

A Foreign Policy Strategy for Austria

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In his satirical supplementary agreements to the current government's coalition pact between the Social Democrats and the People's Party published in the weekly magazine "Profil", the Austrian journalist Rainer Nikowitz states that the Heads of Governments will in future "invariably speak with one voice" within the framework of the EU, "namely that of Angela Merkel." There is always some truth behind any good satire – including sometimes traces of a tragedy as well. In particular, the true essence refers to the foreign and security policy.

Christian Ultsch, Foreign Policy Editor-in-Chief of the daily newspaper "Die Presse", establishes that Austrian foreign policy is shaped by "idealessness, powerlessness, and orientationlessness", and the political scientist Helmut Kramer is of the opinion that currently "too few impetuses and accents are provided for international policy and the diplomatic apparatus." In addition, he criticises the embarrassing expenditures for development cooperation and Austria's humble contributions to the United Nations Specialised Agencies. That the possibilities of neutrality for an active foreign and security policy remained unutilised to a large extent is particularly apparent.

It is not uncommon that questions of foreign and security policy are a function of the prevailing domestic mood and state of affairs. So in 2013, the first referendum on the future defence system (compulsory military service or a professional army) was organised in Austria, which resulted in favour of maintaining compulsory military service. The Social Democrats campaigned for a professional army, although the party had always been an advocate for compulsory military service over the last decades – which was historically well-founded in the year 1934. In the course of the referendum, the People's Party stood up for compulsory military service, in particular, by emphasising the argument of the need to keep the alternative civilian service in place and to further guarantee the disaster management. Though the People's Party rather used to be sceptical towards the alternative civilian service in past. Both parties damaged their credibility in terms of security policy by their short-term 180-

degree turn. While the electorate was surveyed about the defence system, the security strategy of March 2011 pending in Parliament, which would have been much more worthy of discussion, remained publicly unnoticed to a large extent until the resolution was adopted in July 2013.

Austria's security strategy, which has now been adopted, excluded the option of any Austrian accession to NATO – as a major difference to the doctrine of the year 2001. The strategy equates to a large extent the security of Austria and the EU. The strategy refers to numerous classical non-military challenges such as business crime or climate change. Critics are afraid of a securitisation of civil areas of politics and consider a widely expanded concept of security as not capable of being strategic. With the proposed concept of security, the dimension of foreign policy on the level of the nation-state has been completely pushed into the background. After the intensively and highly controversially discussed withdrawal of Austrian soldiers from the UN mission on the Golan Heights, it was decided to reinforce troops in the Balkans, in order to fulfil its continued engagement of 1,100 soldiers in military operations abroad. With the end of the Nabucco pipeline project, it also became evident that Austria subordinated its foreign policy absolutely in vain to economic interests in general and those of the OMV (Austrian Mineral Oil Administration) in particular.

The criticism of the contourlessness of Austrian foreign policy expressed by the media, by science and the civil society prompted Sebastian Kurz, who has been Minister for Foreign Affairs since December 2013, to establish a strategy and planning committee which is to develop a long-term vision. With regard to the development of a vision, Foreign Minister Kurz may count on the support of science and the civil society. The numerous proposals from science for a committed policy of neutrality with non-violent means seem to be a future capable model for Austria and an important contribution to developing a peace policy of the EU. In spite of the comprehensive expertise in the area of civil crisis management, in particular in the area of training, Austria so far has not made any attempts to take a prominent leading role in terms of a civil Core Europe. Yet, Austria could have an important function – among other things together with other neutral countries in the EU – in connection with this task.

The process of discussing the security strategy, the defence system, and Austria's withdrawal from the Golan Heights could unfortunately not be used for self-exploration and a broad public reflection on Austria's role today, 100 years after the beginning of World War One, 25 years after the upheavals of 1989, and 20 years after the referendum on the accession to the EU and on the character of foreign policy, security policy, defence policy, and peace policy.