

Austria's Security and Defence Policy within the framework of ESDP

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I. Basic remarks:

19 of the member states of the EU are taking part in NATO, while Austria belongs to the 6 member states of the EU which are not members of NATO at the same time.

The history and the interests of the 6 members (Sweden, Finland, Ireland, Malta, Cyprus and Austria) show very different backgrounds and positions to the question of NATO membership. Austria's policy of neutrality cannot be compared with the Irish or the Finnish one or with the specific situation of Cyprus or Malta. So you can state that there is no common position and no common strategy of the non NATO members in the EU despite some common initiatives and a "common focus" on ESDP.

Very soon after 1955, the year from which the Neutrality Act dates, Austria left the way of the model of modern neutrality – Switzerland and took part actively in UN peacekeeping operations rather early (e.g. in the early 60th in Congo, in the 70th in Cyprus and the Middle East)

Therefore the Austrian neutrality developed much more in the direction of a non-alignment policy instead of a classical policy of neutrality according to the model of Switzerland.

Particularly after the end of the Cold War the position of neutrality was questioned seriously but out of reasons of domestic politics consensus could not be achieved. Since the Neutrality Act of 1955 has the character of a constitutional act any change of this act requires a majority of 2/3 of the members of parliament which doesn't seem to be realistic at the moment.

Not being a member of NATO which is the traditional and by many decision makers considered the most efficient regional organization of collective security Austria relates her security and defence policy primarily to the European Union.

One crucial structural aspect in the question NATO – EU cannot be overseen:

While NATO is based on the principles of intergovernmentality and consensual decision-making by its nature the European Union particularly her "finality" offers the option of a development from intergovernmentality towards integration even for the "core" of national sovereignty - foreign, security and defence policy.

Depending on the development of the European Union after the Constitutional Treaty – in the direction of a kind of federal state or a specific kind of confederation – and taking into account that the principle of subsidiarity which is already part of the constitutional framework requires the "unification" of ESDP rather than that of other fields of politics the European Union is the "more open" institution compared with NATO.

Principles of Austrian security policy:

6 years after joining the European Union in 1994 and 3 years before the ESS (better known as “Solana Paper”), in December 2001 the Austrian Parliament (Nationalrat) adopted the actual Security and Defence Doctrine (SVD).

On the occasion of the membership negotiations with the EU in the early 90th Austria emphasized already her willingness in “full participation” even in the 2nd pillar of the Treaty of Maastricht.

The former reacting and territorial bound approach towards security policy and defence was replaced by a new comprehensive view of a multinational, active and preventive security policy directed to stabilization of the political (not so much geographic) environment.

II. Comparing national strategies and union level documents:

II.I. The comparability of the two documents

Even before comparing the two documents in detail we can expect similarities as well as differences. Regarding the scope of security doctrines at national and at union level differences have to be expected since security at national level plays another role than at union level and union interests may not be identical with national ones and vice versa.

Security in all its aspects is a prerequisite for continuance and functioning of a constitutional democracy as well the economic well-being of society and its citizens. Therefore security policy is a paramount political duty of the state. Under the current circumstances this duty has to be designed and realized as a “comprehensive security policy”. But the single state is more and more unable to answer challenges and threats adequately.

Austria’s effort is aimed at the prevention of violent conflicts. Therefore its security policy is directed at the prevention of war and peaceful coexistence of nations – based on the Charta of the United Nations, on international conventions for the protection of basic- and liberty rights, on the Convention for Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the European Charta of Fundamental Rights.

The purpose of security policy is to guarantee the security for preferably all fields of a community. The security and defence doctrine represents the guideline of the Austrian security policy. Protection of the state structures as well of its citizens against all kinds of threats is the nucleus of the security and defence doctrine.

The security situation of a European country cannot be examined isolated. Instabilities and perils in Europe or its periphery affect the security situation of all European countries. The new threats and risks can not be dealt alone but only through international cooperation and solidarity. On a national basis it is imperative to develop a public understanding for security policy issues.

III. Comparing the structure:

The structure of the ASS seems to be rather different to the ESS.

III.1. Introduction:

The ASS contains a long introduction called “General Considerations” which tackle Austria’s security situation as well as the paradigm shift in security policy in Europe, the

security risks and dangers replacing clear threat scenarios, the role of International Organizations and Austria's participation and the road from neutrality to solidarity.

Therefore the chapters "Introduction", "The Security Environment, Global Challenges and Key Threats", "Strategic Objectives" of the ESS are to be found in the "General Considerations".

The chapter "Policy Implications" of the ESS can be compared with the chapters "General Recommendations", "Foreign Policy Aspects of Security Policy", "Defence Policy" and "Internal Security".

III.2. Values and interests:

In the first two pages of the "General Considerations" security is addressed as "basic pre-requisite for the existence and functioning of a democracy under the rule of law as well as for the economic welfare of the community and its citizens".

The commitment to a policy of peace and prevention of outbreaks of violent conflicts is addressed as well as the commitment to the Charter of the UN and "international agreements to protect fundamental rights and freedoms, such as the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Charter of Fundamental Rights".

In the very broad formulation "Austria's vital security interests and the security interests pursued in common with the EU constitute the basis of our security policy" gives space to the interpretation that-theoretically- there could be 2 different spheres of interests. But two sentences later the formulation "The security of Austria and that of the EU are inseparably linked" and "Austria today implements its security policy essentially within the framework of the EU" shows a very strong connection with the security policy of the EU but one has to keep in mind that the concrete formulations of the ESS did not exist when the ASS was adopted.

III.3 Challenges and Threats:

A division between "global challenges" and "key threats" like in ESS cannot be found in the ASS. Taking into account that the ASS was formulated before 9/11 it could not be as precise as the ESS but in differentiation between armed conflicts in unstable regions of Europe or on its periphery and "other forms of threats" the ASS is almost in line with the ESS.

The clearly perceivable threat scenario of the Cold War era has been replaced by a complex mix of dangers and risks. Its origins may lie in the political, economic, military, social, ecological, cultural-religious and information technology areas. This very broad view of dangers and risks corresponds to the ESS approach.

The (increasing) "other forms of threat" in the ASS address the most important global challenges to security policy in a very similar way as the ESS. "Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism controlled by governments of certain interest groups and operating internationally, organized crime, destabilizing developments in armaments, ethnic conflicts, phenomena of political fragmentation, totalitarian ideologies and fundamentalist religions, demographic trends and migration, problems of energy and resources, problems of food supply, and environmental hazards" and especially "international terrorism in all its manifestations are serious problems for Western societies".

III.4. Objectives and Tasks:

While the ESS identifies mainly three strategic objectives in

1. Addressing the threats
2. Building security in the neighbourhood

3. Relying on an international order based on effective multilateralism

the ASS speaks about “basic strategies” concerning a “comprehensive conception of security” which includes “promotion, safeguarding and restoration of peace and stability as well as individual and/or collective self-defence under the following fundamental principle: *As much as co-operative promotion of peace as possible and only as much force as necessary.*”

The very strong commitment to multilateralism and the remarkable strong role which is provided for International Organizations and the Austria’s participation in these mention not only the UN, but also EU and NATO with its partnership for peace, OSCE and the Council of Europe as framework for security policy.

III.5 Means and Instruments:

Like the ESS is structured you will not find a list of means and instruments in the ASS related to every single task. Political, diplomatic, economic and military means can be used when appropriate. . The deployment of military means of coercion is a tool with the character of “ultima ratio” and should be used only in respect with the Charta of the United Nations. (Nevertheless one should see the relativism of the term “ultima ratio”: in common understanding it means the last measure but the Romans understood it also as ultimate or extreme measure.)

III.6. Sectoral strategies:

While the ESS does not mention sectoral strategies the ASS uses the term “Sub-Strategies”.

The National Assembly requested the Federal Government to work out sub-strategies for all areas relevant to security policy based on the “recommendations on security and defence policy” which is the most important part of the ASS paper. After elaboration of sub-strategies those should be continuously reviewed, coordinated and, if necessary, adjusted in accordance with the international framework conditions. Sub-strategies should not only relate to the areas of foreign policy, defence policy and internal security but similar sub-strategies should be worked out for the areas of economic, agricultural, transport, infrastructural and financial policy as well as educational and information policy.

IV. Comparing the Content

IV.1. Challenges and Threats:

Unlike the differences in structures the content of the central parts are rather identical. Although one cannot point out a hierarchy of challenges and threats “proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism controlled by governments or certain interest groups and operating internationally, organized crime, destabilising developments in armaments, ethnic conflicts, phenomena of political fragmentation, totalitarian ideologies and fundamentalist religions, demographic trends and migration, problems of energy and resources, problems of food supply, and environmental hazards” is much more detailed than the threat perception in the ESS and some of the threats are even not mentioned in the ESS at all.

IV.2. Regional dimension:

The ASS does not refer to concrete regions of concern unless it comes to internal security where the ASS addresses “combating organized crime in all its varieties (people trafficking

and smuggling, arms and drugs trafficking, money laundering etc.) within Austria on the one hand, and through international cooperation on the other hand, especially with Central and Eastern European governments, and with Russia” as one important task (point 4) like “enhancing exchange of information on migration at EU level, and in particular also with the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (point 8).

The regional aspect may be addressed also by the sentence: “ geographical distance from areas of conflict no longer guarantees sufficient protection”.

But it is clear, that Austria’s foreign and security policy is guided by a kind of regional hierarchy where first of all the Balkan region has to be considered as top priority. In effect that is indeed in line with the CFSP and the security policies of our regional partners and neighbours.

IV.3. International order:

The strong commitment of Austria to international law and international organizations is underlined by the fact that a whole chapter in the ASS is devoted to the “Role of International Organisations and Austria’s Participation”.

“Austria accords central significance to the role of the United Nations in safeguarding world peace and international security. Participation in the UN’s peacekeeping operations has been among the key areas of Austria’s commitment in the World Organisation ever since the Congo Mission in 1960. Since 1960, about 40.000 soldiers of the Austrian Armed Forces have taken part in UN-authorized operations.

“Austria’s role in the UN’s peace missions continued to develop in the nineties. Since then, Austria has also taking part in peace-making operations, since 1999 also with combat units. These are UN-authorized missions conducted under the operative direction of NATO or of a “Lead Nation””.

Austria’s participation in the OSCE derives from its special commitment to promoting understanding and cooperation between East and West, given its geographical situation. After the dismantling of the Iron Curtain it has a natural interest in the stabilisation of conditions in the East of the European Continent.

One essential motivation for Austria’s joining the EU was that this meant “belonging to the European stability zone”. From its beginnings, the European integration perceived itself as a mainly “work of peace and thus as a security concept”. Therefore the last enlargement process was explicitly considered as “benefits in terms of security policy”.

NATO constitutes “not just a classical military alliance but also a comprehensive security community which is based on democratic values and which renders a crucial contribution to peace and security worldwide through its stability-oriented policies.

Already in a framework document signed in February 1995 Austria has expressed its intention to join Partnership for Peace of NATO and from 1995 to 2001 it took part in the NATO-led multinational peace operation in Bosnia-Herzegovina (IFOR/SFOR) as PfP partner and since 1999 Austria has been participating in the Kosovo operation (KFOR).

Despite the evident interest in PfP - Austria is also actively involved in the work of the European Partnership Council (EAPC), PfP’s political consultation forum – there is no current ambition of joining NATO as a member.

V. Conclusions

Austria's security policy made a remarkable development from "classical neutrality" according to the Swiss model to Solidarity in security policy within the framework of the UN and particularly the European Union. Its "full and unreserved participation" in CFSP and ESDP and therefore all spheres of European security and defence is demonstrated by adequate contribution to the military and civilian capabilities of the EU.

Austria's security policy is exclusively committed to the EU and – as long as the EU is committed to international law and the UN system of collective security - no contradiction is arising.

The way from neutrality to the status of non-alignment is questioned currently but not regarding its position towards ESDP and the future development of ESDP.

Whether Austria can be considered being a "Musterknabe" of ESDP- or even having the ambition to be one - cannot be answered precisely but there are some indicators for this assumption.

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