europe (Skuhra 1991, 683). This helped the party in regaining profile in a political arena firmly dominated by Bruno Kreisky. Consequently, in

1979 the ÖVP was the first party to directly collaborate with the European People's Party (EPP) in the European Parliament under the Chair of future Foreign Minister Alois Mock.

### 3.3. Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ)

Since the Treaties of Rome, the FPÖ stands for a full participation of Austria in the European integration movement. During the election campaign of 1970, FPÖ leader Friedrich Peter stressed that his party had put a European federal state at the top of their party agenda. Peter pleaded for a common European monetary union and a common foreign policy. Austria should come as close as possible to be a full-fledged membership in the EC with regard to its status as a neutral state (Europa-Stimme, Jan./Feb. 19970, pp. 5-6).

When the FPÖ entered a coalition with the SPÖ in 1983, the traditionally pro-integration attitude reinforced the general trend away from the global orientation of Bruno Kreisky's foreign policy. The government under Kreisky's successor Sinowatz shifted towards a more European-centered alignment. Especially the relation with Austria's neighbors, but also with the European Community, came back into focus.

## 4. Non-Governmental Organizations

### 4.1. Austrian European Federalist Movement (EFBÖ) and the Austrian Young European Federalists (BJEÖ)

In their political program of 1977, the EFBÖ together with the BJEÖ formulated their common positions regarding the EC, the EFTA, and the Council of Europe:

(a.) The EFBÖ/BEJÖ take into consideration the Austrian State Treaty and the Neutrality Law of 1955. However, Austria must remain open for the option of a full membership in the EC. Austria has to actively take part in the discussions about the present and the future of the EC. The EFBÖ/BEJÖ demands that Austrian observers in advisory capacity should be active in the Commission and the Parliament. The latter should be elected by means of direct elections, as their European counterparts with full rights in the Parliament.

(b.) The EFTA was created out of political reasons as a second economic block in Western Europe. This division should be overcome in the long run.

(c.) The Council of Europe – so the EFBÖ/BEJÖ – remains an important integrative link between the countries of the EC and other European states. As long as the European federation is not realized, the Council of Europe should reinforce initiatives on the European level. (Politisches Programm 1977, p. 2)

Evidently, the EFBÖ/BEJÖ considered the EC and the Council of Europe the main vehicles for European integration. However, the organizations' attitude towards the European institutions was rather ambivalent, as a headline of their newspaper in 1970 illustrates: The EC and the Council of Europe are "our hope as well as our disappointment" (Europa-Stimme, Sept./Oct. 1970, p. 1). When the Council of Europe gave itself a new Charter in 1974, the EFBÖ/BEJÖ criticized the Charter severely for not having expanded the Council's competitions. During a Congress of the European Movement in Brussels two years later, the Austrian and Swiss delegates were reportedly disgruntled due to the exclusive focus of the Congress on EC-Europe. The Vice President of the Union of European Federalists, Claus Schöndube (1976, pp. 3-6), felt obliged to explain the procedure in an open letter.

However, the Austrian section of the EFBÖ/BEJÖ had a reputation of being very active within the integration movement. The ongoing debates published in their periodical, the "Voice of Europe" (Europa-Stimme) between 1970 and 1986 show that the EFBÖ/BEJÖ participated actively in the discussion about the European integration. One major issue in the Europa-Stimme over the years was e.g. the dispute about a direct election to the European Parliament, which was finally first held in 1979.

In 1972, the EFBÖ/BEJÖ collected 63.000 signatures in order to support their demand for a European Education Convention. Chancellor Kreisky from the SPÖ and the Chair of the ÖVP signed the demand, as well as five heads of the province governments. However, the relations with Chancellor Kreisky were never without frictions. When Kreisky's Foreign Minister Willibald Pahr held a tenet speech on Austria's foreign policy orientation, the EFBÖ/BEJÖ publication Europa-Stimme (November/December 1977, p.3) summed up its critics: "His explanations showed that Austria's policy towards Europe under the leadership of Chancellor Kreisky is in the end a rejection of a genuine policy of integration." When Bruno Kreisky himself was invited to address the general assembly of the EFBÖ/BEJÖ in Upper Austria, he opened his speech by unmistakably making clear the ideological

differences between his policy and the EFBÖ: "Whoever expected a stirring appeal for a European orientation and a speech full of pathos, will be disappointed." (Europa-Stimme, July/August 1978, p.6) In Austria, the EFBÖ/BEJÖ launched numerous activities through the years. Since 1965, the EFBÖ/BEJ has organized the European Day in Austria and the rally "Europa without Barriers" at the Italian border at Thörl-Maglern to demand free travelling. A focus point of the activities since 1956 is the Karl Brunner Europahaus in the castle Forchtenstein, where international youth conventions since 1957, seminars on minority since 1966, and the Europa-Forum since 1983.

#### 4.2. Austrian Section of the European League for Economic Cooperation (ELEC)

The Austrian Section of the European League for Economic Cooperation was already founded in 1952. Apart from the common orientation of the ELEC, the Austrian section pronounced to have played an important role in co-operation with the future East European reform countries. Activities included the exchange of know-how regarding questions of the EC and Eastern Europe, and the communication with opinion leaders and multipliers regarding the European integration. Austrian members of the ELEC receive three times a year the report Nachrichten und Kurznachrichten (siehe: Die ELEC – österreichische Sektion - stellt sich vor, p.3).

### **5. OTHER EUROPEAN ORGANIZATIONS**

Austrian foreign policy during the "social-democratic decade" of the 1970's was - relatively to the size of the country – rather active. However, the stress was laid not so much on European integration. Austria's foreign policy was rather autonomous, and occasional critical towards the superpowers. From 1969 until 1974, the former Austrian Minister of Interior Lujo Tončič acted as general secretary of the Council of Europe. From 1979 until 1984, another Austrian, Franz Karasek, was elected general secretary. Karasek was secretary to Chancellor Figl und Raab between 1952 and 1956, in the Austrian Parliament since 1970, and a member of the Austrian delegation at the Council of Europe. Furthermore, Austria played an important role during the negotiations of the Final Act of Helsinki in 1975. A small Austrian contribution came from Herbert v. Karajan, who was assigned to record the "European Hymn" for the Council of Europe.

This perfectly well harmonized with the Austrian (self-)image of a cultural superpower.

## **6. REORIENTATION TOWARD EUROPE**

The framework of Austrian attitudes toward the EC changed drastically in the mid-1980's. First, an enduring structural crisis in the Austrian industry and economy pressed for a further internationalization. Second, the increasing dynamics of European integration fed the fear of small countries to be left behind. Third, the "global" foreign policy of the Kreisky years gave way to a "realistic foreign policy and neutrality policy" (Höll 1992,715) that focused on Europe and particularly on the EC. Furthermore, the concept of a successful "Austrian way" went through a period of political and social crises, challenging the Austrian self-perception, and leading the way for a potential re-definition of national identities. In the mid-1980's, enterprises - especially in western Austria - became increasingly in favor of EC membership. The Chambers of Commerce in western Austria started to discuss an EC membership in 1985. In the same year, the deputy to the Austrian parliament for the ÖVP, Fritz König, stated clearly that for his party the policy focus has shifted from the Council of Europe to the European Community. For him, the status of neutrality was no obstacle in terms of international law. (Europa-Stimme, Sept./Oct. 1985, 5) The youth organization of the ÖVP (Junge ÖVP) started to argue for a full-fledged EC membership. On the level of symbols, the first "Euro-lane" was inaugurated at the border with Italy in 1985. In 1986, Chancellor Franz Vranitzky spoke for the first time about a "quasi-membership" in the European Community.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

As summation, the situation for European movements in Austria between 1970 and 1986 was by no means favorable. The neutrality status made it potentially difficult to opt for a direct integration into the European Community due to strong reservations of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the social-democratic governments of Kreisky I., II. and III. - and particularly the chancellor himself - instrumentalized the Austrian neutrality for other domestic and foreign political goals. Movements for European integration in Austria had to operate within these strict limits of the neutrality status. Party politics left nearly no room for an independent maneuvering of such groups. The opinion that neutrality is preferable to a European Community membership without

neutrality status was carried by a broad majority of the Austrian population. Therefore, the Austrian section of the European Federalist Movement and the Young European Federalists never managed to penetrate a significant share of the population with their ideas. However, these two organizations together with the Austrian European League for Economic Cooperation targeted opinion leaders in politics and economy, and made it a little easier in the mid-1980's to start discussion Austria's place in the European integration.

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