

IV. THE AFTERMATH, 1985–1991

“The content of n[eutrality] changed in every historical epoch according to the influence of economic, social, and political conditions of the given epoch, in particular the character of war.”
“Neitralitet,” in A. Ia. Vyshinskii (ed.), *Diplomaticheskii slovar' 2*, 1st ed. (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1950), 230–234, 230.

15. The End of the Cold War, European Integration, and the Obsolescence of the Special Relationship

The advent of Mikhail Gorbachev did not bring immediate change to international politics – at least none that was discernable to foreign observers. In his first years in power, the Soviet leader rather pursued limited goals such as improving the international climate, building mutual trust, stopping the nuclear arms race and torpedoing the American SDI project.¹ However, while the Soviet economic and societal crisis was obscured by Gorbachev's energetic personality and optimism, the seeds of ideas such as common principles of humanity and global interdependence were about to fundamentally alter international relations and contribute to the end of the Cold War. The decline in international tensions, as could be felt from 1987,² affected the small and neutral powers in two ways: On one hand, their maneuvering space increased; on the other, the attention that was given to the neutrals by the superpowers decreased.

Gorbachev, Austria's EC application, and the disintegration of the USSR

When President Kirchschräger traveled to Moscow to attend Konstantin Chernenko's funeral in 1985, he was received by Mikhail Gorbachev, who expressed his satisfaction with Austria's role in international politics, particularly détente.³ Despite such assurances, Austria was not important enough to be the first Western country visited by the new Soviet leader, who, like Brezhnev before him, went first to France. He consulted the French president François Mitterrand before his planned meeting in November with US president Ronald Reagan in Geneva for negotiations on arms' limitations. No breakthrough was achieved at the summit.

Internal repercussions in Austria over the debate concerning the role of President-elect Kurt Waldheim in the German *Wehrmacht* during the deportations and mass killings of Jews in Greece in World War II, and the rise of the FPÖ as a right-wing, anti-establishment and anti-immigrant movement under the leadership of Jörg Haider did not affect Soviet-Austrian relations – although both were noted in

¹ Archie Brown, "The Gorbachev Revolution and the End of the Cold War," in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War III: Endings* (Cambridge: University Press, 2010), 244–266.

² Anthony D'Agostino, *Gorbachev's Revolution, 1985–1991* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 117–118.

³ *Österreichisches Jahrbuch für internationale Politik* 2 (1985), 214.

the Kremlin. In the Soviet media, Vranitzky was depicted as “capable technocrat,” Haider as a “far right, openly pro-German nationalist,” a “multi-millionaire,” and the “leader of the neo-Nazis.”⁴ In the Waldheim affair, former Chancellor Kreisky, in 1986, warned the CPSU official Vadim Zagladin to be cautious in handling the case of the newly elected Austrian president⁵ (whom Kreisky himself had promoted for the position of a UN secretary general fifteen years earlier). When Waldheim, in 1990, asked Gorbachev for a meeting, the Soviet leader’s aide Anatolii Cherniaev recommended that he not be received.⁶ Nevertheless, the Soviet leadership, in contrast to the US administration’s decision to put the Austrian president on a “watch list,” did not publish any official statement concerning Waldheim and remained appreciative of his actions as Austrian foreign minister from 1968 to 1970 and the secretary general of the United Nations Organization from 1971 to 1982.

Soviet-Austrian bilateral political relations continued to be as cordial as they had ever been. When Sinowatz met Gorbachev in April 1986, both sides expressed full support for the Helsinki process. The “excellent and amicable” relations⁷ were also not strained by the Soviet reluctance to inform its neighbors of the dangerous effects of the nuclear catastrophe in Chernobyl. In the fall of 1988, an agreement on timely information in the case of nuclear accidents was signed, and a month later, a contract on the joint “Austromir” space mission was concluded.⁸ Sinowatz’ successor, Franz Vranitzky, underlined his approval of *perestroika* when he received his Soviet colleague Nikolai Ryzhkov in Vienna in 1987.⁹ Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze traveled to Vienna in November of 1986, January and March of 1987, and October of 1988; his Austrian counterpart, Alois Mock, returned the visit in September of 1988, and Vranitzky followed in October of 1988, accompanied by a delegation of no less than eighty representatives of Austrian companies. In a single year, 1988, six members of the Austrian government were received in Moscow.¹⁰

It soon became clear, however, that the more intense Soviet-Western negotiations became, the less important Austrian mediation or promotion of Soviet ideas was. The sinking geopolitical importance of Austria for the Kremlin was mirrored by the Soviet media, which in earlier decades had repeatedly praised Austria’s role in “peaceful coexistence” and *détente*, and from time to time had criticized certain aspects of Austrian policy. In the Gorbachev years, however, the media signaled its

⁴ Quoted in Lobova, “Die Moskauer Perzeption,” 124–125; Stifter, “Das politische Österreichbild,” 214.

⁵ Conversation Zagladin with Kreisky, 9 September 1986, in GF, 4840.

⁶ Cherniaev to Gorbachev, 11 November 1990, in GF, 2/1. I am grateful to Prof. Oliver Rathkolb for granting me access to his copy of this document.

⁷ *Österreichisches Jahrbuch für internationale Politik* 4 (1987), 179.

⁸ Zhiriakov, *Sovetskii Soiuz – Avstriia*, 154.

⁹ *Österreichisches Jahrbuch für internationale Politik* 4 (1987), 222.

¹⁰ *Außenpolitischer Bericht* (1988), 588.

lack of interest in Austria, and a growing de-ideologization could be noted. Most ideological assertions disappeared with regard to Austria, its social democracy and the “social partnership” were increasingly depicted positively, and its economy, social insurance and school system were even portrayed as promising models.¹¹

Bilateral meetings were increasingly shaped by an issue that had overshadowed Soviet-Austrian relations during the 1960s and that resurfaced in the late 1980s. When the conservative People’s Party again became part of a governing “grand coalition” with the social democrats in 1987, they advocated the country’s application for full membership in the European Community, albeit with reservations regarding the country’s neutrality. This option had been considered possible by certain legal experts since the 1960s, in particular by Michael Schweitzer.¹² Since article 223 and 224 of the EEC Treaty of 1957 contained a sort of neutrality clause that provided the possibility of a member to deviate, for reasons of national security, from the rules of the community as established by the treaty, some international law experts rejected the majority opinion of their colleagues that EEC membership and neutrality were incompatible.¹³ Moreover, Schweitzer and his colleague Waldemar Hummer stressed that the EC of the 1980s was not as supranational as the EEC of the early 1960s, which is why they considered a neutral’s membership in the EC possible. Among other facts and documents that served as evidence for the new standpoint, the lawyers cited, most ironically, the Soviet-Austrian trade agreement of October 1955, which mentioned the possibility that any of the contracting parties might conclude a customs union with a third country. With this new legal advice supporting the compatibility thesis in their hands, by 1989 the People’s Party’s leadership had managed to convince their reluctant coalition partner of the desirability of this option. The social democrats had moved in this direction only slowly. In 1987, the SPÖ chairman, Chancellor Vranitzky, had ruled out EC membership as incompatible with neutrality,¹⁴ thus following a decade-old Soviet (and, in fact, also Austrian) line of argumentation; by October 1988, in Moscow, he conceded that “as long as the two military-political blocs exist in Europe,” membership in the EC would violate neutrality.¹⁵ The chancellor spoke out against “rushing into” the community and pledged that the conservation of neutrality would be a prerequisite for Austria’s possible entry into the EC.¹⁶

¹¹ Stifter, “Das politische Österreichbild,” 53, 122; Lobova, “Die Moskauer Perzeption,” 116.

¹² Schweitzer, *Dauernde Neutralität*, 241–242, 246–247, 291–292.

¹³ Waldemar Hummer and Michael Schweitzer, *Österreich und die EWG: Neutralitätsrechtliche Beurteilung der Möglichkeit einer Dynamisierung des Verhältnisses zur EWG* (Vienna: Signum, 1987), 295.

¹⁴ *Österreichisches Jahrbuch für internationale Politik* 4 (1987), 178.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 5 (1988), 311–312.

¹⁶ Conversation Gorbachev with Vranitzky, 11 October 1988, in GF, 1/1. I am grateful to Prof. Oliver Rathkolb for granting me access to his copy of this document. Cf. Lobova, “Die Moskauer Perzeption,” 107.

However, in Moscow, the possibility of conserving neutrality when joining the EC was strongly questioned by many “orthodox” Soviet officials, who still considered the community to be the economic branch of NATO. This attitude was to be found among “old thinkers” in the Central Committee apparatus and the Soviet Foreign Ministry, including the head of the Third European Department, Aleksandr Bondarenko, whose department was responsible for German-speaking countries. The Soviet ambassador to Bonn, Iulii Kvitsinskii, stated at a party conference in 1988 that “more and more European states may begin to be sucked into the EEC, and via the EEC into NATO.”¹⁷ Nevertheless, the Soviet side, due to Gorbachev’s “new course” of reduced interference in foreign countries’ internal affairs, and particularly in consideration of the rapidly intensifying debate in Soviet think tanks on the correct attitude towards the community,¹⁸ did not rule out rapprochement in Austrian-EC relations completely. The Austrian ambassador Herbert Grubmayr reported that several informal groups in the Soviet Foreign Ministry had emerged, one even advocating Austria’s entry into the EC in order to render the organization less dominated by NATO countries and have Austria promote neutrality within it.¹⁹ In November 1987, the deputy director of the Institute for World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO) of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Vladimir Shenaev, told Austrian journalists that their country’s relation to the EC was frequently discussed in Moscow. The decision, Shenaev stated, had to be made by Austria itself, but the country had to retain its neutral status. As long as Austria’s integration was only “political and economical,” it was considered compatible with neutrality; only military integration was unacceptable.²⁰

This position was the most liberal stance that had yet been communicated, and some weeks later the Soviet ambassador in Austria, Gennadii Shikin, even felt the need to deny reports that his government was supporting Austria’s application for EC membership. He repeated his position of January 1987,²¹ namely, that the USSR understood Austria’s economic situation and its desire for rapprochement with the EC.²² But when considering the development of the EC towards political integration, full membership by Austria had been ruled out by the USSR. In May 1988, the new director of IMEMO, Evgenii Primakov, repeated that Austria’s entry into the EC would be “problematic with regard to neutrality.”²³ An even more critical position was reflected in two major academic studies in 1987 and 1988. Ivan Zhiri-

¹⁷ Quoted in Zubok, “The Soviet Attitude,” 42.

¹⁸ Mueller, *Die UdSSR und die europäische Integration*, 659.

¹⁹ Grubmayr, “In zwei Wochen gehst Du nach Moskau,” 147. This idea had been launched by Austrian circles in the late 1950s, but rejected by the USSR. See above, page 140.

²⁰ *Österreichisches Jahrbuch für internationale Politik* 4 (1987), 260.

²¹ Gehler, *Österreichs Außenpolitik*, 624–626.

²² *Österreichisches Jahrbuch für internationale Politik* 5 (1988), 251. Cf. Gerhard Kunnert, *Österreichs Weg in die Europäische Union* (Vienna: Österreichische Staatsdruckerei, 1993), 109.

²³ *Österreichisches Jahrbuch für internationale Politik* 5 (1988), 274.

akov assessed that economic relations with the EC would not be profitable for the Austrian economy and recommended *Osthandel*; a dissertation by Oleg Ermakov underlined that Austria's relations to the FRG had already reached an intensity that made it difficult for Austria to maintain sovereignty and neutrality, and that integration into the EC would render this completely impossible.²⁴

Against this background, the Soviet reaction during Vranitzky's visit to Moscow in October of 1988 was awaited with great interest. Before the trip, *Izvestiia* on 31 August and *Trud* on 25 September had set an ambivalent tone by, on one hand, reporting on Austrian popular doubts about their leaders' "spookily" naive attitude towards the EC, and, on the other, underlining the difference between the EC and NATO and expressing understanding for Austria's ambitions.²⁵ Still in September, Shevardnadze had warned his Austrian counterpart Alois Mock in Moscow that Austria joining the EC might tilt the balance of forces in Europe.²⁶ In his conversation with Vranitzky on 11 October, Gorbachev acknowledged that economic integration was an objective process. However, he opined that it was unavoidable for integration not to affect the political sphere and therefore it would make it impossible for Austria to observe neutrality. If Austria were to stay out of the EC, Gorbachev stated, its importance as a neutral country would grow.²⁷ When the Soviet leader questioned the concept of "limited sovereignty" within the EC, Vranitzky – according to the Soviet protocol – pledged that Austria would counteract any attempts at achieving closer military-political or economic structures in Western Europe. If this was meant sincerely, it clearly contradicted the EC's goal, outlined in the 1957 Rome Treaty, to form an "ever closer union." In any case, given the traditional Soviet aversion to "closed Western blocs," this pledge must have sounded good in Soviet ears. While Gorbachev did not exert any pressure, Prime Minister Ryzhkov, in his talk with Vranitzky, made it clear that Austria's admission into the EC would be perceived by the USSR as a violation of neutrality.²⁸

Although it had not succeeded in convincing the Soviet side of its standpoint (if it had tried at all), in the summer of 1989 the Austrian government sent a letter to Brussels asking for admission into the EC while reserving its neutrality. Some EC member states' leaders that considered the creation of the European Economic Area a priority and Austrian neutrality an impediment for the EC's common foreign and security policy were not pleased at all. Belgian foreign minister Mark Eyskens

²⁴ I. Zhiriakov, "Sovetsko-Avstriiskie otnosheniia i problema bezopasnosti i sotrudnichestva v Evrope 1945–1986" (PhD Thesis, Moscow, 1987), 50; O. Ermakov, "Vneshniaia politika Avstrii i razvitie sovetsko-avstriiskikh otnoshenii v 80ye gody" (PhD Thesis, Moscow, 1988), 17.

²⁵ Stifter, "Das politische Österreichbild," 101–102.

²⁶ *Österreichisches Jahrbuch für internationale Politik* 5 (1988), 304.

²⁷ Conversation Gorbachev with Vranitzky, 11 October 1988, in GF, 1/1.

²⁸ Gehler, *Österreichs Außenpolitik*, 624–626, 587, 617–619. Cf. Otto Klambauer, *Der Kalte Krieg in Österreich: Vom Dritten Mann zum Fall des Eisernen Vorhanges* (Vienna: Ueberreuter, 2000), 166.

even proposed discussing Austria's neutrality and admission into the EC with the Soviet Union – thus implicitly questioning the country's sovereignty and maturity as a foreign-policy actor. The Soviet position also remained unchanged. An aide-mémoire, handed over to the Austrian government by the Soviet ambassador on 20 August, stated that the participation of a neutral state in a Union “that will pursue a common foreign and security policy [...] would lead to a loss of real possibilities to implement its neutral policy,” policies to which Austria continued to be obliged.²⁹ While praising Austrian neutrality as the “most precious political asset the republic owns” and a “major factor for stability and mutual trust in Europe,” the Soviet memorandum expressed “concern” about Austria's application for EC membership. Moreover, the Soviet side underlined its hope that Austria would stick to earlier commitments as well as, *if the conservation of the country's neutrality within the EC turned out to be impossible*, that the Viennese government would give up its integration efforts. This moderate formulation implied that, under certain conditions, neutrality and EC membership might be compatible, thus marking a return to Shenaev's relatively liberal position of 1987.

The dismissive stance of both the USSR and the EC eased once the dimensions of the changes of 1989 had become clear. On 27 June 1989, Alois Mock and his Hungarian counterpart Gyula Horn cut a hole in the barbed wire at the Austro-Hungarian border that had been part of the Iron Curtain between Eastern and Western Europe. The opening of the border allowed thousands of East Germans to flee their country to the West, triggering the breakdown of the communist regimes in East Berlin, then Prague, and then of the Eastern bloc altogether.³⁰ Following the opening of the Berlin Wall in November and the fall of the communist regime in Prague, in December the fence at the Austro-Czech border was also cut.

It took a bit of time for the Ballhausplatz to realize that not only the Iron Curtain, but also a window of opportunity for Austria had opened. On 27 October 1989, the astonished Ambassador Grubmayr communicated to Vienna a declaration made by Gorbachev in Helsinki, in which it had been stated that all countries were entitled to decide independently which international organizations they wanted to join. Grubmayr felt that, from now on, this could serve as a point for defending Austria's EC ambitions.³¹

Although some hardliners in the Soviet Foreign Ministry and Central Committee apparatus feigned ignorance of Gorbachev's statement, such an Austrian strat-

²⁹ Soviet aide-mémoire to the Austrian government, 10 August 1989, in Michael Gehler, *Österreichs Weg in die Europäische Union* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2009), 285–287.

³⁰ On the revolutions of 1989, see Timothy Garton Ash, *We the People: The Revolutions of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin, and Prague* (Cambridge: Granta Books, 1990); Jacques Levesque, *The Enigma of 1989: The USSR and the Liberation of Eastern Europe*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

³¹ The author's interview with Ambassador Grubmayr, 15 July 2009. Cf. Grubmayr, “Streiflichter aus meiner Moskauer Zeit,” 270.

egy turned out to be unnecessary. Three reasons for this change can be extrapolated: Gorbachev realized that the USSR did not have the power to prevent Austria from joining the EC; the Soviet attitude towards the EC had changed in 1988 towards cooperation; and the Kremlin began to appreciate the value of having a reliable neutral country in the EC. When the social democrat and former foreign minister Erwin Lanc told Zagladin in January of 1990 that Austria could not join the EC since this would hamper neutrality,³² he was repeating an argument that even the Soviet leader himself was about to abandon. Lanc also reproduced the ancient Soviet propaganda thesis that the EC, a “child of the Cold War,” had been founded “to tie Europe to NATO.” In contrast to this type of Austrian statement, the director of the Institute for European Studies of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Vitalii Zhurkin, who came to Vienna for a lecture in May 1990, declared that the good relations between Austria and the USSR would be the basis for Soviet consent of Austria’s integration into the EC.³³

However, it was only after the Soviet prime minister, Valentin Pavlov (who later joined the communist putsch against Gorbachev), had reminded Austria in June 1991 of its obligation to neutrality and after the putsch itself that the Soviet president told Vranitzky on 30 September 1991: “I see this step [i.e. Austria’s entrance into the EC] as a sovereign step of Austria – as a normal element of the European process. You can freely decide yourselves what and when you want it.”³⁴ During the conversation, the Austrian chancellor had merely informed Gorbachev about the start of the Austrian-EC negotiations on full membership without asking for Soviet approval.³⁵ As Vranitzky declared afterwards, the Soviet-Austrian talks, in contrast to earlier meetings, had not touched on neutrality at all. A year earlier, in November 1990, Austria had already used the window of opportunity to declare certain articles of the Austrian state treaty regarding defense (among others, the missile ban) obsolete – after the 2+4 Treaty had lifted similar restrictions on Germany, and Finland had also unilaterally declared certain provisions of its peace treaty obsolete. None of the signatory powers rejected this move.³⁶

³² Conversation Zagladin with Lanc, 22 January 1990, in GF, 7250.

³³ *Österreichisches Jahrbuch für internationale Politik* 7 (1990), 131.

³⁴ Quoted in Klambauer, *Der Kalte Krieg*, 190. Only parts of the Soviet protocol have been released to date. Cf. Conversation Gorbachev with Vranitzky, 30 September 1991, in GF, 1/1. I am grateful to Prof. Oliver Rathkolb for granting me access to his copy of this document. See also Bauer, *Russische Umbrüche*, 68.

³⁵ Letter Friedrich Bauer to the author, 7 September 2009. Cf. the Austrian protocol of the Conversation Gorbachev with Vranitzky, Austrian embassy Moscow to Austrian MFA, Z. 3.5/49-A/91, 4 October 1991. I am grateful to Ambassador Bauer for granting me access to his copy of this document.

³⁶ Helmut Türk, “Die Wende 1989/90 und die Obsoleterklärung einiger Artikel des Staatsvertrages,” in Arnold Suppan, Gerald Stourzh, and Wolfgang Mueller (eds.), *The Austrian State Treaty 1955: International Strategy, Legal Relevance, National Identity* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen

In the meantime, the disintegration and economic crisis of the Soviet Union had become apparent. In February 1990, Peter Jankowitsch, the former Austrian foreign minister, after a visit to Moscow and talks with members of the CPSU central committee and with the opposition, expressed concern “about the growing tensions within the Soviet Union,”³⁷ and in May, after the Lithuanian declaration of independence, Foreign Minister Alois Mock even considered the situation in the USSR to be dangerous. The Soviet crackdown on the Baltic independence movements³⁸ in January 1991 was criticized only mildly: Vranitzky stated he was convinced that Gorbachev, who had earned historic recognition for “fighting inhumane communist structures,” was not changing his mind and “marching in the old direction,” and Mock said that Gorbachev had obviously made the decision under pressure by hardliners and the military.³⁹ When Soviet violence and human rights violations in the Baltics continued, the Austrian ambassador to Moscow was ordered to ask the Soviet government for an explanation.

The uncertain situation within the USSR was reflected in public opinion polls in Austria that were conducted from November 1990 to January 1991 among 2,000 Austrian citizens: 15 percent believed that the Soviet Union would soon turn into a liberal democracy, whereas 47 percent expected the current unstable situation to continue; 26 percent did not believe that the Union would be preserved, but 8 percent feared a return to authoritarianism in Russia.⁴⁰ Only 7 percent of all respondents were confident that the Soviet Union would be able to transform into a functioning market economy without Western help, 73 percent believed that Western assistance would be crucial, and 15 percent expected that the transformation would fail. The percentage of those who believed that the Soviet position in world politics would remain the same, and those who believed that it would lose in importance was 39 each.

After the communist putsch in Moscow in August 1991,⁴¹ Waldheim, Vranitzky, and Mock signaled their concern and expressed their hope that all democratic and political achievements within the USSR and Europe would be preserved. The Austrian government’s declaration of 21 August, however, proved to be a grave misjudgment. In the two days that had passed since the overthrow, the Russian

Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2005), 821–837. During his visit to Vienna in October 1990, Eduard Shevardnadze, the Soviet foreign minister, had given green light for the Austrian initiative.

³⁷ *Österreichisches Jahrbuch für internationale Politik* 7 (1990), 112.

³⁸ Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 279–283. On the Western reaction, see Kristina Spohr Readman, “Between political rhetoric and realpolitik calculations: Western diplomacy and the Baltic independence struggle in the Cold War endgame,” in *Cold War History* 6, no. 1 (2006), 1–42.

³⁹ *Österreichisches Jahrbuch für internationale Politik* 8 (1991), 70–71, 76.

⁴⁰ Hanspeter Neuhold and Paul Luif (eds.), *Das außenpolitische Bewusstsein der Österreicher: Aktuelle internationale Probleme im Spiegel der Meinungsforschung* (Vienna: Braumüller, 1992), 202–203; 364; see also Waltraut Urban, “Die Veränderungen in Osteuropa,” *ibid.*, 1–26.

⁴¹ On the putsch, see John B. Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Princeton: University Press, 1993), 186–255.

government and the international community had, after some hesitation, reacted resolutely: Russian president Boris El'tsin's call for a general strike against the usurpers was followed by hundreds of thousands of Russians; US president George Bush expressed support for El'tsin and declared that the United States still regarded Gorbachev the legal and legitimate head of state; the EC ministers froze all nonhumanitarian economic aid for the USSR; and demonstrators in support of democracy in the USSR gathered in front of the Soviet embassy in Vienna. In contrast, the Austrian coalition spoke out against "sterile agitation" and called on the "Soviet leadership" to solve all problems strictly by nonviolent means and to respect international obligations.⁴² The wording of the declaration, addressing the putschists as new "leadership" and avoiding any judgment of the putsch, was harshly criticized by the oppositional FPÖ and Green parties as an act of "anticipatory obedience." The Austrian declaration of 21 August was even more embarrassing in view of the fact that El'tsin as well as the leading Western powers had already condemned the putsch two days earlier.

Although the putsch disintegrated after three days and Gorbachev returned to power on 22 August (which Vranitzky called the happiest day of the year), the breakup of the USSR could not be stopped. On 22 December, Alois Mock acknowledged that the formation of the Community of Independent States (CIS) was an important step. Mikhail Gorbachev, who would resign as Soviet president three days later, was praised for having achieved the generally peaceful dissolution of the Eastern bloc and transformation of the USSR.

Humanitarian aid and economic relations

A month earlier, Vranitzky had received the special envoy of Russian president El'tsin, Sergei Stankevich, and criticized the reluctant stance of the biggest Western economies to financially support the Soviet Union. Among Western leaders, Gorbachev's unclear economic strategy indeed had left the impression that the USSR would turn out a bottomless pit. However, it was wrong, Vranitzky stated, to invite Gorbachev to the G7 session in London in July and then pose the introduction of capitalism as a precondition for Western help. The chancellor assured Stankevich that Austria would be ready if Russia needed food.⁴³ An opinion poll revealed that 25 percent of the Austrians favored helping Russia as actively as possible; 23 percent were not sure, while 40 percent wanted to leave such efforts to the EC.⁴⁴ Despite this high percentage of reluctant persons in this poll, Austrians had donated five billion schillings for the victims of a major earthquake in Armenia in December 1988. The disaster had led to a wave of Western help for the Soviet population

⁴² *Wiener Zeitung*, 20 and 21 August 1991, 1–2.

⁴³ *Österreichisches Jahrbuch für internationale Politik* 8 (1991), 109.

⁴⁴ Gehler, *Österreichs Außenpolitik*, 593.

– something that was only too readily forgotten in Russia, when in the 1990s and 2000s, the notion of Western hostility was again spread by the official media. A village built by the Austrian Red Cross in Leninakan was inaugurated by Josef Riegler in 1990. In April 1991, the Austrian vice-chancellor, in Minsk, handed over fifty million schillings for victims of the Chernobyl disaster.⁴⁵

In the economic sphere, the Gorbachev era had seen a steady decline of Soviet-Austrian relations. Trade fell from 32.5 billion schillings in 1985 to 17 billion in 1987, while the Austrian deficit in bilateral trade turned quickly into a Soviet one. A major cause was the economic crisis in the Soviet Union and sinking energy prices. From 1980 to 1988, the prices of oil and natural gas fell by 58 and 41 percent respectively. In 1981, the value of Soviet exports to Austria decreased by 19 percent, in 1986 even by 30 percent.⁴⁶ The Soviet share in Austrian exports fell from its all-time high of 6.2 percent in 1981 to 3.8 percent in 1985 to 1.9 percent in 1991, in Austrian imports, from 4.4 percent to 1.6 percent.⁴⁷ By 1989, the Soviet debt to Austria had risen to 44.3 billion schillings (making Austria the fifth-largest foreign creditor after West Germany, Japan, Italy, and France⁴⁸), and Austria granted the USSR a loan of one billion schillings.⁴⁹ The structure of Soviet-Austrian trade remained relatively unchanged, with Soviet deliveries of natural gas and orders of Austrian machinery prevailing.

Table 6: Soviet-Austrian trade 1985–1990

	Austrian exports	Change from previous year	Share of Soviet imports	Soviet exports	Change from previous year	Share of Austrian imports	Balance
1985	13,409.9	−4.9	1.2	19,150.9	−2.4	4.4	−5,741.0
1986	10,483.1	−21.8	1.3	12,497.0	−34.7	3.1	−2,013.9
1987	8,503.1	−18.9	1.0	8,501.3	−32.0	2.1	1.8
1988	11,022.2	29.6	1.1	8,633.1	1.6	1.9	2,389.1
1989	11,473.4	4.1	1.4	8,522.3	−1.3	1.7	2,951.1
1990	10,075.1	−12.2	1.6	10,242.2	20.2	1.8	−167.1

Source: Butschek, *Statistische Reihen; Vneshniaia togovlia*

Exports in millions of Austrian schillings; changes and shares in percent.

Nonetheless, the era saw a rapid rise in the number of joint ventures. The first such venture was launched in the presence of Austrian minister of trade Robert Graf in 1987 and oversaw the construction of a paper mill by Voith and a Soviet

⁴⁵ *Außenpolitischer Bericht* (1991), 681.

⁴⁶ Resch, “Der österreichische Osthandel,” 550.

⁴⁷ Butschek, *Statistische Reihen*.

⁴⁸ Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 259.

⁴⁹ *Außenpolitischer Bericht* (1989), 625.

company.⁵⁰ The next year, fifteen joint ventures were registered, in 1989 sixty-nine, and in 1991 approximately 250.⁵¹ Among Austrian companies involved were the producer of trucks, Steyr-Daimler-Puch, and VOEST-Alpine Industrieanlagenbau, which in 1988 received a Soviet order for expanding the metallurgical plant of Zhlobin in the Belarus SSR. There were collaborative projects on biotechnology, information and communication technology, and protection of the environment. At least fourteen projects included construction on Soviet soil, such as a winter sports resort built by Austrian companies in Gudauri, Georgia.

Human contacts, scientific and cultural cooperation

In the scientific, cultural, and humanitarian sphere, cooperation flourished during the Gorbachev years. In July 1990, Alois Mock, at the opening of a diplomacy seminar in Salzburg, praised the Soviet leader, without whom the generally peaceful changes in East-West relations and in Eastern Europe would not have been possible. Exchanges of teachers and students were intensified. In June 1989, pupils from Moscow stayed in Vienna for a number of weeks, living and going to school with Austrian colleagues, and on the Austrian side, the prestigious Schottengymnasium high school participated in the exchange by sending some of its students to Moscow.⁵² The following year, eighty pupils from Lithuania visited Austria, while young athletes from Georgia were coached at a training camp in Tyrol.⁵³ After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, many of these exchange programs were discontinued and young people were deprived of this channel for meeting foreign colleagues and broadening their mental horizons. An excellent means of reducing narrow nationalist views was lost.

The newly established interchurch relations remained uneasy. Even after visits by the archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal Franz König, to Moscow in 1980 and 1988 and his initiatives to foster dialog by means of his Vienna-based Pro Oriente Forum, founded in 1964 for this very purpose, the Russian-Orthodox Church remained reserved.⁵⁴ The Armenian Church, however, developed cordial relations to the Catholics.

In 1987 and 1990, new agreements on cultural cooperation were signed. An exhibit in Moscow of Austrian *fin-de-siècle* paintings, including Gustav Klimt's "The Kiss," attracted 150,000 visitors,⁵⁵ an Austrian movie festival in the Soviet capital

⁵⁰ *Österreichisches Jahrbuch für internationale Politik* 4 (1987), 248.

⁵¹ Zhiriakov, *Sovetskii Soiuz – Avstriia*, 158; *Außenpolitischer Bericht* (1991), 683.

⁵² *Außenpolitischer Bericht* (1989), 626.

⁵³ Zhiriakov, *Sovetskii Soiuz – Avstriia*, 162.

⁵⁴ Hinteregger, "Erinnerungen an Moskau," 254–256. König's second trip had been strongly supported by Bruno Kreisky in his conversation with Gorbachev's aide Zagladin. *Conversation Zagladin with Kreisky*, 9 September 1986, in GF, 4840.

⁵⁵ *Außenpolitischer Bericht* (1990), 634.

more than 300,000.⁵⁶ When in 1988, the performance in Moscow of the popular Austrian folk-music show “Musikantenstadt” was broadcast throughout the USSR on television, it was watched by millions of Soviet citizens. Later that year, the talk show “Café Central” was also televised from Moscow. The most spectacular scientific collaboration was the Austromir program, which started in October 1991. Austrian cosmonauts Clemens Lothaller and Franz Viehböck participated in a Soviet space flight project and conducted several tests, some of them with Austrian equipment. The Austromir cooperation, which had been agreed upon during Vranitzky’s 1988 visit to the USSR, had been preceded by bilateral cooperation in the “Vega” space project. Austria was the first and only Western country to participate in such a Soviet space flight program, and Austromir became the last major scientific cooperation between Austria and the USSR.

* * *

The end of the Cold War had caused a major change in the international arena: The superpowers intensified their direct contacts, the Soviet bloc disappeared, a reunified Germany emerged as a player on the European field, the former Soviet satellites demanded entrance into NATO and the EC, and talks of a “unification of Europe” became frequent. In this environment, the role of neutral mediators sank. In the Austrian case, this sea change led not only to a loss of mediatory importance but also to a fundamental change of policy: the end of respecting Soviet interpretations of neutrality and the decision to join the European Community.

The following reinterpretation of Austria’s neutrality became more visible in 1990–91 with the measures taken by the United Nations in response to the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. The right for transporting military equipment and for overflights was granted to the US-led coalition and the ban on such transports was lifted for UN operations.⁵⁷ In addition, Austria declared the missile-ban resulting from the state treaty obsolete. All these steps marked a sharp deviation from the hitherto valid Verdross Doctrine of comprehensive neutrality and the advent of what experts later christened the “Avocado Doctrine” – the reduction of neutrality “to its hard core.”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid. (1986), 641.

⁵⁷ Manfred Rotter, “Von der integralen zur differentiellen Neutralität,” in *Europäische Rundschau* 19, no. 3 (1991), 23–36; Gehler, *Finis Neutralität*, 28.

⁵⁸ Cede, “Österreichs Neutralität und Sicherheitspolitik,” 143.

“Thus it will always happen that he who is not your friend will demand your neutrality, whilst he who is your friend will entreat you to declare yourself with arms.” Nicolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, translated by W. K. Marriott (1515, 1908), chapter xxi.

