

European Strategies of the New Right - the example of the FPÖ

The European politics of the FPÖ (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs / Freedom Party of Austria) is not only a mirror of the entire diversity of a quite contradictory and in parts very tactical relationship of the entire New Right towards "Europe". Due to the character of the FPÖ as a populist mass movement, the European politics of the FPÖ is often characterized by short- and medium-term concerns of realpolitik (= pragmatic politics). On the one hand, the aim is to maximize votes with populist discourses and actions before elections, on the other to serve the economic interests of the industrialists and business circles that maintain close relations to the party.

This may at least give a rough idea of the reasons for the relatively jerky changes and the lack of consistency in the position of the FPÖ towards the European Union. Nevertheless, a careful reading of various FPÖ publications reveals a view of Europe that in spite of variations in the tactical and strategic reflections shows a certain degree of continuity.

The position of the FPÖ has to be seen in the context of an ideological evolution of the party which needs to be presented here so that its position on Europe can be situated in an ideological context.

Continuities of the "Third Camp"

In Austria, the FPÖ represents the so-called "Third Camp" that has evolved in the 19th century as a quite heterogeneous camp between national liberalism and German nationalism and has largely merged, in the 30ies of the 20th century, into the Austrian sections of the NSDAP (National-Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter-Partei / National-Socialist German Workers' Party).

Although after 1945, some leading Nazis were removed from their positions by the Allies and partly even taken to court, the majority of the Austrian National-Socialists were left in their positions or at least came to be regarded as "denazified" within the shortest of times. There was even less, in Austria, any kind of radical breaking with the individual ideologists of National-Socialism and the implementers of National-Socialist realpolitik. With the thesis that it was the first victim of National-Socialism, the Austrian society even managed to avoid the debate about the Shoa and National-Socialist terror that was forced upon the FRG and GDR by the Allies. In Austria the victim thesis was official policy and was affirmed even in the declaration of independence of 27 April 1945:

"[...] the National-Socialist Reich government of Adolf Hitler [has used] the complete political, economic and cultural annexation to lead the powerless and will-less Austrian people into a senseless and hopeless war of conquest, which no Austrian ever wanted or was given a chance to foresee or approve, for waging war on peoples against which no true Austrian has ever harbored any feelings of hatred."

On the backdrop of this victim thesis the National-Socialist national body could thus be seamlessly saved into the post-fascist intimacy of an Austrian national body which in 1949, after the former members of the NSDAP had been allowed to vote again, gave the new umbrella movement of this "Third Camp" a corresponding electoral victory. In the elections for the National Council in 1949 the Verband der Unabhängigen (Federation of Independents) won 11,66% of the votes - the first time they presented themselves for election. Already at this point in time the VdU was dominated by former NSDAP functionaries and focused mainly on the struggle "for the former (?) Nazis and against the NS prohibition law." (Gratzer, 1998:44)

After internal quarrels the right wing of the party founded the FPÖ (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs / Freedom Party of Austria) in 1956. Its first party leader, Anton Reinthaller, was "a member of the province leadership of the NSDAP Austria, participated as Minister of Agriculture in the high-treason government of Seyß-Inquart and became SS brigadier". (Bailer/Neugebauer, 1993:329) The entire leadership of the party had similar biographies. The political message of the new party corresponded largely with the political background of the party leaders, who obeyed the democratic rules only superficially while continuing to nurture the individual ideological elements of National Socialism.

Since however the old NS ideas were linked to somewhat antiquated forms of politics, the new party was hardly able to gain nation-wide electoral success and managed to equal the electoral success of the VdU only in provincial parliament elections in the Lands of Carinthia, Salzburg and Vorarlberg.

In order to escape the image of being an outmoded Nazi party and the corresponding lousy electoral results, it is the successor of Reinthaller, of all people, the former member of the 1. SS infantry brigade Friedrich Peter, who initiated in the middle of the sixties a phase of normalization, characterized by "largely stable electoral results, the inclusion of new academic forces, [...] as well as a gradually rising readiness of the political opponents of the FPÖ to enter into discussions with the party." (Luther, 1992:248)

Peter's successor, the Federal Party Leader Götz, continued to try to get closer to the ÖVP, and Federal Party Leader Norbert Steger, the first Party Leader of the FPÖ without a clear NS past, from 1980 on seriously tried to turn the party into a liberal party. He succeeded only at the level of the party leadership, however. At the grass-roots level the FPÖ remained embedded in a network of openly extreme-right organisations, through a variety of extreme-right front organizations ranging from the Österreichischen Turnerbund (ÖTB - Austrian Association of Gymnasts) to the diverse violent Burschenschaften - German-nationalist students' association whose tradition reaches back to the establishment of the original Burschenschaft in 1815 - and suborganizations of the FPÖ itself. It was then that this grassroots level developed an increasing resistance to the liberalization efforts of Norbert Stegers and formed the basis for the putsch-like takeover of power by Jörg Haider at the Innsbruck party convention on 14 September 1986. "Accompanied by a howling reminiscent of fascist rallies, a new party leader was designated, while the losing representative of liberalism was called a "Jew" and threatened to be shot and gassed. Also, National-Socialist convictions were openly displayed." (Bailer/Neugebauer, 1993:340)

The success of the new party leader, Jörg Haider, cannot however be explained exclusively by the extreme-right orientation of the old/new FPÖ politics. Jörg Haider was able, within an extremely short period of time, to dress up that political orientation which in the fifties and sixties made the FPÖ look old-fashioned and derisory, in a new modern dress and to succeed in elections with a new kind of modernized and democratized fascism. While in the liberal era of Steger the FPÖ had come close to being ejected out of parliament the new FPÖ of Haider finds itself on an almost undiminished trend upwards, both on the federal level and in the Lands and the municipalities.

The highest peak of this upward trend so far was in overtaking the conservative ÖVP (Austrian Popular Party) at the elections for the National Council in October 1999. The FPÖ thus became the second-largest Austrian party, and after several months of pretended negotiations between the ÖVP and the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ), the ÖVP summoned the FPÖ into a coalition government in February 2000.

Europe and the "New Right"

Just like the different phases of the FPÖ vary, so do the Party's European Policies. Until Jörg Haider took over power, the relatively strong heterogeneity of the party played an important role, as it tried

to unite different currents of the new and old right. The various strategies towards Europe of the European right are also mirrored in the FPÖ's ideological history.

The meaning of the battle-cry concept of "Europe" varies greatly across the European right and the extreme right: "It is termed the occident by the conservative wing, the German Reich by German-Nationalists, and midway between them the intelligentsia of the new right is straining the notion of Europe as a colony in need of liberation from powers foreign to its space." (SCHIEDEL, 1995: 68) Whereas neo-pagan currents of the extreme right date the beginning of this colonisation back to the times of christianisation in Europe, most representatives of the "New Right" consider the military defeat of Nazi Germany and the subsequent "partition of Europe" between NATO and Warsaw Pact as the beginning of this "Colonisation of Europe". After the defeat of the Warsaw Pact, this current of the European extreme right logically focuses on a struggle against the United States of America, which it perceives as the remaining colonial superpower.

This anti-Americanism is in part where various cross-spectrum front strategies set in, which sometimes successfully try to co-opt equally anti-American leftists for the "New Right" or to establish alliances with them.

The New-Right representatives of a "national liberation struggle" against US hegemony emphasise the struggle against US cultural influences and the "cultural emancipation" of Europe.

"Unsurprisingly, Greater Germany acquires a central role in the announced spiritual emancipation of Europe: The independent "Nation of Europe" aspired to has to link up to its Germanic roots, since the pre-Christian religion of blood and soil is the foundation for the principle of heritage and identity which has to be enforced." (SCHIEDEL, 1998: 23) Such an ideology of a "Nation of Europe" goes all the way back to the British fascist leader Sir Oswald Mosley, who used to be the leader of the British Union of Fascists (BUF), and who continued his activities without any obstruction even after 1945, until in a long fight, "The 43 Group" stopped the activities of his new-founded fascist groups (see BECKMAN, 1992). The "European fascist Elite", met in Malmö already in 1951 "to found the 'European Social Movement' (ESB). In Germany, the former SS 'Sturmbannführer' and Hitler's highest 'gangfighter', Arthur Erhardt, publishes the still existing major magazine 'Nation (and) Europe. Monthly publication serving a re-ordering in Europe'" (SCHIEDEL, 1998: 24), which to this day has the function of producing ideological incentives for the European Extreme Right.

The 'New Right' has since been fighting against the EU, and after Maastricht especially against the Maastricht Treaties, which it sees as an americanised 'multi-cultural sauce' and to which it opposes either a "Europe of Fatherlands" and/or a "Europe of Regions", depending on the respective current. So-called 'naturally grown' units are central to their line of argument, which form "Regions" or "Fatherlands" in a nationalist-populist (völkisch) sense. "Europe" is primarily seen as a battle-cry concept against the US, the Islamic World or other world religions, which allegedly threaten the "European Nation". European "Interior Policy" however is conceived as taking the form of a confederation based on nationalist-populist (völkisch) blood-and-soil communities, instead of that of a political union.

A Europe of Regions and Fatherlands

The concepts of a "Europe of Region" or a "Europe of Fatherlands" have always played an important role in the europolitical line of argument of the FPÖ. It can be seen as a 'brown thread' going through the different tactical shifts in the europolitical positions of the FPÖ.

Until a short time before the referendum on the accession of Austria to the EU, the FPÖ was one of the Austrian parties most vigourously promoting joining the EU. An old FPÖ party programme defines the europolitical position of the FPÖ as follows:

"[...]The last step towards achieving the unification we aim for, as we see it, is the constitution of a European confederation. In this confederation, every people should be able to preserve its

peculiarity on the basis of self-determination." (FPÖ, 1995:1.4) What is meant by this is explained in the chapter on "People, Fatherland", approved during the 'liberal' Steger era: "We consider the maintaining of ethnic communities a necessity in times of supranational and supraregional alliances." (FPÖ, 1995: 3.14)

To what extent this Europe is considered a German-dominated Europe can be appreciated in the Ausseer programme of the predecessor party of the FPÖ, the Alliance of Independents (VdU) in 1954: "Austria is a German State. Its politics must serve the whole of the German people and must not be targeted against another German State. We demand the union of the European peoples on the basis of full equality." (Quoted from REITER, 1993:589)

Erich Reiter, who analysed the FPÖ European Programme, consequently considers the year 1945 (as the year of the military defeat of the German Nazi regime) and not the year 1933 (the year Hitler took over power in Germany) as a European tragedy: "The year 1945 was not only a German, but also a European tragedy." (REITER, 1993:589)

The strategy followed by the majority of the Austrian population after 1945 was a different one. After the crime of German fascism, the majority of people closed their eyes on their recent past in which they had considered themselves a part of the "German Nation", and simply went on to create an "Austrian Nation". An "Austrian Nation" that, as described above, did not want to have anything to do with the "Pan-German" past. With an increasing number of Austrians defining themselves as part of the 'Austrian nation', the FPÖ's open German agitation became increasingly unattractive, which led to a successive diffusion of the German orientation of the party. In the party programme of 1985 one can find, besides the definition of a people as a "natural community that is united by descent and historical development" giving rise to signs of "common characteristic features" (FPÖ, 1985:1.3), also a reference to the "relation of Austrians to the German "people and cultural community": "The large majority of Austrians belongs to the German people and German cultural community. This fact remains true even though it has been repressed as a consequence of a fatal chapter of German history in Austria. We want Austria to be embedded in the German peoples- and cultural space, and to be able in future to independently contribute to shaping these spaces." (FPÖ, 1985 1.3) Jörg Haider started its FPÖ leadership by promoting this classic German-nationalistic position, until he shifted his discourse during the mid-nineties towards an increasing Austrian-patriotic line. This was tactically one of the most important steps to increase the electoral support of the FPÖ beyond the remaining German-nationalistic potential, thereby becoming attractive to post-National-Socialist democrats that had replaced that German nationalism with a feeling of belonging to the permanent 'Austrian poor victims'.

The FPÖ line of argument on Europe became increasingly ethnopluralistic, putting greater emphasis on "culture" rather than "people", on "region" rather than "nation". "Europe" is seen as a union in exclusion of Asia, North Africa, etc., and that union needs to be a confederation of ethnopluralistic regions with internal borders between "native countries". With this political position, the FPÖ partly joins those regionalists that on one hand idealise for a new Europe the old "Holy Roman Empire of German Nations", and on the other bridge over to alternative ecological discourses with the concept of "Europe of regions".

The idea of an ethnopluralistic Europe on the inside and a Fortress Europe to the outside is described in the current FPÖ political party programme under the headline "Europe - Community with a Common Destiny" as follows: "Europe is more than an geographical idea. It is rooted in the Christian occidental community of value. The common destinies that bond its people and their cultural heritage constitute and carry Europe. [...] Europe's wealth is the diversity of its people and ethnic groups. The Christian occidental community of values affords the freedom of the individual and the freedom of its people a particularly high position, much higher than is the case in other cultural circles. [...] The future destiny of Europe must be characterised by the freedom of its people to shape it. The diversity that has resulted through history, as well as the cultural heritage, must be preserved and developed." (<http://fpoe.at/bb/programm97/art6.htm>)

As the FPÖ to a large extent traded in its German nationalism for an Austrian patriotism in the Austro-Fascist tradition - at least to the outside -, it was necessary to take up the sword for the "Christian occident". An additional chapter on "Christianity - a Fundament of Europe" in the new political party programme shows how the FPÖ turning its back on the old anticlerical German nationalism and makes steps towards the catholic fundamentalists and austriopatriotic defenders of the occident: "The world order shaped by Christianity and the antique world constitute the most important spiritual foundation of Europe. The most important spiritual tendencies from humanism to the enlightenment are based on it. [...]"

The preservation of the spiritual foundations of the occident requires a Christianity that defends its values. In their efforts to preserve these fundaments of Europe, the Liberals see themselves as ideological partners of the Christian churches, despite some differences on some political questions. [...] These foundations of Europe are threatened by diverse trends. The increasing fundamentalism of a radical Islam and its penetration into Europe, but also a hedonistic consumerism, an aggressive capitalism, the increase of occultism and pseudo-religious sects and finally a nihilism that can be seen in all areas of life are threatening the consensus of values, which could be lost in the process." (<http://www.fpoe.at/bb/programm97/art5.htm>)

Up until the Maastricht treaty, the European Community was considered by the FPÖ as a possible development towards an ethnopluralistic occidental land. Shortly before the EU referendum in 1994, Jörg Haider changed from a fervant supporter of an accession to the EU to a populist opponent of the EU. The FPÖ tried to establish itself as a party opposing the EU before the referendum by using arguments drawing on fear, as in talk of a "flood of foreigners" or the alleged bull blood in chocolate, or flees in strawberry yoghurt, or the sell-off of the Alps to Dutch and German holiday house owners, or the export of the pure Austrian water to "the Portuguese", etc. This shift in the discourse made it sometimes very difficult for left-wing EU opponents to counter with objective arguments against an EU accession. Some progressive EU opponents even fled into the EU supporters' camp in order not to become tangled up with xenophobic populism.

Looking at the short term, the FPÖ expectations were not fulfilled. The referendum resulted in 2/3 of the voters approving of joining the EU. The shift in the party's discourse and the open xenophobic mobilisation was one of the main reasons for the party to split, and for the creation of the "Liberal Forum", which subsequently profiled itself as anti-FPÖ and took with it the last liberals that had remained in the party.

But looking at the long term, the FPÖ was able to establish itself as the anti-EU party. Because many Austrians felt betrayed by the alliance between social democrats & conservatives, who had promised heaven on earth in case of an EU accession, and due to the latent hostile mood towards a Europe that had been present during the advertising campaign of the government. The opinion on the EU changed dramatically within the first year of Austria being part of the EU. By the end of 1995, every poll agreed that 2/3 of the people were expressing themselves against the EU, while 1/3 were in favor. The FPÖ were the ones to primarily benefit from this shift in opinion.

Since then, the FPÖ has been presenting itself as the EU-hostile party, which together with the open racism and a latent antisemitism drew more and more voters in from election to election. This EU hostile position of the FPÖ became particularly relevant when they took over power together with the ÖVP, the Austrian People's Party (Österreichische Volkspartei ÖVP) and drew all EU countries against them. The supposed bilateral 'sanctions' by the EU-14 against the Austrian government - which mainly consisted in cancellations of common dinners or pictures with Austrian ministers - has since then become not only a permanent topic on all news channels but THE topic of the FPÖ, which was used in a militant anti-European agitation, and to distract the public's attention from the concrete governmental work, in particular the social dismantling, the dismantling of unions.

The FPÖ even managed in the process to inflict a EU hostile position on the previously EUphoric coalition partner ÖVP. The government had announced that it would organise a referendum about cancelling these 'sanctions' in case the report of the 'EU sages' was not going to. Besides the fact

that the idea to ask Austrians whether France or Belgium should cancel their 'sanctions' sounds funny, the referendum would only have contributed to stimulating in the population a mood hostile to Europe. The feelings of the population on this question were so tense that people from the Left, who supported the international reactions to the participation of the FPÖ in the government, were immediately treated as "traitors to the people and the fatherland".

In order to maintain the national consensus and the common enemy, the FPÖ tried to pour oil on the fire. Andreas Mölzer, the German-nationalist chief ideologist of the party and publisher of the right extremist paper "Zur Zeit", announced his wish to organise a large European gathering of right-wing extremists in Austria. Besides the FPÖ, other parties like the Vlaamser Block from Belgium, the MNR from France, the Italian neo-fascists and regionalists (Lega Nord) were to show up in Austria.

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