

ARNOLD SUPPAN

AUSTRIA AND ITS NEIGHBORS IN EASTERN EUROPE, 1955–89

After the State Treaty of 1955, Austria not only succeeded in avoiding a re-run of its history, but managed in a surprisingly short space of time to repackage itself as a model Alpine democracy: neutral, prosperous and stable. In part this was due to the uncomfortable proximity of the Red Army, which withdrew in 1955 only a few dozen kilometers to the east—a reminder that Austria’s neighbors now included three communist states (Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia). Due to the country’s vulnerable location it was prudent to pursue conciliatory and non-contentious policies both at home and abroad. The price Austria paid to get the occupation powers to leave was neutrality and high “reparations” to the Soviets. However, neutrality also put Austria on a path of neutralism and pacifism in the world’s conflicts, producing from the mid-1960s an “island-of-the-blessed” mentality that still prevails today. At the same time, neutral Austria joined the Western European trajectory toward prosperity, consumerism and a “leisure-class society.” Yet neutrality arrested full political and economic integration into Western Europe. “In addition, the Cold War assigned Austria an identity by association—as Western, free, democratic—that it might have been hard put to generate from within.”¹ Piotr C. Wandycz sums up what seems to be historical fact after 1945:

The Second World War, or rather its outcome, reversed the course of history of East Central Europe. Traditionally a borderland or a semi-periphery of the West, the region became a westward extension of the Soviet East [...] For the first time in history the Russian shadow fell not only on Poland but also on Hungary and Czechoslovakia.²

Nevertheless, due to Austria’s geopolitical situation between the blocs the foreign ministers after Karl Gruber, Leopold Figl and Bruno Kreisky, imposed an active “good neighbor policy” toward the adjacent communist states Yugoslavia,

¹ Tony Judt, *Postwar, A History of Europe since 1945* (London: William Heinemann, 2005), 261; Gerald Stourzh, *Um Einheit und Freiheit. Staatsvertrag, Neutralität und das Ende der Ost-West-Besetzung Österreichs 1945-1955*, 5th ed. (Vienna: Böhlau, 2005), 155–61, 537–48; Günter Bischof, Anton Pelinka and Michael Gehler, eds., *Austrian Foreign Policy in Historical Context* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 1–24; Wolfgang Mueller and Michael Portmann, eds., *Osteuropa vom Weltkrieg zur Wende* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007), 9–36.

² Piotr S. Wandycz, *The Price of Freedom. A History of East Central Europe from the Middle Ages to the Present* (London: Routledge, 1992), 236.

Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and from the 1970s also toward Poland, East Germany and Bulgaria. There were two events that fundamentally changed the attitude of Austria and the Austrians toward Hungary and Czechoslovakia—and vice versa. And these changes strengthened the relationships between the populations and started to infiltrate the communist regimes behind the Iron Curtain: the role of Austria and the Austrians during the Hungarian revolution in 1956 and during the “Prague Spring” in 1968.³

The Hungarian Revolution

After demonstrations and protests on 23 October 1956 at the building of the national radio in Budapest, a spontaneous, genuine people’s uprising erupted. The police force and a part of the Hungarian army joined the uprising. The morally discredited party leadership asked Soviet army units stationed in the country to crush the “counterrevolutionary gangs” of “fascist reactionary elements.” On 28 October, the Austrian government, led by Federal Chancellor Julius Raab, made a courageous appeal to the Soviet government to stop the military fight and to end the bloodshed. On 1 November, the new Hungarian Prime Minister Imre Nagy informed the Soviet ambassador Yuri Andropov that Hungary was unilaterally renouncing its membership in the Warsaw Pact and declared Hungary a neutral country. But on the same day, the Soviet secretary general Nikita Khrushchev ordered “an initiative for restoring order in Hungary.” On the morning of 4 November, Soviet tanks attacked Budapest and crushed the Hungarian revolution.⁴

At two emergency Special Sessions, held on 4 and 9 November 1956, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Resolutions 393 and 399 with regard to Hungary. On 14 and 15 November 1956, the Austrian Government sent an aide-mémoire to twenty countries asking for immediate help for the Hungarian refugees. The proposals included:

- The swift absorption of refugees into the individual countries without prior investigation of their personal or financial status; in particular, families should not be separated and immigration not limited to only young and able persons.
- Sending financial aid to help Austria defray the costs emerging from the exodus of Hungarian refugees. The handling of these funds, to be placed at the disposal of the Austrian government, was to be under the control of the Court of Audit.

³ Cf. Arnold Suppan, Wolfgang Mueller, eds., *Peaceful Coexistence or Iron Curtain? Austria, Neutrality, and Eastern Europe in the Cold War and Détente, 1955–1989* (Vienna: LIT, 2009).

⁴ Ivan T. Berend, *Central and Eastern Europe 1955–1993. Detour from the periphery to the periphery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 121–26; László Kontler, *A History of Hungary. Millennium in Central Europe* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 424–30; Csaba Békés, Malcolm Byrne, János M. Rainer, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2002).

- Sending various goods and necessities of all types, including clothes, etc. The Austrian Ministry of the Interior was to serve as the central depot for the delivery of these supplies.⁵

On 26 November 1956, the Austrian Ambassador Franz Matsch gave a statement to the UN secretary general concerning the situation of Hungarian refugees in Austria:

Since the recent developments in Hungary started, approximately 83,000 new refugees have crossed the border. Although 20,000 of this number have been able to leave the country for new destinations in Europe or overseas, the rest, amounting to a total of 63,000, is still in Austria and is continuously augmented by an additional number of about 8,000 refugees coming to Austria every night. The majority of these new refugees are young people, women and children. They are coming from practically all parts of Hungary. New strata of the population seem to be affected increasingly. Austria, in accordance with the provisions of the Geneva Convention, cannot and will not refuse anyone seeking asylum in her territory.⁶

The Austrian government, in cooperation with the Austrian people, undertook all possible efforts to accommodate these unfortunate people as quickly as possible. But Austria needed “generous, united and immediate help from other countries, because collecting points, reception centers, holiday homes and empty hotels, all available private housing facilities and even schools, are completely full.” Sixty-three camps and seven large reception centers were operated in Austria by the federal government. Matsch noted that not a single case of contagious disease had occurred and that all refugees were in good health. He also noted that in the previous four weeks, Austria had already spent 120 million shillings, i.e. 4.8 million dollars, on refugees from Hungary. But the cost of maintaining the current number of Hungarian refugees in Austria for a period of six months was estimated at 600 million shillings or about 24 million dollars. Therefore, he requested other European countries to send trains directly to the Austro-Hungarian border to allow the immediate transportation of refugees to third countries.⁷

The welcome the Hungarian refugees received in Austria changed Austria’s image in Hungary, which had not always been positive as a consequence of 1849 and the two world wars. From this point in time, the Austrian *Schwager* (brother-in-law) and the Hungarian neighbor became a comfortable twosome. This positive

⁵ Aide Mémoire Ambassador Matsch to Philippe de Seynes, UN Under-Secretary, 15 November 1956, UN Archives, Social Matters: Relief and Rehabilitation, SO 534/32 Aut.

⁶ Statement Ambassador Matsch to UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, New York, November 26, 1956, UN Archives, Social Matters: Relief and Rehabilitation, SO 534/32 Aut. Ambassador Matsch underlined that 650,000 refugees had crossed the Austrian border since 1945. “While a large number of these 650,000 could be settled outside the country, 190,000 of them are still living in Austria, 36,000 of whom still being housed in camps.” I am grateful to Dr. Georg Kastner for providing me copies of these documents.

⁷ Ibid.

atmosphere has persisted to the present day; according to opinion polls, the admission of Hungary into the European Union was supported by a majority of Austrians.⁸

The “Prague Spring”

In the mid-1950s the Austrian economy outdistanced that of Czechoslovakia, which had formerly been much larger⁹—a development that would have been unthinkable in either 1918 or 1945. After the Czechoslovak economy entered a serious crisis around 1960, a group of experts from the Institute for Economics at the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, under the leadership of Ota Šik, was given the task of drawing up plans for reform, plans that incorporated decentralization and more market-orientation and individual responsibility of enterprises. Despite this, communist property affairs were not to be changed.¹⁰

Relations between Austria and Czechoslovakia began to intensify. In May 1963, the Czechoslovak author and literature historian Eduard Goldstücker organized an international Kafka Symposium at Karlovy Vary (Karlsbad) with Austrian participation, while the Austrian Society of Literature (*Österreichische Gesellschaft für Literatur*) played host in Vienna to a number of Czech writers, including Václav Havel. Of greater immediate importance in the public sphere were the beginnings of collaboration between the Austrian and Czechoslovakian television stations and live broadcasts of the show “City Discussions” moderated by Helmut Zilk and Jiří Pelikán. Most significant of all for relations was travel between the two countries. Whereas until 1963 only 47,000 Czechs had been to the West, by 1967 the number had climbed to 258,000. And Western foreigners—especially Germans and Austrians—suddenly began to fill Czechoslovak hotels and restaurants in Prague, Brno, Karlovy Vary and smaller towns. In joint university history seminars with Austrian colleagues, Czech and Slovak students clearly articulated their wish that their country leave the communist bloc and like Austria become neutral in the East-West conflict.¹¹

⁸ Michael Gehler, *Österreichs Außenpolitik der Zweiten Republik* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2005), 1, 162–73.

⁹ Arnold Suppan, “Österreicher und Tschechen—missgünstige Nachbarn?,” *Prague Papers on the History of International Relations* (2006): 265–98; Berend, *Central and Eastern Europe*, XV–XVI; Alice Teichova, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte der Tschechoslowakei 1918–1980* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1988); Hans Seidel, *Österreichs Wirtschaft und Wirtschaftspolitik nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Vienna: Manz, 2005).

¹⁰ Otakar Turek and Miloš Pick, “Die Wirtschaftsreformen der sechziger Jahre,” in Stefan Karner et al. eds., *Prager Frühling. Das internationale Krisenjahr 1968* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2008), 133–40.

¹¹ Arnold Suppan, *Missgünstige Nachbarn. Geschichte und Perspektiven der nachbarschaftlichen Beziehungen zwischen Tschechien und Österreich* (Vienna: Club Niederösterreich, 2005), 68–69; Helmut Zilk, “Zum Beginn des ‘Prager Frühlings’: Die ‘Stadtgespräche Prag—Wien’,”

The “Manifest of 2000 Words,” written by Ludvík Vaculík and published on 27 June 1968, was intended to be an account of the state of the country. It was addressed to workers, farmers, officials, scholars, artists and “all others.” The manifesto criticized the privileged class of functionaries who held power in the name of workers, power that was founded on their control of the party and the state apparatus. Signed by sixty-nine intellectuals, the manifesto created an enormous sensation, also in Moscow. On 11 July 1968, *Pravda* was already talking of a “counterrevolutionary conspiracy.” The Austrian ambassador to Moscow sent secret warnings to Vienna.¹²

The first written threat to the leadership in Prague by the Warsaw Pact came on 16 July. Bilateral summit meetings in Cierná nad Tisou and Bratislava ended tensely. On the night of 20–21 August 1968, some twenty-nine divisions with 7,500 tanks and more than 1,000 aircraft of the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, the German Democratic Republic (not troops from the People’s Army but police troops) and Bulgaria marched into Czechoslovakia. Between 80 and 200 deaths occurred. Some members of the Communist Party leadership were arrested and taken to Moscow, where they were forced to accept a joint protocol on the “normalization” of the country. The pro-Russian sentiment of many Czechs, which went back to the nineteenth century and had been strengthened in both world wars, evaporated completely in this night of humiliation.¹³

The Western world—despite having been warned by their secret services and diplomats—was taken completely by surprise. It could only watch from a distance and report on the events taking place. The Austrian broadcasting system played an important role in this regard. The Austrian government registered violations of Austrian airspace in the north and east and feared violations of the land border by tank columns advancing on Brno and Bratislava. Thus only very hesitant public statements were made by the government of the Austrian People’s Party (*Österreichische Volkspartei*, ÖVP) under Federal Chancellor Josef Klaus. Nevertheless, the Soviet ambassador to Austria protested the “anti-Soviet” position of the ORF (*Österreichischer Rundfunk*, the Austrian national public service broadcaster) and the Austrian press. Despite a warning by the Austrian Ministry of the Interior, the Austrian envoy in Prague, Rudolf Kirchschräger, later the president of Austria, issued tens of thousands of visas to Czechoslovak citizens. Some 150,000 people, mainly well-educated and young, left Czechoslovakia at

in Stefan Karner et al. eds., *Prager Frühling. Das internationale Krisenjahr 1968* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2008), 1089–93; see also Gehler, *Österreichs Außenpolitik* 1, 294–300.

¹² “Die Stunde der Tschechen und Slowaken. Ludvík Vaculíks ‘Manifest der 2000 Worte’ als nationale Rechenschaft,” *Die Presse*, 13–14 July 1968, 5.

¹³ Jan Pauer, *Prag 1968. Der Einmarsch des Warschauer Paktes. Hintergründe, Planung, Durchführung* (Bremen: Ed. Temmen, 1995); H. Gordon Skilling, *Czechoslovakia’s Interrupted Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Michail Prozumenščikov, “Die Entscheidung im Politbüro der KPdSU,” in Stefan Karner et al. eds., *Prager Frühling. Das internationale Krisenjahr 1968* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2008), 205–41.

least temporarily. Thousands of others did not return from their vacations in Yugoslavia. The Western world readily admitted all refugees and integrated them in a variety of ways.¹⁴

Yugoslavia

In the fall of 1974, the foreign ministries of Austria and Yugoslavia exchanged sharp notes concerning the Slovene minority question in the southern Austrian province of Carinthia. An outside observer reading the newspaper would have had no reason to doubt a serious disruption of intra-state relations between the neighbors. But this was by no means the case. Despite the disagreement, the economic, social and cultural relations between Yugoslavia and Austria remained largely intact:

- Some 180,000 Yugoslav citizens continued to be employed in Austria as “guest workers.”
- More than 600,000 Austrians continued to take their annual vacations on the Yugoslav Adriatic coast.
- Austrian exports of wood, paper, cattle, and machines to the Arabic world and overseas through the Yugoslav ports of Koper and Rijeka continued to increase.
- Cross-border traffic at the local level between Styria and Carinthia on one side and Slovenia on the other increased.
- Bilateral cultural contacts became more frequent. These included exhibitions (“Trigon”), scholarly symposia (“Mogersdorf,” Yugoslav-Austrian historian symposia), concerts (“Styrian Fall”), and readings by poets.¹⁵

Bilateral relations became less tense following a secret visit between Christmas and New Year 1975 by Federal Chancellor Kreisky to Marshal Tito in Brdo near Kranj. And after the adoption of the Austrian nationalities’ law on 7 July 1976, they clearly improved. Non-aligned Yugoslavia and neutral Austria also continued to work together at the level of the United Nations.

¹⁴ Gehler, *Österreichs Außenpolitik* 1, 341–52; Karl Peterlik, “Tausende Visa pro Tag ausgestellt,” in Stefan Karner et al. eds., *Prager Frühling. Das internationale Krisenjahr 1968* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2008), 1163–66; see also Richard G. Plaschka und Karlheinz Mack, eds., *Die Auflösung des Habsburgerreiches. Zusammenbruch und Neuorientierung im Donauraum* (Vienna: Österreichisches Ost- und Südosteuropa-Institut, 1970); “Ein großer Mann. Professor Kurt Krolop über Eduard Goldstücker,” *Prager Zeitung*, 2 November 2000, 7; David Schriff, “Der ‘Prager Frühling’ 1968 und die österreichisch-slowakischen Beziehungen,” in Wolfgang Mueller and Michael Portmann, eds., *Osteuropa vom Weltkrieg zur Wende* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007), 299–311.

¹⁵ Arnold Suppan, *Jugoslawien und Österreich 1918–1938. Bilaterale Außenpolitik im europäischen Umfeld* (Vienna and Munich: Geschichte und Politik; Oldenbourg, 1996), 11–13. See also Peter Weibel and Christa Steinle, eds., *Identität:Differenz. Tribüne Trigon 1940–1990. Eine Topographie der Moderne* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1992).

Austrian-East European relations in the 1970–80s

East–West détente after 1970, in part a product of Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, gradually pushed the memory of the unhappy end to the “Prague Spring” into the background. And the seemingly all-powerful head of the Soviet Communist Party, Leonid Brezhnev, after whom the theory of the limited sovereignty of communist states was named, regarded the Helsinki Agreement of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe of 1 August 1975 as a guarantee of Soviet dominance in East-Central Europe. From 1976 the civil and cultural stagnation that had established itself in Czechoslovakia was called into question by the Czechoslovak civic initiative *Charta 77*. The movement was based on Basket 3 of the Helsinki Agreement, a concession by Moscow to the West, and called for the upholding of basic civil rights. The protagonists Jan Patočka, Václav Havel, Jiří Hajek and Pavel Kohout were soon persecuted as alleged agents of the CIA, and samizdat publications were strictly suppressed. But Western radio and television broadcasts, many from Austria, nevertheless reached behind the Iron Curtain. In the area between České Budějovice, Brno and Bratislava, many antennas were aimed at the neighboring country to the south and west. The head of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, Gustáv Husák, build up an increasingly imposing police regime with a heavily armed “people’s militia,” and began a new campaign against the Catholic Church that put quite a few priests into prison. The Soviet army, with its 70,000 soldiers a de facto occupying force, provided the background for these developments. Under such conditions, it was not possible for *Charta 77* to become the mass movement that *Solidarność* (Solidarity) was later to become, although about one thousand persons participated, above all intellectuals from Prague and Brno. It nevertheless became a “moral challenge” to the cynicism of Czechoslovak officials, the apathy of the public, and the shallow materialism of both.¹⁶

After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the declaration of martial law in Poland in 1981, the communist regimes appeared cemented in place. *Solidarność* received little support from the Association of Austrian Trade Unions and Chancellor Kreisky remained as passive as Chancellor Klaus had been in 1968. A new wave of political refugees, this time about 40,000 Poles, arrived in Austria. The reception of the Austrian population was not nearly as friendly as it had been in 1956 or 1968, and Austria also did not participate in the Western sanctions against the dictatorial regime of General Wojciech Jaruzelski.¹⁷ But the election of the Cracow archbishop, Karol Cardinal Wojtyła, as pope in the fall

¹⁶ Ferdinand Seibt, “Deutsch-tschechischer Diskurs 1947–1999. Ein Lesedrama in sieben Akten,” *Merkur—Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken* 54 (2000): 216–30; Vilém Prečan, *Die sieben Jahre von Prag, 1969–1976. Briefe und Dokumente aus der Zeit der “Normalisierung”* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1978).

¹⁷ Gehler, *Österreichs Außenpolitik* 1, 483–88.

1978 strengthened the Catholic population of Poland and influenced the mobilization of grassroots Catholic movements also in Moravia, Slovakia and Hungary.¹⁸

Signs of change

Thus, in the mid-1980s the Austrian capital of Vienna was a “Western” city surrounded by Soviet “Eastern” Europe. For Polish, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Serb, Croat and Slovene intellectuals, Vienna stood for “Central Europe” (*Mittleuropa*), an imagined community of cosmopolitan civility that Europeans had somehow mislaid in the course of the century. But for more than 150,000 guest-workers from Yugoslavia, Vienna and Austria stood for better living conditions. “In Communism’s dying years the city was to become a sort of listening post of liberty, a rejuvenated site of encounters and departures for eastern Europeans escaping West and Westerners building bridges to the East.”¹⁹ But Erhard Busek, until 1987 vice-mayor of Vienna and from April 1989, Austrian minister of science and research, frequently warned in those years about overstraining these bridges, since bridges were often windy places and they sometimes collapsed—as a major Viennese bridge over the Danube (the *Reichsbrücke*) had done in 1976. Nevertheless, in 1989 Austria embodied all the slightly self-satisfied attributes of postwar Western Europe: capitalist prosperity supported by a richly-endowed welfare state; social peace guaranteed by jobs and benefits liberally distributed through all the main social groups and political parties; external security assured by the implicit protection of the NATO nuclear umbrella—although Austria itself remained smugly “neutral.”²⁰

Although more than half of the Austrian frontier ran along the Iron Curtain and its borders with Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia, the great majority of the Austrian population, including the intellectuals, did not really recognize what was happening in the *annus mirabilis*, the year 1989, not to mention 1987 or 1988. But today we know that there were several clear signs of the upcoming changes.

Yugoslavia

The events in Yugoslavia were the first sign. The Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences, partly published in September 1986, openly introduced a program of a nationalistic Greater Serbia. Its principle of “all Serbs in one state” heralded the aggression in Yugoslavia against the federal units geographically

¹⁸ Andrzej Paczkowski, *Pół wieku dziejów Polski 1939–1989* (Warszawa: PWN, 1995), 441–48.

¹⁹ Judt, *Postwar*, 2.

²⁰ Cf. Emil Brix and Erhard Busek, *Projekt Mittleuropa* (Vienna: Ueberreuter, 1986).

separated from Serbia in which both ethnic Serbs and non-Serbian populations lived. The memorandum stirred wide opposition in Slovenia, not only in cultural circles, but also in certain economic circles that were critical of the state of the federal economy. The Yugoslav foreign debt had by then reached the enormous sum of 21 billion US dollars, the highest per capita debt in Eastern Europe. In the spring of 1987, a group of young intellectuals—predominantly anticommunist liberals and Catholics associated with the magazine *Nova revija* (New Review)—published articles outlining a Slovene national program in which they demanded the introduction of political pluralism, democracy, a market economy and independence for Slovenia in a possible Yugoslav confederation. Such views encountered opposition and condemnation everywhere in Yugoslavia. But the new leadership of the Slovene Communists, after 1986 led by Milan Kučan, decided not to oppose these demands of the critical youth.²¹

In the spring of 1988, the Yugoslav army—at the time some 260,000 officers and soldiers—staged a show trial before a military court in Ljubljana against four Slovenes, three journalists from the magazine *Mladina* and one army cadet. They were accused of publishing the minutes of a meeting of the Central Committee of the Union of the Yugoslav Communists. But since the trial was conducted in the official language of the army, namely Serbo-Croatian, the trial had exactly the opposite effect of what was desired: the Slovenes united strongly behind a program of democratization and national independence. Even Admiral Branko Mamula, the Yugoslav defense minister at the time, later realized: “With my threats against the Slovene opposition, I did more for Slovene independence than anyone else.” In mid-1988, an abyss opened between Slovenia and Yugoslavia that could no longer be bridged. In 1990, one of the four prisoners, Janez Janša, became the minister of defense of the sovereign Republic of Slovenia and later even became prime minister.²²

In February 1989, a rally in Ljubljana organized jointly by the Slovene government and Slovene opposition parties condemned the political and police violence of the Serbian authorities in Kosovo and called for peace and coexistence. This Slovene stand was the trigger for Serbia to mount a major propaganda campaign against Slovenia. At a large rally in Ljubljana in May, the Slovene opposition parties adopted the “May Declaration”—in memory of the Slovene demand of autonomy in May 1917—for “a sovereign state of the Slovene nation” which would “as a sovereign state decide independently on its links with South Slav and other nations within the framework of a renewed Europe.” In spite of severe pressure and threats from Belgrade, in September the Slovene Parlia-

²¹ Janko Prunk, *A Brief History of Slovenia* (Ljubljana: Mihelač, 1994), 74–75; Peter Štih, Vasko Simoniti, Peter Vodopivec, *Slowenische Geschichte. Gesellschaft—Politik—Kultur* (Graz: Leykam, 2008), 465–80; Laura Silber and Alan Little, *Yugoslavia. Death of a Nation* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 31–33.

²² Štih, Simoniti, Vodopivec, *Slowenische Geschichte*, 481–84; Silber, Little, *Yugoslavia*, 48–57.

ment—still composed of members elected through the one-party system—reclaimed the sovereign national rights it had ceded when the Yugoslav Federation was founded in 1945. At the end of November 1989, the Slovene and Croat governments banned the pan-Yugoslav rallies of the centralistic Greater Serbian forces that had been planned to take place in Ljubljana and Zagreb. By that time similar demonstrations had been held everywhere in Yugoslavia except in Slovenia and Croatia. Serbia and Montenegro reacted to the ban by breaking off all commercial trade with Slovenia. In January 1990, the Greater Serbia hegemonic leanings prevailing in the League of Communists of Yugoslavia caused the members of the Slovene League of Communists to walk out of the fourteenth and last congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia in Belgrade. Their Croat comrades followed.²³

The United States, the European Community and the Soviet Union were all interested in the further existence and unity of Yugoslavia. They did not comprehend what was happening in Yugoslavia or why. This was so despite democratic elections for the Slovene and Croat Parliaments being held in April and May 1990 and the victory of the non-communist parties in both republics, the Republic of Serbia illegally using foreign exchange holdings in the Yugoslav Federal Bank to finance the Serbian special forces, the Slovene–Croat proposal to form a Yugoslav confederation, and the clear results in the Slovene and Croat plebiscites of December 1990 and May 1991 for independence. Yugoslavia's Prime Minister Ante Marković, a Croat economist, succeeded in presenting himself to the world as a liberal economic reformer and even succeeded in eliciting a guarantee of new loans. US secretary of state James Baker warned the Slovene Kučan on one hand that the Helsinki Final Act recognized only peaceful self-determination, not secession by force; on the other hand, Baker warned the Serb Milošević that the United States would not tolerate the use of force to prevent declarations of independence. The Slovene and Croat decisions were supported only by Germany, above all Chancellor Helmut Kohl, and Austria, primarily Foreign Minister Alois Mock. The Serbian generals at the top of the Yugoslav military and their adherents in Yugoslavia's diplomatic corps spoke loudly of a "fourth German Reich" (obviously including Austria!). It was declared that the independent republics of Slovenia and Croatia were going to join this new "Reich" immediately. A number of international spectators still question whether the Western world would have accepted the Slovene and Croat declarations of independence, both on 25 June 1991, if they had not already accepted German reunification. In any case, after the fall of the Iron Curtain and the collapse of the Warsaw pact, Yugoslavia had lost its strategic importance to Washington and Moscow.²⁴

²³ Prunk, *Slovenia*, 75–78; Štih, Simoniti, Vodopivec, *Slowenische Geschichte*, 486–90.

²⁴ Prunk, *Slovenia*, 78–81; Štih, Simoniti, Vodopivec, *Slowenische Geschichte*, 491–501; Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, 29, 147–53.

Hungary

The second group of signs occurred in Hungary. When János Kádár had his first audience with the new ruler in the Kremlin, Mikhail Gorbachev, he also referred to a new opposition in Hungary:

There is an opposition in Hungary; a few social scientists, sociologists, representatives of the intelligentsia, writers. There are not many. They could be called an organized group in the sense that fifty or sixty occasionally meet. The West seeks them out, supports them [...]. The question arises of what we are to do with them. We can take administrative measures against them only in the last resort, as we do not wish to give these people free publicity. Now and then we arrest opposition elements, confiscate their copying equipment, but if need be we can be harsher.²⁵

In Kádár's estimation as well as that of his authorities, routine police harassment did not count as harsh administrative measures. But György Aczél, Secretary of the Central Committee for cultural affairs, defined the boundaries between "prohibited" and "permitted." Although diversity in literary, artistic and scholarly trends, styles, tastes and moods was allowed, these elements of society remained under state supervision.²⁶

Nevertheless, the monopoly of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP) began to receive jolts in several areas:

- In 1986, the planned construction of a series of dams and a hydroelectric power station at the Czechoslovak-Hungarian section of the Danube between Gabčíkovo and Nagymaros became the object of intensive political debate because of the predictably disastrous ecological consequences they would bring. The plan was finally abandoned. A protest march in October 1988 against the construction of this hydroelectric system called attention to the communist system's ecological exploitation.²⁷
- According to data of the Hungarian Central Statistics Office, in 1987 1.9 million people, or nearly 20 percent of the population, lived at or below the "social minimum" level. In the mid-1980s, the country ranked number one in international suicide statistics and second in the consumption of spirits and liquor. The disaffection of the general public was creeping, rather than bursting, into Hungarian life.²⁸
- Kádár, the one-time pioneer of reforms in the Soviet bloc, was deeply disturbed by the aspirations of Gorbachev. In the broad segment of reformers in the party, rank-and-file expectations were raised by the "Gorbachev phenom-

²⁵ György Gyarmati, "Hungary in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century," in István György Tóth et al. eds., *A Concise History of Hungary. The History of Hungary from the Early Middle Ages to the Present* (Budapest: Corvina-Osiris, 2005), 614.

²⁶ Kontler, *Hungary*, 445–46. The historian Ferenc Glatz started to publish the magazine *História* in 1979.

²⁷ Gyarmati, "Hungary," 615; Kontler, *Hungary*, 465.

²⁸ Kontler, *Hungary*, 458–59.

- enon.” In July 1987, Kádár decided to drop the long-serving Prime Minister György Lázár, replacing him with Károly Grósz, who was the most characteristic representative of the new, technocratic type of cadres favoring the continuation of economic reforms without changing the political system. In addition to Grósz, the main reformers included Rezső Nyers, the father of the 1968 economic reform, and Imre Pozsgay, whose commitment to reform, unlike that of the prime minister, extended to democratization as well.²⁹
- On 5 and 6 March 1987, under the protection of Pozsgay, the secretary general of the Patriotic Popular Front, a symposium and an exhibition entitled “300 years of living together—from the history of the German Hungarians” was held at the Houses of Parliament in Budapest. It was the first time since the expulsion of more than 200,000 German Hungarians in 1946 that this subject was officially discussed.³⁰
 - On 27 September 1987 the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) was set up in Lakitelek, a village east of Kecskemét, in the presence of Pozsgay, the liberal democratic writer György Konrád, as well as the leading right-wing populist István Csurka. Its founding members were mainly men of letters and social scientists who spoke up in favor of the democratic *Rechtsstaat*, Hungarian national traditions, and in support of Hungarian minorities abroad. In the neighboring countries, the living conditions of the Hungarian minority in Yugoslavia, mainly in the Serbian Vojvodina and 430,000 strong (1981 census), were comparatively the most favorable. In contrast, for the 1,670,000 Hungarians in Romania (1981 census) a “national homogenization program” had drastically restricted education in this population’s mother tongue. Kádár had intervened unsuccessfully with Ceaușescu. In June 1988 a demonstration in Hungary on behalf of the Hungarian minority in Romania protested Ceaușescu’s megalomaniac plan of destroying the historic network of Hungarian villages and towns in Transylvania. Finally, in Czechoslovakia, the 1968 law on the national minorities made no allowance for cultural autonomy, although 580,000 Hungarians still lived in Slovakia.³¹
 - On 22 May 1988, Kádár and another five members of the Politburo, the hard-liner’s “council of the aged,” were forced into retirement. Despite this, Pozsgay and Grósz, the new Party Secretary, could not stabilize the communist party (MSZMP). Deep generational and political divisions within the party and the obvious loss of confidence among the population could not be checked. From early 1988 a constant stream of new organizations began to be formed:

²⁹ Ibid., 460.

³⁰ Wendelin Hambuch, ed., *300 Jahre Zusammenleben—Aus der Geschichte der Ungarn-deutschen. Internationale Historikerkonferenz in Budapest* (5.-6. März 1987), 2 vols. (Budapest, Tankönyvkiadó, 1988). I attended the opening with my friend Ferenc Glatz.

³¹ Ferenc Glatz, et al. eds., *A magyarok krónikája* (Budapest: Officina Nova, 1995), 758; Berend, *Central and Eastern Europe*, 271; Kontler, *Hungary*, 454–55.

the Alliance of Young Democrats (FIDESZ), the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), etc. Even the so-called reform communists established weeklies and magazines. While these initiatives were confined to a few dozen individuals, they maintained contact with several hundred other sympathizers, among them intellectuals at research institutes, university departments and editorial offices, as well as within student circles. The authorities kept detailed information about the activities of this opposition and the groups linked to them.³²

- Because Grósz was rapidly losing his credibility, in November 1988 he handed over his premiership to the young Miklós Németh, who turned out to be one of the engineers of transition. Németh received reinforcement through the successful maneuvering of Pozsgay, who broke with the interpretation of the events of 1956 as a “counter-revolution,” recognizing them instead as a “popular uprising” and a “fight for national independence.” The government quickly laid a new law before Parliament concerning organizations, and in January 1989 the right to form political parties was proclaimed. In March an opposition round table was formed by the more important parties: MDF, SZDSZ, FIDESZ, the Social Democratic Party, the Independent Smallholders, Agricultural Workers and Bourgeois Party, the Hungarian People’s Party and the Christian Democratic People’s Party. In a cabinet reshuffle in May 1989, most positions held by followers of Grósz were refilled by pragmatic reformers such as Németh himself, and the government became an institutional regulator of transformation. Németh’s main efforts were to ensure that the outlines of a new and workable framework had been created before the old system of institutions was completely dismantled. The government introduced radical reforms, including advances toward privatization and a subsequent market economy. The first month of the “revolution by discussion” ended with the ceremonial reburial of Imre Nagy, together with his fellow martyrs, on 16 June 1989. An estimated 300,000 Hungarians lined the streets, with millions more watching the proceedings live on television. Among the speakers at the graveside was Viktor Orbán, the youthful leader of the Young Democrats, who could not help noting that some of the communists present at Nagy’s reburial were the same people who, just a few years earlier, had so strenuously decried the very revolution whose praises they were now singing. By the end of June, the first secretary had to be content with being only one member of a quartet: he was joined by Németh, Pozsgay and Nyers at the head of the party.³³
- In June 1989, the Iron Curtain was opened a crack: the Hungarian foreign minister, Gyula Horn, and his Austrian colleague, Alois Mock, cut the barbed wire separating western Hungary from the Austrian province of Burgenland. The Austrian minister of science and research, Erhard Busek, concluded agree-

³² Kontler, *Hungary*, 461–62.

³³ Glatz, *A magyarok krónikája*, 777–79; Berend, *Central and Eastern Europe*, 274–75; Kontler, *Hungary*, 466; Gyarmati, “Hungary,” 614–17; Judt, *Postwar*, 610.

ments on German-language teachers and scholarships with the Hungarian minister of education Ferenc Glatz. In August 1989, some six hundred East Germans used an Austro-Hungarian “border picnic” near Sopron (Ödenburg), organized by Otto von Habsburg’s Pan-European Union, to flee to Austria. The picnic was secretly tolerated by the Hungarian government. Events picked up speed when, on 10 September, the Hungarian government authorized the departure via Austria of tens of thousands East German vacationers hoping to flee to West Germany. This wider opening of the Iron Curtain was negotiated with the West German Chancellor Kohl and tolerated by Moscow, but caused a diplomatic clash with East Berlin. In a later interview, Prime Minister Németh stated that the Hungarian government used this event as a *ballon d’essai* to test the Soviet reaction. The Austrian government was informed about the decision very late. When at midnight on 10–11 September, the Hungarian-Austrian border was opened for the East German citizens, it was broadcast live on Austrian, German and Hungarian television. Euphoric young refugees were interviewed and the celebratory mood was obvious. Radio Free Europe and Voice of America covered the event, which enabled the people of East Germany, Czechoslovakia and other bloc countries to learn of the breathtaking mass exodus.³⁴

- Between June and September 1989, representatives of the MSZMP, the Opposition Round Table, the Patriotic Popular Front and the trade unions reached an agreement on creating the legal and political conditions for the transition to multi-party democracy and the rule of law. The fourteenth congress of the MSZMP in early October 1989 also proved to be the last. While the new players in political life were primarily concentrating on rearranging power-sharing, the members of the collapsing Communist Party—only 50,000 of the 700,000 members of the old party became members of the newly formed Hungarian Socialist Party—had the necessary information for appropriating state property. This was a process that was only in its beginning stages. Within the framework of the so-called pre-privatization transactions, they became the proprietors, company directors and managers of societies, limited companies and holdings that soon began to mushroom.³⁵
- On 23 October 1989, Hungary was transformed from a “People’s Republic” of the Soviet type to a “Republic.” The novelty of the Hungarian exit from communism was that it was conducted by the communists themselves. Two weeks before the elections on 25 March 1990, Gyula Horn and his Soviet

³⁴ István Horváth, *Die Sonne ging in Ungarn auf. Erinnerungen an eine besondere Freundschaft* (Munich: Universitas, 2000), 251–334; Berend, *Central and Eastern Europe*, 282; Andreas Oplatka, *Der erste Riss in der Mauer. September 1989—Ungarn öffnet die Grenze* (Vienna: Zsolnay, 2009); Gehler, *Österreichs Außenpolitik* 2, 588–93; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 19 August 2009.

³⁵ Gyarmati, “Hungary,” 618–19.

colleague Eduard Shevardnadze signed an international agreement for the withdrawal of the Soviet troops that had been stationed in Hungary for the previous forty-five years. In the autumn of 1990, a well-attended discussion between leading intellectuals was held at Eötvös Lóránd University in Budapest to answer the question “Did we see it coming?” “It”, of course, referred to the course of events in 1989. The consensus of the participants and the audience was unanimously negative: “It” had been unforeseeable almost until it was actually happening.³⁶

Czechoslovakia

The third set of signs that were overlooked occurred in Czechoslovakia. What was the basic difference between the Polish *Solidarność* or the Czechoslovak *Charta 77* movements, on one hand, and Hungarian reform-from-within on the other? Did the first two merely oppose the regime while the latter simply collaborated? In fact, the line distinguishing these different developments was not so marked. “This line,” stated Václav Havel, “runs de facto through each person, for everyone in his or her own way is both a victim and a supporter of the system.”³⁷

When in 1988 the Czechoslovak foreign minister Bohuslav Chňoupek received his Austrian colleague Alois Mock at Bratislava castle, he stated with a resigned gesture toward the nearby border with Austria that neither would probably live to see it opened.³⁸ He recalled that before 1938, as a child in Engerau (Petržalka, today a southern suburb of Bratislava), he had played soccer with boys from Kittsee in northeastern Burgenland, not far from the Austro-Czechoslovak border. Despite this pessimism, Austrian construction firms began building modern hotels in Prague soon thereafter. Thousands of locals were astonished at the capitalist industriousness of the “Austrians” working on weekends. They did not know, of course, that many were Yugoslav “guest workers” and thus, the Austrian model remained attractive.

In both Hungary and Czechoslovakia, communist rule rested uneasily on the silent memory of a stolen past. When in Czechoslovakia Gustav Husák, in power since 1969, resigned as secretary general of the party in 1987—remaining state president—he was replaced by the younger Miloš Jakeš, best known for his prominent role in the mass “purges” of the early 1970s. Thanks to the brutally efficient management of these purges, most of the country’s intelligentsia, from playwrights to historians, had been removed not merely from their jobs but also from public visibility. Havel’s own civic organization, *Charta 77*, gained fewer than two thousand signatories from a population of fifteen million. Nonetheless,

³⁶ Kontler, *Hungary*, 469; Glatz, *A magyarok krónikája*, 787; Judt, *Postwar*, 610.

³⁷ Berend, *Central and Eastern Europe*, 272.

³⁸ This detail was related to me by Alois Mock after his retirement as foreign minister.

to bolster its citizens' mood communist Czechoslovakia tried to mimic certain aspects of Western consumer society—notably television programming and popular leisure pursuits. There were signs of change already in 1988, when a petition for greater religious freedom was signed by half a million people. And on 28 October 1988, the seventieth anniversary of the founding of independent Czechoslovakia, 10,000 people went onto the streets of Prague. After similar demonstrations on 21 August 1988, many demonstrators were arrested as were Havel and thirteen other *Charta 77* activists in January 1989. All in all, as late as the summer of 1989 there was a clear lack of reform intentions on the part of the party chiefs as well as an absence of any effective opposition.³⁹

On the other hand, the new relations of Moscow to Washington and Bonn, as well as internal developments in the Soviet Union, Poland and Hungary were creating uncertainty among the leaders in Prague. But neither the leaderships in Warsaw and Budapest nor in East Berlin and Prague were aware of what Aleksandr Yakovlev, a member of the Soviet Politburo, told the West German minister Kurt Biedenkopf in February 1989. In Biedenkopf's words:

they [the Soviets] could not continue to support their satellite countries. They would then seek ways of pulling back these supports, and look for some exit options, or some resolution, because they were becoming too expensive. Their weakness was coinciding with the will of the people to be free.⁴⁰

An aging and frightened Husák regime and its perplexed but hopeful population watched the broadcasts of the collapse of Honecker's Germany. The rather apathetic Czech and Slovak masses who had turned their backs on politics during the twenty Husák years, trying instead to "cultivate their own garden," were suddenly mobilized. With the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989, the fate of the communist regime in Prague finally became clear. Although as late as 15 November some old communist cadres warned the West not to intervene, the whole world was waiting for what would happen.⁴¹

Rather surprisingly, the end was triggered by a student demonstration on 17 November to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Hitler's closing Czech universities and schools of higher learning. The demonstrations started with ceremonies held that afternoon at Charles University's campus in Prague's New Town in memory of ten students the Nazi regime had killed fifty years earlier in connection with anti-protectorate demonstrations. Now, in 1989, when nearly 15,000 demonstrators began to chant anti-communist slogans, Czech police forces surrounded the demonstrators and brutally attacked them. The rumor that one of the students had been killed was also encouraged. This false report provoked the students to huge protests, supported by their parents and soon even by many workers. Western

³⁹ Judt, *Postwar*, 616–17.; Berend, *Central and Eastern Europe*, 283.

⁴⁰ Kurt Biedenkopf, "Will Europe Stay Together?," *IWMpost*, no. 100 (January–March 2009): 14.

⁴¹ Berend, *Central and Eastern Europe*, 283.

journalists placed their cameras at the front of the crowd. Václav Havel returned from virtual house arrest in rural northern Bohemia on 19 November, whereupon he established the Civic Forum (*Občanské Forum*) with friends at a Prague theater and practically overnight became the focal point of the opposition movement. A group led by the historian Petr Pithart drew up the “Programmatic Principles of the Civic Forum”: 1: Rule of law; 2: Free elections; 3: Social justice; 4: A clean environment; 5: An educated people; 6: Prosperity; 7: Return to Europe.⁴²

Within a week, the entire Presidium of the Communist Party resigned. After a second week and some negotiations, Prime Minister Ladislav Adamec resigned. And after a third week, President Husák appointed a new government with a majority of non-communist ministers—and then he resigned as well. The new prime minister, Marián Čalfa, was still a party member, but Jiří Dienstbier of *Charta 77* became foreign minister, the Catholic lawyer of the Slovak Public Against Violence (VPN), Jan Čarnogurský, was named deputy prime minister, and Vladimír Kusý of the Civic Forum became information minister. Alexander Dubček tried to replace Husák as president, but because he still spoke of a Czechoslovak path to socialism, Dubček was considered unfit for this office. He was thus elected chairman of the Federal Assembly. The crowds in the streets of Prague demanded: “*Havel na hrad!*” (Havel to the Castle). Indeed, on 29 December 1989 a communist assembly elected Havel president of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.⁴³

Austria temporarily suspended visa requirements for Czechoslovak citizens, first until 17 December and then until the end of 1989. The citizens of Břeclav (Lundenburg) undertook a symbolically profound reconfiguration of spatial relationships by forming a human chain to the Austrian village of Reintal, a mere eight kilometers away, as part of a “Hands to Europe” event. Perhaps the grandest “mission” of all involved 150,000 citizens who set out from Bratislava on 10 December 1989. Following arrangements that had been made in advance by Public Against Violence (VPN) activists, most walked through Austrian customs and then proceeded happily along the Austrian bank of the Danube toward the small town of Hainburg, some fifteen kilometers away. On 9 and 10 December alone, a quarter million Czechs and Slovaks visited Austria; 100,000 of them went to Vienna. The city of Vienna invited Czechoslovak citizens to visit its museums free of charge and the Austrian railway company offered them discounts in order to do so. So many citizens wanted to travel to Austria that Czech and Slovak financial institutions ran out of banknotes for them. The organized border cross-

⁴² Václav Havel, *Fassen Sie sich bitte kurz. Gedanken und Erinnerungen zu Fragen von Karel Hviždala* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2007); Judt, *Postwar*, 618–19; Beáta Blehová, “Michail Gorbačev und der Fall des Kommunismus in der Tschechoslowakei,” in Wolfgang Mueller and Michael Portmann, eds., *Osteuropa vom Weltkrieg zur Wende* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007), 349–367.

⁴³ Jan Rychlík, *Rozpad Československa. Česko-slovenské vztahy 1989–1992* (Bratislava: AEP, 2002), 67–90; Judt, *Postwar*, 618–20.

ings as well as these individual excursions to Vienna were an appropriation of previously forbidden public space.⁴⁴

On 17 December 1989, the new Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Jiří Dienstbier and his Austrian colleague Mock symbolically opened the Iron Curtain by cutting the barbed wire between Austria and Czechoslovakia south of Znojmo (Znaim). With the Iron Curtain's fall, Austria's position on the periphery of the West was suddenly re-transformed into a central European position. The dramatic events in Eastern Europe between 1989 and 1991 finally allowed Austria to join the European Community.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ James Krapfl, "A Big Bang of Signifiers. Nineteen Eighty-Nine and the Theory of Revolution," paper presented at the conference "1989 Revolutions: Roots, Courses, and Legacies," Stanford University, 14–15 March 2008.

⁴⁵ Michael Gehler and Wolfram Kaiser, "Austria and Europe, 1923–2000. A Study in Ambivalence," in Rolf Steininger, Michael Gehler and Wolfram Kaiser, eds., *Austria in the Twentieth Century* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2002), 294–320; Gehler, *Österreichs Außenpolitik 2*, 605–56.