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**Klaus Fiesinger, *Ballhausplatz-Diplomatie*
1945-1949**

(Munich: tuduv Verlag 1993).

**Michael Gehler, ed., *Karl Gruber: Reden und*
*Dokumente 1945-1953***

(Vienna: Böhlau Verlag 1994).

Wolfgang Krieger

How was the Austrian foreign office re-established after the war? What were the new Austria's policies toward her neighbors? These two questions are the focus of Klaus Fiesinger's *Ballhausplatz-Diplomatie*. They deserve a good deal of attention because Austrian foreign policy played a crucial role in the re-creation of Austrian nationhood.

The Ballhausplatz—once the home of Klemens von Metternich, later the office of the Austrian chancellors and their foreign office—was in shambles in April 1945. So was Austria's diplomatic machinery after a full third of its staff had offered their services to the Nazis. Fiesinger describes its re-establishment after the war in some detail, though little is said about the crucial denazification issue and about the extent to which personnel selections may have been made along party political lines.

Only twice does the author hint at the importance of party politics in this context. One reference suggests that the socialists (SPÖ) may have tried to get some of their people hired in that otherwise conservative-led (ÖVP) department. The other quotes Karl Gruber, Austria's foreign secretary until 1953, who told the author that he never discussed the great issues of foreign policy with his diplomats. "That was done in the party." But this hint is ignored and

for the rest of the book, Austrian foreign policy is a matter of the Ballhausplatz diplomats and their secretary. Even the chancellor is barely mentioned. Was there no need to explore further the roles of the political parties in a democracy as literally partisan as Austria's?

Before dealing with any of the bilateral relationships between Austria and her neighbors, it is essential to understand the fundamentals on which Vienna's policies were built.

Unlike that of Germany, the Austrian leadership essentially sought—and largely managed—to return to the *status quo ante*, that is before the Anschluß of 1938. The guiding assumption was that Austria had been the first victim of Nazi aggression, had not been a state actor during the war and therefore bore no responsibility for Axis policies. The Austrian contribution in manpower at every level of the Nazi system never enters into the equation. (Nor does Fiesinger belabor the point. Even the 10 April 1938 Anschluß referendum, with its very large majority voting in favor, is never mentioned.) Now, in 1945, with Germany in ruins and given the promises of the 1943 Moscow Declaration, Austria would be recreated as an independent state. And what better proof of her national independence than to show that the new Austria could do what had been denied to the First Republic, namely to define her relations with her neighbors!

The Renner and Figl governments were extremely lucky, and they made excellent use of their opportunities. Contrary to the post-1918 period, the international climate after 1945 worked in favor of Austria's traditionally precarious position on the borderline of the Slavic and the Germanic worlds. Literally from the day when the European Axis front collapsed, in April 1945, the Austrians had a single national government, and since November 1945 they even had a freely elected one. Under the second Allied control agreement of June 1946 the Austrians could pass legislation and conduct their own diplomacy subject only to a unanimous Allied veto, which meant unimpeded by a lone Soviet "nyet." Economically, there was of course much hardship, not the least because of the ways in which the Soviets exploited their occupation zone. But Austria received much Allied help, too—per capita about ten times as much in Marshall Plan aid as did Western Germany!

Yet Austria's early foreign policy was by no means an unqualified success. After the highly promising June 1946 Allied

economic minority rights for the South Tyroleans, indeed "autonomous legislative and executive regional power" for their region. It expressed the hope of close ties with Austria. And above all it had the qualities of an international treaty inasmuch as it became an annex of the Italian peace treaty of 1947. Thus, all signatory powers took a certain amount of responsibility for the improvement of the region's conditions and Austria could legitimately involve herself in what would otherwise have remained an internal Italian affair. That was a huge improvement, though it would take four decades before De Gasperi's promises were fully implemented.

Quite rightly, Fiesinger points out that roles were reversed concerning Austria's borders with Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. Here it was the other side that claimed rectifications, either to restore old territorial connections or to "free" non-German minorities. Of the latter type, the Yugoslav border region was particularly touchy, because in a 1920 plebiscite a large minority of 41 percent had voted against Austria. Thereafter Slovenian ceased to be an official language and bilingual signs were removed. Later the Nazis stepped up Austria's already tough Germanization policies, and, during the war, the Slovenian minority fought particularly hard in the anti-Nazi resistance. Again it was the British and Americans who stuck to the 1937 borders by refusing to reopen the old Pandora's box of ethnic claims. In May 1945 they literally forced Tito's troops out of Carinthia. In 1949, when Tito wished to be on his best behavior with the West, he buried his claims against Austria. Incidentally, on that issue Stalin seems to have been on Austria's side all along.

Relations with Prague were harder to fathom and are much less well explained by Fiesinger. The great disaster, from the viewpoint of Austria's "first victim" dogma, was that the Czechs made no distinction between Germans and Austrians when expelling millions of Sudeten ethnic Germans. In addition they demanded border changes which only made sense in military terms, giving important advantages to the Czechs. Now it was Vienna that stuck to the 1937 borders. Important issues, particularly those relating to Austrian property, remained unresolved until the detente era of the 1970s when full diplomatic relations were established and when Prague's foreign secretary came to Vienna for his first official visit in 1974.

agreement, it was to take another nine years for Austria to become fully independent of any Allied interference or military presence. The chief reason was of course Soviet intransigence, ostensibly tied to the issue of German investment property in the Soviet zone. In fact, however, Austria's situation was simply one of the pawns which the Kremlin left on the European chess board as a sign that the game of remaking Europe was still on. And Vienna could do precious little to change the minds in Moscow.

The South Tyrol was the first issue which Vienna's diplomats fully threw themselves into. In retrospect it is difficult to believe that they sincerely believed they could rescind the provisions of the 1919 peace treaty which had awarded a large part of the German-speaking Tyrol to Italy. True, the Austrians could argue with some justification that the principle of national self-determination had been violated in 1919, that Italy's security was hardly enhanced by the Brenner borderline, and that the forced Italianization of the South Tyroleans had left a legacy of hatred which might upset Italy's political stability in the future. But where would a new border be drawn? What would be the effect on the Italian body politic? What would be the implications for Italy's border dispute around Trieste? And were the moral claims of Italy's new democracy, based on nearly two years of anti-fascist and anti-Nazi fighting, of no value? In comparison, what moral weight did the Allies accord to Austria's self-portrayal as a mere victim of Nazism?

Unfortunately, Fiesinger makes little effort to understand the American and British, or indeed the Italian, positions on South Tyrol. They were not simply Cold War calculations as he claims. It is also doubtful that things would have gone very differently if the Ballhausplatz had been up to speed in September 1945 when the Allied Council of Foreign Ministers decided that Austria would only be allowed "minor changes" of her 1937 borders. Naturally this is a convenient explanation for the retired Gruber and his former staff members whom Fiesinger interviewed. But it overlooks a whole lot of other considerations, such as those relating to Italy, which Fiesinger never seriously considers.

For all his nationalist rhetoric as a leading politician of the Austrian People's Party, and a Tyrolean at that, Gruber adjusted quickly and, in September 1946, struck a deal with Italian foreign minister Alice De Gasperi. It held out the promise of cultural and

By stark contrast, full diplomatic relations were reestablished with Hungary early on, although the communist take-over in Budapest made dealings as difficult as it did with other east European states. An Austrian request for the city of Ödenburg, ceded to Hungary under the name of Sopron in 1921, was dropped eventually. Perhaps it was "a strong conviction, weakly held"—to quote (out of context) from A.J.P. Taylor, the eminent historian of the Habsburg empire.

Then comes Austria's diplomacy toward Germany, of which little can be said except that it was narrowly focused on issues of social welfare, particularly repatriation issues, for years. This was because West Germany could not exchange ambassadors until 1955. But there was also a large element of psychology in this long period of non-relationship. Austria's identity as a separate state depended on a clear break with her German past. The years 1866 to 1945 had to be buried once and for all. Thus, at a 1950/51 GATT conference in Britain, Austrian and (west) German delegations met for the first time "officially."

The only surprise is a border issue fabricated by Gruber and other conservative politicians. They repeatedly laid claim to the Berchtesgaden and Rupertiwinkel districts (just to the west of Salzburg). And they did so for no better reason than geographical convenience and political propaganda. While Manfred Rauchensteiner, author of several very important books on post-1945 Austria, admits to the cynicism of this claim, Fiesinger dismisses it lightly. The hero was the old Austromarxist Karl Renner who, as chancellor in July 1945, vehemently opposed the claims as "in no way based on historic rights."

Little of interest can be said of Austria's relations with Switzerland and Liechtenstein. No problems existed, though one wonders if the old wish of the Vorarlberg population to join Switzerland—80 percent in a 1919 referendum—was mentioned at any stage by the diplomats. Fiesinger never raises the point.

If Fiesinger underrates party politics, the published papers of Karl Gruber, covering his years as foreign secretary, set the record straight. Here we have as much party politics, self-serving "first victim" propaganda, and foreign policy speeches for home consumption as anyone can stomach. In the early years, Gruber's speeches lash out against the "standardized Prussian" ("dem

preussischen Einheitsmenschen”), who is clearly an Untermensch compared to the lofty Austrian. He gives soothing accounts of Austria’s fate during the “alien” Nazi rule. Consequently the reborn Austria bears no war-guilt, no responsibility for the Holocaust. In fact, as Michael Gehler points out in his important introduction, Gruber never even mentions the Holocaust, by name or otherwise. And Gehler writes as someone who is preparing a biography of Gruber and has therefore surveyed a great deal more documents than could be included in this edition.

Gruber’s biography has an unexplained blank from 1939 to March 1945 when he worked in Berlin as an electrical engineer, apparently undisturbed by the Nazis. Why, one wonders, given his own account that in 1938 he helped to purge Austria’s telephone and telegraph services of their Nazi sympathizers and that he kept in touch with various resistance movements throughout the war? This information comes from Gruber’s own curriculum vitae and from a 1991 Austrian state TV interview reproduced by Fiesinger. One hopes that Gehler will find the answer.

This edition of speeches and papers is a most welcome contribution to postwar Austrian history, carefully annotated and supplemented by a very detailed chronology. However, the bibliography might have included more non-German language works. Even the most important Cold War classics in English are missing, to say nothing about French, Italian and other scholarly works that deal with the many issues raised in this volume.