Schweizer Partnerschaft mit der NATO

20 Jahre Schweizer Teilnahme an der Partnerschaft für den Frieden
20 YEARS OF AUSTRIAN PARTNERSHIP WITH NATO
RECORD AND OUTLOOK

Gerhard Jandl

Introduction
„Austria will craft its security policy predominantly within the UN, the EU, the OSCE, in its partnerships with NATO and within the Council of Europe […]”.

This is one of the most significant phrases of the Austrian Security Strategy, adopted on 3 July 2013. The reason reads: “Today, due to their complexity, security issues can only be resolved through international cooperation. The role of international organizations and forums is thus becoming ever more important […]. At the same time, the role of individual states is generally diminishing in relative terms.”

It goes without saying that for Austria, as a member of the EU, participation in the EU’s Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) has the highest priority. But NATO is without any doubt the number one security organization in the Euro-Atlantic area. 22 out of the 28 EU Member States also belong to NATO and for them it “remains the foundation of their collective defense and the forum for its implementation”, as the EU has recognized (Art. 42 para 7 TEU). Thus, Austria’s cooperation with the Alliance is a crucial element of its security policy and a determining factor for its standing as a security policy player.

Neutrality
Although in early 1955, Austria had pledged “internationally to practice in perpetuity a neutrality of the type maintained by Switzerland”, it deviated from that model only a few months later. The Federal Constitutional Law of 26 October 1955 on the Neutrality of Austria does not mention the Helvetic template any more. By joining the United Nations in December of the same year, Austria steered a course different from its Western neighbour and its neutrality began what Franz Cede called “fröhliches Eigenleben” (the merry life of its own), culminating in a “phase of exaggeration” (Peter Hilpold) until 1989.

A few years after the end of the Cold War, in 1995, Austria became a member of the EU, something which had been considered impossible for a neutral country in earlier decades. Vienna has not only foregone any neutrality reservation; it has – in the Final Act on the accession – obliged itself (together with Sweden and Finland) to be “ready and able to participate fully and actively in the Common Security and Foreign Policy” and to make its “legal framework […] compatible with the ‘acquis’.” To fulfill the latter commitment, the Constitution was amended by the stipulation that “Austria participates in the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union […]” (Art. 23f and 23j, resp., of the Federal Constitutional Law), thus derogating neutrality for the field of CFSP including CSDP which is an integral part of CFSP. Wolfgang Benedek calls this a “differentiated neutrality”. The first test was the invocation of the mutual assistance clause of the Lisbon Treaty by France in November 2015. There was an immediate agreement among the lawyers that there were no grounds for any neutrality excuse to Paris’ request which “à sollicité, sur la base de l’article 42.7 du TUE, l’aide et l’assistance des États membres de l’UE, pour faire face à « l’agression

---

1 Dr., Sicherheitspolitischer Direktor, Bundesministerium für Europa, Integration und Äusseres BMEIA, Österreich
3 Austrian Security Strategy, para 2.1.1.
4 For more on the nexus of neutrality and security policy see Jandl (2015b).
5 Moscow Memorandum of 15 April 1955, para I.1.
armée » dont a été victime la France”, and Vienna officially responded positively a few days later, thus passing the test so to speak. The constitutional norms allow Austria even to participate in a possible future common European defense and/or army, as shown in an earlier publication.

Also in 1995, Austria joined NATO’s Partnership for Peace (PfP) which allows for comprehensive cooperation between the Alliance and non-members, including neutral countries. PfP programs are bilaterally arranged between NATO and the respective partner countries and touch on virtually every field of NATO activity. Two years later, Austria became a member of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) which today comprises the 28 NATO members and 22 partner nations (including Russia, by the way). It is the multilateral forum for consultations on political and security-related issues.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, there was a debate whether Austria should join NATO. The Security and Defense Doctrine of 2001 explicitly said that “Austria will continuously assess the value of NATO membership for its security and defense policy and the option of joining NATO will be kept open”. Even the possibility of a NATO membership compatible with (the core elements of) neutrality was discussed as some saw NATO (then) developing from a defense alliance into a regional organization as referred to in Chapter VIII of the UN Charter. Such considerations were later dropped, due to a changed domestic and international political landscape. The 2013 Security Strategy which replaced the 2001 Doctrine does not contain the NATO option any longer; however, there is no explicit language to the contrary either. The text mentions neutrality again, but rather incidentally and not argumentatively.

Today, there is widespread consensus that Austria should not seek NATO membership but maintain (what is left of) neutrality. In any case, the latter is reduced to its core (or its ‘avocado pit’ as Franz Cede calls it in his famous ‘avocado doctrine’): the general reference to permanent neutrality (Art. I para 1 of the Neutrality Law) with the two specifications of no access to military alliances and no establishment of military bases of foreign States (Art. I para 2 leg.cit.), the aforesaid derogation for CFSP/CSDP prevailing.

Some understand (erroneously) the 2013 Security Strategy as a call for revival of the aktive Neutralitätspolitik (active policy of neutrality), coined the 70s and 80s. No surprise that international commentators see the Austrians still as being „obsessed with neutrality” practicing it as „a secular religion”. Some Austrian experts, however, regard the current neutrality – in light of the above – as “ausgehöht und sinnentleert” (hollowed out and devoid of meaning).

I agree with those warning of stylizing neutrality into a sort of myth of national identity. As Peter Hilpold stresses, demystification is required, bearing in mind that neutrality is not an end in itself but contains finality, serving the security interests of the State.

Cooperation with NATO
Austria has been cooperating intensively with NATO since 1995. It is actively participating in two of the three core tasks of NATO defined in its 2010 Strategic Concept: Crisis Management and Cooperative Security (the core task of Collective Defense being for members only). The opportunities of the Individual Partnership Cooperation Program (IPCP), the Planning and Review Process (PARP) and a number of other instruments are being widely used. So are the possibilities of consulting with the most important players, notably the U.S., in a forum which is sometimes termed the ‘hub’ of the international security debate.

---

13 Jandl (2015a).
16 For details see: Jandl (2014a) p. 244 f.
17 E.g. Cede (2007), p. 27. In German, the “Reduktion auf den harten Kern” sounds even more telling.
18 For a more detailed discussion, see Jandl (2015b) p. 198.
19 de Gruyter (2014).
20 Cede/Prosl (2015) p. 35.
For the first time ever, Austrian soldiers served under NATO command with IFOR and SFOR in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Today, with its 550-strong contingent in Kosovo, Austria is the third largest troop contributor to KFOR, it had contingents with ISAF and has now 10 officers with RSM in Afghanistan. Participation in trainings and exercises is indispensable for upholding the interoperability and the relevant military standards of the armed forces, and for their constant transformation. Vienna is actively taking part in shaping NATO's work on the political and thematic fronts in the field of Cooperative Security, e.g. on human security, on emerging challenges, on building integrity and in particular by co-chairing the ‘tiger team’ on the protection of civilians which has elaborated well-received recommendations. The avant-garde NATO-Austrian cooperation on cyber security has set the standards for other countries’ (including NATO members’) cooperation models. Vienna is supporting a deepened cooperation between NATO and the EU which is also mandated by the European Council’s conclusions on the CSDP review. (The latter, by the way, shall be carried out “in full complementarity with NATO” and “in coherence with NATO efforts”. Thus, it is fair to say that NATO now has not only a role vis-à-vis CSDP but already in CSDP.) It can be expected that the new European Global Strategy, to be presented in mid-2016, will advance this cooperation as well.

Moreover, Austria – together with Switzerland and other partners – is keen in pushing the partnership agenda forward. The Austro-Irish-Swiss paper ‘For a Euro-Atlantic Partnership looking to the Future – Proposals for NATO’s new Strategic Concept’, presented in 2010, or the Austro-Swiss ‘Non-Paper on the Development of our Partnerships with NATO post-2014’, introduced before the Wales Summit of 2014, are prominent examples of such joint endeavors. There is also an active and fruitful cooperation within the WEP-5 group (the five Western European partners Austria, Finland, Ireland, Sweden and Switzerland, occasionally expanded to WEP-6 with Malta).

The Wales summit has created a new Partnership Interoperability Initiative plus a related Interoperability Platform with 24 partners, including Austria (and Switzerland). Within that initiative, so-called ‘enhanced opportunities’ were offered to an inner circle of five nations: Australia, Finland, Georgia, Jordan, and Sweden, but neither Austria nor Switzerland. There are no written criteria for these enhanced opportunities, but there are hints that they have to do not only with participation in crisis management operations (a criterion which Vienna fulfills perfectly), but also in the NATO Response Force (NRF) and other advanced trainings, with defense budgets and with general political record including vis-à-vis Russia. The concrete advantages of the enhanced opportunities lie in intensified political consultations, closer involvement in the planning of activities of interest to partners and in guaranteed participation in desired training activities. The five ‘enhanced’ countries thus play, so to speak, in the major league.

**Preparing for NATO’s 2016 Warsaw summit**

The Alliance’s current agenda is understandably dominated by the Russia/Ukraine conflict. While reaffirming the three core tasks defined in the Strategic Concept, the Wales summit of 2014 at the same time underlined its “strong commitment to collective defense and to ensuring security and assurance for all Allies”. The related Readiness Action Plan is intended to “contribute to ensuring that NATO remains a strong, ready, robust, and responsive Alliance capable of meeting current and future challenges from wherever they may arise.” Russia and the Middle East and North Africa region are explicitly mentioned in this context. A refocus on collective defense aspects is thus to be observed.

The Kremlin’s activities in and around Ukraine, but also its arms build-up, including on the nuclear side, and its activities in the Nordic and Baltic areas both conventional and ‘hybrid’, are understood by many as threatening and as gravely deteriorating the security situation there. The same is true for the formulation in Russia’s military doctrine of 26 December 2014 that “the establishment of regimes in bordering States whose policy threatens the interests of the Russian Federation” constitutes a military danger. As Sven Biscop puts it: „Until recently the idea of war […] against an EU/NATO

---

22 Conclusions, European Council, 19 and 20 December 2013; reiterated by the Conclusions, European Council, 25 and 26 June 2015.

23 Wales Summit Declaration, 5 September 2014, paras 3 and 5, resp.

Member State was simply unimaginable. That is no longer so.\textsuperscript{25}

In the run-up to the 2016 Warsaw summit, it is being stressed that the Alliance would increase its military presence in Eastern Europe, but these measures will be below the threshold defined in the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997, in order to avoid provocation of the Russian side. There is a call by many to further focus on the collective defense aspect and to update NATO’s Strategic Concept at Warsaw.

**The Swedish and Finnish cases**
The said concerns are voiced not only by NATO members, but increasingly also by Sweden and Finland, both obviously being subject to Russian provocations and intimidation efforts. The recent simulation of a nuclear attack on (inter alia) Stockholm in Russian exercises was certainly not a confidence-building measure.

As a consequence, Stockholm and Helsinki are moving closer to NATO. They have stepped up their participation in NATO exercises, and they use their enhanced opportunities partnership widely. Approval rates for an eventual NATO membership have gone up in both countries, although none of the governments is likely to move into that direction any time soon. For quite some time now, Finland and Sweden have understood themselves not as neutral any more but as alliance-free.

There is a certain risk that thereby the very coherent and effective WEP-5 group would lose its impact or even disintegrate, something neither Austria (nor Switzerland, presumably) can wish for.

**Challenges for Austria**
It goes without saying that Austria will continue its cooperation with NATO, as also pledged by the 2013 national Security Strategy,\textsuperscript{26} by significant contributions to Crisis Management operations, by co-shaping the Cooperative Security activities in the political field, and by participation in trainings and exercises to uphold and further improve the armed forces’ interoperability. Austria is playing a committed role as a partner to NATO, as outlined above. “NATO highly values its relations with Austria. The Allies view Austria as an effective partner and contributor to international security” is to be read on the NATO website.\textsuperscript{27}

But NATO is an organization rapidly adapting to changing circumstances, and if a partner country would simply continue to walk comfortably on the beaten track, it runs the risk of diminishing its significance as an actor in the security policy field. Austria should, from a foreign policy point of view, urgently seek the ‘enhanced opportunities’ and, hence, reach a level of partnership comparable to Sweden and Finland – even if Bern or Dublin should not share this aspiration.

Moreover, Austria (and the other partners) will be called upon to further develop the partnership agenda and to enhance partners’ ownership, according to our interests and needs. The run-up phase to the Warsaw summit will be a propitious occasion which should be duly seized.

**References:**


\textsuperscript{26} In particular in paras 3.4.2.2, 4.3.14 and 4.4.19.

\textsuperscript{27} NATO homepage, chapter “NATO’s relations with Austria”, on http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_48901.htm?selectedLocale=en.


