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Is Small Still Beautiful? The Case of Austria

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ABSTRACT

Small states are often perceived to be particularly suited to take on the role of mediators and facilitators in international disputes. The case of Austria is peculiar in this regard insofar as the emergence of a ‘typical’ small state attitude in international affairs indeed coincided with the establishment of the country as a small nation in 1945. Throughout the Cold War, Austria developed an active and value-based foreign policy which heavily emphasized international law. Austrian political leaders, foremost the Social Democrat Bruno Kreisky, established a global reputation for their country as a benevolent mediator, for example in the Middle East. This attitude has been intrinsically linked to the country’s neutral status, which has been formally preserved until today but has lost much of its substance and practical importance. This paper discusses the historical and normative foundations of Austria’s small state identity and asks whether the glorious reputation of the past has been preserved. The paper argues that European and transatlantic integration as well as a number of domestic factors have substantially diminished Austria’s role as a ‘natural born’ peacemaker on the global stage.

Keywords: Austria, Neutrality, Security, Small states, Internationalism

Introduction

Austria is frequently portrayed as a ‘typical’ small state along with, for example, Sweden, Finland and Ireland – both within the European Union (EU) and in the wider context of international relations. The title of this article refers to the idea of Austrian philosopher Leopold Kohr (1909-1994) that greatness was an inherent weakness in states rather than an indicator of their power and superiority over others. While his theory referred more specifically to the societal and economic problems caused by rapid and unlimited growth, his writings also suggested that small states had a greater normative capacity and a greater potential to take adequate policy decisions, to pursue “global pluralistic cooperation” and enjoy “largely unaffiliated self-sufficiency” (Kohr 1995: 15). By looking at the way Austrian foreign policy discourse has developed over time, this article seeks to explore in what way Austria tried to play this role of a small and unaffiliated state, and whether any such imagery accurately describes contemporary Austria, particularly in view of the country’s involvement in transatlantic and EU security and defence arrangements. Within the context of this special issue, this includes the question whether Austria is a natural peace-maker, a country with a special disposition towards peaceful means in international relations and with a distinct commitment towards the principles of international law.

Oliver Rathkolb (2010: 3), a widely published and renowned Austrian historian, once referred to post-war Austria as the “paradoxical republic” that had spent most of its time being “self-absorbed” and “self-obsessed” regardless of its actual international perception. For him, Austrian identity up until the end of the Cold War was based on an “overestimation of the Austrian question [i.e. Austrian independence after 1945],

combined with an unvoiced bad conscience [related to its role in the Second World War] that continues to this day, very much as a national solipsism mediated through and strengthened by the Austrian press.” In line with Holsti (1970), Rathkolb points to the importance of national role conception and the issue of identity construction.

As this study will show, Austrian foreign policy during the Cold War was based on visions and ideas that were neither naturally given nor solely induced by external factors. Rather it has been Austrian political leaders, foremost the Social Democrat Bruno Kreisky, who actively established a myth around Austria’s ‘third way’ as a neutral country. They promoted Austria’s purported normative and moral superiority as an asset in the international sphere, which at the time was dominated by high politics and a conventional balance of power. During the Cold War, Austria developed an active and value-based foreign policy which heavily emphasized international law. This helped to construct a global reputation for Austria as a benevolent mediator, for example in the context of the Middle East peace process. However, this was not so much because Austria had any sort of natural disposition to play such a role in international relations. Rather, the role conception as a peacemaker seemed to serve national interests at the time, while also helping the country to cope with the systemic constraints that the Cold War entailed.

Today, Austria is a compliant and inconspicuous post-neutral state whose foreign policy is largely embedded in the European Union’s (EU) Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Austria’s Security Strategy of 2011 (*Österreichische Sicherheitsstrategie 2011*) reads very much like a German version of the European Security Strategy (ESS) both in terms of its threat assessment and the perceived political and strategic implications. Austria’s neutrality policy, which for decades had been the core of Austria’s foreign policy, has lost much of its substance and practical

relevance. The reason for this was not only because global circumstances have changed after the end of the Cold War. Throughout the past two decades, Austrian leaders have taken proactive and deliberate steps at reducing the normative significance of neutrality, limiting it to its military core, i.e. the abstention from joining military alliances and from allowing foreign forces to be stationed on Austrian territory. This paradigmatic shift gradually undermined Austria's special status as an international mediator. Although Austria is still not a member of NATO it no longer stands for a 'third way' in international relations.

This article first discusses various theoretical approaches to small state foreign policy and the way they contribute to our understanding of Austrian peace policy. It then turns to the development of Austrian foreign policy during the Cold War, after Austrian accession to the EU and in the years following the conservative turn in 1999. The article concludes by looking at the most recent developments in Austrian foreign policy and the way these have changed Austria's potential role as a peacemaker.

Small State Austria: Smallness as Fate or Asset?

Small states have been discussed in the literature as having a distinct approach to foreign policy. In the specific context of the Cold War, small state foreign and security policy was seen as being determined by the struggle for physical survival in the context of systemic confrontation between blocks (see Rothstein 1968; Keohane 1969). While this perspective focused on asymmetries in the international system and dilemmas resulting for small states, other studies (e.g. Hey 2003) put more emphasis on small state behaviour, including specific coping strategies. Some authors (e.g. Inbar and Sheffer 1997; Bauwens, Clesse and Knudsen 1996; Wivel 2005) have suggested that the awareness of states of their relative size and political and military leverage at the global stage has an impact on the way these countries pursue their

foreign policy interests. There is no consensus in the literature as to what exactly constitutes 'typical' small state foreign policy along these lines, but Hey (2003) identified the following features in small state foreign policy that are commonly discussed in the literature: (1) a focus on a limited number of core areas in foreign policy (e.g. nuclear non-proliferation, peace-building); (2) a pre-occupation with securing the immediate geographical neighbourhood; (3) a commitment towards diplomatic and non-coercive measures; (4) an emphasis on international law and normative principles; (5) a preference for multilateral arrangements and international organizations; (6) and an exceptional readiness to contribute to conflict management and peacemaking.

Moreover, one of the most common elements of small state foreign policy, particularly during the Cold War, was the adoption of neutrality (see e.g. Goetschel 1999), i.e. a status that would keep these states out of military conflicts and other forms of power politics. By adopting neutrality as a foreign policy principle, small states like Austria, Finland, Sweden and Switzerland sought to compensate their relative power deficit. Instead, they protected their territorial integrity and sovereignty by political and ideological means (Katzenstein 1996).

The adoption of neutrality, and more generally, of a small state foreign policy, however, has never just been a matter of small states reacting to the specific challenges they face as weak actors in a global system dominated by great powers. Small state foreign policy has also been conditioned by the construction of a specific national identity, which built on the overall awareness of material and structural weakness but also emphasized the promotion of norms and values as a contribution to world order. The result was an approach that went beyond the mere issue of size and relative power gains.

Many studies on small state foreign policy focus on the way national identities have been *constructed* around values and ideas that enhanced and perpetuated typical small state foreign policy principles like neutrality or mediation. Constructivism generally suggests that any political situation or action has to be interpreted against the background of norms, values and ideas. The ideational and normative context shapes agency in any given situation in International Relations. Critical constructivists like De Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak (1999: 5) put emphasis on political discourse and argue that national identities are discursively “produced, reproduced, transformed and destructed”, i.e. they are spoken into existence. Based on a set of related emotional attitudes and similar behavioural dispositions they are then “internalized through national socialization”. Along these lines, small state identity can be understood as having emerged from a discourse that is informed by perceived smallness but driven by certain political objectives. It becomes part of the mindset of political leaders and the population, and combined with values and other elements of national identity. This small state identity then translates into a national role conception that shapes the state’s international standing.

One strand in small state theory underlines that the construction of identity and role conceptions can be used by small states as a strategy to introduce “alternative models of engagement” (Ingebritsen 2002: 11). The analytical focus is not on the constraints of Realpolitik but on the discursive construction of alternatives. Thus, taking a strong stance on normative matters and international diplomacy, such as mediation and conflict prevention, enables small states to move the international discourse away from power politics, and find alternative arenas of engagement. During the Cold War, adopting foreign and security political profiles that differed from the logic of power politics as it dominated international relations at the time was a viable strategy for

small states like Austria, Finland, Sweden and Switzerland. It allowed them to compensate their relative lack of conventional political but also military leverage. Building on the work of Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), Ingebritsen (2002: 12-13) introduced the concept of small states as ‘norm entrepreneurs’, arguing that international norms have not just “been perpetuated and enforced by those with a preponderance of power” but that they also “originate in a group of states that share distinct ideas about appropriate forms of domestic and international intervention (12-13).” Thus, small and neutral states in Europe have not only found a way to protect their most vital foreign policy interests, they have also played a crucial role in international norm diffusion, influencing global developments and the way the international community deals with contentious issues.

Against this background, this article seeks a middle ground between realist and constructivist assumptions. According to a realist perspective small state foreign policy is conditioned by relative limitations in size and resources (e.g. Jervis 1978; Wivel 2005). This includes the contention that the idealistic and peace-oriented ideology often barely results from the awareness of this relative smallness (Hey 2006; Goetschel 1998). The constructivist assumption in turn is that small state leaders have deliberately constructed national role conceptions that would benefit their countries beyond the mere compensation of material weaknesses. The idea of seeking a common ground also resonates in Goetschel’s work (2011) as he contends that small states can act as “brokers” for certain ideas and normative visions. He thus combines interest-based arguments with a constructivist perspective.

This article holds that the emergence of any sort of small state approach is based on material circumstances and their realist implications but also on the way these are perceived, interpreted and managed by political leaders and their respective societies.

In other words, whether or not a state adopts a small state foreign policy approach is both a matter of realist choices, and of the construction and internalisation of an ideational framework that serves specific small state interests.

This article is not going to establish whether or not Austrian leaders deliberately sought to create a small state identity with the purpose of undermining conventional power politics. It will also not seek to find evidence for Rathkolb's (2010) contention about a "self-obsessed" and "self-absorbed republic". Rather, the article will discuss the way floury rhetorics about a 'third way', about the pre-emptive effect of neutrality during peace times ("*Vorwirkung der Neutralität zu Friedenszeiten*") and active neutrality policy ("*aktive Neutralitätspolitik*"), have played a powerful role in establishing a distinct international profile for the country during the Cold War. What is peculiar about the Austrian case is that elites and national media took the idea of smallness and relative weakness to construct a sort of national myth that became engrained in Austrian national identity – they turned material inferiority into an asset, "beautiful" in the words of Kohr.

Austria's Role as a Peacemaker During the Cold War

Austrian Neutrality: Peacemaker by Choice or by Fate?

The concept of a "peace policy" ("*Friedenspolitik*") has never dominated the foreign policy discourse in Austria. Political leaders have, however, routinely emphasized Austria's disposition to play a distinct role in international affairs both as a mediator and a moral great power. These arguments essentially built on the policy of military non-alignment and neutrality, which Austria pursued since the inception of the Second Republic in 1955. In the course of the Cold War, Austrian neutrality developed into much more than an international legal status: it was to become the

centrepiece of a distinct Austrian national identity and national role concept (Pelinka 1993). The extent to which neutrality is a defining part for Austria as a nation is not least expressed in the fact that the national holiday is not the day Austria regained its independence (27 April 1945), nor the day the Second Republic was created (15 May 1955). It is the 26 October in commemoration of the adoption of the federal neutrality act (*Neutralitätsgesetz*) in 1955.

The idea of establishing a neutral status for Austria emerged in the very context of the country being turned into a small state after decades at the heart of a multi-national power block, the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867-1918). There is obviously a direct link between the country losing its *great* power status and the interest to keep it outside of high politics and hard power issues. However, just as becoming a small state had not been a deliberate choice by Austrian leaders at the time, adopting a neutral status for the country was also not a free decision based on any sort of ideological conviction. The following section will look more closely into the specific context of the Austrian adoption of neutrality. Against this, it then analyses the development of Austrian peace policy during the Cold War and after 1989.

Similar to the case of Finland and unlike the case of Switzerland and Sweden, Austria's adoption of neutrality is recent, as it started in the context of the international post-Second World War order. The Republic of Austria was declared permanently neutral ("*immerwährend neutral*") in 1955, after the territory had been occupied by allied forces since the end of the Second World War. There is evidence (Suppan 1996: 171), however, that political leaders such as then Minister-President Heinrich Lammasch, catholic conservative, had envisaged neutrality even for the First Republic, which was installed in 1919. Exponents of both the Social Democratic Party (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs* – SPÖ) and the conservative Austrian

People's Party (*Christlichsoziale Partei*) at the time considered this option for Austria in order to guarantee its independence and autonomy after the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. They only abandoned the idea of a formal declaration of neutrality as Austria was granted an international loan under the supervision of the League of Nations, and macro-economic conditions put the country into a state of de facto neutrality until 1933. The discourse in Austria then started to be dominated by the issue of joining Nazi Germany to form the Greater German Reich (*Grossdeutsches Reich*), a scenario that eventually materialized when Hitler annexed Austria in the so-called *Anschluss* ("link-up") in 1938 (Stourzh 1998: 242). The issue of neutrality was off the table for the duration of the Second World War but was revived in the context of the post-war settlements.

The Austrian State Treaty (*Österreichischer Staatsvertrag*) of 15 May 1955 marked the re-establishment of an independent and democratic Austrian state after the country had been under authoritarian rule from 1933. The Treaty built on the Moscow Memorandum of April 1955 in which the Soviet Union demanded Austria to adopt a neutral status based on the model of Switzerland (Steininger 2005). This condition was portrayed, particularly by the Soviet Union, as the only way to ensure stability in Central Europe in the sensitive post-war setting, where "stability" mainly meant that Austria would be kept from joining the transatlantic alliance. The adoption of the permanently neutral status was then formally enacted in the Declaration of Neutrality (*Neutralitätserklärung*) of 26 October 1955 through a constitutional act of parliament (*Bundesverfassungsgesetz*).

It seems important to point out that, formally, Austria's declaration of neutrality took place in a unilateral national procedure and out of its "own free will" ("*aus freien Stücken*") rather than being included in the State Treaty, which had been signed by the

Allied occupying powers, i.e. France, the United Kingdom, the United States and the Soviet Union. This had important legal implications (Zielinski 1990: 45) since codifying Austrian neutrality in the State Treaty would have imposed the status, and it would have given the signatories legal power to monitor and enforce the policy. Therefore, at least officially, it was the sovereign decision of the newly independent Republic of Austria to adopt the neutral status. In view of the historical context, however, declaring neutrality was the only way for Austria to retain territorial integrity (Barz 1992). The alternative would have been for Austria to remain under allied rule, and eventually, to be divided into a Western and an Eastern part.

Construction of a National Myth: the Positive Ideologization of an Old Trauma

Losing the great power status came as a trauma to the Austrian people at the time. Post-war Austria was a small state with a barely viable economy depending on the support and favour of the world's great powers. At no time had Austrian dependence been more apparent than when the Allied powers signed the State Treaty on the country's behalf. It is all the more remarkable that this very moment in history was later reified as a formative event, a historical experience that would define Austria's confident self-image for decades to come (see Gebhard 2005). What is more, instead of taking the adoption of neutrality as what it was, a condition imposed by the Allies, political leaders eventually turned neutrality into the centrepiece of Austria's newly gained self-determination (Lohninger 2003), the core of a new role concept that would take the country "out of the shadow of the past" (Pelinka 1998). The position of the two major parties in this process was subject to substantial changes over time, particularly in the first two decades of the Second Republic. While it was first the conservative ÖVP to advocate the adoption of a neutral status more strongly throughout the 1950s, this changed in the 1960 under the auspices of ÖVP chancellors

Although Austria's options were limited by great power interests, at the time, the adoption of the neutrality principle for the Second Republic seemed to meet the interests of all parties involved. For Austria, it constituted a way to re-establish its sovereignty and for the Soviet Union as well as for the Western powers it meant that Austria was not going to join any of the two blocks (Rendl 1998). The neutrality act was on the one hand a symbol for the conclusive loss of Austria's great power status but also marked a crucial point in Austrian national identity formation. Over the next decades, Austrian foreign policy discourse saw the construction of a myth (Bruckmüller 1997; Liebhart 1998; Kernegger 2009) around Austria's purported 'third way' and the country's disposition towards a more moral and normatively grounded foreign policy.

Active and Activist Foreign Policy During the Cold War: Kreisky's Internationalism

Austrian foreign policy in the first years of the Second Republic was understandably inconsistent and confused. Austria immediately joined the United Nations (UN) and the Council of Europe, showing the importance that Austria as a 'typical' small state ascribed to international institutions (Hey 2003). In the context of the looming Cold War, Austrian leaders argued over the way the neutrality act ought to be implemented within the country but even more so in Austria's external relations. Conservative chancellors Julius Raab (four terms in office 1953-1961 in ÖVP-SPÖ coalition governments), Alfons Gorbach (two terms in office 1961-1964 in ÖVP-SPÖ coalition governments) and Josef Klaus (one term in office 1964-1966 in ÖVP-SPÖ coalition government, and one term in ÖVP-government 1966-1970) were unclear in their position on neutrality (Der Spiegel 1962) although throughout the 1950s it had mainly been the conservative ÖVP to act as an advocate for neutrality (Schneider 2000). Against the background of the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC)

in 1957 and Austrian prospects of potentially joining in the future, there was a tendency within the ÖVP started to employ a rather loose interpretation of the neutrality principle. Its effect should be limited to the military realm and not be extended to other policy areas (Meyer 2005).

The same political leaders, however, seemed to be keen to cultivate the myth of the independent and neutral small state because of the pressure they felt from the Soviet Union. In addition, it would help to distance Austria from the German Federal Republic (BRD), and even more so, from the German Democratic Republic (DDR) (Gehler 1995). It would also work against the memories of Hitler's "link-up" (Pelinka 1990: 17) and any responsibility (complicity/*Mitschuld*) the Austrian people might have had to take in this regard. Therefore, the myth of Austria as a benevolent small power essentially built on the argument of Austria's victimhood (*Opferrolle*). Bruckmüller (1995) contends that neutrality and the positive self-experience it entailed at the time helped Austrians to cope with both the loss of international status and the "unvoiced bad conscience", which Rathkolb (2010: 3) referred to as a core element of Austria's "paradoxical national identity". To this day, the question of Austrian complicity in Hitler's gruesome plan is a contentious issue, with more than 36% of Austrians believing that Austria was a victim of Nazi-led Germany rather than having to share the responsibility (*Mitschuld*) (see e.g. Kleine Zeitung 2010).

As Austria joined the European Free Trade Agreement (EFTA) in 1960, along with Sweden and Finland, it was then Minister of Foreign Affairs Bruno Kreisky (SPÖ, 1959-1966) who sought to promote a new kind of neutrality policy, which he found should be different from the more passive one practised by Switzerland and from the more active approach adopted by Sweden (e.g. Höll 1994). His dedication to the issue marked a departure from the reluctance SPÖ leaders had shown throughout the 1950s

– from this point onwards, it was the SPÖ and no longer the ÖVP to actively promote Austria’s neutral status as the core of its international profile. The Austrian political culture of the following decades, particularly under later SPÖ chancellor Kreisky, saw the establishment of a new and increasingly confident self-image, which portrayed Austria as the peaceful small state with altruistic intentions, a commitment to building bridges (“*Brückenbauer*”). Austria was pictured as a haven for democratic welfare, as the home of confidence and sociability (“*souveräne Gemütlichkeit*”), and as the country of culture and music blessed with a certain moral and intellectual superiority (“*moralisch-intellektuelle Überlegenheit*”) (Bruckmüller 1997: 20, 24, 27). When Kreisky became chancellor in 1970 (in office for four consecutive terms, 1970-1983 in SPÖ governments) he had already established a track record of active neutrality policy for the country. What conservative foreign minister Kurt Waldheim (1968-1970) promoted in preceding years as “active participation in international cooperation” (Luif 1995: 138) had had less of a distinct focus on the international function of neutrality but was more linked to Waldheim’s personal experience within the United Nations and related aspirations for a more active role of Austria in e.g. the Conference on the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) (see Fischer 2008). As the figurehead of the SPÖ (see Pittler 1996), Kreisky was not only at the centre of the Social Democratic success story of the Second Republic, he also became something like the “father of the Austrian way” in international relations (Liebhart 1998: 38).

Kreisky’s engagement within the Socialist International was one of the building blocks of his internationalist approach and active if not activist foreign policy. His involvement in major diplomatic actions, particularly in the Middle East peace

process¹ and in the context of the North-South dialogue,² contributed to the establishment of a distinct Austrian identity that revolved around the principle of “active neutrality” (“*aktive Neutralitätspolitik*”).³ One of the most important tendencies in Kreisky’s political discourse was the way he glorified neutrality and attempted to establish it as an essential part of the founding myth (*Gründungsmythos*) of an independent Austrian state (Gehler 2000: 725) with the aim of furthering the internalisation of these ideas in the national conscience. Austria’s impartiality in the Cold War served as a basis for what was to be perceived a distinct kind of foreign policy purportedly driven by a morally higher purpose.

Under Kreisky’s rule, from the late 1960s up to the early 1980s, Austrian neutrality was interpreted in an extensive and comprehensive manner. Neutrality was not just about the responsibility to be impartial in conflicts, but there was frequent reference in the political discourse to the peace-time effects of the status (“*Vorwirkungen zu Friedenszeiten*”).⁴ The leaders of the SPÖ, in particular, promoted a conception of neutrality that went well beyond the limited military meaning of the term and was to include all parts of civic life. As mentioned before, Rathkolb (2010: 3) suggested that

¹ Kreisky was, for example, prominently involved in the international discourse in reaction to the Jom Kippur War in October 1973. He openly argued for Europe to take on an active role in bringing peace to the Middle East. Throughout 1974-1976, he led a number of fact-finding missions to facilitate negotiations between Israel and various Arab states. In 1979, he was one of the first Western leaders to reach out to Jassir Arafat for diplomatic contact (see Secher 1994).

² During his terms as foreign minister and chancellor, Kreisky actively sought contact with leaders in the developing world. In 1981, he organized a North-South Summit in Cancun to facilitate debate between what were then the First and the Third World (see Rathkolb 2002).

³ Kreisky’s offensive style in foreign policy matters, however, was interpreted by some (Pelinka and Rosenberger 2003) as an attitude that would endanger Austria’s impartiality rather than actually building on it.

⁴ For a discussion on the way these peace-time effects have been reinterpreted over time, see Luif 1995 (124-147).

this approach assumed traits of a “self-obsession” at times, which came inflated conceptions about Austria’s capacity to make a difference in world politics.

It was in these years that Austria developed a significant peace policy. Vienna hosted a set of important international events (Gustenau 2002) such as the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) 1969-1972 and the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in 1973. Austrian diplomat Kurt Waldheim served as UN Secretary General for two consecutive terms (1971-1981). Also, the headquarters of international organizations were established in Vienna, for example the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1965, and the UN in 1979. Under the conservative chancellor Raab (1953-1961) the headquarters of the International Atomic Energy Community (IAEA) had already been established in Vienna in 1957. Austria also deployed soldiers in UN peacekeeping operations, first in the Congo in 1961, then in 1972 in Cyprus, and from 1974 until June 2013 on the Golan Heights bordering Syria and Israel, as part of the UN Disengagement Observer Force. This international engagement did bring external recognition but it also enjoyed broad domestic support as it “allowed the Austrian people to some extent to overlook that their country was no longer one of Europe’s leading powers” (Meyer 2007: 3).

Austria’s Post-Cold War Peace Policy

After Kreisky: Active but no Longer Activist

During the mid and late 1980s when Bruno Kreisky was succeeded by SPÖ chancellor Fred Sinowatz (one term in office 1983-1986, SPÖ-Freedom Party/FPÖ coalition government) and then Franz Vranitzky (SPÖ, four terms in office 1986-1996, one term in coalition government with FPÖ, three terms with ÖVP) Austrian neutrality policy became more low-key. The SPÖ retained the ministry of foreign

affairs until 1987 and to some extent continued an “active policy of neutrality”. Eventually, however, Kreisky’s commitment towards a “global foreign policy” was to be eclipsed (Luif 1982).

The most important changes in this respect were introduced by Alois Mock, conservative Vice Chancellor (1987-1989) and Foreign Minister (1987-1995), as he started to bring Austria closer to the European project. In 1987, he pushed for an open debate about Austria’s future role in international relations. He underlined that Austrian foreign policy had been determined by global circumstances, i.e. the context of the Cold War. Any change to these circumstances as it happened would require a rethinking of Austria’s foreign policy principles including neutrality (Scheich 2005). Mock’s term in office therefore marked a period in Austrian foreign policy that was dominated by the attempt to normalize Austria’s status in international affairs, and to move away from the idea of a ‘third way’ or Austrian exceptionalism. The discourse on neutrality was significantly toned down as representatives of the conservative ÖVP seemed to prepare the public for a historical step: the formal application for accession to the then European Economic Community (EEC). One of the main issues in this regard was whether Austria’s neutral status was compatible with full membership in the EEC. Mock managed to diffuse concerns about the country losing its independence by pointing to the importance of “real” rather than “formal sovereignty” (Scheich 2005: 50). In a changing international environment and in the face of economic recession, Austria’s ability to act autonomously was intrinsically linked to its involvement in significant decision-making bodies, i.e. also in the EEC’s institutions.

When Austria formally applied for EEC membership in 1989 there was a general perception among Austrians that neutrality could be retained regardless. At the

European level, Austria's legacy as a neutral country was seen as a useful contribution to the peaceful integration of Western Europe (Luif 2003a). Moreover, Ireland had already set an example when it joined the EEC in 1973 retaining its status as a neutral and non-aligned country. At the point of application, the Austrian coalition government (upon the insistence of the SPÖ) included a reserve condition ("*Neutralitätsvorbehalt*") that would allow the country to formally retain its neutral status regardless of any potential involvement in political integration, i.e. the so-called "Irish clause" (Gehler 2000: 733). However, in the Austrian case no such reserve was brought up during the accession talks, which took place after the Treaty on European Union, which included a foreign and security policy component, had become the new legal basis for membership. The Austrian public seemed unimpressed by this change as the following EU referendum in June 1994 resulted in a clear 66.6% in favour of accession. When Austria, Sweden and Finland joined the EU they indeed signed an additional protocol to declare that they would pursue European policies without any reservations that might arise from their foreign policy status (Schneider 1999).

European Union Membership and Transatlantic Integration

When Austria became a member in 1995, the EEC had developed into a political union, which included a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Although the security and defence component of the CFSP did not materialize until the early 2000s, Austria had subscribed to all parts of the policy, which according to Title V of the Treaty of Maastricht of 1993 (Treaty in European Union, Maastricht) foresaw the creation of a common security and defence policy if the Council so decided. In 1994, shortly before Austria joined the EU, a special provision was added to the Austrian Federal Constitution (article 23f) to make sure that Austrian participation would not clash with legal responsibilities related to the Neutrality Act of 1955

(Bundesgesetzblatt 1994). This meant a clear change of direction in Austria's foreign policy: neutrality was formally reduced to the core of military impartiality, whereas Austria's contribution to European integration constituted the new building block of its new peace policy. Although neutrality was still an essential element in Austrian national identity, public interest in these changes remained limited, particularly as the discourse within the EU still highlighted similar themes, such as solidarity and civilian security.

Austria also joined the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) and its Planning and Review Process (PARP) in 1995, alongside Finland and Sweden, without any major domestic controversy. The international context of NATO revising its strategic outlook and self-image in view of the new global circumstances after the end of the Cold War certainly helped to diffuse concerns that PfP-membership could endanger Austria's independence. If at all, the PfP Programme was publicly debated as a platform for technical cooperation and development with minor political implications. Any option of joining the alliance as a full member, however, continued to be ruled out. Moreover, in 1996, Austria was one of the founding members of the UN Multinational Standby High Readiness Brigade of UN Operations (SHIRBRIG) and has since contributed to SHIRBRIG with a contingent consisting of a transportation company as well as taking over its presidency in 2004.⁵

Austria's early years as a member in the EU and full contributor to the EU's CFSP were in no way compromised by the neutrality issue. The discourse at the international and European level in fact moved away from Austria's special status altogether. Instead, political leaders, and most of all representatives of the ÖVP, seemed keen to underline their new focus on the principle of solidarity, and to

⁵ The brigade ceased operational business in June 2009.

signalise that Austria was not going to obstruct any steps towards further European integration (Schneider 1999). The EU's security and defence policy, and the military capability development process were eventually brought underway during the Austrian Council Presidency in the second half of 1998.

The foreign minister to succeed Mock in 1995, Wolfgang Schüssel (ÖVP), was one of the central figures in the new domestic debate about the changing importance of neutrality for Austria's role in the world. While at the beginning of Austria's EU membership he was still moderate in his views about the compatibility of neutrality with European integration, his perspective changed dramatically over time. In public statements he started to picture permanent neutrality as a status that had been imposed upon Austria in a very specific historical context, namely in return for the withdrawal of post-war Soviet occupation forces. Schüssel openly declared that neutrality would no longer make sense in the complex circumstances of the 21st century (Nationalrat 2002). President Thomas Klestil (1992-2004) in turn adopted a moderate position, which did not openly challenge Schüssel's basic argument but highlighted that formally speaking the Austrian parliament had adopted neutrality out of its own will. He also stressed that any changes to the existing status of Austria would need to be approved by the Austrian population. However, Klestil (1994) himself also suggested that Austria's neutrality policy would need to be reinterpreted as international circumstances had changed. He underlined that neutrality had never been an end in itself and that securing the country's interest should be the foremost priority of any approach to international engagement (Schneider 1999).

Outlining Schüssel's evolution during these years, Pelinka (1998: 172) pointed out that the argumentative challenge for politicians was enormous: "Now the elites had to undo the belief they had worked on long and hard to install in the Austrian people".

Finding common ground in the face of this challenge, and agreeing on a joint course for a new Austrian foreign policy after the end of the Cold War and in the new European context, turned out to be impossible for the two governing parties, the SPÖ with chancellor Viktor Klima (1997-2000) and the ÖVP with Vice Chancellor and Foreign Minister Schüssel. In 2000, internal divisions over this issue along with fundamental disagreements over economic and social policy ended the phase of grand coalition governments (1987-2000) as well as social democratic prevalence. After the general elections in 1999, SPÖ and ÖVP failed to build another coalition government, so that Schüssel turned to a coalition with the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ), which had won a landslide victory equalling the ÖVP at 26.9% in the parliamentary elections. The emerging ÖVP-FPÖ government was the first centre-right coalition in the history of the Second Republic – a systemic change, which had fundamental implications for Austria's foreign policy.

The Conservative Turn in 1999

At the European level this 'conservative turn', i.e. the inclusion of Jörg Haider's FPÖ in the government, was seen as a threat to liberal democracy, which is why the then EU-14 decided to impose diplomatic sanctions on Austria. At a time ÖVP chief Schüssel wanted to see his country as an integral part of the European integration project, Austria found itself more isolated than ever since the establishment of the Second Republic. Although the sanctions were eventually lifted, a bad aftertaste remained.⁶ In the following months, Schüssel's ÖVP advocated a strong pro-European stance for his country, underlining the principle of intra-European solidarity. No longer restricted by normative concerns of the former coalition partner

⁶ Some argue (e.g. Luif 2010) that Austria struggles to this day to find allies within the European Union.

SPÖ, now Chancellor Schüssel (2000-2006) adopted a clear yet rather drastic approach to the issue of neutrality and Austrian exceptionalism. In a number of public appearances he emphasized that the circumstances under which neutrality had been deemed necessary or useful in the past had ceased to exist with the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. In fact, since Austria had become a member of the EU “it had no longer been capable of being neutral in practice anyway. [...] We will have to finally tell people the truth” (Nationalrat 2002). It was also Schüssel who in a speech to the National Assembly on the 46th anniversary of the Austrian Neutrality Act (26 October 2001, National Holiday) explained Austrian emotional and ideological attachment to neutrality as similar to the one to “Lipizzaner” and “Mozartkugeln”,⁷ which had also lost much of their normative importance but would continue to exist in people’s minds (Nationalrat 2002). Aware of public support for neutrality (see e.g. Reinprecht and Latcheva 2003: 443), however, he added that the core of the policy would be retained: Austria would still not fight wars, host any foreign troops on its territory or become a member of any military alliance. In 2001, the National Assembly adopted a new Security and Defence Doctrine (*Österreichische Sicherheits- und Verteidigungsdoktrin* 2001) after the last Defence Plan had dated from 1983 and was based on the Defence Doctrine of 1975. The new document also suggested that Austrian neutrality had de facto changed in the course of EU accession, and that the status was now rather “non-aligned” (“*bündnisfrei*”), which reflected a narrative that Sweden (“*alliansfri*”) and Finland (“*sitoutumattomat*“) had taken on already in the early 1990s in view of EU accession. ‘Neutrality’ was to be replaced with ‘solidarity’. The document also contained strong

⁷ “Lipizzaner” are a breed of horse, which is closely associated with the Spanish Riding School (Hofreitschule) in Vienna. “Mozartkugeln” is a confectionary, which has for a long time been exclusively produced in Salzburg.

references to the objectives of the EU's foreign and security policy, suggesting i.a. that Austrian security could no longer be seen in isolation from the EU context (Hauser 2007). In other words, neutrality had been dismantled insofar as Austria's foreign policy would no longer differ from that of other member states.

In 1999 Meanwhile, the government also started a major reform of the Armed Forces in line with the capability development processes Austria absolved in the context of NATO's PARP and the EU's Capability Action Plan (ECAP). Austria's involvement in these developments was at no point compromised by reservations concerning the continued status of formal neutrality. Meanwhile, the reform was as much a strategic decision in view of new global circumstances as a political and financial necessity: the only constraints for Austria's Armed Forces in this regard seem to have been the obvious budgetary limitations (with a general defence budget of less than 0.9% of the GDP), and the relative pressure to be interoperable within the EU and NATO-PfP frameworks.

When the EU's European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP, now CSDP) became operational with the launch of the military operation 'Concordia' in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in March 2003, Austria contributed with a contingent, along with other formerly neutral member states such as Sweden, as well as France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Ireland. In the years to follow, Austria became one of the top-10 ESDP contributors with consistent contributions of up to 5% (SIPRI 2012).⁸ The largest and most extensive involvement of Austrian forces in

⁸ Other countries in this top-10 list are France, Italy, Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom, Poland, the Netherlands, (Austria) Hungary and Portugal, which shows that Austria's contribution is remarkable for a state of its size and capabilities.

an EU operation has so far been in the context of EUFOR ‘Althea’ in Bosnia and Herzegovina with approximately 360 troops at a time (since 2004).⁹

Recent developments

Since the end of the centre-right coalition in 2006 and the return to power of an SPÖ-led coalition with the ÖVP, Austria has moved further away from its exceptionalism. Even under the social democratic chancellor Gusenbauer (SPÖ), neutrality and the myth of Austria’s ‘third way’ did not see its revival. Austria has since continued its path towards a normalized and inconspicuous national role conception, and has pursued a policy of ‘pragmatic neutrality’, albeit without turning into a free rider. The Austrian Security Strategy (*Österreichische Sicherheitsstrategie* 2011) has by now fully endorsed the EU approach to contemporary challenges as it was laid down in the European Security Strategy in 2003 although it is still awaiting ratification.

Austrian forces have been deployed in most civilian and military CSDP missions and some NATO-led operations over the past years. These contributions seemed to be more restricted by material shortfalls and budgetary restraints than by political reservations. Critical voices have repeatedly pointed at Austria’s reluctance to deploy forces in more robust operations such as in Afghanistan where Austrian contributions have been limited. Crucial in this debate have been internal documents of the US embassy in Vienna, which were made public by Wikileaks in late 2010 (Cable 10STATE17263). These documents criticised Austrian leaders, and Minister of Defence Norbert Darabos in particular, for being “openly hostile” to committing

⁹ Since 1999, Austria has contributed even larger contingents of up to 500 troops to the NATO-led KFOR in Kosovo. Since 1974, Austria has also held a contingent of up to 370 troops with UNDOF on the Golan Heights (Syria/Israel).

troops to dangerous operations such as in Afghanistan and Iraq (Presse 2010). While Austrian contributions in these cases have indeed been limited, there has generally been a clear move away from traditional limitations in the scope of operational engagements. This was not least marked by the Austrian participation in the (then) EU-led civil-military operation in Chad (2008-2009), which was both unpopular and militarily challenging.

While during the Cold War any international engagement of Austrian forces was to be limited to non-controversial types of missions such as UN peacekeeping operations and monitoring, Austria is now more ready to deliver across the whole spectrum of Petersberg Tasks.¹⁰ Austria also contributes to a multi-national Battle Group along with Germany, the Czech Republic, Croatia and Macedonia. Most recently, in Spring 2012, the Austrian contingent at UNDOF, which has been stationed on the Golan Heights since 1974, saw a dramatic change of operational and strategic circumstances. As the civil war in Syria unfolds, UN forces stationed near the border are expected to “interpret their mandate more extensively”, i.e. including the use of weapons to enforce UN law. In the past, the Austrian government would have considered withdrawing its troops to prevent them from getting involved in fighting. This time, however, acting defence minister Darabos (SPÖ) is simply expressing “concerns” while the Austrian commander orders “business as usual” (Kurier 2012).

In the context of recent treaty revisions, and the incremental extension of the remit of the EU’s CFSP and CSDP, Austria has refrained from claiming any sort of special treatment. While drawing up a new framework for the EU’s CSDP operations as well as for the internal and external dimensions of its general security policy, the Reform Treaty of 2009 foresaw both a solidarity clause (“Solidaritätsklausel”, art. 222 TFEU),

¹⁰ Petersberg tasks also include more robust scenarios, such as peacemaking and the separation of parties by force.

and a mutual military assistance clause (“*Beistandsverpflichtung*”, art. 42 TEU) (see Schilchegger 2011). The treaty thus contained a number of legal provisions that further reduced the substance of Austria’s neutral status, although these came with a number of caveats that left the question what an assistance or solidarity call would practically entail for Austria, relatively open. It is important to point out, however, that these provisions came with a number of caveats. The section on the Common Security and Defence Policy (art. 42 TEU) i.a. highlights that the policy of the Union “shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States” (art. 42(2)). This so-called “Irish clause” has traditionally served as a safeguard for neutral member states to ensure their participation in EU policies does not interfere with legal obligations arising from their status. Legal experts have been divided as to whether this would mean that neutrals would as a result be bound by a kind of “asymmetric” assistance clause, which would only come with benefits for these states but with no responsibilities. Others have highlighted that art. 42(7) on the military assistance clause would have had to repeat this safeguard whereas it only mentions member state obligations towards NATO in this context. Hilpold (2010) summarizes the legal debate by suggesting that any specific commitment or even involvement of Austria would be decided on a case-by-case basis. What seems crucial, in any case, is that regardless of these novel legal implications the neutrality principle has been formally retained to this day.

According to several public opinion polls conducted in the past decade, Austrian citizens consider neutrality an essential part of their national identity. Today, however, Austrian neutrality is reduced to its core meaning, i.e. no membership in any military alliance (i.e. NATO) and no stationing of foreign troops on Austrian territory. Any additional meaning and normative effect that neutrality was ascribed during the

Cold War has been replaced by a policy of active but not activist engagement within the EU and NATO's PfP. Full-NATO membership has so far still not been envisaged, not least because public support for such a step is limited (Reinprecht and Latcheva 2003: 446-447). According to opinion polls held during the past decade more than 75% of Austrians would not approve of formally giving up neutrality, which is what NATO-accession would entail. The ideological and societal costs of such a step are higher than the relative gains as Austria is already fully associated in the transatlantic context of the PfP. A majority of the Austrian population is also in favour of common European security and defence arrangements including the capability improvement processes coordinated through NATO's PARP, although overall support for the EU has been consistently low among the Austrian people.

Conclusion: Not a Natural Born Peacemaker

This article set out to explore in what way Austria has followed a typical small state approach in its foreign policy, and to what extent the end of the Cold War as well as Austria's involvement in transatlantic and EU security and defence arrangements have had an impact on the country's national role conception. In the context of bipolar confrontation, Austrian leaders, and foremost the Social Democrat Bruno Kreisky, actively sought to establish a global reputation for their country as a benevolent mediator, and purportedly, a 'natural born' peace maker. Much of this normative image built on Austria's neutrality, which allowed the country to promote an alternative 'third way' in its foreign policy. Kreisky's diplomatic activism during the 1970s and 1980s helped the country to assert itself on the global stage despite its relative lack of resources and leverage.

Today, much of the discourse about the normative orientation of Austrian foreign and security policy has been retained, but policies and the underlying constitutional law have gradually changed in substance. Austria's accession to the EU and its contribution to the CSDP have normalized the country's international profile. Even if Austria has so far refrained from abandoning its neutral status altogether by e.g. entering NATO as a full member, the country is externally perceived as part of the EU and thus as part of an alliance that is based on mutual solidarity.

Over the last decade, the EU has become more involved in all policy areas, and the implications of membership are far more comprehensive than they were at the time Austria entered the Union in 1995. Austria, regardless of which parties constituted its government, has established itself as a proactive EU member state that consistently pushes for closer cooperation in all policy areas including sensitive policies like security and defence. Geostrategic circumstances after the end of the Cold War have exposed neutral countries like Austria to a new set of challenges, which could not be addressed by military or hard power alone. Contemporary threats such as organised crime, religious fundamentalism and transnational terrorism do not lie within the remit of an active neutrality policy. Potential attacks are no longer directed against states with certain international positions but against Western civilization as a whole. This includes neutral states as much as any one of the great powers with offensive foreign and security policy traditions. Moreover, globalization has deprived Austria of the option to argue for a special status as a proponent of the third way or as a natural born peace maker, and finding partners and political allies in Europe has proven difficult as well.

Finally, this article also set out to explore whether Austria has got a special disposition towards peaceful means in international relations, i.e. whether it has been

a 'natural born' peace maker. In answering this question, this article sought a middle ground between realist and constructivist explanations of small state behaviour in international affairs. The conclusion here is that Austria has in fact never been a natural born peace maker. As has been reflected in the level of moral inflation and self-obsession over Austrian exceptionalism during the Cold War, it was not really a natural decision of the country to be "small and beautiful". Adopting a sort of non-offensive but active (and activist) foreign policy during the Cold War was more of a strategic decision than a normative one. Reduced to a small state, and in the shadow of the all-pervasive block confrontation, there was very limited leeway for an autonomous foreign policy profile. Austrian leaders, however, successfully established an image of Austria as an ideal partner and mediator in conflict situations. As soon as systemic circumstances allowed for fundamental changes, leaders moved away from the idea of a 'third way', which proves to an extent that the peace policy had been a mere strategy to survive. Austria's peace policy, however, was more than just a product of historical circumstances as a structuralist perspective would suggest. As this article has shown, Austrian leaders constructed a specific image for Austria to be able to make the most out of its relatively weak position at the time.

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