

Austria as a Bridge for Bulgaria to the West, 1969–1990. A Model of “Peaceful Coexistence” During the Cold War

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Abstract: The Bulgarian Communist Party decided on January 16, 1968 to intensify economic, trade, cultural, scientific-technical and tourist relations with Austria. The establishment of “special relations” with Austria was given great emphasis in Bulgaria to increase the role played by itself in the Cold War theater, despite the difference in the socio-political order of the countries. After the suppression of the Prague Spring, Soviet leaders explicitly instructed Bulgaria to intensify relations with Western countries to sow discord among them. Vienna, in turn, gratefully accepted the outstretched hand from Sofia in order to intensify and test its Ostpolitik. When Zhivkov made a plea to Austrian Chancellor Klaus to advocate a pan-European security conference and even hold it in Vienna, Vienna, however, remained reluctant, as it did not want to be seen as a mouthpiece for Moscow’s wishes. An intensification of economic relations, on the other hand, were welcomed in Austria, especially to prevent to drive Bulgaria further into Moscow’s arms after the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. Nonetheless, trade remained imbalanced as there was little demand for Bulgarian products in Austria, despite mutual efforts (1971: agreement on payments; 1972: tourism agreement; 1973: most-favored nation treatment). The close integration of the Bulgarian economy into the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) left tourism as the only concrete field in which economic relations could be expanded.

The article further concentrates on humanitarian issues frequently put forward by Austrian officials, as they – not least during the CSCE – ranked high on the Austrian agenda. It were also these issues that from Sofia’s (and, behind it, Moscow’s) perspective dragged out the CSCE negotiations. Of all people, the Austrian Chancellor Kreisky, whose Foreign Ministry and delegation supported these agendas, agreed with this assessment. At the same time, Sofia planned to use the humanitarian cases presented by Austria as political leverage, not least in exchange for cooperation against anti-Bulgarian emigrants in Austria.

Todor Zhivkov interpreted the post-Helsinki agenda primarily in the further expansion of economic cooperation – and Austrian officials accepted, that there were limits with regard to cooperation in other, including humanitarian, matters. Cultural cooperation reached its peak in the 1970s and until Lyudmila Zhivkova’s death in 1981.

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Todor Zhivkov's adoption of a strongly nationalistic course in the 1980s strained the friendly relations, but did not bring them to an end. When Vienna hosted the CSCE Follow-up Meeting 1987-1989, it exercised restraint, but continued to stand up for the humanitarian provisions (Basket III). This "pro-Western" stance was seen critically (not only) in Sofia.

After the opening of the "Iron Curtain" in 1989, Austria discontinued to focus on Bulgaria, but instead stretched its supportive hand towards those countries in Eastern Europe which showed signs of transformation. But also Bulgaria was more interested in expanding its relations with the USA and the large EU member states. Austria joined the EU in 1995, and Bulgaria followed in 2007. Whereas Austrian neutrality was thus limited to the purely military sphere – Bulgaria, on the other hand, joined NATO in 2004. Integration in Western institutions provided a degree of cooperation, security and stability to the two countries far beyond what had been possible during the Cold War.

Key words: détente, Cold War, Austrian-Bulgarian political and diplomatic relations, neutrality, economic cooperation, CSCE, human rights

The Restoration of Ties after World War II

Bilateral relations between the Republic of Austria and the People's Republic of Bulgaria were shaped by changes in international relations in Europe after the end of the Second World War. In mid-April 1946, Bulgarian Foreign Minister Georgi Kulishev sent a letter to the head of the Soviet Military Mission in Bulgaria, General Sergei Biryuzov, requesting permission to recognize Austria. Biryuzov responded positively, and thus on 10 May 1946, after informing the Austrian authorities and requesting the exchange of political representatives, the Bulgarian government announced its recognition of Austria. Meanwhile, the Austrian government was allowed by the victorious powers (USSR, USA, Great Britain, and France) to resume its diplomatic relations and to establish political offices.¹

After complicated diplomatic steps by the two countries, a crucial decision was taken by the Allied Control Commission on 18 October 1946 in Vienna allowing Bulgaria and Austria to restore their diplomatic and consular relations. Soon thereafter, in March 1947, Austrian government announced the restoration of diplomatic relations with Sofia and sent its diplomatic representative. A few months later, in June 1947, a Bulgarian representative was sent to Vienna.² The long road to restoring diplomatic ties between the two countries was successful but was dependent on the willingness of the victorious Allied powers to control the diplomatic ties of occupied Austria.

¹ Mateeva 2005, p. 73.

² Ibid., p. 74.

The next and very important event that framed bilateral relations between Bulgaria and Austria was the signing of the Austrian State Treaty in May 1955, which proved to be a crucial step in regulating the international order in Central Europe. The treaty enabled Austria to establish a neutral status in European politics and provided opportunities for the Austrian government to pursue more active cultural and economic contacts with Western countries, and with some Eastern bloc countries. Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech in February 1956 denouncing Joseph Stalin and Khrushchev's subsequent push to reduce military spending and to curtail Soviet military deployments abroad raised hopes for a détente in international politics in Europe.³

On 15 December 1955 Bulgaria recognized the neutrality of Austria.⁴ In a special announcement by the Bulgarian Telegraph Agency issued on 15 December 1955 and published in the leading newspaper *Rabotnichesko Delo* the next day, the Bulgarian authorities recognized the full neutrality of Austria and "expressed confidence that the policy of permanent neutrality adopted by Austria will contribute to the development of mutually beneficial relations between the two countries."⁵ Not until 1963, however, did the two countries decide to elevate their relations, with the establishment of embassies.⁶

In the economic sphere, Austria and Bulgaria pursued a "substantial expansion of ties," especially with regard to industrial cooperation. The Bulgarian government's Commission for Economic and Scientific-Technical Cooperation was responsible for developing a corresponding program in consultation with the Austrians. Because the demand for Bulgarian industrial goods in Austria was low, the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Trade was instructed to develop measures to "popularize" Bulgarian mechanical engineering and industrial products in Austria. A new long-term trade agreement was to be drafted to improve Bulgarian export conditions to Austria.

For cultural and scientific-technical exchange, Bulgaria's Committee for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries was given the task of preparing a draft agreement in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Bulgarian Committee for Tourism, in turn, had to develop measures to increase the number of tourists from Austria to Bulgaria.

³ Boyadjieva 2017, p. 513.

⁴ Document №100. „Information of Bulgarian Telegraph Agency on recognition of the full neutrality of Austria by PRB.” 15 December 1955. – In: Vanshna politika na Narodna republika Bulgaria. (1979) Ministerstvo na Vanshnite raboti na NRB. Tom I 1944–1962. (Sofia) [Foreign policy of the Peoples' Republic of Bulgaria (PRB). Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRB. Volume I. 1944–1962], pp. 236–237

⁵ Ibid., p. 237

⁶ Mateeva 2005, p. 74

The Cold War Context

On 16 January 1968, the leaders of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP) decided to intensify economic, trade, cultural, scientific-technical and tourist relations with Austria.⁷ Against the backdrop of a deep ideological struggle between the two superpowers, Bulgaria wanted to play an important role in the Cold War by establishing “special relations” with Austria. The decisions of the BKP Politburo in 1968, supplemented by another BKP Politburo decision in 1969, meant that relations with Austria were given major emphasis despite the two countries’ different socio-political systems.

In subsequent years, the Bulgarian and Austrian governments signed numerous bilateral agreements. These agreements need to be evaluated within the framework of relations between the Soviet Union and Western countries. After Soviet and East European troops crushed the “Prague Spring” in August 1968, Soviet leaders wanted Bulgarian foreign policy officials to sow discord among the West European countries. The aim was to find out how strong U.S. influence was in Western Europe and to disrupt possible military plans of the West. Above all, Soviet leaders wanted to counter attempts by Western countries to spread influence into Eastern Europe.

Push toward Détente

Bulgaria’s initiatives to establish close political, diplomatic, economic, and cultural relations with Austria were viewed favorably in Vienna.⁸ On 6 March 1968, the two countries signed an “Agreement on Cultural and Scientific Exchange for the Years 1968 and 1969,” and on 27 May 1968 they signed an “Agreement on Economic, Industrial and Technical Cooperation.” The invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, in which Bulgarian troops took part, caused only a brief pause in the emergence of an East-West détente.

Attempts to revive friendly relations and good economic ties were followed by intensified political exchange. The BKP leader, Todor Zhivkov, visited Vienna from 14 to 18 April 1969. He was the first leader from the Soviet bloc to visit a capitalist country after the August 1968 invasion.⁹ The Austrian Foreign Ministry was aware of the symbolic effect of the visit and interpreted

⁷ Tsentralen Darzhaven Archiv na Republika Bulgaria [Central State Archive of the Republic of Bulgaria], further in the text – CDA, Fond (F.)1B, opis (op.) 35, a. e. [archivna edinita - archival unit] 12, Protocol “A” No. 13 of the Meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee (CC) of the BKP, 16.1.1968, IV On the Relations of Our Country with Austria and Norway, l. 8f.

⁸ On Austria’s “balancing act between East and West” during the Cold War, see Bischof & Ruggenthaler 2022.

⁹ *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 13th of April 1969.

it “as a first attempt by a Warsaw Pact state to reconnect with the Western European states after the ČSSR crisis.”¹⁰

For Bulgarian authorities the visit was more than just an opportunity to restore friendly relations. In a conversation with the Austrian Ambassador in Bulgaria, Rudolf Krippel-Redlich, on 13 December 1968, Bulgarian Deputy Foreign Minister Gero Grozev emphasized that the visit “not only would be a courtesy visit” but “would also be reflected in some concrete results.”¹¹ He asked Krippel-Redlich “to find out in Vienna which pending matters could still be settled before the visit of the Bulgarian Prime Minister . . . or whether a treaty could be signed on the occasion of the visit.”¹²

In December 1968, the Bulgarian Embassy in Vienna approached the Ministry of Education. To expedite the process, the Bulgarian side asked for the already-prepared text of the Austro-Hungarian Agreement on Scientific and Technical Cooperation. The Bulgarians wanted to use it as a template for an analogous Bulgarian-Austrian document.¹³ The final draft of the text sent to the Austrian Ministry of Education “was copied by them almost verbatim” and was meant to serve as the basis for a Bulgarian-Austrian technical-scientific agreement.¹⁴

The receipt of the Bulgarian draft prompted the Austrian Ministry of Education to convene an interagency meeting on 14 February 1969. Representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Finance, Trade, and Technology took part in it. During the meeting, the two parties stated that the agreements concluded with Bulgaria the previous year (the “Agreement on Cultural and Scientific Exchange for the Years 1968 and 1969” and the “Agreement on Economic, Industrial and Technical Cooperation”) were “quite sufficient” in substance and scope.¹⁵ Nevertheless, a compromise was sought in order to placate the Bulgarians. Austrian Minister of Education Franz Karasek presented a document that

¹⁰ Austrian State Archive/Archive of the Republic (ÖStA/AdR), II-pol. 1973, Kt. 2033, Zl. 30.776-6(Pol)73, Official visit of the Federal Minister to Bulgaria, 7-9 February 1973, Information, 24.1.1973, p. 6.

¹¹ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol, Kt. 1343 (Bahrein - Burundi) 1968, Zl. 198-RES/68, Ambassador Krippel-Redlich to the Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Vienna. Visit of Bulgarian Prime Minister Zhivkov to Vienna, 16.12.1968.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1969, Kt. 1493 (Botswana-Burundi), Zl. 251.002-Kult-bi/69, Draft Agreement between the Republic of Austria and the People's Republic of Bulgaria on Scientific and Technical Cooperation, Interministerial Meeting at the Federal Ministry of Education, 14 February 1969, file note, 17 February 1969, pp. 1-4, here: p. 1.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 2.

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met with general approval: a new agreement on cooperation in the scientific and technical field could be signed during the visit, but only on the condition that it would not enter into force before May 1970, and that any overlaps with existing agreements would be eliminated from the Austrian draft.¹⁶

After the invasion of Czechoslovakia, Warsaw Pact efforts to gain Western support for the Soviet bloc's proposal to hold a pan-European security conference were suspended, albeit only briefly until the spring of 1969.¹⁷ Zhivkov had a clear European policy mandate for the Austrian government. He appealed to Chancellor Josef Klaus for a stronger commitment on Austria's part to a "pan-European security conference," which had been advocated by the Warsaw Pact since 1966.¹⁸ At the same time, Soviet diplomats also began to reach out to Austria again for support to hold the proposed conference.¹⁹ The parallel timing of Sofia's and Moscow's initiatives, as well as the similar wording, indicated that they had been synchronized in advance. But unlike Soviet officials, Zhivkov offered concrete ideas for a pan-European forum. He told Klaus that the Austrian government should convene the conference in Vienna, and he assured him that "we will support you in this."²⁰ Holding a pan-European security conference would give Austria an opportunity to do "great work for Europe" and boost Austria's neutral profile and reputation.²¹ He also spoke openly about the difference

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁷ On the neutrals and the CSCE, see Fischer 2009. On the role of Austria see: Graf-Steiner 2024; Gilde 2013; Liedermann 2002; on Switzerland, see Rosin 2014; Renk 1996; on Sweden see: Makko 2017; on Finland see: Rentola 2005; on the CSCE in general, see: Morgan 2018; Zagorsky 2005; Békés 2008; on the role and perception of neutrality in the Cold War see: Kramer 2021, pp. 533–564.

¹⁸ 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 Zhivkov, n. d. (c. August 1969), l. 20.

¹⁹ Stiftung Bruno Kreisky Archiv (SBKA), Vienna (Bruno Kreisky Archives Foundation), VII.1 Country Box USSR, Box 2_ex 1240 Conversations with Soviet Diplomats. Ambassador Walter Wodak to SPÖ Party Chairman Bruno Kreisky. Information for the party chairman concerning talks with the 1st Secretary of the Soviet Embassy, Mr. Albert Dimitrieff, on April 17, 1969.

²⁰ 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 Zhivkov, n. d. [April 15, 1969], l. 20; see also: ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1969, Kt. 1493 (Botswana-Burundi), Zl. 157595-6/69. Official visit of the Bulgarian Prime Minister Zhivkov to Austria, minutes, statement of the Federal Chancellor and final communique. Annex B, Minutes of the Working Meeting 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, l. 26f.

²¹ Ibid.

in political room for maneuver. Zhivkov claimed that, compared to Bulgaria, Austria had much greater opportunity to make its voice heard internationally because of the country's neutral status.²²

In the spring of 1969, the Austrian federal government apparently did not see itself in a position to advocate a pan-European security conference. Klaus replied to Zhivkov that Austria "could not propose to convene such a conference," stressing that such an initiative would have to come from the superpowers. Austria had always been reluctant to respond to Moscow's urging to become deeply involved in a security conference. The Austrians had no intention of becoming a standard-bearer for the Soviet bloc and wanted to uphold Austria's neutral image in the West.²³

Economic relations were the central topic of discussion during Zhivkov's visit to Austria, as they had been during Klaus's visit to Bulgaria in the fall of 1967. In November 1968, the Austrian Embassy in Sofia sent a "Radio Free Europe" analysis of 7 October 1968 to the Austrian Foreign Ministry. The report concluded that Bulgaria, as a result of its participation in the invasion of Czechoslovakia, would be limited in its capacity to expand contacts with the West.²⁴ Economic restrictions by Western countries, the analysis continued, would inevitably drive the Bulgarians further into Moscow's arms.²⁵

Bulgarian officials were concerned about Bulgaria's trade deficit with Austria, which had grown to 100 million US dollars in the 1960s. Zhivkov told the Austrians he wanted to increase exports from Bulgaria, and he hinted that the trade deficit might become unmanageable.²⁶ Klaus responded that efforts were already under way to buy more Bulgarian goods, and he expressed interest in recruiting Bulgarian guest workers ("Gastarbeiter") to Austria.²⁷ He said Austria could provide jobs for some 10,000 guest workers from Bulgaria in sectors of shortage, helping to bring foreign currency into Bulgaria.²⁸

²² Ibid.

²³ Gilde 2013; Graf-Steiner 2024.

²⁴ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol, Kt. 1343 (Bahrein - Burundi) 1968, Zl. 129.268-6/Pol/68, Effects of the Intervention in the ČSSR on Bulgaria, [day illegible].11.1968.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1969, Kt. 1493 (Botswana-Burundi), Zl. 157595-6/69. Official visit of Bulgarian Prime Minister Zhivkov to Austria, minutes, statement of the Federal Chancellor and final communique. Annex B, Minutes of the Working Meeting between Federal Chancellor Dr. Josef Klaus, and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, Todor Zhivkov, April 15, 1969, p. 41.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1969, Kt. 1493 (Botswana-Burundi), Zl. 157595-6/69. Official Visit

Zhivkov, however, rejected this proposal because there was also a shortage of workers at home.

The Road to CSCE

On 5 May 1969, Finland proposed that a conference on security and cooperation in Europe (CSCE) be held in Helsinki.²⁹ Alluding to Finland's announcement, Bulgarian Foreign Minister Ivan Bashev told Austrian Foreign Minister Kurt Waldheim on the sidelines of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly on 1 October 1969 that "the Bulgarian side had suggested Vienna as a conference venue . . . and still preferred Vienna."³⁰ The Austrians themselves likewise hoped that Vienna would serve as an additional host for negotiations on CSCE.

In November 1969, Bashev told Waldheim about a "swap" the Warsaw Pact countries were hoping to accomplish with CSCE. He said that if the participation of all European states, including the German Democratic Republic (GDR), would be guaranteed "on the basis of complete equality," Bulgaria would raise "no objection to American and Canadian participation."³¹ In June 1970, the Warsaw Pact's newly created committee of foreign ministers met in Budapest and officially announced the position Bashev had outlined to Waldheim seven months earlier.³²

of Bulgarian Prime Minister Zhivkov to Austria, minutes, statement of the Federal Chancellor and Final Communiqué. Annex B, Minutes of the Working Meeting between Federal Chancellor Dr. Josef Klaus, and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, Todor Zhivkov, April 15, 1969, p. 42.

²⁹ On the genesis of the Finnish initiative for a pan-European security conference, see in detail: Rentola, 2005; see also: Morgan 2018, p. 87.

³⁰ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1969, Kt. 1493 (Botswana-Burundi), Zl. 165372-II/69, conversation between the Federal Minister [Waldheim] and the Bulgarian Foreign Minister [Ivan Bashev]. New York, Oct. 3, 1969. Even in May 1972, Bulgarian Foreign Minister Mladenov told Austrian Chargé d'Affaires Peter Moser that "he certainly saw the possibility of holding the conference in Vienna," but added that Finland would have to be considered first, since it was "making a special effort to hold the conference." See: ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1972, Kt. 1901 (Bahrein - Burundi), Zl. 152648-Pol/72, visit of an Austrian parliamentary delegation to Sofia from 11 to 18 May 1972, 24 May 1972.

³¹ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1969, Kt. 1493 (Botswana-Burundi), Zl. 167006-6/69. Summary minutes of the working discussion between Federal Minister Waldheim and Bulgarian Foreign Minister Bashev in Vienna on 17 November 1969.

³² Memorandum of the Conference of Foreign Ministers of the Warsaw Treaty Member States in Budapest on June 21-22, 1970, on Questions of Convening a Pan-European Conference, in Schramm (Riggert - Friedel (eds.), Sicherheitskonferenz in Europa, pp. 520-522. Within the CPSU CC, this had been decided internally in June 1969, see: RGANI, F. 2, op. 3, d. 168, pp. 65-72, excerpt from L. I. Brežnev's speech in the CC of the CPSU, 26.6.1969; cf. on the Soviet view of Austria's role also Anna Graf-Steiner 2024, Brückenbauer im Kalten

In July 1970, Austrian President Franz Jonas paid a visit to Bulgaria. The Austrian press covered the meeting favorably and included positive descriptions of Bulgaria, the first time a Communist country had been accorded such treatment by Austrian journalists.³³

In November 1971, the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry requested consultations with the Austrians to discuss issues of European security and bilateral relations.³⁴ The Austrian Foreign Ministry accepted the offer, “although there is no particular interest in the talks on our side.”³⁵ A Bulgarian delegation led by Ambassador Nikolai Minchev came to Vienna on 9–10 December and met with Helmut Liedermann, the head of the East-West Relations and CSCE Department in the Foreign Ministry and later head of the Austrian CSCE delegation. The consultations focused primarily on the proposed CSCE talks and the question of troop reductions in Europe.³⁶ As late as May 1972, Bulgarian Foreign Minister Petar Mladenov told the Austrian Chargé d’Affaires, Peter Moser, that “he certainly sees the possibility of holding the conference in Vienna,” adding, however, that Finland would have to be considered first.³⁷ This was in line with Austria’s own efforts. As plans for CSCE negotiations neared fruition, the Austrians reaffirmed their desire to have Vienna as another venue, seeing it as opportunity to strengthen Austria’s international prestige as a neutral mediator and meeting place for all European states. At the same time, Austrian diplomats and politicians were careful not to be seen as competing with Finland.³⁸

The CSCE was also the focus of Bulgarian Prime Minister Stanko Todorov’s visit to the Austrian Embassy on 4 December 1972. Todorov expressed satisfaction with the multilateral preliminary talks in Helsinki, which had started at the end of November. He stressed that the CSCE had the potential to create a better atmosphere in Europe “and Austria could make a very constructive contribution

Krieg. Österreich und der lange Weg zur KSZE-Schlussakte.

³³ Only the coverage on Austrian radio was negative towards the cooperation of Austria and Bulgaria.

³⁴ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1971, Kt. 1758 (Bahrein - Burundi), Address of the Bulgarian Ambassador to the Secretary General [Walter Wodak], 17.11.1971.

³⁵ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1971, Kt. 1758 (Bahrein - Burundi), Zl. 121546-6a/71, contact meeting with Bulgaria, 20 November 1971.

³⁶ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1971, Kt. 1758 (Bahrein - Burundi), Zl. 123.401-6a/Pol. 71, Bulgarian-Austrian contact talks; visit of a delegation of officials to Vienna on 9 and 10 December 1971.

³⁷ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1972, Kt. 1901 (Bahrein - Burundi), Zl. 152648-Pol/72, visit of an Austrian parliamentary delegation to Sofia from 11 to 18 May 1972, 24 May 1972.

³⁸ Gilde 2013; Graf-Steiner 2024.

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to this.”³⁹ Vienna was finally proposed by the Warsaw Pact countries as the host for the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction Talks (MBFR) in January 1973, which was a major factor in the decision to choose Geneva rather than Vienna as the venue for the CSCE ambassadorial talks in May 1973.⁴⁰

Trade and Tourism Issues

Bulgaria's trade balance with Austria remained a central topic in bilateral talks. There was little demand in Austria for Bulgarian products despite efforts on both sides to counter the imbalance, such as an agreement on payments (1971), a tourism agreement (1972), and the mutual granting of most-favored-nation treatment (1973). During a visit to Austria in February 1973, Bulgarian Foreign Minister Petar Mladenov insisted to his Austrian counterpart, Rudolf Kirchschläger, that “ways and means must be found for Bulgaria to sell more to Austria.” He said he was aware “that no minister in Austria is in a position to force an Austrian merchant to buy without profit,” but at the same time he asked for political assistance in creating favorable trade conditions. Kirchschläger cited measures that had already been taken. Starting in April 1972, the Bulgarian economy had been granted preferential tariffs for industrial products by a unilateral Austrian act, which put Bulgarian industrial products on an equal footing with those from the EEC.⁴¹ Kirchschläger said he understood Bulgarian efforts to balance trade, but he criticized Bulgaria's decision to restrict Austrian exports (from 750 million Austrian schillings in 1971 to 467 million schillings in 1972). He warned that this would “initiate a general process of contraction, the reversal of which is likely to be difficult” and that there was a further danger that “Bulgarian exports to Austria would be curtailed.”⁴²

In the tourism sector, a positive trend could already be seen after the conclusion of the tourism agreement, even though the statistical data on Austrian tourists in Bulgaria differed widely. To Mladenov's objection that the possibilities were “not yet exhausted,”⁴³ Kirchschläger objected that the number of tourists for 1972 (9,400 persons) put forward by the Bulgarian side was much too low. He knew from Austrian sources that about 33,000 tourists from Austria had

³⁹ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1972, Kt. 1901 (Bahrein - Burundi), Zl. 19-Pol/72, official note on the conversation with Prime Minister Stanko Todorov on the occasion of the inaugural visit on 4 December 1972, Sofia, 6.12.1972.

⁴⁰ See: Rosin 2014, pp. 73–79; Haftendorn, 2008, pp. 251f.

⁴¹ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1973, Kt. 2033, Zl. 67-Res/73, Minutes of the Working Talks between the Federal Minister Dr. Kirchschläger and the Bulgarian Foreign Minister Mladenov on 8 February 1973 in Sofia, 14.2.1973, p. 8f.

⁴² Ibid., p. 8f.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 5.

spent their vacations in Bulgaria the previous year.⁴⁴ The difference arose because the Bulgarian statistics took into account only organized travelers, whereas “Austrians tend to travel more individually,” Kirchschläger said, cautiously hinting at the freedom to travel that Austrians enjoyed in contrast to the lack of such freedoms for Bulgarians.

Closer Political Cooperation

In 1973, Bulgaria and Austria held high-level political meetings. Bulgarian officials were intent on strengthening political and diplomatic relations with Austria. In 1971 the former Austrian foreign minister Kurt Waldheim had received “active support from socialist countries,” especially Bulgaria, when he was chosen as Secretary General of the United Nations (UN) starting in 1972.⁴⁵ Soon after Waldheim took office, Bulgarian leaders invited him to visit Bulgaria, hoping thereby to strengthen the country’s international authority. Bulgarian officials believed the personal contacts with the UN Secretary General would have the potential to improve the Bulgaria’s relations with the organization and strengthen its positions in UN bodies.⁴⁶ Accordingly, Waldheim paid an official visit to Bulgaria in August 1973.

Several months earlier, in February 1973, Austrian Foreign Minister Kirchschläger had emphasized the Austrian government’s interest in maintaining “good and friendly relations with Bulgaria, relations such as one maintains with a neighboring country and not with a state many thousands of kilometers away.” He also stressed that the neighborly relationship had grown historically through the Danube but was also expressed in the affection of residents of the two countries for each other.⁴⁷

In the fall of 1973, Todor Zhivkov visited Austria for the first time since 1969. During his talks with President Franz Jonas, Chancellor Bruno Kreisky and Trade Minister Josef Staribacher at the Hofburg in Vienna, Zhivkov outlined his country’s ongoing and planned industrialization.⁴⁸ Both Zhivkov and

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

⁴⁵ CDA, F. 1B, op. 35, a.e. 3125, Politburo Decision No. 378, May 11, 1972, Supplement “A,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria to Todor Zhivkov, Chairman of the State Council of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria, on the Invitation of Kurt Waldheim, Secretary General of the United Nations, to Visit Bulgaria, May 5-11, 1972.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1973, Kt. 2033, Zl. 67-Res/73, Minutes of the Working Talks between the Federal Minister Dr. Kirchschläger and the Bulgarian Foreign Minister Mladenov on 8 February 1973 in Sofia, 14.2.1973, p. 6.

⁴⁸ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1973, Kt. 2033, Zl. 46928-6/73, Chairman of the State Council of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria Zhivkov, State Visit to Austria: Minutes of the Working

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Kreisky expressed support for increased contacts between states with different economic systems. He said that “we [the Austrians] believe that East-West co-operation is most likely in the economic sphere.”⁴⁹

In Bulgaria, Zhivkov's visit to Austria was very positively received. In an official report, Zhivkov referred to the bilateral relationship as one of “friendship.” This choice of words was emphasized by the Austrian Embassy's report to the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Thus, Austria was the only country besides France to be honored with the word.⁵⁰ Accordingly, Bulgarian-Austrian relations were often presented to Western diplomats and politicians as an auspicious example of good relations across the Iron Curtain.⁵¹

Overall, the Austrian embassy in Sofia reported that the image of Austria in Bulgaria was very positive. On official occasions, the country's foreign policy and neutrality were warmly praised in the press.⁵² Interest in Austrian art, culture, and sports remained high, and the Austrian embassy reported that Bulgarian media coverage in these areas was “without ideological prejudices.”⁵³ Even if the development of trade was no longer at the high level of the 1960s, Austria “would still be gladly used as a lead, presented as a showpiece, recommended for imitation and thus given a priority position as a pacesetter,” Ambassador Agstner judged in March 1975.⁵⁴ As far as the domestic political and economic situation in the country was concerned, it was admittedly viewed through the glasses of the “Volksstimme”, the Central Organ of the Austrian Communist Party, “so that the Bulgarian reader is to be given the impression that Austria swings from one crisis to another and that life there is not very rewarding or pleasant.”

Economic Mismatches

Austrian consumers' interest in obtaining Bulgarian products lagged behind the Bulgarian government's wishes. During an official visit to Sofia in September

Meeting on 10.10.1973 [at Vienna Hofburg], 11.10.1973, p. 5.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

⁵⁰ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1975, Box 5, Kt. 23-32, Zl. 7-Pol/75, Accountability Report of the Bulgarian Government for the Year 1974 [Chargé d'Affaires Dr. Peter Moser], 4.4.1975, p. 4f.

⁵¹ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1975, Box 5, Kt. 23-31, Zl. 109-RES/75, Basic Report: Supplement 1972-1974 Part III: Relations between Austria and Bulgaria [Ambassador Agstner], 19.3.1975, p. 16.

⁵² ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1975, Box 5, Kt. 23-32, Zl. 23.06.03/1-I.3/75, Annual Press Report of the Austrian Embassy in Bulgaria 1974. 6.3.1974.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1975, Box 5, Kt. 23-31, Zl. 109-RES/75, Basic Report: Supplement 1972-1974 Part III: Relations between Austria and Bulgaria [Ambassador Agstner], 19.3.1975, p. 16.

1976, Austrian President Kirchschräger explained to Zhivkov that Bulgaria was not yet anchored in the public consciousness as an industrial power (“Just as Austria has the reputation in the world that people there only waltz and indulge in the Heurigen, Bulgaria has the reputation of being a country of gardeners”).⁵⁵ Measures for image building, would be gladly supported further, but this would be “a long process,” he said.⁵⁶

In fact, because of the close integration of the Bulgarian economy into the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) (79 percent of Bulgarian foreign trade was with other CMEA members), Austria did not expect any significant improvement in industrial cooperation.⁵⁷ Indeed, the “original” interest of the Austrian business community in entering into industrial cooperation with Bulgaria had noticeably waned. Bulgaria was particularly closely aligned with the rest of CMEA in machinery production, where Austrian hopes had been high.⁵⁸ For an expansion of economic relations, tourism was “the only concrete area of hope”, the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry warned before Zhivkov’s visit to Austria in the fall of 1978.⁵⁹

Humanitarian Issues and the CSCE

When efforts by the Austrian Embassy in Sofia to seek redress for human rights problems did achieve the desired results, embassy officials forwarded the cases to the Austrian Foreign Ministry with the request to raise them at the highest level. During Zhivkov’s first visit, in the spring of 1969, Chancellor Klaus insisted on the positive settlement of individual humanitarian cases submitted by the Austrian embassy. The requests concerned matters such as the issuance of exit permits for the purpose of family reunification in Austria or pending alimony payments by Bulgarian fathers for their children living in Austria. Klaus emphasized that these problems were “relatively modest” and stressed that the public in Austria would attach “overwhelming importance”

⁵⁵ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol, 1976, Zl. 564-Res/1876. State visit of the Federal President; minutes of the working talks, 20.9.1976, p. 4. The Heurigen is a traditional Austrian pub where wine is served.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol, 1978, Bulgarian State Council Chairman Todor Zhivkov State Visit to Austria in the Period September 18-22, 1978, p. 20.

⁵⁸ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol, 1977, Box 6, Kt. 23-32, Zl. 23.01.01/9-II/77. Bulgaria; state visit of President Zhivkov to Austria; Bulgarian presentation, 16.11.1977, p. 21. In 1977, only 20% of Austrian exports consisted of machinery, *ibid.*, p. 22. According to this document, this impression had also been confirmed by a cooperation symposium in Vienna organized by the Austro-Bulgarian Society together with the two chambers of commerce in 1978.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 23.

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to humanitarian issues. Therefore, humanitarian requests would be of high political significance.⁶⁰

In September 1971, the Austrian Embassy in Sofia reported that the Bulgarian regime's domestic policy had become stricter, which would strain Bulgarian-Austrian relations.⁶¹ The Embassy informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that repressive measures had reached a new peak in recent months. Those measures included the forced expulsion of Bulgarian citizens (the so-called Pomaks), the relocation of several thousand residents from Sofia to smaller villages, and a campaign urging Bulgarians abroad, many among them students, to return to their homeland.

The Austrian Embassy also complained about constant delays in the issuance of exit visas for Austrian citizens living in Bulgaria. On several occasions, Austrian tourists who were married to Bulgarian émigrés had been asked to leave the country within 24 hours. The Bulgarian authorities declined to inform the Austrian embassy about the reasons for such actions and merely said that these "people already knew why this had happened". The Embassy's contacts with the Bulgarian population were further curtailed. For example, the *Chargé d'Affaires* reported that the coach of the Bulgarian national ski team, who had approached the Austrian Embassy with a request for Austrian winter sports posters and brochures, had been "reprimanded" by the Bulgarian authorities for this contact.⁶² Furthermore, he reported stricter monitoring of embassy staff recently. The embassy, however, also made clear that the tighter restrictions were not aimed specifically at Austria. All Western embassies experienced the same.⁶³

On other diplomatic and humanitarian issues, the Bulgarians sought Vienna's assistance. After Bulgaria had suspended diplomatic relations with Chile following the military coup of September 1973, the Bulgarian government requested Austria to take over the function of representing Bulgaria's interests in Chile, as it had done in Israel since 1967. Austria immediately complied with the request – "both for humanitarian reasons and with a view to good relations," as Kirchschläger explained to the Austrian Council of Ministers.⁶⁴ From 1978

⁶⁰ ÖStA, AdR, II-pol, 1969, Kt. 1493 (Botswana-Burundi), Zl. 150493-6/69 State visit of Prime Minister Zhivkov, submission of do. [illegible] cases, 18.4.1969.

⁶¹ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol, 1971, Kt. 1758 (Bahrein - Burundi), Zl. 10.Pol/71, Sharp domestic political course in Bulgaria and its effects on the work of the Embassy and on Austrian-Bulgarian relations, Austrian Embassy Sofia to the Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, 6.9.1971.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol, 1973, Kt. 2033, Zl. 320.004-VR/73, Assumption of the Protecting Power Function by the Republic of Austria for the People's Republic of Bulgaria and for the People's Republic of Hungary in Chile, oral presentation [Rudolf Kirchschläger] to the Council of Ministers, 8.10.1973.

to 1984, Austria assumed the function of representing Egypt's interests in Bulgaria.⁶⁵

Within the CSCE negotiations, Western and neutral states, including Austria, advocated cultural contacts and human rights protection. By contrast, the Bulgarian authorities increasingly cracked down on the few dissidents in the country. The Bulgarian State Security (Darzhavna Sigurnost, or DS) was responsible for monitoring dissident groups and tightening surveillance of artists and cultural figures who might harbor dissident sympathies.⁶⁶ Overall, though, Bulgaria's dissident movement was on a smaller scale than in other countries of the Warsaw pact, such as the USSR, Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia.

⁶⁷ The Austrian ambassador Dietrich Bukovsky explained the absence of a significant dissident movement in Bulgaria by noting that first, the relationship with the Soviet Union was harmonious ("unproblematic"), and second, that Bulgaria's industrialization, unlike that of other satellites, had only begun in the Communist era.⁶⁸

In August 1973, the Austrian Foreign Ministry sent a detailed report to the Embassy in Sofia about the Foreign Ministers' Conference in Helsinki from 3 to 7 July, which had officially opened the CSCE. He informed the Embassy in Sofia about the positions taken by Bulgaria, stressing that Bulgaria was trying, especially on the question of humanitarian affairs ("Basket III"), "to define the socialist interpretation of cooperation even before the second phase in Geneva [at the ambassadorial level from September 18 of this year]."⁶⁹ The report highlighted which provisions of the final recommendation negotiated in Helsinki were incompatible with the situation inside Bulgaria and predicted "the very greatest difficulties" in Bulgaria concerning freer movement and contacts on an individual and private basis⁷⁰, both of which were "largely denied to the ordinary citizen."⁷¹

⁶⁵ Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy Report 1984. Report of the Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, available at: www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XVI/III/85/imfname_553327.pdf, p. 459. Full diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Egypt were restored as of December 31, 1984.

⁶⁶ Boyadjieva 2023A, pp. 610–619.

⁶⁷ On the dissident movement in former Soviet bloc countries, the CSCE and the 3rd basket issues see: Boyadjieva 2009, pp. 47–58.

⁶⁸ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol, 1977, Box 6, Kt. 23-32, Zl. 3-Pol/77, Dissidents also in Bulgaria [Ambassador Bukovsky], 28.2.1977, p. 3f.

⁶⁹ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1973, Kt. 2033, Zl. 284-Res/73, CSCE, Preparation of the Second Phase. Chargé d'Affaires Moser to the Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Vienna, Sofia, 14.8.1973, p. 1.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 1–3.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 5.

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The report also criticized that Bulgarian passport law, which tightened political controls on the issue and levied fees for passports to capitalist countries that were “at least three times higher” than passports to socialist countries. Thus, a passport for multiple trips to Austria cost 104 leva, but only 29 leva for Hungary. According to the report, the clear discrimination against travel to the West and the complication of the passport-issuing procedure itself clearly contradicted the commitments to facilitate human contacts within the framework of the CSCE. Moreover, Bulgarian policies ran counter to bilateral agreements, including the 1967 Austro-Bulgarian visa agreement and the 1972 tourism agreement, both of which were concluded to facilitate and promote reciprocal travel and tourism. According to the Austrian report’s assessment, “there can be no question of reciprocity if Bulgaria makes passport issuance more difficult and discriminates against travel to Austria through higher fees.” It was for these reasons that states such as France and Italy “have not yet wanted to conclude a visa agreement with Bulgaria”, the report concluded.⁷²

The Chargé d’Affaires further complained that “contacts based on family ties, .. are made inordinately difficult”. The Embassy often received requests from Austrian citizens to intervene on behalf of their Bulgarian relatives in order to obtain permission to leave the country. In many cases, it was “necessary for these cases to be raised at a very high level,” albeit without any guarantee of success. The five cases that were brought up during Kirchschräger’s most recent visit to Sofia were “subsequently rejected outright”.⁷³

Another area of concern between the two countries was freedom of information. Bulgaria did not permit access to Western newspapers, with the exception of those put out by national Communist parties. In the case of Austria, this was the *Volksstimme* (People’s Voice). Only through the initiative of foreign travel agencies, a small number of Western newspapers were made available, at least in the tourist centers on the Black Sea resorts.⁷⁴ Usually, *Volksstimme*’s reporting on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) lacked objectivity. The reporting on Austria was more positive “because relations with Austria are considered very good and are consciously presented as such”.⁷⁵

The Austrian report also mentioned the case of Austrian journalist Paul Lendvai, who was still banned from entering the country because of his portrayal of Bulgaria in his book “Der Rote Balkan [The Red Balkans]”, published in 1969. During the foreign minister’s visit in February, Lendvai had almost been arrested because of the entry ban policy. Although the ban had been lifted

⁷² Ibid, pp. 1–3.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 3.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

ad hoc for Kirchschräger's visit, the Bulgarian authorities refused to drop it in general.⁷⁶

The report emphasized that the entire chapter on "humanitarian aspects," the so-called "Basket III" of the CSCE negotiations, was "especially in practice [viewed] only hesitantly and with extreme caution and mistrust" in Bulgaria. The authorities were "well aware that concessions will have to be made," but were doing their utmost to "minimize them and maintain state control as far as possible."⁷⁷

Austria attached great political importance to the humanitarian dimension of its relations with Bulgaria. This was certainly understood by the Bulgarian authorities, who tried to keep friendly relations with Vienna. In August 1973, the Austrian chargé d'affaires had complained about the rejection of the Austrian applications that Kirchschräger had submitted to the Bulgarian authorities. Those cases were resolved "in Austria's interest" right before Zhivkov's visit to Austria in 1973, and Federal President Jonas expressed gratitude.⁷⁸ Austria's agreement to diplomatic representation of interests of Bulgaria in Chile may also have played a role in the concession.⁷⁹

Zhivkov's 1973 Visit and CSCE

Zhivkov's visit to Austria in 1973 was extensively covered in the Austrian press. His opening address was published in the influential newspaper *Wiener Zeitung* on October 14.⁸⁰ Publication of the speech had not been coordinated with the Austrian Foreign Ministry; instead, the text was sent directly by the Bulgarian side to both editors-in-chief, to the editor of the Austrian Press Agency, Otto Schönherr, and to the editor of *Wiener Zeitung*, Rudolf Antoni. Zhivkov stressed in his speech that the good relations between Austria and Bulgaria were based primarily on the "common[...] aspiration [...] for peace, security and co-operation" and "common[...] or close[...] positions on numerous issues of international politics."⁸¹ He urged the conclusion of the CSCE "without unneces-

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 7f.

⁷⁸ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1973, Kt. 2033, Zl. 46928-6/73, Chairman of the Council of State of the People's Republic of Bulgaria Zhivkov, State Visit to Austria: Minutes of the Working Meeting on 10.10.1973 [in the Hofburg], 11.10.1973, pp. 8f.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1973, Kt. 2033, Zl. 47241-6(Pol)73, Official visit of the Chairman of the Bulgarian Council of State Todor Zhivkov to Austria; publication of a "greeting address" in the 'Wiener Zeitung', 16.10.1973.

⁸¹ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1973, Kt. 2033, Zl. 47241-6(Pol)73, Official visit of the Chairman of the Bulgarian Council of State Todor Zhivkov to Austria; publication of a "greeting address" in the 'Wiener Zeitung', 16.10.1973.

sary delay”.⁸² Bulgaria fully supported Moscow’s position that the negotiations should be concluded as quickly as possible, without detailed discussion of the “useless” humanitarian issues demanded by the West. The main aim of Moscow and Sofia was to achieve the priority goal of fixing Europe’s postwar borders at the multilateral level.⁸³

Austria’s role as a neutral mediator within the framework of the CSCE was assessed positively in principle by the Bulgarian side. The positions taken by the Austrian delegation were admittedly “closer to the opinion of the Western countries”, yet the Bulgarians appreciated the greater “flexibility, restraint and desire for a generally acceptable solution” of the neutral conference participants compared to other Western states.⁸⁴ The strategy of the head of the Austrian CSCE delegation, Liedermann, was to stay out of the discussion of principles and present himself as a mediator between East and West. This strategy paid off. Even the Austrian delegation’s commitment to the “Third Basket” did not affect the East’s benevolent attitude toward Austria.⁸⁵

The Bulgarian government never publicly criticized the Austrian delegation and tried instead to persuade Austrian leaders that CSCE should reach a swift conclusion. In a conversation in February 1973, Mladenov told Kirchschläger that the agenda in Helsinki should be approached “objectively” because it was “impossible [to] include all the questions in it.” He stressed that, “with all due respect to the ambassadors in Helsinki, one would have to leave individual questions to the foreign ministers and heads of government as well”.⁸⁶

These demands to speed up the CSCE found a receptive audience in Austrian Chancellor Kreisky, of all people. He had been skeptical of the “diplomats’ conference” from the very beginning. He was disappointed that an item he had

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ See, for example: ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1973, Kt. 2033, Zl. 81-Res/73, Minutes of the Working Talks between the Federal Minister Dr. Kirchschläger and the Bulgarian Foreign Minister Mladenov on 8 February 1973 in Sofia, 19.2.1973, p. 20; ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1975, Box 5, Kt. 23-32, Zl. 7-Pol/75, Accountability Report of the Bulgarian Government for the Year 1974 [Chargé d’Affaires Dr. Peter Moser], 4.4.1975, p. 3. On Moscow’s view of Austria’s role in the CSCE, see: Anna Graf-Steiner 2024; An overview of Bulgaria’s role in CSCE, see Grozev & Baev 2008, pp. 160–174.

⁸⁴ CDA, F. 1477, op. 31, a. e. 171a; Official Visit of the Federal Chancellor of the Republic of Austria, Dr. Bruno Kreisky, to the People’s Republic of Bulgaria, May 11–14, 1975. Draft Memorandum of Conversation for Todor Zhivkov on Some Questions Concerning the International Situation and the Foreign Policy of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria, l. 120–130, here: l. 125f.

⁸⁵ Gilde, 2013, p. 105.

⁸⁶ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1973, Kt. 2033, Zl. 81-Res/73, Minutes of the Working Talks between the Federal Minister Dr. Kirchschläger and the Bulgarian Foreign Minister Mladenov on 8 February 1973 in Sofia, 19.2.1973, p. 20.

wanted to pursue through CSCE – “the European contribution to détente in the Middle East” – had not been included in the conference agenda.⁸⁷ During Zhivkov’s visit to Austria in October 1973, Kreisky impatiently criticized the ambassadors on the spot for getting too hung up on details. Kreisky did not mention that these “details” were precisely the humanitarian issues that Austrian diplomats in Geneva vigorously defended (and about whose non-compliance in Bulgaria he must have been only too well aware).⁸⁸ Contrary to the official Austrian position that a high-level conference must be well prepared, the Chancellor demanded a quick conclusion. Kreisky declared in his conversation with Zhivkov that the ambassadors should be required to “prepare this conference in such a way that it can be conducted reasonably successfully,” insofar as the main issues would eventually have to be resolved by government representatives anyway.⁸⁹

Continued Human Rights Problems in Bulgaria

Bulgaria’s dismal record on human rights remained an obstacle to better relations with Austria.⁹⁰ In a letter to the Austrian Foreign Ministry in December 1974, ambassador Agstner reported the “harassing[...] behavior[...] of the Bulgarian authorities, which is in complete contradiction to the aspirations of the CSCE.” The Foreign Ministry responded to the letter with “emphatic support for the [Austrian embassy’s] claims” and rejected the Bulgarian government’s insistence that this was a “purely internal Bulgarian matter.”⁹¹

⁸⁷ Graf-Steiner 2024; Gilde 2013. The Middle East proposal was not pushed hard by the Austrian delegation on the spot and also by the Foreign Ministry in light of the clear opposition of the other participating States (with the exception of Malta). For example, in a conversation with Mladenov in February 1973, Foreign Minister Kirchschräger said that Austria was aware of the negative attitude of the USA and the USSR toward the inclusion of this item on the agenda. Austria’s attitude, he said, was simply to stress the urgency of a solution to the Middle East question, “but the conference will not be held up by that.” See: ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1973, Kt. 2033, Zl. 81-Res/73, Minutes of the Working Talks between the Federal Minister Dr. Kirchschräger and the Bulgarian Foreign Minister Mladenov on 8 February 1973 in Sofia, 19.2.1973, p. 26.

⁸⁸ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1973, Kt. 2033, Zl. 46928-6/73, Chairman of the Council of State of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria Schivkov, State Visit to Austria: Minutes of the Working Meeting on 10.10.1973 [in the Hofburg], 11.10.1973, p. 18. Note: The quotation comes from Fritz von Hermanovsky-Orlando’s parodistic play “Kaiser Joseph und die Bahnwärterstochter”, published posthumously in 1957.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1975, Box 5, Kt. 23-32, Zl. 2567-A/74, Dr. Kerjaschki, claims against Bulgarian companies, 16.12.1974.

⁹¹ Ibid.

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A memorandum prepared for Kreisky's visit to Sofia in February 1975 underscores that humanitarian concerns were sometimes very consciously used by the Bulgarian side as a means of exerting political pressure. The expectation before the visit was that Austria would again submit requests of a "so-called 'humanitarian' character". Because such requests had already been "repeatedly fulfilled" in the past, it would be "appropriate to demand . . . in a delicate form" in return "that Austria assist in ending the anti-Bulgarian activities of Bulgarian émigrés on its territory."⁹²

During Kirchschläger's visit to Bulgaria in February 1973, Mladenov had expressed hope that the two sides would sign a declaration on the principles of mutual relations during Zhivkov's visit in the fall of the same year. This could be "perhaps very positive in view of the current situation in Europe," Mladenov said. Such a declaration of generally accepted principles should include, for example, recognition of UN principles, non-interference, mutual respect, and the prohibition of the use of force in settling bilateral issues, which "should also [form] the basis for the principles to be adopted by the European Security Conference."⁹³ Kirchschläger had rejected the idea at the time.⁹⁴

When Chancellor Kreisky traveled to Sofia from 11 to 14 May 1975, a bilateral declaration of principles was signed in addition to a consular treaty.⁹⁵ At that time, the delegates in Geneva were still wrestling over the text of the CSCE Final Act, with the "Third Basket" (i.e. the humanitarian provisions), rather than the principles of the "First Basket" causing heated discussions. The fact that the signing of the CSCE Final Act was still scheduled for the summer may have contributed to a rethinking of the question of a bilateral declaration of principles. In the joint communiqué of the visit, the Heads of Government expressed their "expectation" that the present phase of CSCE negotiations would soon be concluded and that they would be able to proceed to the high-level conference.⁹⁶

⁹² CDA, F. 1477, op. 31, a. e. 171a, l. 255-261; Official Visit of the Federal Chancellor of the Republic of Austria, Dr. Bruno Kreisky, to the People's Republic of Bulgaria, May 11-14, 1975. Reflections in Connection with the Visit of the Federal Chancellor of the Republic of Austria, Dr. Bruno Kreisky, to the People's Republic of Bulgaria, Sofia, February 20, 1975, here: l. 257f.

⁹³ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1973, Kt. 2033, Zl. 67-Res/73, Minutes of the Working Talks between the Federal Minister Dr. Kirchschläger and the Bulgarian Foreign Minister Mladenov on 8 February 1973 in Sofia, 14.2.1973, p. 4f.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 12f.

⁹⁵ CDA, F. 1477, op. 31, a. e. 171a; Official Visit of the Federal Chancellor of the Republic of Austria, Dr. Bruno Kreisky, to the People's Republic of Bulgaria, May 11-14, 1975. Joint Communiqué, May 14, 1975, l. 234-239, here: l. 236.

⁹⁶ Ibid., l. 237.

In the bilateral Declaration of Principles, both states committed themselves to respect the other's sovereign equality, to renounce the use of force, and to uphold numerous principles, including the inviolability of frontiers, territorial integrity, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-interference in internal affairs, human rights and fundamental freedoms, equality and the right of peoples to self-determination, cooperation between states, as well as the fulfillment in good faith of the obligations of international law in bilateral relations.⁹⁷ The declaration consisted precisely of the ten principles that were included in the list of principles of the "First Basket" of the CSCE Final Act. The Final Act was signed on August 1, 1975, by the heads of state and government of the 35 participating states - the European states (excluding Albania, including the Soviet Union), the United States and Canada. In Helsinki, Kreisky and Zhivkov committed themselves not only to the principles, but also to the measures for pan-European cooperation in the fields of economics, science, technology, and the environment ("Basket II"). The Final Act also included provisions on humanitarian aspects, including the facilitation of people-to-people contacts, including cross-border family reunions and marriages, and the promotion of information exchange ("Basket III").

Limits to Closer Relations

Austrian Foreign Ministry officials understood that there were "limits from the outset" to closer cooperation with Sofia. This was partly because of the "internationalist, class-struggle foreign policy that Bulgaria pursues with the zeal of a teacher and at the same time a model pupil". It was also because of the strict isolation of the population from connections with the capitalist foreign countries. The Austrians suspected that even the CSCE would change little in this respect.⁹⁸ During a state visit to Bulgaria the following year, President Kirchschräger said that the differences in the social orders could not be overcome by the CSCE ("Whoever believed this was a dreamer").⁹⁹ Instead, he said, people must learn to live together "in peace and friendship," regardless of "different views on fun-

⁹⁷ CDA, F. 1477, op. 31, a. e. 171a; Official Visit of the Federal Chancellor of the Republic of Austria, Dr. Bruno Kreisky, to the People's Republic of Bulgaria, May 11-14, 1975. Declaration of Principles for Cooperation between the People's Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of Austria, May 1975, l. 148-151, here: l. 149.

⁹⁸ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1975, Box 5, Kt. 23-31, Zl. 109-RES/75, Basic Report: Supplement 1972-1974 Part III: Relations between Austria and Bulgaria [Ambassador Agstner], 19.3.1975, p. 17.

⁹⁹ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1976, Zl. 564-Res/1876. State visit of the Federal President; minutes of the working talks, 20.9.1976, p. 14.

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damental issues.”¹⁰⁰ Bulgaria and Austria, he said, are an illustration of the fact that cooperation between states with different social orders is possible, because “much of what is in the Helsinki document is a reality between the two of us [Austria and Bulgaria].” He wanted the two countries to set an example for the outside world.

Zhivkov saw the post-Helsinki agenda primarily in the further expansion of economic cooperation.¹⁰¹ In Sofia, one could “by no means be satisfied” with the fulfillment of the Final Act, which Zhivkov “said emphatically” had to include Basket II.¹⁰² To the Austrian President, he expressed concern about the close connection of Austria to the European Economic Community (EEC), which could endanger political relations and economic cooperation.¹⁰³ Zhivkov referred to Finland as a positive example, which “also [works] within the Common Market,” without forgetting “that they also cooperate economically with the socialist countries.”¹⁰⁴ Kirchschräger assured Zhivkov that signing trade agreements with Western countries was “not a political action” toward third parties, but that Austria “had to do so by the necessity of maintaining competitiveness on European markets.” However, he emphasized that efforts were being made to “eliminate the difficulties that arise for other states, such as Bulgaria.”¹⁰⁵

The Austrian Ambassador in Sofia, Bukovsky, reported in the run-up to the Belgrade CSCE Follow-up Conference in 1977/78 that he had been told by a senior Bulgarian diplomat “that Basket III was felt to be a weak point of the East for the Belgrade Conference.”¹⁰⁶ Conversely, in the Bulgarian diplomat’s view, a weak point of the West was the “inadequate fulfillment” of the Helsinki commitments to remove trade barriers. Eastern European states continued to be discriminated against in their exports to Western Europe, he insisted.¹⁰⁷

The political connotation of the humanitarian cases was directly addressed by the Bulgarian ambassador in Vienna when he spoke with Austrian Foreign Minister Willibald Pahr in February 1977. He said that “in the near future 28

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol, 1976, Zl. 564-Res/1876. State Visit of the Federal President; Minutes of the Working Talks, 20.9.1976, p. 9f.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol, 1977, Box 6, Kt. 23-32, Zl. 3-Pol/77, Dissidents also in Bulgaria [Ambassador Bukovsky], 28.2.1977, p. 5.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

so-called ‘humanitarian’ cases” would be settled positively and that would “now expect . . . that for persons who carry on propaganda against Bulgaria, or belong to organizations ‘working against Bulgaria’, no intervention will be made”.¹⁰⁸ Pahr noted these remarks and replied that “Austria’s position on these matters in the future would be determined exclusively by humanitarian considerations, as it had been in the past.”¹⁰⁹ Not only were Austrian humanitarian cases positively settled in large numbers at the beginning of 1977, but there was also a “conspicuously large concession” toward other Western states, as Ambassador Bukovsky reported from Sofia.¹¹⁰ He assumed that this was a step by Bulgaria to demonstrate to the world “that one could easily afford a generous approach to consular cases insofar as everything was stable at home anyway”.¹¹¹ Another reason could be, according to the ambassador, that Bulgaria wanted to resolve the pending cases before the Belgrade CSCE follow-up conference in order to offer as little surface for attack as possible there.

During the discussion of the minority question within the framework of the CSCE and in connection with the Macedonian question, Bulgaria “repeatedly expressed interest in the question of the Carinthian minorities”.¹¹² On this matter, Austrian diplomats were deliberately reserved “in order to avoid any appearance of solidarity that would give the impression that these two issues were of the same nature.”¹¹³

When speaking with Austrian Foreign Minister Pahr, the Bulgarian Ambassador proposed that consultations be held on 20–30 March 1977 between Bulgaria and Austria on the forthcoming Belgrade CSCE Follow-up Conference. Pahr agreed.¹¹⁴ Probably not coincidentally, reports increased in Bulgarian media in mid-March “that the campaign of imperialist reaction against the socialist countries and détente was continuing.”¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁸ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol, 1977, Box 6, Kt. 23-32, Zl. 65-K/77, Presentation of the Bulgarian Ambassador to H. Federal Minister on 16.2.1977, official note, 17.2.1977, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol, 1977, Box 6, Kt. 23-32, Zl. 3-Pol/77, Dissidents also in Bulgaria [Ambassador Bukovsky], 28.2.1977, p. 5.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² ÖStA/AdR, II-pol, 1977, Box 6, Kt. 23-32, Zl. 23.02.01/7-II.3/77, New Bulgarian Ambassador to Austria; Information for the Federal President, 6 July 1977, p. 2.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol, 1977, Box 6, Kt. 23-32, Zl. 65-K/77, Presentation of the Bulgarian Ambassador to H. Federal Minister on 16.2.1977, official note, 17.2.1977, p. 2.

¹¹⁵ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol, 1977, Box 6, Kt. 23-32, Zl. 148.Res/77, Bulgarian press quotes Federal Chancellor Kreisky as warning against exaggerating the dissident issue [Ambassador Bukowski], 16.3.1977.

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Bulgarian state media reported that Kreisky “described the playing up of the dissident problem as an extremely serious mistake”. Kreisky feared that this could lead not only to the failure of the follow-up conference, but even to a “renewal of the Cold War”. The Bulgarian state media took this statement as evidence that opposition was also forming in the West to the “agitation over the implementation of Helsinki Basket III”. The Bulgarians surmised that Kreisky was aiming “to make the Belgrade Conference a turning point in the process of détente, if not a return to Cold War times altogether.”¹¹⁶

Culture and Propaganda

In the 1970s, the friendly political ties and active economic exchange between Bulgaria and Austria led to intensive cultural relations between the two countries.¹¹⁷ A bilateral agreement in the field of culture, science and technology had been concluded on February 9, 1973.¹¹⁸ The cultural exchange with Austria was seen by the Bulgarian side as proof of Austria’s sincerity in wanting to deepen ties between states with different social and political orders.¹¹⁹ On the eve of the signing of the CSCE Final Act, the BKP evaluated relations with Austria as a “prime example of a good relationship with Western capitalist states,” emphasizing cultural relations in particular.¹²⁰ The Bulgarian embassy repeatedly pointed out that in the area of cultural ties, “clearly [Bulgaria] has the initiative in its hands.”¹²¹ In this connection, the BKP emphasized the “benefit of personal contacts between members of the government” and mentioned specifically the meeting between Austrian Federal Minister Herta Firnberg and her Bulgarian ministerial colleague, Nacho Papazov.¹²² They also stressed that she was “currently spending a vacation in Bulgaria as a guest of the Bulgarians.”

In 1976, the Austrian and Bulgarian governments decided to forge links between their universities, deeming them equivalent. When Zhivkov visited Austria in September 1978 at the invitation of President Kirchschräger, the two leaders emphasized in the joint communiqué the importance of cultural rela-

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ See Bachmaier, 2008 & 2009.

¹¹⁸ CDA, F. 1477, op. 31, a.e. 171a, l. 236.

¹¹⁹ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1973, Kt. 2033, Zl. 67-Res/73, Minutes of the Working Talks between the Federal Minister Dr. Kirchschräger and the Bulgarian Foreign Minister Mladenov on 8 February 1973 in Sofia, 14.2.1973, p. 6.

¹²⁰ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol. 1975, Box 5, Kt. 23-32, Zl. 329-RES/75, Resolution of the Central Committee of the BKP on Foreign Policy, 1.8.1975.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

tions and referred to the significance of the 1300th anniversary of the Bulgarian state. Within the framework of this state visit, an additional protocol to the agreement on university exchanges was signed.¹²³

The importance of Austria for Bulgaria can be seen in the number of embassy staff alone. Bulgaria had 39 representatives in the United Kingdom and 61 in France, but 98 in Austria. Hundreds of representatives of the Bulgarian print media and dozens from radio and television stations were accredited in Vienna. The Bulgarian response was to establish the “Sofia Press” agency. Austria would remain the bridge, “but in our hands and not in the Western hands of propaganda and distraction,” said Foreign Minister Ivan Bashev.¹²⁴

On the Bulgarian side, it was primarily Zhivkov’s daughter Lyudmila Zhivkova who drove cultural exchange. The Bulgarian Cultural Center in Palais Wittgenstein, founded in 1976, became a focal point of cultural life in Vienna in the 1980s. Further agreements on cooperation were concluded in the 1970s, notably the 1973 agreement between the Ludwig Boltzmann Society and the Bulgarian Medical Academy, and the agreement in 1977 between the Academies of Sciences of Bulgaria and Austria. President Kirchschräger often attended Bulgarian musical events and was a fan of the famous Bulgarian opera singer, Nikolai Gyaurov, among other Bulgarian artists. Kirchschräger cut short his Easter vacation and travelled to Vienna to attend a Bulgarian national opera performance. He gave Gyaurov the highest Austrian award for an opera singer, which speaks to the great attention paid toward Bulgarian culture.¹²⁵

In February 1977, Ivaila Valkova, the correspondent in Austria for the newspaper of the Bulgarian Peasant Party, *Zemedelsko Zname*, described the political importance of foreign cultural activities in Austria in order to “correct” the image of Bulgaria in Austria. The cultural service of the Bulgarian Embassy with the Wittgenstein House would give thousands of Austrians the opportunity “to learn about Bulgaria and life. As it is in reality.”¹²⁶ According to Valkova, all visitors must come to the conclusion “that in a country with such a refined culture, there can probably be no question of restrictions on the freedom of creative work, democracy, and human rights.”¹²⁷

¹²³ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol, 1978, Zl. 23.01.01, Communiqué on the Visit of the Chairman of the State Council of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria, Todor Zhivkov, to the Republic of Austria, 21.9.1978, p. 4.

¹²⁴ Bachmaier 1999, pp. 106–108.

¹²⁵ AMVnR, op.32, d. 45, a.e. 176, l. 39

¹²⁶ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol, 1977, Box 6, Kt. 23-32, Zl. 1348-A/77, Dissidents in Bulgaria, Further reactions to the “Presse” article of 21.2.1977 [Ambassador Bukowsky], Supplement, ‘Zemedelsko Zname’ of 30 June 1977, 5.7.1977.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

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By the end of 1978, a work plan for the Bulgarian diplomatic mission in Austria was issued that foresaw an increase of cultural and propaganda activities concerning the history of the Bulgarian nation. The aim was “to reveal the achievements of the Bulgarian contemporaries and the successes of the socialists, to popularize their peace-loving and constructive foreign policy.” When Pahr traveled to Sofia at the end of January 1981, the main focus of conversation with Mladenov was on cooperation in the field of culture, in addition to the economy.¹²⁸ Pahr and Zhivkova signed a cultural agreement for the years 1981–1983.¹²⁹ The Bulgarian diplomatic mission described Zhivkova’s visit to the Austrian Minister of Science, Hertha Firnberg, in June 1981 as “extremely important,” offering “vivid proof of the intensive and rich exchange between the two countries, a top political achievement and a demonstration of Austria’s positive attitude towards the 1,300th anniversary of the country [Bulgaria].” This was also attested by Lyudmila Zhivkova’s personal meeting with Austrian Federal President Kirchschräger.¹³⁰ In July 1981, Zhivkova died suddenly, and her death considerably slowed down the momentum of Bulgaria’s international cultural activities.¹³¹ The Jubilee Year, however, continued.

A key role in cultural cooperation on the Austrian side was played by the deputy chairman of the Austrian Socialist Party (SPÖ), Karl Blecha. Blecha was president of the Austro-Bulgarian Society and chairman of the Austrian festive committee of the 1,300th anniversary celebrations.¹³² The Bulgarian diplomatic mission was highly satisfied with the visit of a Bulgarian government delegation led by Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers Georgi Yordanov on 24–28 February 1981, which was carried out at Blecha’s invitation, as well as with Blecha’s visit to the official celebrations in Bulgaria in October 1981.¹³³

In a memorandum at the end of 1981, the Bulgarian diplomatic mission emphasized the “distinctly political character” of the anniversary campaign and stressed that all actions were based on the slogan of subordinating history to

¹²⁸ CDA, F. 1B, op. 81A, a. e. 7, l. 78-178, Report “on the Work of the Diplomatic Mission of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria in Vienna for the Year 1981,” Dec. 16, 1981, here l. 96.

¹²⁹ Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy Report 1981. Report of the Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, available at: www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XV/III/130/imfname_556713.pdf, p. 331.

¹³⁰ CDA, F. 1B, op. 81A, a. e. 7, l. 78-178, Report “on the Work of the Diplomatic Mission of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria in Vienna for the Year 1981,” Dec. 16, 1981, here l. 96f.

¹³¹ Peter Bachmaier, *Die Kulturpropaganda der Volksrepublik Bulgarien in Österreich*, in: *Wiener Slavistisches Jahrbuch* 55/2009, pp. 13-24, here p. 22.

¹³² CDA, F. 1B, op. 81A, a. e. 7, l. 78-178, Report “on the Work of the Diplomatic Mission of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria in Vienna for the Year 1981,” Dec. 16, 1981, here l. 96f.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

the solution and realization of political goals.¹³⁴ The anniversary initiatives had contributed to creating “more favorable conditions for the further expansion of Bulgarian-Austrian relations.”¹³⁵

Austrian-Bulgarian Relations in the 1980s

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979 fundamentally changed the geopolitical situation, putting an end to détente between the USSR and the USA. In an urgent special session of the UN General Assembly on 14 January 1980, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was condemned “by the overwhelming majority of states,” including Austria, which demanded the “immediate and unconditional withdrawal” of Soviet troops.¹³⁶

In a conversation with Bulgarian Ambassador Stoyan Georgiev in early 1980, Chancellor Kreisky was pessimistic about the international situation. He did not condemn the Soviet invasion in this conversation, but merely stated that he was “personally surprised by the Soviet actions.”¹³⁷ He hoped that the Soviet Union and the other Warsaw Pact countries “would now see more clearly” that only social democracy would continue to defend the policy of détente in the West. Conservative parties, on the other hand, would support “American actions” and were ready to bury the policy of détente.

Ambassador Georgiev reported to the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry that it was clear from the conversation “that Kreisky sees the main danger to international peace in U.S. policy, although he understandably does not criticize it directly.”¹³⁸ Several times during the conversation, Kreisky had stressed that he would speak candidly in order to inform Todor Zhivkov personally of his opinion, but would not make such statements publicly.¹³⁹ Georgiev reported that Kreisky’s statements in defense of détente were “received with satisfaction” in

¹³⁴ CDA, F. 1B, op. 81A, a. e. 7, l. 78-178, Report “on the Work of the Diplomatic Mission of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria in Vienna for the Year 1981,” Dec. 16, 1981, here l. 117.

¹³⁵ Ibid., here l. 104.

¹³⁶ Austrian Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy Report 1980. Report of the Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs, available at: www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XV/III/83/imfname_556075.pdf, p. 13f.

¹³⁷ CDA F. 1B, op. 101, d. 194, l. 1-8, Minutes of a Conversation with Bruno Kreisky, Chancellor of the Republic of Austria, February 21, 1980 [recorded by A. Lukanov], February 28, 1980, l. 5.

¹³⁸ CDA F. 1B, op. 101, d. 194, l. 1-8, Minutes of a Conversation with Bruno Kreisky, Chancellor of the Republic of Austria, February 21, 1980 [recorded by A. Lukanov], February 28, 1980, l. 7.

¹³⁹ Ibid., l. 7.

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Bulgaria, which once again “confirms the constructive role of Austria and its head of government in the relations between East and West.”¹⁴⁰

Austria’s efforts to maintain an “equidistance” between the blocs – “but from the position of a democratic country inseparably linked to the West” – were again clearly expressed at the CSCE Follow-up Meeting in Madrid (1980-1983), according to the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry.¹⁴¹ Austria’s approach was “completely sober and realistic” and characterized by an understanding that decisions must be “balanced” between the areas of human rights, economic and technological cooperation, human contacts, culture, and education.¹⁴² He also said that Austria’s diplomacy during the visit proved “that deepening cooperation with socialist countries is an important part of its foreign policy.”¹⁴³

From 12 to 15 May 1981, at the invitation of Zhivkov and Stanko Todorov, Chancellor Kreisky visited Bulgaria, which was seen as “new evidence of mutual goodwill in realizing the traditionally good relations between the two countries” and as a model for and contribution to détente in Europe.¹⁴⁴ The Bulgarians were confident that the visit would give “new impetus” in the economic sphere. During the visit, the two sides agreed to double the trade volume between the two countries by the end of 1985 in the ratio of imports to exports 1:1 - based on imports from Austria under favorable credit conditions and increasing Bulgarian exports to Austria.¹⁴⁵

At the end of 1981, the Bulgarian mission in Austria wanted to pursue a further improvement of political, economic, and cultural relations with Austria. Against the backdrop of the “deepening and intensifying [conflict between the two opposing strategic and foreign policy directions]” and in connection with the new Reagan administration in the United States, relations with Austria should be used “as a model for relations between states with different social systems.”¹⁴⁶ He said that the Bulgarian ambassador should maintain the high level

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., l. 2.

¹⁴¹ CDA, F. 1B, op. 81A, a. e. 7, l. 78-178, Report “on the Work of the Diplomatic Mission of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria in Vienna for the Year 1981,” Dec. 16, 1981, here l. 88.

¹⁴² CDA, F. 1B, op. 81A, a.e.8, l. 70-171, Report on the Activities of the Mission of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria in Austria in 1982, Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the CC of the BKP, Department “Foreign Policy and International Affairs,” 2.2.1983, l. 77f.

¹⁴³ CDA, F. 1B, op. 81A, a. e. 7, l. 78-178, Report “on the Work of the Diplomatic Mission of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria in Vienna for the Year 1981,” Dec. 16, 1981, here l. 88.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., here l. 95.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., here l. 79.

of bilateral political relations and arrange regular working meetings between Todor Zhivkov and Chancellor Bruno Kreisky.¹⁴⁷

The Bulgarian Foreign Ministry recommended to the leaders of the BKP in 1981 that the Bulgarian Embassy should in the future pay “special attention” to Austria. This attention should be especially given to Austria’s attitude toward initiatives of the Soviet bloc on the questions of détente, disarmament, and arms control, and to Austria’s policy toward Bulgaria and the socialist camp. Other important issues for consideration should be the development of relations between the Republic of Austria and the Balkan countries, especially with Yugoslavia, and Austria’s relations with the EEC and its activities in the Council of Europe. Furthermore, the Bulgarian mission should observe the activities of the Socialist International, Austria’s policy toward developing countries, and the domestic and foreign policy positions of the governing and opposition parties in Austria.¹⁴⁸

The Bulgarian Foreign Ministry also wanted its embassy in Vienna to “monitor” the activities of the embassies of the USA, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), the People’s Republic of China, and Albania, in coordination with the embassies of other Warsaw Pact countries. Another main focus for the embassy would be the Bulgarian diaspora in Vienna. The Foreign Ministry wanted the embassy to bolster the “patriotic feelings” of Bulgarians abroad but also to keep tight surveillance of “hostile emigrants”. In doing so, “the necessary measures to isolate them [the ‘hostile emigrants’] from the patriotic community” were to be taken, and the Foreign Ministry was to be notified immediately.¹⁴⁹

Todor Zhivkov visited Austria again on 3–4 June 1982. The two sides agreed on a five-year program for economic, industrial, and scientific-technical cooperation.¹⁵⁰ In July, an additional agreement was concluded on cooperation and mutual assistance in customs matters.¹⁵¹ Despite the efforts taken by both sides in the economic sphere, only Austria benefited significantly.¹⁵² The negative trade balance to Bulgaria’s disadvantage continued in subsequent years. Bulgaria

¹⁴⁷ CDA, F. 1B, op. 81A, a.e.8, l. 1-69, Draft Plan for the Embassy of the PR of Bulgaria in Austria in 1982, Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the CC of the BKP, Department “Foreign Policy and International Affairs,” Dec. 24, 1981, l. 5f.

¹⁴⁸ CDA, F. 1B, op. 81A, a.e.8, l. 1-69, Draft Plan for the Embassy of the PR of Bulgaria in Austria in 1982, Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the CC of the BKP, Department “Foreign Policy and International Affairs,” Dec. 24, 1981, l. 5f.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., l. 9.

¹⁵⁰ Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy Report 1982. Report of the Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, p. 335.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., l. 162.

¹⁵² Ibid., l. 335.

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exported primarily food products, but also processed goods, chemical products, tobacco, oil seeds and petroleum products. Austria supplied mainly machinery and vehicles, processed goods, chemical products, other manufactured goods and raw materials.¹⁵³

The Austrian ambassador Berta Braun, who worked in Sofia from 1980 to 1985, described the good relations between the two countries. She summarized the image of Austria in Bulgaria in her final report in 1985 as follows:

Although even educated Austrians usually have trouble distinguishing Bulgaria and Romania and identifying Sofia as the capital [of Bulgaria]; even the average Bulgarian would have favorable impressions of Austria and Vienna: impressions of the former great power Austria-Hungary, of Vienna, the capital of music, of the University of Graz, where numerous Bulgarians graduated, of the Salzburg Festival with significant participation of Bulgarian artists, and of Austria's contribution to the 1,300th anniversary of the founding of the Bulgarian state in 1981 on the initiative of the president of the Austro-Bulgarian Society, Federal Minister Karl Blecha. For Bulgarian officials, Austria is sort of the window to the West, whose policy of neutrality and geographical location give our country [Austria] a status that can only be compared with neighboring Greece among Western-oriented states.¹⁵⁴

Disruption of Friendly Relations in the 1980s.

Todor Zhivkov's adoption of a strongly nationalistic course, including severe repression of the Turkish minority in the country and its forced assimilation, brought Bulgaria into international isolation. The Bulgarian government initiated this policy and justified it by calling the Turkish minority a danger to national security. Austria joined other Western countries condemning the policy of forcefully renaming the Turkish minority (i.e., compelling the Turks to take Slavic surnames). To prevent a breakdown of relations with Austria over the matter, Bulgaria had to fulfill many of Austria's requests.

Consequently, Bulgaria's attitude toward Austria's EEC ambitions was also one of wait-and-see, and in contrast to other Eastern bloc states, it was by no means negative. The Bulgarians were less inclined toward rigid support of the Soviet position regarding the EEC.¹⁵⁵ Bulgaria even exercised restraint in crit-

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ ÖStA/AdR, II-pol, Austrian Embassy Sofia, Zl. 2-Pol/85, 4 ½ Years Bulgaria, Final Report, 15.4.1985, p. 1.

¹⁵⁵ See, for example, AMVnR, F. 46, Op. 4, a.e. 82, l. 1-12, Report by the Bulgarian embassy in Vienna to the Bulgarian foreign minister on "The International Basis for Austria's Participation in the Integration Process as a Neutral State," 5 January 1989; and also: Ibid, l. 13-25, Report on "The Positions of Austrian Political Parties on the Status of Neutrality and on

icizing the increasing anti-Communist, anti-Soviet, and anti-Bulgarian propaganda in Austria, contenting itself with the fact that it was generally nuanced and alternated between positive and negative coverage of the Warsaw Pact countries.¹⁵⁶ The Bulgarian embassy reported to the BKP Politburo that the most effective propaganda measure in Austria was “individual work with certain journalists”, which had proven successful in the past.¹⁵⁷

The friendly nature of Austrian-Bulgarian relations did not come to an abrupt end in 1984, when Vienna criticized the Bulgarian policy toward ethnic Turks as a violation of human rights.¹⁵⁸ On 18–19 June 1984, Foreign Minister Mladenov visited Vienna to prepare for the visit of Chancellor Fred Sinowatz and to sign a cultural agreement for the years 1984–1987 together with his Austrian counterpart Erwin Lanc. Sinowatz stayed in Bulgaria from 27 to 29 September at the invitation of Zhivkov and Prime Minister Grisha Filipov.¹⁵⁹ Scientific-technical cooperation remained a main pillar of bilateral relations: in 1988 there were 44 joint research projects between Austria and Bulgaria. This was the second highest rate of Austria’s cooperation in science and technology with a CMEA country, surpassed only by the GDR.¹⁶⁰

In January 1985, the Bulgarian Embassy in Vienna assessed the “main accents” of Austrian foreign policy as follows: Austria’s solidarity with the political interests of the West was becoming stronger, which stemmed from pressure from the USA, which would use Austria’s strong economic dependence on US technologies as a means of “curbing Austria’s political and economic cooperation” with the USSR and other Warsaw countries. Also, the increased influence of the opposition party Österreichische Volkspartei [Austrian People’s Party] (ÖVP) would increasingly push Chancellor Fred Sinowatz toward a pro-Western and pro-American course. The government, however, would continue to view relations with Soviet bloc states, “as an important factor in maintaining neutrality and safeguarding the country’s security” and would continue to advocate peaceful coexistence.

Cooperation with the Socialist Countries as Conditions of a Potential EEC Accession by Austria,” n.d. [March] 1989.

¹⁵⁶ CDA, Op. 43–4, a.e. 46, l. 1–8, “Analysis of Bulgarian Topics in the Austrian Mass Media in 1985” by the Bulgarian embassy in Vienna, 26 February 1986. l. 1–8,

¹⁵⁷ CDA, F. 1B, op. 81A, a.e. 11, l. 184–222, information material from the Embassy of the PR Bulgaria to the Secretary of the CC of the BKP, Emil Christov, 21.7.1988, l. 186f.

¹⁵⁸ Bachmaier 2009, p. 507.

¹⁵⁹ Austrian Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy Report 1984. Report of the Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, pp. 457–459.

¹⁶⁰ Bachmaier 1999, pp. 108–112; see also: Bachmaier 2008&2009.

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The Bulgarian embassy in its year-end report in 1985 maintained that Austria's foreign policy activities toward the Warsaw Pact states reflected a willingness to engage in dialogue, mutual understanding, and a sense of reality.¹⁶¹ Austria had moved politically "to the right," according to the report of the Bulgarian embassy, and this shift also influenced Austria's policy in international organizations in favor of Western positions. Nonetheless, the country would "continue to strive to fulfill its role as a bridge between East and West." This well-established role would "most closely [correspond] to its political and economic interests as well as to its possibilities for exerting influence on the international stage," the embassy source concluded.¹⁶²

The visit of Bulgarian Foreign Minister Mladenov to Austria for the official opening of the Vienna CSCE Follow-up Conference in 1986 was assessed as important in the context of relations with Turkey. During his stay, Mladenov met not only with Austrian Foreign Minister Peter Jankowitsch, but also with the Foreign Minister of the FRG, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, and with the Foreign Minister of Turkey, Vahit Halefoglu. Mladenov and his delegation made "every effort to move Bulgarian-Turkish relations away from a state of acute confrontation," according to the Bulgarian embassy report from 1987. The same document described the discussions between Mladenov and Gratz about the demands of the Turkish minority as an "important political act". This meeting, as well as the extensive contacts of the Bulgarian ambassador and other diplomatic staff, allowed for a "neutral official position of Austria," although the media in Austria, especially television, were "showing a tendency to subjective criticism."¹⁶³

However, the conflict between Turkey and Bulgaria continued to hamper Bulgaria's relations with Austria. The Turkish government's decision to reintroduce visa requirements for Bulgarian citizens of Turkish origin led to a sharp increase in the entry of this same group into Austria. As a result, the Austrian government felt compelled to suspend the visa agreement with Bulgaria, which had existed since 1967, as of 6 November 1989.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ AMVnR, op. 42, a.e. 237, l. 12-20. Embassy of the People's Republic of Bulgaria in Vienna to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Information Regarding the Main Accents of the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Austria in 1984, Jan. 11, 1985.

¹⁶² AMVnR, op. 42, a.e. 234, l. 46-51, Report of the Bulgarian Embassy in Vienna to the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Austria's Involvement in International Organizations, Dec. 5, 1985.

¹⁶³ CDA, F. 1B, op. 81A, a.e. 11, l. 59-120. Activity Report of the Embassy of the PR of Bulgaria in Vienna in 1986, Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the CC of the BKP, Department "Foreign Policy and International Affairs," Feb. 27, 1987, l. 79.

¹⁶⁴ AMVnR, F. 46, op. 4, a.e. 90, l. 1-3. Report of the Bulgarian Embassy in Vienna to the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nov. 2, 1989.

The Bulgarian Embassy in Vienna judged that Austria's foreign policy under Chancellor Franz Vranitzky would "increasingly approach the positions of the U.S., Western European countries, and NATO." According to the Bulgarian embassy, the Austrian government was pursuing a "right-wing foreign policy course."¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, Bulgarian officials remained convinced that Austria would continue its efforts to fulfill its proven role as a 'bridge' between East and West.¹⁶⁶ Austria remained "one of Bulgaria's most important capitalist partners". The dialogue with both Chancellor Vranitzky and President Waldheim should therefore be continued at the highest level in order to revitalize bilateral economic relations.¹⁶⁷ As a first step in this regard, the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry suggested organizing an official visit by Mladenov to Austria in 1987.¹⁶⁸

Practical constraints began to hinder Bulgaria's ties with Austria. Bulgarian officials were concerned about what they saw as the inefficiency and poor quality of work of "all Bulgarian services, the mission and all Bulgarian companies, firms and manufacturers based in Austria". The Foreign ministry suggested cost-cutting measures, which would require a review of the structure of all facilities in Austria and the implementation of appropriate reductions.¹⁶⁹

Vienna CSCE Review Conference

Both Bulgaria and Austria took with respect and responsibility Helsinki Final Act Accord (1975) and its importance for variety important issues incorporated in the three "baskets".¹⁷⁰ The Helsinki Final Act included provisions for follow-up meetings. After the conference in Belgrade (1977-1978) and the Madrid CSCE review meeting (1980-1983), the third follow-up meeting of the CSCE took place in Vienna (1986-1989). The Bulgarian assessment of Austria's position in the CSCE negotiations in Helsinki, Belgrade, Madrid, and Vienna, was

¹⁶⁵ The same assessment was made in many documents from the Bulgarian Embassy in Vienna, for example: AMVnR, Op. 42, a.e. 234, l. 46-51, Report by the Bulgarian Embassy in Vienna to the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry "On Austria's Involvement in International Organizations," 5 December 1985; CDA, F. 1B, op. 81A, a.e. 11, l. 59-120, Activity Report of the Embassy of the People's Republic of Bulgaria in Vienna in 1986, Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the CC of the BKP, Department "Foreign Policy and International Affairs," 27 February 1987, l. 69f.

¹⁶⁶ CDA, F. 1B, op. 81A, a.e. 11, l. 59-120, Activity Report of the Embassy of the PR of Bulgaria in Vienna in 1986, Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the CC of the BKP, Department "Foreign Policy and International Affairs," Feb. 27, 1987, l. 69f.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., l. 116.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ On negotiation process and goals of Soviet and U. S. diplomacy see: Morgan 2018; On overview of main problems and achievements see Boyadjieva 2017, pp. 553–567.

very favorable. Austria had always, in close cooperation with the group of neutral and non-aligned states, “actively participated in the search for the preservation of the CSCE Final Act and the fleshing out of it with concrete content”.

¹⁷¹ Austrian officials recognized the special role of the USSR and the USA in détente. Austria saw its own role, like the role of small and medium-sized states in general, as a mediator in the necessary dialogue between the superpowers.¹⁷²

As host of the CSCE Follow-up Meeting, Austria exercised restraint as a matter of principle. However, concerning humanitarian issues, Bulgarian officials regretted that Austria’s “views are in practice fully in agreement with those of the Western countries” and that the Austrians wanted to “ensure” the implementation of or compliance with the human rights agreements of the CSCE Final Act.¹⁷³

The Post-1989 Reorientation

After the opening of the “Iron Curtain” in 1989, the Bulgarians were disappointed to find that their country was “no longer an object of special attention in Austrian public and political life”¹⁷⁴. This was explained by the Bulgarian transformation path, which “did not [fit] Austrian expectations and models.”¹⁷⁵ The ongoing changes in the BKP, the Bulgarian government, and new informal organizations in Bulgaria “were assessed here [in Vienna] as an initial phase of democratic changes in Bulgaria”¹⁷⁶.

Foreign Minister Mock’s “outstretched hand” policy toward Eastern Europe and his focus on supporting social and economic transformation processes, especially in Hungary, Poland, and Yugoslavia, as well as his open advocacy of German reunification, were criticized by the Bulgarian embassy.¹⁷⁷ Bulgarian officials were aware of the different views within the Austrian government about the question of German reunification. Other than Mock, who thought it would be beneficial for Austria, Chancellor Vranitzky thought that support for German reunification would be regarded as interference in the domestic affairs of

¹⁷¹ Ibid., I. 71f.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid., I. 73.

¹⁷⁴ AMVnR, F. 46, Op. 4, a.e. 80, I. 28-35, Report by the Bulgarian embassy in Vienna to the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry and the International Department of the Central Committee of the KPB on “Austria’s Stance with Regard to the Processes and Reforms in the Socialist Countries,” 14 November 1989, I. 35.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., I. 32.

sovereign countries.¹⁷⁸ On the other hand, Austrian leaders said they felt morally obliged to support processes of reforms and democratization in Warsaw Pact countries, especially the countries bordering Austria.¹⁷⁹ This explanation of special relations reflected historical ties “with the people from neighboring countries”, as well as “the interest of [Austrian] national security.”¹⁸⁰

Austria’s positions on these matters stemmed from several principles, above all the notion of “permanent neutrality”.¹⁸¹ Austria declared support for the “right of those states and peoples to decide on their own” the fate of the reforms and “support for any kind of development that is in line with ‘peace and freedom’ in Europe”.¹⁸² According to the Bulgarian embassy’s evaluation, the position of Austria was essentially “the position of Western pluralistic democracy”. This meant that “Austria is ready and, in a position, to support those countries that are looking for changes.”¹⁸³

Bulgarian officials at the time tended to be critical of Austrian foreign policy, claiming there was a difference between what was said and what was done. The Bulgarians believed this discrepancy arose because Austria was ruled by a coalition government (SPÖ und ÖVP), whose main parties had opposite ideologies.¹⁸⁴ The most important characteristic of Austrian foreign policy, according to Sofia, was that it was building up “on the basis of bourgeois democratic values”.¹⁸⁵

After 1989, relations between Austria and Bulgaria changed. Bulgaria was much less interested in Austria than in the United States and the large EU states. Conversely, Bulgaria was no longer of interest to Austria as a gateway to the Soviet Union, and the Austrian government turned its attention to neighboring countries. The Bulgarian government under Andrey Lukanov was considered only temporary in 1990. There were no official contacts between Austria and Bulgaria until 1991.

Both countries in subsequent years were firmly integrated into Western institutions. In 1995, Austria joined the European Union, and in 2007 Bulgaria joined it as well. Three years earlier, in 2004, Bulgaria had joined NATO. Inte-

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., l. 31-32.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., l. 31.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., l. 31.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., l. 32.

¹⁸² Ibid., l. 31.

¹⁸³ Ibid., l. 31.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., l. 32.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., l. 32.

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gration into these Western institutions provided a degree of security and stability to the two countries far beyond what had been possible during the Cold War.

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