Austria's Defence Policy and Role in NATO and the EU

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Introduction: History as a necessary precondition for understanding Austria's ambivalent security policy

In order to understand Austria's security policy and its strategic culture, it is above all required to understand the history of the country, creating peculiarities that cannot be found in many other countries of the European Union (EU). After World War II, the country had to regain its full sovereignty, especially with regards to security and defence policy. However, the Allied Powers imposed certain restrictions in this field. In the course of negotiations towards its independence, one of the preconditions, set especially by the Soviet Union, was the declaration of neutrality on 26 October 1955. This declaration has to be seen in the wider context of the *State Treaty* of 15 May 1955, restoring the independent and democratic state of Austria. The Federal Constitutional Law on Neutrality stipulates in its Article 1 that neutrality should be of a permanent nature, and in its second paragraph, that Austria will not join any military alliance nor allow the deployment of foreign troops on its territory. In the following decades during the Cold War, Austria's neutrality was very important at the national and international political level but was targeted by western and eastern strategic military concepts. The reason was the important geostrategic location of Austria in the middle of the European continent (Magenheimer 2002, 19).

As Hauser rightly points out, Austrian permanent neutrality was a product and a result of a Soviet peaceful coexistence policy that created a neutral Alpine wedge, together with Switzerland, cutting the NATO northern flank from the southern flank (Hauser 2007, 46). In the beginning, Austria's neutrality was intended to be comparable with the concept of Swiss neutrality, but quite soon, Austria's neutrality changed and developed in its own way, but continued the myth of living neutrality based on the Swiss model. Henceforth, the concept of Austrian neutrality was the subject of heavy debates in Austria, due to the fact that the country joined the UN in December 1955 and the European Council in April 1956. According to Karl Zemanek, there were already at that time contradictions between the Austrian concept of neutrality and the obligations deriving from UN membership (Hauser 2007, 46). Compared to the international dimension of Austrian foreign policy, the European dimension was underdeveloped. In 1959, Austria was a founding member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), because at that time an EC membership was rather illusory as a consequence of the restrictions set by the neutrality.

However, in 1956, the Austrian armed forces were called on to deal with the first of two border crises. In the same year, the Hungarian uprising was crushed by the Soviet Union, and 170,000 Hungarians fled into Austria. The second crisis took place in 1968, when Warsaw Pact

troops invaded neighbouring Czechoslovakia. Austria's experiences during the Hungarian and Czechoslovak crises helped clarify the nature of the potential threat to the nation's neutrality and led to a reorientation of its defence policy and consequently to a revised definition of the military's mission. At the beginning of the 1960s, Austria actively engaged in UN peacekeeping operations, such as the operations in Congo (1960–1963) and Cyprus 1964 (Kramer 2006, 813). During the Cold War period, the Austrian neutrality became important within the framework of a very active and peaceful neutrality policy as stated by Chancellor Kreisky during his governments from 1970 to 1983. Characteristic for the so-called "Kreisky era" was the engagement of Austria in the third world especially in the Near East. The Austrian foreign policy at that time had a globally oriented policy of neutrality (Kramer 1997, 723). At that time, all major parts of the Austrian foreign policy were considered a part of Austria's neutrality policy (Skuhra 2006, 843). Austria was then actively involved in the drafting and adoption of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975 in the framework of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and was still an active member of the international organisations. As a consequence, Austria's neutrality policy and attitudes changed towards active neutrality.

During and after the epochal geopolitical change in 1989, new security challenges arose and Austria reoriented its focus in the security policy especially to the field of foreign policy. A new development was the significant institutional "pro-Western" integration through the membership in the European Community (EC) in 1989. The war in former Yugoslavia as well as the Austrian integration process into the EU dominated the discourse on the country's security policy. The Austrian Parliament passed a declaration in November 1992 stating that "Austria should prepare itself to participate fully in an eventual collective security system within the future European Union" (Lahodynsky 1992). This led again to debates about the validity of Austrian neutrality, but the new developments in the European and international security, and especially the integration of Austria into the EU, changed this perception. The Austrian accession to the EU in 1995 and cooperation with NATO provided new impulses for the security policy of Austria.

General perceptions on NATO and CSDP

As it has been shown, Austria's security and defence policy has been strongly shaped by its geographic position between the two blocks as well as by its status as a neutral country which has helped in taking over a function as a mediator and venue for international organisations. However, besides its neutral status, an active participation in the EU's CSDP has been an ultimate goal of Austria's accession to the EU. On 12 June 1994, a majority of 67% of the Austrian people voted for EU membership in a referendum. At the same time and later on, too, strong majorities continued to favour neutrality. It is nonetheless interesting to analyse the perceptions of Austrians regarding neutrality, the EU and its CSDP as well as NATO especially in the context of Austria joining the Union in 1995.

For Austrians, the concept of neutrality can be considered a basis of identity in the country. In 1991, 52% of the Austrian population considered neutrality very important and another 26% important (Khol 1991, 685). In 1998, in a poll commissioned by the Austrian Society for European Politics, 91% of the respondents considered neutrality to have been a historically correct decision (Reinprecht–Latcheva 2003, 5). However, with the accession

to the European Union, neutrality became less attractive. According to investigations carried out by the "Gallup Institut", the percentage of approvers of preserved neutrality dropped from 81% to 63% over the 1993–1996 period (Reinprecht–Latcheva 2003, 7). Today, however, Austrian neutrality is reduced to its core meaning, i.e. no membership in any military alliance (i.e. NATO) and no stationing of foreign troops on Austrian territory (Gebhard 2013, 292).

After the Austrian accession to the EU, the general perception became critical. According to Eurobarometer 59, in 2003 only 34% of Austrians had a positive image of the EU, which was further decreasing to 32% in fall 2017. Looking at CSDP, back in 1997 (Eurobarometer 47), 45% favoured the developments in the area of CSDP. In 1999, 25% favoured the idea of joining a European military alliance and 78% of the respondents agreed that the Union should not simply be limited to economic and financial policies but rather should also attempt to guarantee Europe's security (Haerpfer 1999). In 2003 (Eurobarometer 59), 41% of Austrians favoured decisions on a European Defence Policy to be taken by the EU, 35% were in favour of national decisions and 11% favoured NATO. According to EB 84, in fall 2015, 61% of Austrians called for a common European Security and Defence Policy, whereas 53% were against the creation of a European Army. In fall 2017, still 56% of Austrians were in favour of a common security and defence policy according to Eurobarometer 88.

Despite all geopolitical developments, NATO remained quite unpopular in Austria. According to an investigation published by the daily *Der Standard* on 11 November 1993, 15% were in favour of NATO membership, 34% considered accession conceivable, and 45% were absolutely opposed. In 1998, a poll carried out by the Austrian Society for European Politics already identified 24% who were unconditionally in favour of NATO membership, 25% approved of joining under certain conditions (preservation of "residual neutrality"), with 40% opposing membership altogether (Reinprecht–Latcheva 2003, 5). Thus, in general, it can be said that public support for becoming a NATO member is limited. According to opinion polls held during the past decade more than 75% of Austrians would not approve of formally giving up neutrality, which is what NATO accession would entail (Gebhard 2013, 292).

Institutional relations since 1989

With the fall of the Iron Curtain and the Austrian membership to the EC/EU in 1995, the security policy changed significantly and was from then on directly linked with the developments on a European level. When Austria joined the EU together with Finland and Sweden, no exception was made for the new "neutral" members. On the contrary, they had to sign a joint declaration, which was added to the Final Act of the Accession Treaty, stating that they would be ready to and able to participate fully and actively in the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the EU and that their legal framework would be compatible with the rules and traditions of CFSP (Hey 2003, 102). The creation of CFSP became one of the main objectives of all EU member states with the Maastricht Treaty, including the *de jure* neutral countries of Austria, Finland, Ireland and Sweden. As a consequence of the Austrian membership to the EU, the understanding of neutrality has changed completely and the importance of the concept has diminished considerably. Ex-Article 23f (now after the Lisbon Treaty amended as the new Article 23j) of the Austrian Federal Constitution (Bundes-Verfassungsgesetz, B-VG), which was introduced in the course of the Austrian accession to the EU, allows the Austrian participation

within CFSP in the whole spectrum of the Petersberg tasks, including crisis management and peacekeeping operations. Therefore, in the opinion of the country's leading constitutional law experts, the concept of neutrality has been materially derogated (ÖHLINGER 1999, 96; WALTER–MAYER 2000, 168).

In 1995, Austria also became a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program and its Planning and Review Process (PARP) without any major domestic controversy. On a political level, the Coalition Agreement of 1996 between the Social Democratic Party and the People's Party called for a so-called "option paper" in order to analyse all relevant security political options for Austria including the question of a full membership to the WEU. The report should have been presented at the beginning of 1998, however, the coalition failed to deliver the report due to party differences about the future relationship with NATO and the WEU as well as the compatibility with Austrian neutrality. The centre-right coalition in 2001, in its security and defence doctrine considered Austria to be non-allied; this shift was, however, changed again with the new security strategy in 2011 leading to a revival of the Austrian neutrality and stopping all debates about a closer cooperation with NATO.

Both the new obligations resulting from the EU treaties as well as membership to PfP have changed drastically Austria's traditional approaches to security and defence policy. Therefore, it is now necessary to take a look at the issues dominating the Austrian approach to security and defence policy.

Since its membership to the EU in 1995, the traditional Austrian focus has shifted towards carrying out its security and defence policy in the framework of the UN and towards taking on an active role as a member of the EU regardless of its neutral status. The discourse at the international and European level in fact moved away from Austria's special status altogether. Instead, political leaders, and most of all representatives of the OVP, seemed keen to underline their new focus on the principle of solidarity (GEBHARD 2013, 288). Therefore, it is not surprising that the primary aim of the Austrian security policy has been to promote Austria's role as an active and solitary player within CSDP in order to preserve national and European security interests, as well as to maintain Austria's position in the group of European financial core contributors and policy shapers (REITER–FRANK 2004, 1). Consequently, during its first EU Presidency in 1998, Austria has organised the first informal meeting of EU defence ministers even before the historic kick-off of the CSDP at the St. Malo Summit in December 1998.

Furthermore, Austria has actively participated in the EU Battlegroup in the first half of 2011 as well as in 2012, 2016 and 2018. The Security Strategy also reiterates the implications of the Lisbon Treaty for EU Member States regarding capability development and underlines the need to further develop the CSDP and to provide the necessary capabilities (Security Strategy 2011, 11). Additionally, it states that Austria will fulfil all its commitments implicit in the Treaties. Interestingly, the draft strategy also calls for a closer cooperation between the EU and NATO. Nonetheless, it is not explicitly mentioned what the future cooperation between the two organisations should be like. Despite its neutral status, Austria has also from the very beginning participated in the so-called Permanent Structured Cooperation and currently participates in four projects. In addition, another project has been proposed for the second set starting in autumn 2018. The joint project – developed by Austria, Slovenia, Hungary and Croatia – will aim at using unmanned aerial and terrestrial vehicles to autonomously detect and survey risks caused by nuclear, biological and chemical hazardous substances.

With respect to NATO and Austria's participation in the PfP, the draft Security Strategy emphasises Austria's participation in the further development of the Alliance and underlines the willingness to take part in non-Article 5 missions being of Austrian national security interest. Comparing the Security Strategy with the old Security Doctrine of 2001, it is clear that NATO plays a rather limited role. Whereas a possible membership to NATO was subject of ongoing evaluations as stated in 2001, NATO membership as such is not considered by the current security strategy. Nonetheless, the (currently theoretical) option of becoming a NATO member has not been excluded. Austrian forces joined NATO Allies in the late 1990s/early 2000s in the Western Balkans and have participated in missions both in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as in Kosovo. In recent years, the cooperation between Austria and NATO, however, has been hampered by the deterioration of the relationship between Austria and Turkey. Consequently, Turkey is blocking NATO cooperation with Austria as a retaliation measure of Austrian moves to block it from joining the EU and being most critical about the Turkish leadership.

The role of the CSDP and NATO in domestic political and military transition and reform

Basic constitutional and institutional framework

Considering developments from a legal perspective, in the course of a revision of the B-VG in 1975, Article 9a B-VG was introduced declaring the concept of comprehensive national defence (CND, in German: umfassende Landesverteidigung) as a national state objective. Its aim should be to guarantee the independence of the republic and to defend the neutrality of Austria. Generally speaking, the concept of a comprehensive national defence comprises elements of military, psychological, civil and economic national defence. This concept was then extended to comprehensive security precaution (CSP, in German: umfassende Sicherheitsvorsorge). Article 9a B-VG lays down the basis of the Austrian conscript system in its third paragraph. Article 79, paragraph 1 B-VG stipulates that the Austrian armed forces have to be developed as a militia system (WALTER et al. 2007, 361).

In the field of the Austrian security and defence policy, the key players can be found in the Austrian Government, mainly the Federal Chancellor, the Minister for European and International Affairs and the Minister of Defence. Nonetheless, also the Austrian Parliament plays a key role with regard to the foreign deployment of the AAF. According to Article 80 B-VG, the President of the Republic is commander-in-chief of the armed forces, but the supreme command is held by the Minister of Defence, above all through the officers and military commanders. According to Article 79, paragraph 2 B-VG, the armed forces, i.e. the Austrian Bundesheer, have to protect the constitutionally established institutions and the population's democratic freedoms; to maintain order and security inside the country; to render assistance in case of natural catastrophes and disasters of exceptional magnitude (WAGNER 2006, 36).

Therefore, one could argue that national defence is the key task of the AAF but, due to its foreign engagements and the duties deriving from membership in the UN and EU, supporting international crisis management missions and operations is also of major importance. Thus, it became necessary to regulate the practice for the deployment of Austrian troops abroad.

Therefore, the National Assembly adopted a constitutional law act, the so-called KSE-BVG, in 1997. In its paragraph 1, this law permits the deployment of Austrian troops for peacekeeping missions within the framework of international organisations, the OSCE or the CFSP as well as for providing humanitarian aid and support in international crisis management exercises. This norm also determines that in case of any deployment, the Austrian responsibilities with regard to International Public Law and the basic principles of the CFSP need to be respected. Paragraph 2 (1) KSE-BVG states that such a deployment requires a consensus between the Government and the Main Committee (Hauptausschuss) of the Austrian Parliament. All other deployments, like for instance training activities, lie in the sole responsibility of the Minister of Defence. Paragraph 4 KSE-BVG stipulates the principle of voluntariness as the core principle for foreign deployment of Austrian troops. In case of an urgent decision, the Federal Chancellor, the Minister for European and International Affairs as well as other affected Ministers, such as e.g. the Minister of Defence or in case of a humanitarian deployment, the Minister of the Interior can decide upon consensus. Nonetheless, they need to report to the Government and the Main Committee of the Austrian Parliament (paragraph 2 (1) KSE-BVG). The Main Committee can issue a veto within two weeks. This committee comprises 32 parliamentarians (out of a total of 183) and has also a strong role with respect to Austrian actions in the framework of the EU. The coding is particularly difficult, since on the one hand, prior parliamentary approval is required before a deployment can be made, but on the other hand, this approval is given by a committee and not by the plenary (Wagner 2006, 36).

Moreover, Wagner points out the following: "[A]lthough the members of the main committee reflect the composition of the entire parliament, the delegation of competencies from the plenary to the main committee is likely to compromise the influence of the parliament. As a committee, the Hauptausschuss is likely to receive less publicity than the plenary" (Wagner 2006, 36). Due to the fact that the committee also reflects the strengths in parliament, the committee is very likely to follow the government's proposals. Apart from the Main Committee, the Standing Committee on European Affairs also has the possibility to voice opinions to the respective Federal Minister. These are legally and politically binding and can be issued regarding all areas falling under the competences of EU law. In this context, the executive can only deviate from such binding opinion in case of "compelling reasons for foreign and integration policy".

The actions of the AAF and the intelligence agencies are scrutinised by the Austrian Parliamentary Commission for the Federal Armed Forces and the Standing Subcommittee of the Committee on National Defence. Therefore, the Austrian Parliament plays a rather active role in controlling the actions and deployments of the AAF.

Defence Planning and Security Sector Reform

In the context of its EU and NATO-PfP membership, in 2002, the Austrian Government also started a major reform of the Armed Forces in line with the capability development processes Austria absolved in the context of NATO's PARP and the EU's Capability Action Plan (ECAP). The new Security and Defence Doctrine represents a significant step towards the further development of Austria's security policy. The doctrine includes plans to transfer the comprehensive national defence into a concept of comprehensive security precaution, which

foresees the Europeanisation of the Austrian Armed Forces with regard to the international spectrum of military tasks. However, owing to early elections in 2002 on the one hand, and the appointment of the Austrian Armed Forces Reform Commission on the other hand, the original timetable for developing these new strategies in the areas of foreign policy, defence policy, internal security, economic policy, agriculture, transport, infrastructure, finance, education and information by the end of 2002 could not be met. Regarding the staff strength of the armed forces, a reduction from 110,000 to 55,000 was foreseen. In the future structure of the armed forces, a contingent of 10,000 soldiers for domestic operations was planned. In emergency cases, this contingent can be strengthened by the mobilisation of an additional 5,000 militia troops by the Minister of Defence (FRANK 2006, 135). While the comprehensive national defence was organised on a purely national level and mainly oriented towards a passive threat-reaction concept, the concept of the comprehensive security precaution is based on the principles of prevention and European solidarity.

In 2002 during the restructuring of the armed forces, a Special Operations Forces Command, which was a higher command directly reporting to the Ministry of Defence, was established and was responsible for tasks such as mission preparation and the command and control of special operations forces. Austria's involvement in these developments was at no point compromised by reservations concerning the continued status of formal neutrality (GEBHARD 2013, 290). Meanwhile, the reform was as much a strategic decision in view of new global circumstances as a political and financial necessity: the only constraints for Austria's Armed Forces in this regard seem to have been the obvious budgetary limitations (with a general defence budget of roughly 0.6% of the GDP), and the relative pressure to be interoperable within the EU and NATO-PfP frameworks.

As it has been stated before, the Austrian military system is based on conscription. According to the conscription system defined in Article 9a, paragraph 3, B-VG, the obligation for male citizens starts at the age of seventeen and continues up to the age of fifty. Female citizens are in general not drafted for the Austrian Armed Forces, but since January 1998, they have been allowed to join the military. Male citizens may be drafted for basic training up to the age of thirty-five; thereafter they cannot be called up. Officers, non-commissioned officers (NCOs), and, under certain circumstances, other ranks may serve up to the age of sixty-five. In general, around thirty thousand men are drafted into the armed forces each year. People can be exempted from Austrian military service under certain legal circumstances, for example, when compelling economic or family circumstances occur. Since 1975, there has also been the possibility of performing an alternative civilian service, the so-called *Zivildienst,* for persons refusing to do compulsory military service based on conscientious objection. In 2013, after a domestic political debate about whether or not to retain the compulsory military service, Austrians voted overwhelmingly in favour of keeping compulsory military service.

Policy field-specific relations

Austria's geographical responsibility lies clearly in its neighbourhood. The political guidelines foreseen in the draft Security Strategy prioritise missions and operations in Central and Southeast Europe and the Middle East. If required by the international situation, the Austrian engagement might be extended towards the Danube and Black Sea Region, to the Caucasus and

via the Near and Middle East also to Africa (Security Strategy 2011, 13). Due to its membership in the UN and the EU, the AAF engage mainly in missions within the UN and EU framework. However, without being a member of NATO, Austria expands its activities in NATO-led operations as well as within the PfP framework. Since 1960, more than 100,000 Austrian troops and civilian personnel have been participating in more than 50 international peace support and humanitarian missions. The geographical focus of Austrian foreign engagement lies on the Western Balkans, i.e. Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Kosovo, but traditionally the Near and Middle East also play an important role. Austria's participation in operations in Africa and Asia is still rather limited. Nevertheless, Austria strongly engaged in EUFOR Tchad/RCA in 2008–2009 and currently Austria contributes 14 staff officers to EUTM Mali. Presently, approximately 1,200 personnel are engaged in various international operations, the majority of which is currently participating in the NATO-led KFOR operation in Kosovo, EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina and UNIFIL in Lebanon. Since 2002, Austria has actively participated in the ISAF missions. Furthermore, in May 2012, Austria has agreed to financially support the training and capacity building for the Afghan police forces with € 18 million for the time period 2014–2016 and is currently also deploying troops for the mission Resolute Support in Afghanistan.

Taking a closer look at the different types of missions abroad, there is a big acceptance among Austrian officers to take part in humanitarian engagements as well as in peacekeeping and monitoring missions, especially in Europe, but also in Asia. Peace enforcement in general as well as peacekeeping and monitoring missions outside Europe, mainly in Central and East Africa, are less accepted. This can clearly be seen in a survey carried out among officers by the Austrian Ministry of Defence in 2007. Generally, there is a broad consensus as regards participation in foreign engagements, as only one fourth of the questioned officers deny participation in missions abroad (Langer 2007, 329).

The level of ambition with regards to international engagements has been defined as two battalions plus support forces for unlimited deployment on stabilisation and reconstruction missions of low to medium intensity. In addition, a framework brigade at 30-day readiness, sustainable for one year, was planned for high-end missions such as separation of forces, and the government aimed to develop the ability to maintain a classical peacekeeping deployment similar to its earlier mission in the Golan Heights (Giegerich–Nicholl 2008, 66).

Focusing more on Austria's participation in the EU crisis management, the Austrian efforts are rather biased. From the beginning of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), Austria has been strongly committed to crisis management exercises and participation in civilian, as well as military, crisis management operations. Again, also in the EU framework, the same geographic regions can be identified as fields of action, namely the Western Balkans and Africa, being both of strategic importance for the EU as well as for its member states. Considering the importance of the Western Balkans for Austria's security, it seems rather obvious that there has always been a need to engage in the neighbourhood. Thus, the traditional engagements in this region are still in line with the priorities set out in the various strategic documents.

Furthermore, Africa is of particular interest for the European Union. The large number of crises and vital interests that the EU takes in Africa renders this region crucially important for its CFSP. Consequently, Austria will not be able to shirk the common responsibility of the EU, which means that missions in Africa will become more and more

likely (Segur-Cabanac 2006, 17). Austria already has lengthy experience with peacekeeping missions in Africa within the framework of the UN, which date back to the year 1960 when Austria participated with a medical contingent in ONUC in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Moreover, Austria participated in UNEF II in Egypt from 1973 to 1974 and sent military observers to Cambodia, Somalia and Rwanda.

Looking at the continuing and finished military CSDP operations from an Austrian point of view, the picture is rather ambivalent. While Austria's engagement, primarily by deploying staff officers, in the CSDP operations Concordia, Artemis and the Congo was of a rather symbolic nature, Austria played an important role in EUFOR Althea and EUFOR Tchad/RCA. International assignments are carried out under the norms of the Federal Constitution and especially the KSE-BVG. The security strategy for the first time has set up various conditions under which deployments could take place (Security Strategy 2011, 13; Kammel 2011):

- The security political implications of an event on Austria
- European solidarity and the importance of an action for the security of the EU and Europe
- International Solidarity and the implications of a concerted action on global security
- The implications of an Austrian participation with regard to its status within an international organisation
- Geographical situation of a mission
- The availability of suitable Austrian civilian and military forces to be deployed
- Possible financial implications of a deployment

The conditions are not stated in a formal order due to the fact that it would have been difficult to reach an agreement on the ranking of the different conditions among the political parties; nonetheless it can be assumed that the presented list ranks the criteria for foreign deployments on an informal basis.

Following its role as a mediator, Austria historically enjoys good relations with Russia despite its historic memories of the Russian occupation of vast parts of Austrian territory before regaining its independence. Thus, the Austrian Security Strategy calls for targeted cooperation with both the U.S. and Russia taking European values into account and asserting the rights and fundamental freedoms with self-confidence, also with regard to the efforts made to find sustainable solutions to problems in international regions of crisis (Security Strategy 2011, 19).

For Austria, also the Central European region is of vital security interest and thus it is not surprising that Austria has actively engaged in various multinational structures. In 1996, Austria and Sweden were founding members of the UN Multinational Standby High Readiness Brigade of the United Nations Operations (SHIRBRIG) with its headquarters in Copenhagen. This brigade also included the NATO members Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and Poland. Austria took the SHIRBRIG presidency in 2004, coordinating UN operations. Austria's contingent to SHIRBRIG consisted of a transportation company (Hauser 2007, 47).

Furthermore, Austria plays an active role in the context of the Central European Nations' Co-operation in Peace Support (CENCOOP), as there are common interests between Austria and its neighbours in the field of security policy. The political dimension of CENCOOP is an example of regional cooperation having the potential to be used in the future to not only share a common analysis, but also a part of the burden related to European security (Wosolsobe 2006, 9).

In 2010, cooperation among Central European neighbours was again revitalised and as a consequence, meetings on security political directors' level take place on a regular basis. This new Central European Defence Cooperation (CEDC) encompasses the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia and Austria. CEDC fosters "regional military cooperation in selected areas through shared military projects." The shared field of interest focuses to the sustained stabilisation of the Western Balkans. Although many defence officials in the region are not necessarily enthusiastic about this development, the Central European political environment and also practical defence considerations pushed the defence ministries of CEDC countries towards a deeper cooperation on border control, as well as better coordination with ministries of interior affairs on the national and the regional levels. In general, CEDC, however, has been more significant as a framework for regional cooperation than in facilitating EU level initiatives (Müller 2016, 31).

A similar central European setting can also be found with the Salzburg Group dealing with matters related to Justice and Home Affairs. The Salzburg Forum developed out of an Austrian initiative to improve security in Central and Eastern Europe through regional cooperation with the five then EU candidate countries Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland in 2000. Romania and Bulgaria joined in 2006 and Croatia, after it had participated as an observer since 2006, became a full member in 2012. The first conference among the interior ministers of the Salzburg Forum, who meet twice a year, took place in August 2000. It is mainly an informal gathering, also at the margins of the EU JHA Council (Müller 2016, 27). Austria has successfully worked through the Salzburg framework to influence EU policies on issues such as the EU's 2010 Internal Security Strategy, the establishment of a response mechanism for exceptional circumstances met by the Schengen area in 2012, and the EU's 2015 Strategic Guidelines for JHA (Müller 2016, 31).

Conclusion and way ahead: Austria's ambivalent security policy

Due to historical developments, there is a strategic culture in Austria composed of two diverging poles: solidarity within the European Union and non-alignment outside the EU. In the context of bipolar confrontation, Austrian leaders, and foremost the Social Democrat Bruno Kreisky, actively sought to establish a global reputation for their country as a benevolent mediator, and purportedly, a "natural born" peacemaker. Much of this normative image built on Austria's neutrality allowed the country to promote an alternative "third way" in its foreign policy (Gebhard 2013, 292). As this chapter has shown, the classical concept of neutrality has never been fully exercised from the start and its importance has been further diminished due to the Austrian membership in the UN and EU. Austria's accession to the EU and its contribution to the CSDP have normalised the country's international orientation. Even if Austria has so far abstained from abandoning its neutral status altogether by e.g. entering NATO as a full member, the country is externally perceived as part of the EU and thus as part of an alliance that is based on mutual solidarity. However, neutrality often remains a good exit strategy tool for politicians and policy-makers to shy away from making concrete commitments.

On the other side, the advantages of neutrality, especially Austria's being perceived as an honest neutral broker in international peace talks or as a host country for international organisations, are still considered. Austria has so far been active in the development of

a genuine European security and defence policy and will continue to do so. Any specific commitment or even involvement of Austria in a further developing CSDP will most properly be decided on a case-by-case basis. With regard to NATO, there is currently not even a debate about whether or not a closer relationship would be beneficial for Austria; the blocking by Turkey does not help in overcoming the current deadlock neither.

A further deepening of regional cooperation formats, such as the CEDC and the Salzburg Forum will remain high on the Austrian agenda as well as its active involvement in crisis management missions and operations in its neighbourhood, mainly with regard to the Western Balkans. Thereby, the question of whether to deploy troops under UN, EU, NATO or OSZE flags is secondary; the stability of the neighbourhood having direct effect on Austria's security prevails.

Also the 2018 EU Council Presidency of Austria shows that Austria is willing and committed to tackle security and defence policy on a European Union level. The general topic of a "Europe that protects" further underlines this approach. Austria has continued to focus on the Western Balkan region, as well as on the importance of strengthening civil-military relations and also applying a more comprehensive view to security and defence.

Looking at the Austrian security and defence policy over time, it becomes obvious that by taking a future perspective the country will not drastically change its course of action. So far, the Austrian third way has best provided for the countries interest. Nonetheless, what has become clear and undisputed is the fact that Austria cannot decouple its foreign, security and defence policy from the developments within the process of European integration. That also means that any further deepening will sooner or later lead to renewed debates about the Austrian way and whether the concept of solidarity within the EU and neutrality outside the EU can be further sustained.

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