

## **"Experiencing a Nasty Fall from Grace..."**

### **Austria's Image in the U.S. after the Formation of the New ÖVP/FPÖ Government**

#### **I. The Context: Austria's Postwar Image**

It was one of the distinct characteristics of Austria's neutralist *mentalité* during the Cold War that the country's self-perception, especially during Kreisky's years in power, was that of the "island of the blessed." On the one hand, economic prosperity, an all-encompassing welfare system, and Austria's unique neutral position between the blocs have turned most Austrians into self-absorbed *isolationists* enormously pleased with themselves. On the other hand, Austria's social peace and low unemployment rates, engendered by the complex and highly statist Austrocorporatist system, also produced a perception in the world of Austria as a model small republic.

Austria's postwar image among U.S. policy elites was formed by the early Cold War struggle. In 1955 the Austrian State Treaty brought an end to the end of the endless four-power occupation. The image of Austria in the U.S. print media as "heroes of the Cold War" began to recede. In the early 1950's the threat of Communist coups made Austria vulnerable to be partitioned. American geopolitics considered Austria, along with divided Germany, as crucial players in the struggle against Communism on the frontlines of the Cold War. Austrians were admired for having patiently suffered the oppressive Soviet occupation regime for so long. During the occupation, Americans often did not closely distinguish between Germany and Austria. In fact it was one of the greatest challenges of Austrian diplomats in Washington to try to make the American public understand the vital differences between liberated Austria and defeated Germany.

From the perspective of *Washington policy makers*, after 1955, after a neutralized Austria had been saved for the West, it became a normal country and was downgraded on the list of U.S. Cold War priorities. Maybe the clearest official representation of the decreasing importance of Austria in U.S. Cold War priorities is the fact that in the official State Department documentation on U.S. foreign policy, the impressive volumes of the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series, until 1960 Austria was still coupled with Germany. In the 1961-63 volume Austria for the first time was placed (downgraded?) in the Eastern European region. Ever since John Foster Dulles, Washington tended to watch Austria's active neutrality policy suspiciously as fence-sitting between East and West (is the origins of the neutralist "*Trittbrettfahrer*" metaphor?). Kreisky's iconoclastic Middle Eastern policies in the 1970's often met hostility, especially among Jewish Americans.

In the U.S., Austria's *popular image* after World War II was largely defined by Hollywood. On the one hand there was seedy and corrupt Vienna in the four-power postwar occupation of the *Third Men*; on the other hand there was the kitschy family saga of the *Sound of Music*, replete with Salzburg's beautiful landscape and music, yet with a darker underside of Nazism raising its ugly head in prewar Salzburg. When the occupation ended in 1955 and Austria gained neutrality (one of the few miraculous stories of the Cold War), Austria's dark past was quickly forgotten and a superficial 5-M image of Mountains, Music, Mozart, Metternich, Maria Theresa came

to prevail in the U.S. (the Austrian Cultural Institute in New York concluded this from media surveys in the early 1980's). The Nazis in the popular TV series *Hogan's Heroes* were Germans not Austrians. Letters to major newspapers from Jewish refugees that had fled Vienna in 1938, reminding the American public about Austrians' unique contributions to the Holocaust, became rare (they were not in 1946).

The honeymoon of this superficial but positive image of Austria began to collapse in the mid-1980s with the election of Kurt Waldheim as president. Tendentious American newspaper reporting led many Americans to believe that he had been a "Nazi." Waldheim came to symbolize Austria's unmastered World War II past.

Domestic and international sea changes also contributed to the change of Austria's image in the world. *Domestically*, the Waldheim affair of 1986 forced Austrians to begin to reveal the skeletons in the closet of their World War II past. During the commemorative year of 1988 (50 Years after the Anschluss) the debate about the Austrian contribution to Nazi war crimes was in full swing. Austrians could no longer hide behind the half truths of the state doctrines of both having been "Hitler's first victim" in 1938 and a nation of resistance fighters during the war. The taboos of postwar "coalition history" imploded and the dark history of Austrian World War II perpetrators pried open and revealed by historians. The public (along with some government official still wed to the "victim's myth) resented this breaking of taboos and attacked the messengers of bad tidings as "*Nestbeschmutzer*." These polemical debates further intensified during the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* in the second half of the 1990s. One of the last taboos -- the myth of "the good Wehrmacht" soldiers -- was unraveled too and crimes of Austrian Wehrmacht soldiers came under serious scrutiny too. The debate over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* in and of itself became a crucial turning point in Austrian World War II memory. However, this debate was hardly registered by the U.S. public and did not soil the Austrian image there.

These transformations in historical memory ran parallel to a sea change in Austria's political system. The old two-and-a-half party system was replaced with a fickle new five party system, in which the new populist FPÖ under Jörg Haider was ascendant. A new and much more volatile party system emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. The iron rule of the old "grand coalition" ÖVP-SPÖ power cartel was increasingly challenged and finally collapsed (probably once and for all) in the October election of 1999. Throughout these years the effort to master Austria's World War II past has been one of the major underlying issues in reshaping Austrian politics ever since the fiasco of the Waldheim election in 1986, which led to the collapse of Austria's cherished "*Insel der Seligen*" image. Is Austria's image in the world now that of a "*nasty little amnesiac Alpine redoubt full of unreconstructed neo-Nazi xenophobes*" {emphasis added}, as Tony Judd has recently summarized the view of French commentators?

*Internationally*, with the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and the Soviet Empire in Eastern Europe, the bipolar Cold War international system caved in as well. A new multilateral international system emerged, with a strengthened European player by way of strengthening EU-integration. *Globalization* and heightened competition have come to define the new high tech word economy. Austria joined the European Union in 1995. In terms of national security, "the peculiar Cold War cocoon of [Austrian] neutrality" has become obsolete. Austrians' highly emotional and nostalgic attachment to neutrality (some 70 percent still have been supporting it) is clearly related to their "island of the blessed" self-perception and continues to retain enormous importance for *Austrian identity*. With the collapse of the Iron Curtain Austria moved geographically away from the periphery of Western Europe back into Central Europe and lost its special status of Cold War neutral. The winds of NATO and EU Eastern expansion have been buffeting Austria ever since the end of the Cold

War. Both intense partisan disagreement and large public infatuation with neutrality have been major obstacles to resolving the issue of finding an acceptable framework for its future national security. The current class of the Austrian political elite has abandoned the country's national security by abandoning the firm commitment of Austria's "founding fathers." For the Figls and Grubers the only lesson from the *Anschluss* was that Austria should never rely on outside forces again for the preservation of her national independence – Austria had to put up at least a symbolic resistance against future aggressors. Clearly, Austria's cherished "free rider" status will not be acceptable much longer to the national community and her poorer neighbors to the East who have recently joined NATO..

## II. The Case Study: The Reaction of the American Press to the New Austrian ÖVP-FPÖ Coalition Government

But all this is well-known to observers of the international scene. The issue here is how these domestic and international changes have transformed the international image of Austria, particularly after the recent election and the new ÖVP-FPÖ coalition government was formed in late January/early February 2000. How is Austria's image faring at the beginning of the new millennium? Obviously a short analysis like this can only suggest some trends. It is too early for firm conclusions. Mountains have been published in the American and international news media about Austria recently. No individual should be so presumptuous to think he could cover all this material. What can be done is to dare a few hypotheses, in this case based on observations of American media, based on scattered readings and cocked ears. Obviously, since "*The Media are American*" (J. Tunstall), trends in the American media and their influence on Austria's image abroad are significant in the formation of international public opinion, at least elite opinion. Any analysis about American public opinion formation – and that is the analytical tool applied here to assess the formation of specific images of a country in the U.S. – needs to operate within a formal structure.

Leading historians of American public opinion on foreign affairs issues have posited (based on social science methodology) that only about 15 percent of Americans are interested in public affairs (including foreign policy). They usually take their cues from the 1 or 2 percent of well-informed "*opinion leaders*." In other words, the cues and messages that these "opinion leaders" in the Washington national news media, elite think tanks, high brow journals like *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, or the *New York Review of Books*, various regional Councils on Foreign Relations and elite universities send out into the country, usually have an inordinate influence in shaping American popular opinion. Therefore a brief analysis of such opinion leaders in the national U.S. print media should be of considerable help to hypothesize on the trends of U.S. popular opinion formation and their influence on shaping the American image of Austria after this recent election and government formation. There are other factors that might help to refine these trends in public opinion formation. We can only briefly touch in passing on *polls*, a possible *Austrian lobby* in the U.S. that might help shape Austria's image in the U.S. in times of trouble through letter writing campaigns, discussions etc., and the views of influential American policy-making institutions like *Congress* or the *State Department* as well as new ways of communicating political views through the *internet*.

**Print Media Analysis:** Three prominent themes have dominated American print media coverage after the formation of the ÖVP-FPÖ government: 1) The character of Jörg Haider and his Party's qualification to serve as a coalition partner in a national government; 2) the politically questionable but morally correct EU response to the new Austrian government; 3) Austria's postwar failure to master her World War II record.

1. *Haider and the FPÖ*: If Haider would sue every American news organization that explicitly or implicitly called him a "fascist", he would have to hire the largest New York law firms. Not only would he get nowhere with such legal intimidation strategies due to the nature of American First Amendment rights, but even a man of his considerable personal fortunes would go broke in the process. Therefore he only intimidates critics in Austria where the law (and now the Minister of Justice) seem to be on his side. The left *New Statesman* cited the European Parliament's characterization of "yuppie fascist"; the left-liberal *New Republic* averred he was "slick and sickening fascist" – his was a "winking fascism, which is the only sort of fascism that can prosper after Hitler." Mainstream *Time* magazine asked the more rhetorical question whether he was "merely a brash, bungee-jumping populist politician—or is he a racist an apologist for aspects of Nazism.?" Yet discerning journalism also stressed that "Haider has never been a member of the neo-Nazi movement" and that he has never spouted anti-semitic remarks. The prominent American political scientist Andrei Markovits seems to be the only voice who sees Haider playing to the galleries of Austrians' "growing anti-semitism." From the very beginning of American reportage has been nigh unanimous in characterizing Haider and his Party as a "right wing populist." Only few publications succumbed to the temptation of identifying the new business class in Austria and Haider's appeal among this group as a "neo-Thatcherite" advocate of privatization. News magazine reportage was generally more circumspect than the initial coverage of daily newspapers, who often described the Freedom Party as "far-right."

Haider's rabid anti-immigration stance was the most prominent political platform of the FPÖ that was uniformly cited as characterizing this party as one on the "far right" of the political spectrum. In their xenophobic positions Haider are seen as those of the FPÖ and vice versa. Here the FPÖ comes closest to be portrayed as a "*Führer* party" totally beholden to Haider's personal platform. Most of the initial reports from Vienna characterized Haider's movement as "xenophobic." The more circumspect reportage of news magazines, however, usually noted that Austria was by no means alone in Europe in this rigid anti-immigration stance; it was rather a common phenomenon. The "discontent" over immigrant workers who are causing "unemployment and economic insecurity," analyzed the respected left *The Nation*, is being as an "irrational yet catchy argument" by Christoph Blocher in Switzerland and Umberto Bossi's League in Italy and most of the right wing populists in Europe. The sentiment of severe immigration restrictions was also popular in the Pete Wilson wing of the Republican Party in the U.S., argues Anne Applebaum in *The Weekly Standard*. It had already been practised by Austria's Socialist Interior minister Karl Schögl in Victor Klima's government, who had brought immigration in Austria "to a trickle," avers *In These Times*.

The more time reporters spent in investigating Europe's xenophobic mood and broad-based anti-immigration public opinion (one third of respondents to a Europe-wide poll conducted by the European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia described themselves as "quite" or "very" racist), the more they began to differentiate and consider this to be not only Austria's but Europe's biggest political challenge of the future. This is particularly the case when seen against the larger backdrop of globalization and global migration patterns. In one of the most perceptive comments penned on xenophobia in Europe, historian Mark Mazower argued that with Haider's FPÖ entry into the government, "Alpine xenophobia, with its deep fear of the chaos of urban culture and the proliferating impurities of modernity, has entered the bloodstream of [Austrian] national politics." But then he quickly adds the lesson of this for Europe at large: "The real problem in Europe today is not the specter of totalitarianism but the realities of democracy.. So long as xenophobia and anti-immigration sentiments are rife, the parties that cater to these impulses will do well." The *St. Petersburg Times* editorialized in a similar vein on "Austria's telegenic racist":

"The *gentrification of intolerance* [emphasis added] can be seen in the anti-immigration platforms of the Conservative Party in Britain, the new government in Italy, sections of the Christian Democrats in Germany and throughout the Balkans – which hardly need any encouragement. Xenophobia and ethnic hatred are also flaring up in the former Soviet Union, where religious or linguistic minorities are habitually discriminated against."

One can already come to a partial conclusion on the operating style of American media at this point, particularly when it comes to the sensationalist fast-living media hype of today. The ground rule is that the bigger the pressure for instant reportage – the more superficial the coverage. Television sound-bites champion emotional coverage. The CNN and CBS camera crews and reporters descended on Vienna and reported the bare facts of the new government. CBS evening news ran some old World War II footage of Nazis marching in Vienna to emotionally color its reports. For expertise a few Austrian academics were interviewed who spoke decent English, often from the left and favorable to the Socialists who had just lost power. The tabloids rely on wire services and present the facts emotionally charged like the news channels. The major national newspapers have not regular correspondents in Vienna (or any capitals of smaller European countries for that matter) any longer. Usually they send their Berlin bureau chiefs or reporters from other European bureaus. Roger Cohen of the *New York Times* and William Drozdiak of the *Washington Post* stayed for a few days and therefore were capable of more substantive reporting. The problem with the cable reports and the prominent dailies is that they are the "map makers" of American public opinion, often reinforcing existing stereotypes (eg. Waldheim = Nazi, Haider = Nazi, FPÖ = far right; implication: Austria = a Nazi country). Hundreds of provincial papers around the U.S. copy their reports; thus they largely define American popular views on Austria and its new government. The *Times* and *Post* reporters clearly do not have a specific Austrian expertise and often fail to recognize the deeper context of domestic political changes in Austria over the last twenty years. And indeed, news magazine reportage covered extensively the rise of the FPÖ as a protest movement against the old grand coalition power cartel and "party state" – the "corrupt carve-up of power and patronage," as the *Economist* termed it.

Such greater depth and historical context in reporting on Austrian domestic politics is only discernible in the reporting of the prominent news magazines. Their coverage is often based on group reporting by a number of European correspondents and with the benefits of stringers in Vienna. As has been demonstrated above, their analysis was usually cautious and circumspect and, above all, situated in the larger European context. No newspaper or magazine correspondent reached the sophistication that the analyses of prominent historians of Mark Mazower's, Tony Judd's and Harold James caliber.

Interestingly no one seems to have consulted the essays on the Haider phenomenon published in the scholarly journal *Contemporary Austrian Studies* (CAS), edited by myself and Anton Pelinka. Since its inception, CAS has explored the Haider phenomenon thoroughly, compared him to David Duke, Ross Perot and California's former anti-immigration Republican governor Pete Wilson (all these comparisons cropped up in the recent reportage!). It is sad to note that obviously journalist to not take time to consult easily available academic sources. Their operating style rather seems to be to rush through one or two interviews with academic experts that can confirm the views that they are wont to present to their readers after first glances. Usually they pre-select their interview partners – thereby a handful of Austrian "sound-bite" experts co-sponsored the American view of Austria. One Austrian observer noted that the high paid CNN reporters came to Vienna "asked three or four

people, mainly from the left side, and the picture of a Nazi-country was ready" [emphasis added].

2) *Reactions to the EU's Response to Haider's FPÖ entering the new coalition government in Vienna:* On 31 January, 14 EU countries announced they would suspend (actually downgrade) all bilateral political contacts with Austria if the Freedom Party entered the government. The EU Commission, on the other hand, would continue its routine business with Vienna since Austria was still a member. Without spelling it out the message intended was that "intolerance and xenophobia were unacceptable in Europe today." Portugal's Prime Minister Antonio Guterres declared that this decision "represents a symbol and a lesson for the world" (Portugal is holding the rotating EU presidency). Once the new Austrian government was formally constituted the EU countries started to implement this policy of freezing contacts.

The indignant Schüssel government protested that this was interference in Austria's domestic affairs since the government was constituted democratically and formed according to Austria's constitution. In a speech at Princeton University Foreign Minister Benita Ferrero-Waldner argued that Austria has been accused without proof and that Austria did not receive a fair hearing. In this speech she also revived the government's charge that the Austrian Socialist party, resenting their loss power, spearheaded the international campaign against the Freedom Party. She implicitly forwarded the conspiracy theory that the EU's response was *manipulated by the Socialist International*, specifically its current leader Portugal's President Guterres. Similar to the precedent of the Socialist-Jewish conspiracy against Waldheim, this new charge of a Socialist conspiracy was eagerly picked up by the conservative Austrian press but went virtually unreported in the American press.

The critics of *EU moralism* spoke up before too long. While the daily press generally reported the EU policy and Austria's reaction, editorial opinion and expert views on it tended to quickly become critical of the EU's unprecedented choice, particularly since it was not broadly discussed among EU member nations. The policy seems to have been pushed by the Italians, French, Belgians and Germany's Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, while the British seem to have been outflanked in the decision-making and smaller EU countries like Denmark "bounced" into the collective position without any discussion or procedures. The prominent columnist George Will, a conservative Republican, led the early charge against the EU's "arrogant and lawless folly of declaring, in effect, that Austria's new government, produced by recent elections, is illegitimate." Will branded the EU "onslaught" "an extralegal, and therefore anti-legal, exercise in moral exhibitionism." *The New Republics* editorial writers were even more cutting about the EU's "rancid hypocrisy." The *New Republic* argued that the EU had tolerated the "real Nazi and proven war criminal" Kurt Waldheim as Austrian President, as well as fascists in Silvio Berlusconi's Italian government and both ethnic cleansing in Kosovo and extermination in Grozny. It concluded that it is "risible" to think that the foreign policies of the EU states "stand on moral foundation." Historian Tony Judd warned early, what most perceptive critics feared most, that "the European furor over a governing coalition including Haider" party.... may make things worse," since it made Haider the hero and unleashed the usual Austrian "*jetzt erst recht*" reaction they had practised during the Waldheim flap. In his sophisticated *New York Review of Books* analysis Judd called the hypocritical EU "overreaction" "confused and unprecedented."

In the lead journal of the American foreign policy establishment *Foreign Affairs*, Andrew Nagorski, a *Newsweek* senior editor, also criticized the EU's "claim to the moral high ground." He notes that the EU "caricatured the real origins of Austria's political crisis" and failed to acknowledge that "Haider skillfully plays on legitimate

discontent, along with xenophobia." He wonders whether the EU's "politics of guilt" has considered "what will happen if it fails to achieve the all-or-nothing goal of bringing down the current Austrian government." He attacks the EU's "rationale that it must send a clear signal to far-right parties that they have no place in member governments," a "reckless oversimplification."

Historian Mark Mazower avers that the real underlying problem of European politics is the struggle "to reconcile the demands of multiculturalism and the tensions of mass immigration with the increasing strains of the creaking welfare state." This and "Europeans' ever-unstated obsession with the delusory notion of national purity" was the breeding ground for unscrupulous politicians of Haider's ilk. Mazower contention is that "the true heart of darkness at the heart of Europe today" is not a return of vanquished totalitarianism but the challenges for "democracy triumphant" to effectively deal with xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments. The *National Journal* writes that the "core mission" of Germany – Particularly during the Kohl ascendancy – "has been to keep European authoritarianism down and out." The tacit ground rule of European politics in the past decade was that *the mainstream right would not offer the far right its hand* – this was the rule broken by the Austrians. But could it be as Mazower suggests that Europe is so transfixed on the threat of a new totalitarian threat that it fails to confront more diffuse issues such as common immigration policies and nostrums against xenophobia?

Among American intellectuals the voices praising EU's "moral containment" of Haider are rare. Michigan political scientist Andrei Markovits' "thanks" to the EU for their moral stance was published in left German daily not the U.S. He notes that the EU's "moral symbolism" was of "deep historical significance" -- it sent a clear signals to Europe what is acceptable and what not.

3) *Austria's Failure to Master the Past*: In the center of almost every extended analysis of the Austrian crisis stood the country's postwar failure to master the darker chapters of its World War II past. We should not forget that the general backdrop to the story of the new Austrian government was intermittent American media coverage about holocaust era assets, restitution funds to Jewish and slave labor victims, the Eisenstadt Commission's work, and Ed Fagan's flashy law suits for multi-billion dollar settlements. Since *Austria* – which is usually not much covered in American media, figured prominently in both stories, presumably many informed Americans connected these stories. The nexus was *the long term burdens of Austria's unresolved World War II past*.

It was generally noted that this was not the first time in recent memory that Austria "hunkered down when faced with diplomatic isolation," as *U.S. News and World Report* noted. It already happened after Waldheim's election campaign once his "concealed Nazi wartime activities" became widely known. Compared to the *New Republic's* undocumented attack on Waldheim as "a real Nazi and proven war criminal," this was putting it mildly. *In These Times* also noted that Austrians resented Western rebukes of "ex-Nazi" Waldheim, and concluded: "Unlike Germany, Austria has not done the soul-searching to come to terms with its Nazi past. To put it bluntly, the Austrians don't get it."

Some Austrians don't get it, Foreign Minister Ferrero-Waldner and Governor Haider among them. Under siege from her prominent academic critics about Austria's failed *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* during her Princeton speech (she felt she was "on trial"), she meekly retreated to the worn-out Austrian defense, arguing: "And Austria was the first victim of the Nazis" [emphasis hers]. Who was she trying to fool? Megan Greene, a bright Princeton student working on Austrian politics, had the incredulous reaction:

"I was really surprised (and disappointed) when Ferrero Waldner flat out stated that Austria was the first victim of the Nazis. I know that in the past Austrians have typically taken this position, but I thought that this school of thought was obsolete. It frustrated me to see that someone as bright as this new foreign minister still believes that Austria was Nazi Germany's Opfer. Would Austrian youth today agree with this on this point."

I personally would hope not.

Obviously the process of radically revising Austria's historical memory of the war since the Waldheim election has not registered yet in all parties. Former Chancellor Franz Vranitzky of the SPÖ had been a trailblazer in the early 1990's in publicly acknowledging the complex mix of both Austrian victims and perpetrators during World War II. Is the current government reversing this long-overdue revision of acknowledging and beginning to master the Austrian war crimes of World War II, seriously begun in 1986? Has the joint statement President Klestil forced the new government to sign before it assumed power, notably the assumption of Austrian collective guilt responsibility for "the monstrous crimes of the national socialist regime" and "for past actions of all Austrians good and bad alike" already been tabled and forgotten? The declaration also Pledged to "work for an Austria in which xenophobia, anti-Semitism and racism have no place." Indeed, it has been noted that this declaration was a form of forward defense and "a classic case of too little, too late."

Haider himself practiced his *usual double-speak* by apologizing for past statements in which he expressed admiration of Nazi policies and SS-henchmen while at the same time insisting that he is fed up with the "entire ritual of apologizing for past misdeeds" ("*dies ganze Entschuldigerei für die Vergangenheit*"). Contrary to the government's proclamation (which his party signed, but not he), he insists in a rash interview with the German weekly *Die Zeit*, that "we have no collective guilt, but certainly have to carry the burden of memory" ("*Gedächtnislast*"). Since all these apologies only produce "lots of emotions," he pleads for "breaking away from the past... and looking towards the future." In his *Zeit* interview he does admit that postwar Austria failed to enter a debate about its past, yet in his highly misleading *Time* interview he blames the "two predominant political parties" for "reducing responsibility for the past." The *Time* interviewer did not muster the gumption to question him about the FPÖ's way of mastering its leaders' World War II past (Anton Reinthaller, Friedrich Peter).

Unfortunately, Austria's considerable progress in *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* fell by the wayside in American coverage, even in the more sophisticated coverage. In the rush to unearth Haider's personal "Nazi" roots, finer distinctions about Austria's complex postwar trajectory of dealing with its World War II past were ignored. One of the harshest broadsides came from Markovits who attacked Bruno Kreisky's cooperation with Haider's predecessor as FPÖ boss Friedrich Peter, who had served in the SS. Markovits' highly polemical conclusion: "*Haider is Kreisky's creature*" [my emphasis]. Ferrero-Waldner's and Haider's throwback remarks gave credence to all the critics who charge that Austria was not yet ready to face its past.

**Polls:** I have not seen any American polls that specifically have tracked the changes in the Austrian image in the U.S. as a result of the recent election and change in government.

**Congress and State Department:** It is the job of the Austrian Embassy in Washington to track the official American response to the Schüssel/Riess-Passer government. Presumably a lot went on behind the scenes. Historians traditionally only get access to these files 30 years (in Washington 25 years) after the event. So I will



have to wait until the years 2025/2030 before I can study the official level of Washington-Vienna exchanges. It is no secret, however, that the administration of Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Madleine Albright reacted much more cautiously than the EU or the government of Israel did. They recalled the ambassador from Vienna for consultations and promised to watch events in Vienna very closely but they did not withdraw the ambassador as Israel did, or freeze relations as the 14 EU countries are doing. Austrians in general seem to be quite grateful for Clinton's "wait and see policy." This certainly would indicate that both experts in the State Department and interested parties in Congress have not radically changed their views of Austria. On the other hands, Austria most likely is considered a trouble spot in Europe that needed to be closely monitored, namely the view of "Austria in the doghouse."

**Austrian Lobby:** One just had to observe the extraordinary spectacle of the Cuban response in South Florida to the Elian Gonzalez custody case to comprehend what a powerful ethnic lobby can accomplish in U.S. politics -- at least in keeping the national media focused on their agenda. The powerful Cuban lobby is probably as strong these days as the older Israeli lobby has been for a while -- both demonstrate the crucial influence such interest groups can wield on U.S. foreign policy formulation. When compared to such small country lobbies, there is no "Austrian lobby" in the U.S. Austrians immigrants to the U.S. have been characterized as the "*quiet invaders*" -- they remain painfully quiet.

After 20 years of living in the U.S. and not giving up my Austrian citizenship, a note of personal observation about recent Austrian immigrants to the U.S. is in place here (especially for an historian of American history with some interests in immigration history). Amongst my own circle of Austrian friends who have started very successful professional careers in the U.S., I have observed over the years a high degree of *assimilationism*, once they turn their backs on Austria. While the prewar refugees from Austria often maintained a high degree of emotional attachment to their homeland, which they were forced to leave, this younger crop of careerists sports hardly an iota of nostalgia or much emotional involvement for their birthplace. They want to be successful and leave Austria behind. Is this lack of attachment to their native land a *failure of Austrian patriotism*, or hard-headed realism to fit in? Do young *Auslandsösterreicher* in the U.S. lack a basic sense of solidarity with their homeland, especially when it is in trouble? I do not know. But any serious study of U.S. - Austrian relations perforce would need to tackle this difficult issue.

Short of an Austrian lobby, Austria at least can rely on some American universities who feature Centers of Austrian Studies, or have *Auslandsösterreicher* on their staff who still maintain an emotional and scientific attachment to Austria and fight an uphill struggle as lone wolves. Apart from the Foreign Ministry their efforts are entirely ignored by the Austrian government and the Austrian public. Some of these *Austrian Centers* organized lectures and/or panel discussions on recent events in Austria. On February 16, the University of Minnesota's distinguished Austrian Center organized a panel discussion with UM Austrian/Western European experts before a crowd of 125 people. The conclusion: "Most people seemed to agree that no matter how distasteful they found Haider and the FPÖ, the EU had overreacted somewhat, and it well-meaning sanctions were vague and premature." On February 15, the University of New Orleans' CenterAustria organized a lecture by the prominent political scientist Anton Pelinka from the University of Innsbruck. An audience of ca. 100 people discussed the EU-sanctions with Pelinka, who tended to support them. Prior to New Orleans, Ambassador Peter Moser had invited Pelinka to make a presentation in Washington, D.C. to a group of opinion leaders from universities and think tanks.

Richard Mitten, a professor at Central European University in Budapest and currently a research fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholar in Washington, analyzed

the domestic context of the recent elections and the EU response for a high-powered group of academics and Washington policy wonks. Mitten also participated in a panel discussion at New York University organized by Professor Tony Judd's Western European Center. In the most impressive event of all, Wolfgang Danspeckgruber, director of the Liechtenstein Research Program on Self-Determination, organized on 18 April 2000 a lecture by Austrian Foreign Minister Ferrero-Waldner, with critical responses by prominent faculty members, at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University.

I believe one cannot over-emphasize the critical importance of such public intellectual discourse, no matter how modest the audiences. They help shape balanced assessments of Austrian events among American *opinion leaders*. In lieu of a non-existent Austrian lobby in the U.S., these activities come closest to discreet Austrian influence peddling to form American public opinion. On top of it, it comes free to the Austrian taxpayer, who woefully ignores such activities abroad, designed to rescue Austria's image, which the Austrian voting record maligns. Compared to German beneficence in endowing Western European studies at American universities, the measly Austrian efforts are wholly inadequate. In times when Austria's image is in trouble, these Austrian Institutes and individuals carry on a mission against all odds, while Austrians bunker up against critical views from abroad and blame everyone else but themselves.

**The Internet:** Maybe the most fascinating aspect of following the debate on the new Austrian government from the American side, were the academic efforts from Viennese colleagues to correct the one-sided picture coming out of Vienna by American media reporters in early February. Two examples must suffice to demonstrate how crucially important this new media of communications is in influencing particularly opinion leaders early on in the emerging public discourse, in this case by shaping the considered views academic experts. The first outstanding spirited intervention came from Lonnie R. Johnson, director of the Austrian Fulbright organization. The American Johnson has lived in Vienna for many years and understands the subtleties of Austrian politics well. As early as 8 February he posted his long analysis on H-Habsburg and explained the election results, voters' perspectives, the EU-response and its legal shortcomings, Austrian protests against the new government and Austrian public reaction to their new pariah status. The Johnson posting stirred up considerable discussion among H-Habsburg subscribers. I subsequently asked the editor of H-German to cross-post this well-written and sophisticated analysis on H-German, which made it available to an even larger audience of specialists on Germany and Western Europe in the American academic community. It was followed up on H-German by a spirited "Letter from Vienna," penned by the American Mitchell Ash, recently appointed professor of modern history at the University of Vienna. Ash analyzed the formation of the new government and contradictions in the EU response and the protest movement ("the extra-parliamentary opposition") against the new government. His conclusion was that of most academic observers who understand the larger context: "The Austrian crisis is also a European crisis, and it will not be over soon."

Friends and colleagues such Eric Frey, the business editor of *Der Standard*, and Paul Luif from the Austrian Institute of International Affairs in Laxenburg, also e-mailed me their personal assessments of the situation. These provided much welcomed calm analyses of the situation, quite unusual for early February, when most personal messages I received from Austria were highly alarmist. Their messages went out to dozens of friends around the world and thus surely also played a subtle role in influencing opinion readers. The trend of all these informed e-mail commentaries carried a very important message to informed public opinion in the U.S. and the world

– *not the Nazis were marching again in the streets of Vienna, but the protesters against the government* (the anti-fascists, if you will).

E-mail messages also flooded my computer from the debate of the "European Association of American Studies", which was getting ready for its biannual meeting in Graz. While some speakers cancelled their visits to Graz in protest, the EAAS leadership decided not to cancel the meeting but add information sessions and debates about the Austrian situation. Some of the critics of the EAAS gathering probably fell into the general category of French "anti-fascist" intellectuals, bitingly characterized by Tony Judd: "The frisson of risk-free excitement aroused by the opportunity to score moral points off foreign 'fascists' has proven irresistible."

A friend also forwarded me the message, which Olin Robinson, the President of the Alumni of the Salzburg Seminar, sent out to hundreds of former Salzburg Seminar fellows and powerful Seminar corporate sponsors around the globe – many of them again *opinion leaders* in their respective countries. His message: "We believe as that our best response as an independent, international, non-profit institution, is to continue to be a showcase in Austria for what can be accomplished through *openness and inclusiveness*." The Salzburg Seminar would continue to be "a visible symbol" of embracing "the principles of tolerance, diversity, and reconciliation" against those who oppose them. Who could doubt that the multiplier effect gave such reasoned e-mail messages an important role in calming the agitated mood that in the first weeks of February came out of Vienna. It set the trend towards calmer reasoning and analyses. This ultimately helped to salvage tarnished Austria's image before among crucial opinion leaders in America and the world

### III. Conclusion

Anson Rabinbach concluded his response to the Ferrero-Waldner talk at Princeton with the following hyperbolic statement: "*It is particularly tragic that Austria has gone from being a model nation to the pariah of Europe in a few short years*" [emphasis added]. Hardly so. I believe Austria was never a model and few observers – at least judging from an American perspective -- seem to view it as pariah now. The more circumspect perspective of noted historian Sam Williamson seems more accurate. He feels that "*the Haider issue has hurt less here than the Waldheim affair*" [emphasis added]. Williamson thinks that the lack of reaction in the U.S. is based on the basic conservative worldview prevailing in the U.S. today, which simply spells out as "good riddance toward the socialists." Austrian students who spent the year at the University of New Orleans told me that they had hardly any inquiries from their American fellow students but met considerable interest on the Austrian situation from fellow international students. They did not encounter any hostility. My own experience has been similar. But such spotty and intuitive evidence can hardly count as empirical social science analysis. Even if such relative disinterest in the new Austrian government in the larger American public were the case, it would be small comfort.

Indeed, the demise of Austria's positive image in the U.S. and the world came about as a result of the Waldheim affair and its larger symbolic meaning. *Waldheim was a perfect specimen of Austria's unmastered past*. Waldheim was a fitting representative for the many Austrian accomplices to Hitlerite war crimes and their postwar denial of this. Haider is another Waldheim case in the sense that the international media zoomed in on his facile handling of the "brown past" in his profile: his rabid nationalist voters in Carinthia, the Nazi past of his parents, his ill-gotten gains from aryanized Jewish property, his ease in praising Hitlerite policies and Nazi henchmen, and his illegitimate historical comparisons (Churchill and Hitler as war criminals; expulsion of Germans from Eastern Europe after the war being comparable to the extermination of

Jews). Austria's failure to thoroughly "denazify" its body politic and tackle its World War II past led to the relative acceptance of National Socialism as being "not so bad." This is quite unique when compared to Germany, as polls have demonstrated. Austrians' comfortable existence in the shadows of the mountains of World War II victims has also helped produce the many Haider voters. This (for want of a better term) "*postfascist* mentality" is intolerable to the world. President Klestil was right in swearing in the new coalition partners to his declaration of "collective responsibility." He must hold the coalition to the standards of this declaration and not permit them getting away with only paying lip service to it. Austria's tarnished image in the world will not improve markedly unless Austria is serious about continuing the agenda of honestly confronting its World War II past. This is Austria's conundrum.