

Experimental Field of Eastern Policy Austrian-Bulgarian Relations from the End of the Second World War to the Aftermath of the Crackdown of the “Prague Spring”

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Abstract: After World War II, Austria for several weeks was occupied not by four, but by six powers. After the Bulgarian government committed itself to the Allied side in October 1944, the 1st Bulgarian Army was subordinated to the 3rd Ukrainian Front, which advanced on Austrian soil - into southern Styria and Carinthia – at the end of the war. The Bulgarian troops stayed until mid-May, and the short period of occupation by them is hardly remembered in today's Austria, but if it is, the Bulgarians have been described as more prudent and calm than the Red Army or the Yugoslav partisans.

After World War II, the situation in Bulgaria and Austria, both under military occupation, was comparable. They diplomatically recognized each other in May, 1946, and officially resumed diplomatic relations on March 7, 1947. Soon after (July 26), a trade agreement was signed. Diplomatic relations, however, were maintained only at the lowest level after the establishment of the communist regime in Bulgaria. In 1948, the BKP decided that no more Bulgarian students would be sent to Austria and those in Austria should return. Until then, Bulgarian students had been the largest foreign student group.

Relations began to improve after the death of Stalin in 1953 and the signing of the Austrian State Treaty in 1955. Sofia welcomed Austria's new role as neutral country and bridge between East and West. At first, Moscow was the focal point of Austria's “Ostpolitik”, but as of the late 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, the policy diversified and relations with the other socialist states intensified. The only stumbling block in Austria's relations with Bulgaria was, from Vienna's perspective, the unresolved issue of Austrian property losses in Bulgaria. Only after the property treaty was finally signed in May, 1963, relations picked up speed. Bulgaria was the first Warsaw Pact state willing to take this step and thus a pioneer. In the absence of a burdensome common border at the Iron Curtain and without a serious historical burden on relations, Sofia from then on served as a testing ground in East-West relations for Vienna. A remarkable result that was far ahead of its time was the conclusion of a treaty on the abolition of mutual visa requirements in May 1967. The suppression of the Prague Spring by Warsaw Pact troops but a short halt to the relations, and even a visit by Zhivkov envisaged for the second half of 1968 was postponed. When Zhivkov finally paid a visit to Austria in

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April 1969, he did not only underline the positive role neutral Austria could play in European security, but he also was the first Warsaw pact leader to openly promote Vienna as a possible location for an European Security conference.

Key words: Post-World War II diplomacy, Austrian neutrality, Ostpolitik, property treaty, European security, Prague Spring

I. Austria and Bulgaria after World War II

Austria was liberated in 1945 – just like Germany – by the armies of the anti-Hitler coalition and divided into four occupation zones in July 1945. The “military East-West border” ran right through Austria.¹ Immediately after the end of the war, however, Austria was occupied not by four but by six powers. For several weeks, Tito partisans and the Bulgarian Army occupied parts of southern and southwestern Styria as well as Carinthia.²

After the Red Army occupied Bulgaria as an ally of Hitler-Germany in 1944, the Bulgarian government committed itself to further participation in the war – on the Allied side – in the Armistice Declaration of October 1944. The 1st Bulgarian Army was subordinated to the 3rd Ukrainian Front under Marshal Fedor Tolbukhin, which at the end of the war advanced into southern Styria and as far as Carinthia.³ The British, coming from Italy and liberating Carinthia, were surprised to meet the Bulgarian Army.⁴ On May 20 and May 21 respectively, the Bulgarian Army was seen off from Austria.⁵ In accordance with the four zones of occupation (American, Soviet, British, French) established in the Zone Agreement of July 9, the Soviets handed over all of Styria to the British on July 24.⁶

The brief occupation of areas of Austria by Bulgarian troops is hardly remembered in Austria. Compared to the Red Army and Yugoslav partisans, they are said to have acted more prudently and calmly, although there were isolated reports of looting, robbery, rape, arrests of war returnees, and shootings by Bulgarian soldiers.⁷

After World War II, the general conditions on the political, social and economic level were similar between Austria and Bulgaria. Both Austria and Bulgaria were under military occupation. The mutual diplomatic recognition of Bulgaria and Austria took place in May 1946, but the dispatch

¹ On the danger of a division of Austria see: Stourzh & Mueller 2020, p. 571, 575–578.

² Karner *et. al.* 2008, p. 16; Ruggenthaler 2015, p. 97.

³ Karner *et. al.* 2008, p. 17.

⁴ Ruggenthaler 2015, p. 97

⁵ Karner *et. al.* 2008, p. 17.

⁶ Bischof 1999, p. 48. Yugoslav troops left Carinthia at the same time as the Bulgarians, but remained in Styria until July 24. See Karner *et. al.* 2008, pp. 17–18.

⁷ Karner *et. al.* 2008, p. 16.

of diplomatic representatives did not take place until after the conclusion of the Allied peace treaty with Bulgaria in February 1947. Now the political representations were transformed into legations.⁸ Diplomatic relations were officially resumed on March 7, 1947, and the first trade agreement after World War II was signed on July 26, 1947. It was also still possible to maintain the traditionally close scientific contacts. Bulgarian students were still the largest foreign student group in Austria after the Second World War, until the communist regime in Sofia put a stop to this. At the 1948 meeting of the Committee for Science, Art and Culture, chaired by Valko Chervenkov, later General Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP), it was decided that no more Bulgarian students would be sent to Austria. Students already there were urged to return to Bulgaria. After not all of them complied with this appeal, further calls followed in 1950 and 1953.

With the establishment of the communist regime in Bulgaria, diplomatic relations were maintained only at the lowest level. Between 1950 and 1953, the respective legations were headed by only one chargé d'affaires. A major point of conflict in relations was the activity of the anti-communist "Bulgarian National Committee," which was tolerated by Austria. This committee actively recruited Bulgarian emigrants and maintained sections and training schools in the western occupation zones. Under unclear circumstances, some committee members subsequently returned to Bulgaria.

After the death of Stalin in 1953 and the signing of the Austrian State Treaty in 1955, which restored the country's full sovereignty, the relations between Austria and Bulgaria began to improve. Austria's new role as a military neutral zone, committed to perpetual neutrality, and the bridging function between East and West lived by Vienna was welcomed by Sofia. Still in November 1955 the Austrian-Bulgarian Society was founded by Austrian citizens of Bulgarian descent and Austrian friends of Bulgaria.⁹

II. Austrian-Bulgarian Relations from 1955 onwards

Austria was restored as a free and independent state with the State Treaty of May 15, 1955. As politically agreed between Moscow and Vienna in the Moscow Memorandum of April 15, 1955, Austria declared itself neutral on October 26 by a resolution in Parliament. Perpetual neutrality included the security policy aspect of not joining any military alliances and not allowing the establishment

⁸ AMVnR op. 39, d. 9, p. 159, Ministerstvo na vashnite raboti, Poseshenie na Todor Zhivkov v Avstrii 1982. Szirtes 1982.

⁹ Bachmaier 1999; Bachmaier 2009.

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of foreign military bases on Austrian territory. Ideologically, however, Austria was clearly committed to the democratic values of the Western world. As a neutral state between the blocs, Austria's foreign policy course was a constant "balancing act between East and West."¹⁰

Austria's Ostpolitik represented one of the focal points of the Second Republic's foreign policy in the Cold War era. In the official diction, one spoke of an Austrian "neighborhood policy", which historians called the Austrian form of Ostpolitik. However, since this included Austria's "eastern" neighbors as well as the socialist states of Europe in their entirety, a picturesque addition was found and finally the term "neighborhood policy in the extended Danube region" was used. The fact that this also made Poland, for example, a part of the Danube region did not bother anyone. It may have been due to the foreign policy ideas of Chancellor Josef Klaus – which were not devoid of a certain nostalgia – or to Bruno Kreisky's rejection of the term "Ostpolitik" that the term "neighborhood policy" prevailed. The fact is, however, that there was indeed talk of Ostpolitik internally and that it was perceived as such abroad.¹¹

After the conclusion of the Austrian State Treaty in 1955, however, Bulgaria was not a focal country of Vienna's developing Ostpolitik. Until the early 1960s, the development of relations with the Soviet Union dominated Austrian policy toward the Warsaw Pact states.¹² However, a certain diversification can already be observed since the late 1950s. The gradual development of relations with the socialist states manifested itself in numerous visits at the highest level and an intensification of economic relations. A significant improvement in relations was achieved, apart from the special case of Yugoslavia (which, after Stalin's break with Tito in 1948, took a special path that also facilitated the solution of bilateral problems),¹³ initially with Poland,¹⁴ Bulgaria and Romania.¹⁵ These three countries had in common that in their relations the burdening element of a common border at the Iron Curtain did not exist. In contrast, the location of the border with barbed wire and mines was to burden Austria's relations with Hungary until the end of the 1960s¹⁶ and, in the case of Czechoslovakia, even until the 1980s,¹⁷ at least in terms of the economy. In the case of Romania

¹⁰ Bischof & Ruggenthaler 2022.

¹¹ Graf 2016, pp. 145–173; Suppan & Mueller 2009; Gehler 2005.

¹² Mueller 2011; Kramer *et. al.* 2021.

¹³ Graf 2020, pp. 197–206.

¹⁴ On Poland see Graf & Ruggenthaler 2016, 2021; Graf 2015.

¹⁵ On Romania see Ullmann 2009, 2010.

¹⁶ Graf 2014, Baranyi *et. al.* 2014.

¹⁷ Ullmann 2006.

and Bulgaria, moreover, the burdensome past of World War II also largely fell away. Nevertheless, the development of relations between Austria and Bulgaria, which was under Soviet-style communist rule, got off to a slow start – not least because the conclusion of a property treaty was initially unsuccessful. Thus Bulgaria, which had already recognized Austrian neutrality in December 1955 and, for its part, did not impose any conditions on the development of bilateral relations, quickly found out “that there were such [= conditions] on the part of Austria.”¹⁸ Viennese diplomacy insisted that bilateral relations could not be developed until open property issues were resolved.¹⁹

III. The Conclusion of the Property Contract as a Prerequisite for Improved Relations

Austria's image of Bulgaria after 1955 was as follows: “More than any other country in the Soviet Union's sphere of influence, Bulgaria has based its entire policy entirely on the Soviet model.”²⁰ Virtually nothing changed in this regard until the end of the 1960s. The quoted sentence was repeated mantra-like, with minor adaptations, in Austria's diplomatic documents.²¹ Nevertheless, Bulgaria was seen as interested in the independent development of political, economic²² and cultural²³ relations with the West and with neutral Austria. An initial assessment of relations was made in the annual “Basic Report” introduced by Foreign Minister Bruno Kreisky in 1959:

“If one takes stock of Austria's relations with Bulgaria at the present moment, one must emphasize above all the correctness of the relations, which, however, is also due, among other things, to the lack of conflict material between the two states. Bulgaria always emphasizes its great interest in the existence of a neutral Austria, and again and again this Austrian example is brought out to create a mood for neutralization of the Balkan region.”²⁴

¹⁸ AMVnR op. 39, d. 9, p. 159.

¹⁹ AMVnR op. 39, d. 9, p. 159.

²⁰ Basic Report of the Representation Authority; Regular Supplementation and Revision, Chargé d'Affaires Steiner to BM Kreisky, Sofia, 31.12.1959, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, GZ. 71.895-6/60.

²¹ On the persistence of this assessment, see also, for example: Basic Report for 1963 (supplement), Nezbeda to BM Kreisky, 15.1.1964, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 3, GZ. 66.432-6/64; Official Visit of the Federal Chancellor to Bulgaria, October 17-21, 1967, as of early October 1967, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol 1967, Bulgaria 2; Basic Report 1966 - Bulgaria (Zl. 1-Pol/1967), ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol 1967, Bulgaria 3, Zl. 13.646-6/67.

²² See the contribution by Christoph Huber in this volume.

²³ Bachmaier 2009.

²⁴ Basic Report of the Representation Authority; Regular Supplementation and Revision,

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However, the Austrian diplomatic mission in Sofia also had to state: "It is not always easy to translate the certainly friendly mood that prevails among the Bulgarian authorities for Austria into practical concessions." This applied "especially to the question of Austrian property in Bulgaria." From Ballhausplatz's point of view, the lack of a treaty on compensation for Austrian property losses in Bulgaria represented the decisive obstacle in the further development of relations. Such a treaty, however, was seen by the Austrian side as a basic prerequisite for a fundamental improvement of bilateral relations with the socialist states and was particularly difficult to achieve with the successor states of the Habsburg Monarchy (such as Hungary and Czechoslovakia) because of their historical proximity and interconnections and the large sums involved. Although comparatively marginal claims were at stake with Bulgaria, no progress had been made in the 1950s and negotiations had even been interrupted in 1958. The Austrian conclusion was therefore: "Obviously the Bulgarians are neither able nor willing to fully compensate the confiscated Austrian property." The Austrian legation in Sofia was convinced that Bulgaria "[f]or such full compensation" would also lack the financial means.²⁵ Moreover, they denied the lack of good will to reach a solution to this question:

"One has the impression that the Bulgarians are speculating on the fact that such demands will lose more and more weight in the course of the years and eventually can be settled with the settlement of a small lump sum. If Austria is not prepared to use the strongest means of pressure, it will be difficult to change the attitude of the Bulgarians. However, it is difficult to imagine what these means of pressure should consist of and whether it makes sense to block relations, especially trade relations, for years by such measures. If, however, one decides to be satisfied with a small sum of compensation, one should do so soon, for time is certainly not working in favor of Austrian demands."²⁶

The Austrian legation summarized the problem quite aptly, and its view of the future was also far-sighted. A blockade of relations was not in Austria's interest, but a contractual settlement with a compromise on the compensation sum was a *conditio sine qua non* on the way to the intensification of relations sought by Bulgaria.

Chargé d'Affaires Steiner to BM Kreisky, Sofia, 31.12.1959, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, GZ. 71.895-6/60.

²⁵ Basic Report of the Representation Authority; Regular Supplementation and Revision, Chargé d'Affaires Steiner to BM Kreisky, Sofia, 31.12.1959, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, GZ. 71.895-6/60.

²⁶ Basic report of the representative authority; regular supplementation and revision, chargé d'affaires Steiner to BM Kreisky, Sofia, 31.12.1959, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, GZ. 71.895-6/60.

Until the early 1960s, it was still difficult to resume negotiations.²⁷ Then, in 1962, there was movement in the matter.²⁸ In May of that year, Deputy Foreign Minister Ivan Bashev, in conversation with Austrian envoy Wilhelm Nezbeda, urged an expansion of visiting contacts with Austria and expressed surprise “that the Austrian property delegation had left so quickly, although there had been a certain rapprochement of the two positions.” Nezbeda stressed that relations could only be intensified after the conclusion of a treaty and that the time was not yet ripe for politicians to travel to the Plovdiv Fair.²⁹ The same applied to an intensification of treaty relations. In 1962, Austria was not yet interested in a consular treaty or a social security agreement with Bulgaria.³⁰ The continuation of the property negotiations in November 1962 finally brought the long-awaited breakthrough.³¹ The treaty was negotiated and initialed by the end of the month and approved by the Austrian Council of Ministers on December 13, 1962. Finally, it was agreed that Bulgaria would pay a global sum of 350,000 USD as “compensation for losses of assets in Bulgaria, including certain claims and assets, which Austrian citizens had incurred as a result of a Bulgarian nationalization, expropriation or other measure related to the structural changes in the Bulgarian national economy”, “insofar as these assets had thereby come under the control of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria”. The agreement also served “to redeem the Austrian-owned bonds of the Bulgarian external bonds”. The distribution of the global sum to the Austrian claimants was the exclusive competence of the Republic of Austria. The payment of the global sum was made by diverting 5% of the Bulgarian export earnings in Austria and this withdrawal was limited to USD 100,000 annually. The amounts diverted were to be “transferred quarterly by the Bulgarian National Bank to the Austrian National Bank and credited by the latter to the Republic of

²⁷ Austrian-Bulgarian property and financial negotiations; visit of the Bulgarian envoy to Envoy Dr. Gödel on 17 November 1961, Vienna, 18 November 1961, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, GZ. 31.733-6/61, Zl. 34.712-6/61.

²⁸ Conversation between Envoy Nezbeda and Envoy Dimitre Grekov at the Bulgarian Foreign Office, Vienna, 14.2.1962, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, GZ. 62.182-6/62.

²⁹ Talks between Envoy Nezbeda and Bulgarian government members, Vienna, 28 May 1962, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, GZ. 67.485-6/62.

³⁰ Austrian Consular Treaty and Social Security Agreement with Bulgaria, Vienna, 21.2.1962, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, GZ. 62.937-6/62.

³¹ Property negotiations with Bulgaria; continuation in Sofia on 20 Nov. 1962, Vienna, 23 Nov. 1962, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, GZ. 76.683-6/62.

Austria.”³² The property agreement was finally signed in Vienna on May 2, 1963.³³

IV. Thematic areas of relations in the mid-1960s

Bachev, who had been promoted to foreign minister in November 1962, had already “let it be known” to envoy Nezbeda in April 1963 “that he would like to get to know Austria better sometime.”³⁴ In the Austrian Foreign Ministry, with reference to Bachev’s statement, it was stated that after the conclusion of the Property Treaty “at present – apart from occasional encroachments by Bulgarian militia authorities – there are no open problems in the relationship with Bulgaria”. The way was thus clear for Bachev’s visit.³⁵ Moreover, the time had also come to elevate the Austrian legation in Sofia and the Bulgarian representative authority in Vienna to the rank of embassies.³⁶ Now a number of other bilateral issues could be tackled. Bulgaria immediately encouraged the conclusion of new agreements. These included an economic-technical agreement, a field in which an “exchange program” already existed with Italy. Bulgaria attached particular importance to a social agreement, not least because of the fact that numerous Bulgarian workers (mainly gardeners) were employed in Austria.³⁷ Since the conclusion of the Property Treaty, Austria no longer had any reservations about a social security agreement with Bulgaria.³⁸ However, no progress was made due to the internal Austrian constellation. The Ministry of Commerce opposed the possibility of working abroad and still being able to obtain insurance in Austria. Progress could only have been expected after a compromise within Austria. Bul-

³² Nezbeda to BM Kreisky, April 1963, Zl. 6-Pol/63, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 20.337-6/63, GZ. 26.313-6/63.

³³ Treaty between the Republic of Austria and the People’s Republic of Bulgaria for the Settlement of Open Financial Questions, Federal Law Gazette No. 128/1964.

³⁴ Austro-Bulgarian Property Treaty, service note, Vienna, 3.1.1963, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, GZ. 20.337-6/63.

³⁵ Conversation of Envoy Nezbeda with Bulgarian Foreign Minister Bachev, Vienna, 2.5.1963, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 20.337-6/63, GZ. 26.313-6/63.

³⁶ Service note to Section II, Vienna, 7.5.1963, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 20.337-6/63, GZ. 27.352-6/63; Diplomatic Relations between Austria and Bulgaria, Rank increase of the mutual representation authorities to embassies, Vienna 19.6.1963, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 20.337-6/63, GZ. 29.541-6/63

³⁷ Nezbeda to BM Kreisky, 25.5.1963, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 20.337-6/63, GZ. 28.878-6/63.

³⁸ Bulgarian suggestion to conclude a Bulgarian-Estonian social security agreement, Vienna, 16.7.1963, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 20.337-6/63, GZ. 30.907-6/63.

garia pressed for a solution in the interests of the people.³⁹ A bilateral agreement on social security was not to be concluded until the 21st century.

As early as the late 1950s, Austrian diplomacy had been convinced that Austria would have “a good opportunity” in Bulgaria “to bring its cultural assets to bear here.” However, it was also felt that “undoubtedly Austria would be in the role of giver and much less in the role of taker in such an exchange.”⁴⁰ In the early 1960s, cultural relations were described as “satisfactory, if not intensive.” Now, for example, mutual exhibitions, concert tours of Austrian soloists and ensembles took place. The music competitions organized by Bulgaria were regularly supplied by Austria with participants and jurors. The Slavonic Institute of the University of Vienna collaborated in the preparation of the 1100th anniversary of Cyril and Methodius, which took place in 1963.⁴¹ Visiting contacts in the field of culture always took place “in an extraordinarily pleasant atmosphere and in full openness” – even when they touched on delicate issues such as the question of the transfer of fees from Bulgaria to Austria. This was a central inhibiting factor, since Austrian cultural workers were only willing to engage in Bulgaria if they could transfer their income generated there to Austria in convertible currencies. The Austrian conclusion on the further development of cultural relations was: “The interest [of Bulgaria] in an intensified cultural exchange with the West and especially with Austria was clearly expressed.”⁴² However, a noticeable intensification of cultural relations probably did not occur until the 1970s – when Bulgarian cultural policy was under the leadership of Lyudmila Zhivkova.⁴³

In contrast to many other areas, economic relations had hardly been affected by the absence of a property treaty. Bulgaria had always expressed its interest in intensifying trade. At the beginning of the 1960s, Austria already ranked second among Western partners behind the Federal Republic of Germany.⁴⁴ A 5-year

³⁹ Minutes of the working meeting held on the occasion of the official visit of the Bulgarian Foreign Minister to Austria on 17 June 1964, Vienna, 27 May 1964, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 66.241-6/64, GZ. 73.746-6/64.

⁴⁰ Basic Report of the Representation Authority; Regular Supplementation and Revision, Chargé d’Affaires Steiner to BM Kreisky, Sofia, 31.12.1959, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, GZ. 71.895-6/60.

⁴¹ Conversation of Envoy Nezbeda with Bulgarian Foreign Minister Bachev, Vienna, 2.5.1963, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 20.337-6/63, GZ. 26.313-6/63.

⁴² Trip of Envoy Leitner to Bulgaria, 28.8.1963, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, Gr. Zl. 20.337-6/63, GZ. 33.297-6/63.

⁴³ Bachmaier 2009, pp. 496–499.

⁴⁴ Talks between Envoy Nezbeda and Bulgarian government members, Vienna, 28 May 1962, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, GZ. 67.485-6/62.

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agreement on the exchange of goods had also been signed in April 1963, close in time to the signing of the property treaty.⁴⁵

In the 1960s, the Soviet Union and, in its wake, the other Warsaw Pact states vehemently opposed Austria's efforts to become associated with the European Economic Community (EEC) and expressed this attitude with varying degrees of severity in bilateral contacts.⁴⁶ Bulgaria was at the lower end of the excitement scale here.

Bulgarian diplomats, in talks with their Austrian counterparts, expressed their conviction that Austria would like to come closer to the EEC "only in economic matters". At the same time, they pointed out that "the six EEC countries have ultimately set themselves a political goal" and that Austria "might under certain circumstances" run into "difficulties in this respect, when a strict line between politics and economic policy cannot always be drawn."⁴⁷ *Mutatis mutandis*, it was stressed, "in the case of Austria's economic rapprochement with the common market, it may be difficult to judge *à la longue* where economic rapprochement ends or political rapprochement begins, and therein lies a certain danger." Deputy Prime Minister Kimon Georgiev said that "Austria will find appropriate ways to avoid discrimination against the East, if only because of its proven Ballhausplatz policy, because Austria has always known how to think and act in real and practical categories. He did not believe that Austria would allow itself to be pushed into a self-inflicted impasse." As a conclusion remained on the Austrian side: on the part of Bulgarian politicians and diplomats "a certain uneasiness in view of Austrian efforts to come to terms with the EEC has certainly been expressed, but so far no one has made direct objections that Austrian neutrality would be violated by an association."⁴⁸ Foreign Minister Bachev stressed in 1963 that Bulgaria would "by no means interfere in internal Austrian affairs," but that "the preservation of Austrian neutrali-

⁴⁵ See the contribution by Christoph Huber in this volume.

⁴⁶ The exploratory talks ran from 1962 to 1964, and negotiations took place from 1965 to 1967. The procedure, which was hotly contested in domestic politics, failed neither because of the stagnating integration of the EEC at that time nor because of the clearly negative attitude of the Soviet Union, but because of an Italian "total blockade," which manifested itself in a veto against EEC negotiations with Austria from 1967 to 1969 due to the escalating situation in the South Tyrol conflict following terrorist attacks. Cf. Gehler 2009, pp. 58–80. The close link between EEC rapprochement and the mood in Austrian-Soviet relations is particularly clear in Mueller 2011, pp. 133–174.

⁴⁷ Conversation between Envoy Nezbeda and Envoy Dimitre Grekov at the Bulgarian Foreign Office, Vienna, 14.2.1962, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, GZ. 62.182-6/62.

⁴⁸ Talks between Envoy Nezbeda and Bulgarian government members, Vienna, 28 May 1962, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, GZ. 67.485-6/62.

ty” was “a condition ‘sine qua non.’” In this context, he expressed doubts as to whether Austria would succeed in “continuing to pursue an independent trade policy vis-à-vis third countries,” for he feared that the EEC would not “stop halfway for Austria’s sake” and “would therefore hardly be generous in granting ‘escape clauses.’⁴⁹

The “more than good trade relations” according to Bulgaria, which would be to the advantage of both sides,⁵⁰ were definitely Sofia’s main concern when Austria’s EEC ambitions were discussed – not least because the effects of the EEC were already beginning to be felt in bilateral trade with its member states.⁵¹ Otherwise, only Bulgaria’s steadily growing trade balance deficit clouded economic relations. In the field of tourism, Austria was considered exemplary in Bulgaria.⁵² Before his visit to Austria in June 1964, Foreign Minister Bachev was very pleased “with the visit of Austrian tourists to Bulgaria, especially to the Black Sea coast”; however, he said, his country “should study both Austrian and Swiss tourism, because it still had a lot to learn in this field.”⁵³

V. The Intensification of Visit Diplomacy

The first official visit of a Bulgarian member of the government to Austria, that of Foreign Minister Bachev to Vienna, took place from 16 to 19 June 1964. Foreign Minister Kreisky opened the conversation by stating “that our relations are very good and are completely unencumbered by the conclusion of the Property Treaty. You know that your compatriots enjoy great sympathy in Austria because of their abilities and character, that there have always been good friendly relations between our countries, and that your visit is a visible expression of the desire both governments have to further intensify these relations.” Seeking to place the visit in the larger context, Kreisky concluded his introduction with the following remarks: “We Austrians consider all the peoples who live in this part of Europe, that is, the part we call the Danube region, we consider all the peoples as our neighbors, without regard to whether we have a common border or not, and one does want to keep good friendly relations with neighbors, and so

⁴⁹ Nezbeda to BM Kreisky, 25.5.1963, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 20.337-6/63, GZ. 28.878-6/63.

⁵⁰ Nezbeda to BM Kreisky, Sofia, 7.12.1963, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, GZ. 39.126-6/63.

⁵¹ Stanoeva 2021, pp. 159–189.

⁵² Visit of Bulgarian Foreign Minister Bachev to Austria, Vienna, 27 May 1964, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 66.241-6/64, GZ. 73.783-6/64.

⁵³ Invitation of the Bulgarian Foreign Minister to an official visit to Austria, 30.11.1963, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 20.337-6/63, GZ. 37.676-6/63.

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we also consider Bulgaria as one of our neighboring states.” In his reply, Bachev echoed Kreisky’s opinion “that there are no difficulties between our countries now. These relations have an old and good tradition. We particularly value this tradition because cultural relations have always been very useful for the cultural development of our country. But still, I think that the natural consequence of these relations should be the further development of cultural exchanges. Despite the diversity of the systems, there are great possibilities, in the fields of science, art and technology.” Kreisky stressed “that in Austria we do not in itself have a great inclination to conclude cultural agreements, but that need not be an obstacle to the de facto realization of everything that is otherwise included in such an agreement.” Regarding further development possibilities, Bachev emphasized the desire for a social security agreement, while Kreisky referred to domestic Austrian resistance.⁵⁴

Unsurprisingly, however, the conversation focused on economic aspects of the relationship. Bachev explained, “Our trade has a good and solid basis: the good means of transport (Danube) and the old tradition. With Austria we have 15% of our total exchange of goods.” He noted a good development of trade in recent years, but he saw the possibilities as not yet exhausted. For example, he wanted to double the import of iron and steel goods in the amount of 8 million USD. In return, however, he demanded increased imports by Austria from Bulgaria and urged that the deficit balance should be balanced. As a country dependent on the export of agricultural products, he hoped for greater sales opportunities for tobacco and wine, as well as greater tourism revenues from travelers from Austria. In response, Kreisky said: “Young Austrians prefer to go to the sea than to the mountains. [...] If you succeeded in getting 20,00 or 30,000 Austrians to your country, it would be a significant income for you, but this is also partly a traffic problem. You would have to get people down the Danube quickly.” In addition, the Austrian foreign minister pledged to “examine without prejudice” all Bulgarian proposals for closer economic relations, stressing, “We don’t do that with all states, for example, we wouldn’t do that with Hungary and the CSSR, we would say we have to clean up our outstanding problems first before we can move on them.”⁵⁵ He thus alluded to the outstanding property treaty arrangements with the two neighboring states.

⁵⁴ Minutes of the working meeting held on the occasion of the official visit of the Bulgarian Foreign Minister to Austria on 17 June 1964, Vienna, 27 May 1964, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 66.241-6/64, GZ. 73.746-6/64.

⁵⁵ Minutes of the working meeting held on the occasion of the official visit of the Bulgarian Foreign Minister to Austria on 17 June 1964, Vienna, 27 May 1964, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 66.241-6/64, GZ. 73.746-6/64.

As part of the further development of economic relations, Trade Minister Fritz Bock traveled to Bulgaria in February 1965. A year after Bachev's visit, an Austrian parliamentary delegation also traveled to Bulgaria. Since it was the first such Western visit to Bulgaria after World War II, it was "considered a goodwill tour."⁵⁶ From Austria's point of view, there had been no changes in relations since Foreign Minister Bachev's visit. There were "no unresolved bilateral problems of a political nature." Bachev, on the other hand, had given the Austrian Embassy to understand "that Austrian-Bulgarian relations had not developed to the extent that could have been expected after his visit to Austria." He referred that agreements were made since then between Austria and Hungary and Romania, respectively, he "obviously wanted to express that Austrian-Bulgarian relations had reached the stage of a certain stagnation." After arranging a return visit by Kreisky to Bulgaria, Austria declared its willingness to meet Bulgaria's requests for agreements on legal assistance (with the treaty with Hungary serving as a model) and on the lifting of the visa requirement for diplomatic passport holders. Regarding a consular treaty, Austria remained reluctant, and in the areas of culture, science, and economy, Vienna wanted to "cooperate more closely on a pragmatic basis," hoping for a more precise definition of Bulgarian ideas on cooperation in economic and technical matters. The volume of goods exchanged was already increased to 40 million USD in May 1965 by an additional protocol. Cultural relations were now described as "loose and not lively," although Bulgaria always urged that they be intensified.⁵⁷ However, possibilities for cooperation could be found in the field of animal health: a veterinary agreement⁵⁸ was signed on July 12, 1965.

Kreisky paid his return visit to Bulgaria from July 9 to 13, 1965. During his stay he had his first meeting with Todor Zhivkov, with whom he had a very frank conversation. By way of introduction, the host inquired about Kreisky's impressions of Bulgaria and stated: "Bulgaria used to be a backward country. Today, the pace of development is quite rapid. Of course, there is still a lot of catching up to do in the economic field."⁵⁹ Turning to bilateral relations, Zhivkov said: "There are potential opportunities for good cooperation between Bulgaria and Austria. In many questions of international politics the views are the same.

⁵⁶ Nezbeda to BM Kreisky, Sofia, 17.5.1965, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 132.707-6/65, GZ. 137.300-6/65.

⁵⁷ Trip of the Federal Minister to Bulgaria, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol 1965, Bulgaria 2, o. GZ.

⁵⁸ Federal Law Gazette No. 269/1965 Veterinary Agreement between the Federal Government of the Republic of Austria and the Government of the People's Republic of Bulgaria.

⁵⁹ Bulgaria visit of the Federal Minister; minutes, Vienna, 22.7.1965, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol 1965, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 131.851-6/65, GZ. 139.853-6/65.

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Bulgaria strives to play the same role in the Balkan Peninsula that Austria plays in Central Europe. Bulgaria did not set itself the task of assuming a leading position in the Balkans. However, this does not change the fact that it is geographically located in the center of the peninsula. This circumstance determines its function. [...]"⁶⁰

Kreisky took up the ball: "He, too, would like to confirm that Austria and Bulgaria have to cope with similar tasks in the parts of Europe where the two countries are located. In the past, small states had often given themselves up to provoking great conflicts. Now one had learned from history that small states should not provoke, Austria had many neighboring states. It would be an easy foreign policy to start conflicts with all of them. There would always be occasions for that. The Austrian foreign policy, however, is of the opinion that it costs more effort but is also more successful to live in peace with all of them. Bulgaria and Austria had neighbors who belonged to both NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Both, however, exercised a stabilizing function." The Austrian Foreign Minister continued, "Neutral Austria was in the center of Europe. With the CSSR, to speak of the nearest neighboring states, there were still certain difficulties since the property question had not yet been solved. This complex of questions, on the other hand, had been settled in the relationship with Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and in some form with Yugoslavia." Zhivkov interjected that "this was the first time he had heard that there were still unresolved issues between Austria and the CSSR. Surely it would be desirable that an agreement could be reached here soon, since both states are developed industrial states and neighboring countries." Kreisky reiterated "trade between the two countries is significant." Zhivkov inquired, "Notwithstanding the unresolved issues?" Kreisky answered in the affirmative: "'Yes.' It was to be hoped that a solution would be found soon." Zhivkov inquired about his own role: "Bulgaria was the first country with which you reached an agreement in the property sector?" Kreisky confirmed: "The two countries would have acted as 'icebreakers' on this issue." The two statesmen then exchanged views on the international situation and the possibilities of détente.⁶¹

In a conversation with Bachev, Kreisky shared the latter's positive assessment of bilateral relations and added: "It is precisely in the fact that developments are not stormy that there is a certain guarantee of calm and frictionless further development. Brick is laid on brick, therefore, he also believes that a possible deterioration of the international situation should not necessarily lead to a dete-

⁶⁰ Bulgaria visit of the Federal Minister; minutes, Vienna, 22.7.1965, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol 1965, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 131.851-6/65, GZ. 139.853-6/65.

⁶¹ Bulgaria visit of the Federal Minister; minutes, Vienna, 22.7.1965, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol 1965, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 131.851-6/65, GZ. 139.853-6/65.

rioration of the Austrian-Bulgarian relations.” With regard to the development of visiting diplomacy, Kreisky said, “With the help of these contacts, one would have acted as an ‘icebreaker’. Perhaps one could go a step further and next plan a visit at the level of heads of government.” As in the case of the Property Treaty, Kreisky stressed the pioneering role of bilateral relations: “Austria and Bulgaria had followed a path that had now become classic. Later, other states in Western Europe had followed this example.”⁶²

After Kreisky’s visit, the diplomats of France, Great Britain, Italy and Finland met one after the other at the Austrian Embassy in Sofia. After Kreisky’s visit, the diplomats of France, Great Britain, Italy, Switzerland and Finland met one after the other at the Austrian Embassy in Sofia “in order to find out whether the Austro-Bulgarian talks had produced any special results ‘behind the scenes’”. The Western diplomats “expressed very positive views about Austria’s Ostpolitik and emphasized that Austria was predestined to pursue a conciliatory but cautious Ostpolitik not only for traditional reasons but also in view of its neutral status.” The British diplomatic representative in Sofia expressed the view “that the visit of an Austrian statesman to Bulgaria had undoubtedly contributed to the further deepening of mutual relations on a ‘horizontal level’ (economy, culture) – a strengthening in ‘vertical terms’ was not possible at present in view of the different socio-political systems.” He described the “activity of Austrian Ostpolitik” as “very remarkable”.⁶³

In the context of the further development of treaty relations, there was a willingness on the part of Austria to negotiate the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty a little later.⁶⁴ In the economic sphere, the familiar problem remained. The Deputy Chairman of the Bulgarian Council of Ministers, Stanko Todorov, expressed “his concern that the balance in Austrian-Bulgarian trade exchange in 1965 continued to show a ratio of about 2 : 1 in favor of Austria and that he did not believe that an improvement in Bulgaria’s favor could be achieved with the traditional Bulgarian export products (tobacco, vegetables, fruit, corn and pigs) alone.” He expressed the view “that Bulgaria’s negative trade balance with Austria would be improved if the Austrian side were also prepared to accept Bulgarian industrial goods” which both the Federal Republic and Belgium were already prepared to do. The Austrian Embassy stat-

⁶² Bulgaria visit of the Federal Minister; minutes, Vienna, 22.7.1965, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol 1965, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 131.851-6/65, GZ. 139.853-6/65.

⁶³ Nezbeda to BM Kreisky, Sofia, 30.7.1965, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol 1965, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 131.851-6/65, GZ. 140.524-6/65.

⁶⁴ Bulgaria – Draft of an Austrian-Bulgarian Legal Assistance Treaty, Vienna 29.10.1965, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol 1965, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 131.851-6/65, GZ. 144.303-6/65.

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ed: "In any case, it must be acknowledged that Bulgaria will insist on an improvement of its trade balance with Austria in the very near future."⁶⁵

In May 1966, in a conversation with the Austrian ambassador, Bachev again spoke of "perceived disinterest on the part of Austria," although a further intensification of relations would be in the interest of both sides, and expressed Bulgaria's interest in continuing contacts at the highest level.⁶⁶ At Ballhausplatz it was noted that Austria had been the first Western country after 1945 to re-establish economic relations with Bulgaria and had enabled Foreign Minister Bachev to make his first visit to the West in 1964. Against the background of the progress of détente, there was now a danger of falling behind for the first time. For example, Zhivkov's first official visit to the West, to France, was planned for October 1966. Austria did not want to lag behind this development and began planning a visit by Chancellor Josef Klaus to Bulgaria,⁶⁷ which was finally envisaged for 1967. At the same time, it was stated at Ballhausplatz that the Austrian foreign minister would not travel to Sofia a second time beforehand to sign a treaty.⁶⁸

Admittedly, there had been no standstill in visiting diplomacy before. In 1965, Vice Chancellor Bruno Pittermann, who was responsible for Austria's nationalized industry, had visited Bulgaria, and in 1966 an Austrian business delegation had been a guest. At Sofia's request, Austria had assumed the role of protecting power for Bulgaria in Israel after Bulgaria's relations with Israel were broken off. Austria was convinced: "Bulgaria believes that Austria has a constructive function in Europe with regard to its neutrality. Above all, neutral Austria is considered geopolitically and historically predestined for tasks in the Danube region and for an active eastern policy." Furthermore, "there were no longer any significant outstanding problems between Austria and Bulgaria" and Bulgaria remained "interested in further intensification of relations, especially in concluding a series of agreements in the cultural, scientific-technical and social fields." The legal assistance treaty was about to be con-

⁶⁵ Nezbeda to BM Kreisky, Sofia, 28.10.1965, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol 1965, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 131.851-6/65, GZ. 144.636-6/65.

⁶⁶ Austrian-Bulgarian Relations; Conversation between Ambassador Dr. Nezbeda and the Bulgarian Foreign Minister Baschev. Foreign Minister Baschev, Vienna, May 6, 1966, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, GZ. 36.809-6/66.

⁶⁷ Austrian-Bulgarian relations; Bulgarian request for reciprocal official visits by the heads of government of the two countries, Vienna, 17 August 1966, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 36.809-6/66, Zl. 42.098-6/66.

⁶⁸ Official visit of the Federal Chancellor and the Federal Minister to Bulgaria in June 1967, Vienna, 18.11.1966, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 36.809-6/66, Zl. 48.623-6/66.

cluded in the spring of 1967. On the part of the Austrian Embassy in Sofia, "repeated reference was made to the great possibilities that existed in Bulgaria for a stronger cultural commitment on Austria's part." Bulgaria's trade balance deficit persisted as a permanent problem.⁶⁹

Accordingly, economic relations also took up a great deal of space in the conversation between Zhivkov and Klaus during the latter's visit to Bulgaria in October 1967. In the course of the conversation Zhivkov asked: "How should Bulgaria pay for the [...] industrial plants it would like to buy from Austria? [...] This problem could be solved only if exports to Austria could be increased." In the long run, he wanted to finance trade with the West through the export of agricultural products, adding dramatically: "A small country could only hold its own through active trade, which for Bulgaria was a matter of life and death." He further spoke of being ready to favor Austria in economic relations with the West if the framework conditions would fit. "Frankly speaking, Bulgaria does not wish to expand trade with the Federal Republic, but the German traders are very shrewd and the German Bundesbank has only recently shown concession again." Klaus "pointed out that Austria, as a small country, could not offer terms like the U.S., but solid trade was preferable to bait-and-switch offers." Earlier in the conversation, Klaus had felt compelled to emphasize, "that Austria was neither a client nor a representative or a federal comrade of the Federal Republic" in the context of remarks on the relationship Austria sought with the EEC.⁷⁰ For Zhivkov, who in February 1967 in a conversation with Ambassador Nezbeda had shown no optimism regarding the new West German government and had wanted to adopt a wait-and-see attitude, this was probably balm on his soul. At the time, he had expressed his skepticism by saying, "But perhaps it was also pursuing 'the strategic goal of weakening the camp of the East European states, indeed, of destroying it if possible.'"⁷¹

Under the ÖVP's unity government, which had been in office since 1966, "Ostpolitik" had been intensified. According to the West German embassy in Vienna, this had always been a "hobbyhorse" of Chancellor Klaus and had led to conflicts with the more reserved Foreign Minister Kreisky. At the end of 1967,

⁶⁹ Official visit of the Federal Chancellor to Bulgaria, October 17-21, 1967, as of early October 1967, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol 1967, Bulgaria 2. See also Nezbeda to Keisky, Sofia, Jan. 7, 1967, Basic Report 1966 - Bulgaria (Zl. 1-Pol/1967), ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol 1967, Bulgaria 3, Zl. 13.646-6/67.

⁷⁰ Working session on Wednesday, 18 October 1967, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, GZ. 19.223-6/7, Zl. 33.351-Pol/67.

⁷¹ Nezbeda to Kreisky, Sofia, 14 February 1967, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, Zl. 15.983-Pol/67.

this was commented on as follows: “The chancellor, meanwhile, in sole government, saw himself freed from the inhibitions of his socialist foreign minister and tried to activate his emotionally determined and prestige-oriented Ostpolitik of bridge-building in the sense of Austria’s European task by means of a lively diplomacy of visits.” However, no significant improvement in relations resulted from this “active Ostpolitik” of Austria.⁷² This assessment was also reflected in the assessments of international media on Klaus’ visit to Bulgaria. In many cases, the zeal of Austria’s Ostpolitik was also seen as a distraction from domestic problems. The *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ) saw only an “atmospheric” improvement and doubted the value of the visit.⁷³ The NZZ provided another article with the title “Austria’s controversial eastern policy”. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, under the title “Criticism of Vienna’s Eastern Policy,” noted the SPÖ’s unease and distrust of Klaus’ travel diplomacy and smugly noted that the SPÖ was now turning the tables and would castigate the ÖVP for its “Ostanfälligkeit” (susceptibility to the East).⁷⁴ *Der Spiegel* referred to Klaus, alluding to the well-known detergent manufacturer, as a “black giant” who toured Eastern Europe “with tough charm and a Christian Catholic sense of mission.” However, he had “vainly defended” his “preference for red,” according to the journalistic verdict.⁷⁵ Former Foreign Minister Kreisky, according to “*Der Spiegel*”, had called Klaus’ visit offensive an “undignified kowtowing to the Eastern rulers.”⁷⁶ The Austrian media paid little attention to the visit. The government was pleased with Bulgaria’s positive assessment of the visit. Bachev had stressed that “he was particularly pleased with the constructive aspects that had become clear in the bilateral relationship between Austria and Bulgaria.” The Austrian Embassy also emphasized: “Western and Eastern colleagues agreed that the Austrian visit had differed from that of the Danish Prime Minister, among other things, in that Mr. [Jens Otto] Krag had sometimes appeared as an advocate of the Federal Republic, while the Chancellor had spoken from the superior standpoint of the pan-European.”⁷⁷

⁷² Graf 2017, p. 157.

⁷³ State visit of the Federal Chancellor and the Federal Minister to Bulgaria; press reports, Vienna, 10 November 1967, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, GZ. 19.223-6/7, Zl. 33.800-Pol/67.

⁷⁴ State visit of the Federal Chancellor to Bulgaria; press reports, Vienna, 20 November 1967, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, GZ. 19.223-6/7, Zl. 34.846-Pol/67.

⁷⁵ Black Giant, *Der Spiegel* 45/1967, October 29, 1967.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Nezbeda to Kreisky, Sofia, 25.10.1967, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, GZ.

This was presumably an allusion to the Bulgarian evaluation of Klaus' statements in the conversation with Zhivkov.

From the Bulgarian side, Klaus's visit was apparently understood as the starting signal for a broad-based intensification. One month after Klaus' visit, on November 11, 1967, the Sofia Foreign Ministry submitted recommendations for the expansion of relations between Austria and Bulgaria to the Politburo of the CC of the BKP.⁷⁸ These included a substantial expansion of economic, commercial, and scientific-technical relations with a focus on industrial cooperation, preparation of a long-term trade agreement that would improve export conditions for Bulgaria, elaboration of measures to popularize Bulgarian engineering and industry in Austria, preparation of an agreement on cultural and scientific-technical exchanges, preparation of a draft social security agreement and of a consular treaty. On 16 January 1968, the Politburo incorporated these recommendations unchanged - supplemented only by measures to make Bulgaria more attractive as a destination for Austrian tourists - into its decision and instructed the relevant authorities to implement them.⁷⁹ In fact, bilateral agreements in some of the listed areas were already concluded in the course of the year: on May 6, an "Agreement on Cultural and Scientific Exchange for the Years 1968 and 1969," for the implementation of which an Austrian-Bulgarian Joint Commission was established, and on May 27, an "Agreement on Economic, Industrial and Technical Cooperation."⁸⁰

VI. Visa Exemption

When Klaus visited Bulgaria, a reciprocal visa-free travel agreement had already been concluded and entered into force in May 1967. Since visa-free travel between countries of the West and the Warsaw Pact remained the exception to the rule well beyond the 1960s and became a central Western demand in basket 3 during the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe under the title "free movement of persons". This aspect, the genesis of this agreement, will be examined in more detail here. In this area Bulgaria served as an experimental field for Austria's Ostpolitik too.

The proposal for a general abolition of the visa requirement between Austria and Bulgaria had been made by Sofia in 1965, and Vienna assured a detailed examination. The Foreign Ministry was convinced that such an agreement would

19.223-6/7, Zl. 33.345-Pol/67.

⁷⁸ CDA, F. 1B, op. 35, a. e. 12, pp. 59-65, Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Politburo of the CC of the BKP, 10.11.1967, p. 64f.

⁷⁹ CDA, F. 1B, op. 35, a. e. 12, Protocol "A" No. 13 of the meeting of the Politburo of the CC of the BKP, 16.1.1968, IV. On the relations of our country with Austria and Norway, p. 8f.

⁸⁰ Federal Law Gazette No. 523/1974, Art. 9 and 11.

have “little practical significance” and would not lead to “a lively exchange of labor” between the two countries. At that time, however, Austria wanted to conclude such agreements only in connection with recruitment agreements for foreign labor, such as those concluded with Spain (1962), Turkey (1964), and Yugoslavia (1966).⁸¹ The Ministry of the Interior expressed “reservations about a general abolition” of the visa requirement “for weighty state-police reasons. In view of the symbolic power of such a step, the Foreign Ministry took a more differentiated view: “Whether these state police considerations are of such importance as to surpass the value of a visa waiver agreement with a communist state in terms of its symbolic effect cannot be judged.” Rather, in “weighing the pros and cons,” it was considered essential to clarify in advance the question “whether passports in Bulgaria would be issued only to a limited privileged group of persons or to almost any applicant.”⁸² When Kreisky visited Bulgaria in July 1965, they had initially agreed to negotiate the abolition of the visa requirement for diplomatic passport holders, which Bachev wanted to be understood “as a first step in the direction of a complete abolition of the visa requirement between friendly and neighboring states.” As a next step, he wanted to see “service passport holders” included, which would have meant relief for Bulgarians working in the transport sector. Kreisky explained that “there were still additional possibilities between Austria and Bulgaria in this area. He said that the difficulties were especially great where neighboring states were concerned. This was the case, for example, with Yugoslavia. Austria does not want to become an immigration country. It is too small for that. However, such problems do not exist between states that do not directly border each other.” In addition, he recognized and emphasized the potential of such an agreement for the expansion of reciprocal tourism. “The number of holidaymakers is constantly growing, which will also benefit Austrian-Bulgarian tourism,” he said. Moreover, this would also be a means to change the balance of payments in favor of Bulgaria. Bulgaria would thus have the opportunity to make purchases in Austria. Facilitation in obtaining visas would thus be interesting not only psychologically, but also materially. S 70 to S 80 [Austrian Shillings] would be saved per person, which every Austrian traveler could then spend again in Bulgaria.” Baschew confirmed this wanted to calm the immigration fears: “As far as the liberalization of the visa regime was

⁸¹ Bulgaria – Bulgarian Proposals for Intensifying Austrian-Bulgarian Relations – Conversation between Ambassador Nezbeda and the Bulgarian Foreign Minister, Vienna, 19 March 1965. Foreign Minister, Vienna, 19.3.1965, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol 1965, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 131.851-6/65, GZ. 133.690-6/65.

⁸² Bulgaria – Bulgarian proposal to abolish the visa requirement – possible abolition of the visa requirement for diplomatic passport holders, Vienna, 14.5.1965, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol 1965, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 131.851-6/65, GZ. 136.655-6/65.

concerned, he shared the opinion of the Federal Minister; he only wanted to add that Bulgaria had been the country with the smallest emigration in the last 150 years, even under the worst political and social conditions. Today, in the period of economic expansion, there is even less danger for economic reasons. With regard to tourism, a relaxation of the visa regime would be very useful. One could imagine liberalization in stages, and for all types of passports. The authorities on both sides should study this issue. In any case, Bulgaria is ready to take further steps in this direction even now.”⁸³

Notwithstanding these bilateral deliberations, the Ministry of the Interior continued to have “reservations of a fundamental nature” against such an agreement. In a letter to Interior Minister Franz Hetzenauer, however, Kreisky had stated “that it would hardly be justifiable in terms of foreign policy to reject the liberalization wishes of an Eastern bloc state and thereby virtually reverse roles.” Hetzenauer maintained the fundamental reserve of his department, but in his reply to the Foreign Minister he stated: “[I]f, however, the foreign policy reasons for offering Bulgaria the conclusion of a social security agreement are so serious that the reservations here have to be disregarded, it might prove expedient to offer Bulgaria an agreement corresponding to the Austrian-Yugoslav social security agreement”. Thereupon, an intra-Austrian interministerial dialogue was set in motion, which eventually reversed the initially negative attitude toward the Bulgarian advance.⁸⁴

In February 1967, in a conversation with Ambassador Nezbeda, Zhivkov expressed his personal satisfaction “with the positive reaction of the Austrian authorities to the Bulgarian proposal for a visa agreement.”⁸⁵ In the run-up to Klaus’s visit in 1967 it was stated: “The normalization of relations finally found expression in the growing number of Austrian tourists spending their vacations in Bulgaria, which, however, is not yet matched by any significant numbers of Bulgarian tourists coming to Austria. The willingness of Austria to facilitate travel and to accommodate Bulgarian tourist interests is also shown by the readiness with which the Bulgarian proposal to lift the visa requirement was taken up this year.”⁸⁶ During the visit, Zhivkov expressed his satisfaction with the

⁸³ Bulgaria visit of the Federal Minister; minutes, Vienna, 22.7.1965, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol 1965, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 131.851-6/65, GZ. 139.853-6/65.

⁸⁴ Proposals for lifting the SV compulsion between Austria and Bulgaria, Vienna, 9.11.1966, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, Gr.Zl. 36.809-6/66, Zl. 48.262-6/66.

⁸⁵ Nezbeda to Kreisky, Sofia, 14 February 1967, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, Zl. 15.983-Pol/67.

⁸⁶ Official Visit of the Federal Chancellor to Bulgaria, October 17-21, 1967, as of early October 1967, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol 1967, Bulgaria 2.

agreement. The Austrian Chancellor also said that the agreement brings good results and enables many Austrian citizens to visit Bulgaria, thus contributing to confidence building between the two countries.⁸⁷ At the same time, he expressed his hope for more Bulgarian tourists to Austria.⁸⁸ However, bringing more Bulgarian tourists to Austria, as suggested by Klaus, was not on the Bulgarian agenda. In its decision of January 1968, the Politburo had added tourism to the list of measures for intensifying relations with Austria prepared by the Foreign Ministry in November 1967, but only in one direction. It instructed the Committee for Tourism to prepare measures for increasing the volume of tourists from Austria to Bulgaria.⁸⁹

VII. Concluding Remarks

Austrian-Bulgarian relations showed little dynamism until the early 1960s. The historical strains on the relationship between the two states were only slight. In Austria, the image of Bulgaria as the most loyal follower of the Soviet Union prevailed above all, and the volume of trade had a modest level. However, the main reason for the slow development of relations was the absence of a property treaty. When Bulgaria was finally ready to conclude such a treaty and to pay compensation, it was the first Warsaw Pact state willing to take this step. As a result, Bulgaria became a pioneer in the normalization of Austria's relations with the socialist states and at the same time an experimental field of Ostpolitik. In the absence of a burdensome common border at the Iron Curtain and without a serious historical burden on relations, Vienna was able to take quite remarkable steps in East-West relations with Sofia. Even if many levels of relations – including the economy – remained at a comparatively low level, progress was made everywhere and visiting contacts were always a small step ahead of their time – this was true for the trips of Austrian politicians to Bulgaria and even more so for the visits of Bulgarian politicians to the West. Probably the most exciting result of this development was the conclusion of a treaty on the abolition of mutual visa requirements, which was in any case far ahead of its time – on a larger scale, free movement of persons was not negotiated between East and West until the CSCE. Interestingly, this was a Bulgarian initiative that could be realized only after overcoming domestic resistance.

⁸⁷ CDA, F. 1B, op. 35, a. e. 12, pp. 59-65, Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Politburo of the CC of the BKP, 10.11.1967, p. 63.

⁸⁸ Working session on Wednesday, 18 October 1967, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, GZ. 19.223-6/7, Zl. 33.351-Pol/67.

⁸⁹ CDA, F. 1B, op. 35, a. e. 12, Protocol "A" No. 13 of the meeting of the Politburo of the CC of the BKP, 16.1.1968, IV. On the relations of our country with Austria and Norway, p. 8f.

Against this background, Zhivkov should have visited Austria in the second half of 1968. In the wake of the Warsaw Pact intervention in Czechoslovakia, the visit was postponed. Despite the setback, Austrian diplomacy believed that "it is considered likely that Bulgaria will not return to its earlier isolationist policy but will try to regain and expand the terrain of Western contacts lost as a result of its participation in the CSSR intervention." The reason was interest in the West in the areas of economics, modernization, and tourism.⁹⁰ When Zhivkov was finally able to make up for his visit to Austria in April 1969, Klaus did confront him with repercussions of the intervention in Czechoslovakia on Austria and on détente. At the same time, however, the focus was already clearly on the European security conference under discussion. Zhivkov said in this context "that Austria could make a great contribution to European security. Let me exaggerate, the Republic of Austria could do 'business' if a proposal were made that this security conference be held in Vienna. We would be very happy to support this proposal. We welcome the policy of neutrality of the Republic of Austria, the policy of peaceful cooperation with all countries, likewise the policy of mediation between the East and the West."⁹¹

At the beginning of 1970, the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry still affirmed: "One really believes that the neutrals, especially Austria, could play a positive role. Austria had old traditions in organizing such conferences and it was considered good if it remained true to these traditions. On the Bulgarian side, it was felt that the neutrals should not form a bloc."⁹² With this state of affairs, Austria

⁹⁰ Effects of the Intervention in the CSSR on Bulgaria, Vienna, 18.11.1968, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 3, Gr.Zl. 111.157-6/68, Zl. 129.267-Pol/68.

⁹¹ "However, Mr. Prime Minister, it would not serve the open character of our conversation if I did not at the same time also state that the events and happenings in our northern neighboring country have been filling us with concern for quite some time. On the one hand, a country like Austria has an eminent interest in maintaining peace and stability on its borders. And on the other hand, Austria in particular, which has made so many efforts for détente and cooperation between the states of the European East and Southeast, must realize that a serious setback has arisen for these détente efforts as a result of the events in the CSSR." Minutes of the working discussion between Federal Chancellor Dr. Josef Klaus and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, Todor Zhivkov, on April 15, 1969, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, GZ. 150.493-6/69, Zl. 157.595-6/69. See also: CDA, F. 378b, op. 5, a.e. 386, Minutes of the conversation between the Federal Chancellor of the Republic of Austria, Josef Klaus, and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, Todor Živkov, o. D. [April 15, 1969], p. 20.

⁹² Summary minutes of the talks held by the head of Section II, Ambassador Dr. Halusa at the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry on February 3 and 4, 1970, ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II-Pol, Bulgaria 2, GZ. 81.671-6/70.267-Pol/70.

entered the Kreisky era, which lasted until 1983, and internationally the dawn of the heyday of détente took place.

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