



Heinz Gärtner (IIP) participated in the Eastern Partnership security policy workshop of the Minsk Dialogue Forum under the auspices of the Austrian Presidency of the EU Council

***Security Options of the EU's Eastern partners:
Is there a role for neutrality?
November 13, 2018 – Minsk, Belarus***



Here are excerpts of his speech:

Austrian Neutrality as a Model for the New Eastern Europe?

Heinz Gärtner

Introduction

The concept of neutrality has proven time and again that it can adapt to new situations. The notion that the concept of neutrality is a phenomenon and a part of the Cold War is false in many ways. First, the history of neutrality is much older; the Swiss idea of neutrality dates back to the fifteenth and sixteenth century. It received its legal basis at the Hague convention of 1907. Second, neutrality was not constitutive of the Cold War but was its anomaly. The Cold War in Europe was about building blocs; neutrality was about staying out of them. Whereas the Cold War was the normal, neutrality was the exception.

Under some circumstances, the concept of neutrality could serve as a model for Central and Eastern European states. During the Cold War, neutral states managed to stay out of the spheres of influence created by the two military superpowers. There have been suggestions to create a “neutral belt” in the new Eastern Europe that has emerged between the EU/NATO and Russia. Neutrality could be a sustainable conceptual option also for the future. As a diplomatic solution, the Austrian model could be an interesting alternative for Central and Eastern European States.

In its neutrality law of 1955, Austria agreed not to join a military alliance and not to allow any foreign military bases on its territory. Austria quickly adopted Western values and started a process of integration in the market economy, which eventually led to its accession to the European Union in the 1990s. This development was accepted by the Soviet Union, mainly because Austria did not become a member of NATO. In addition to affirming Austrian neutrality, the Austrian State Treaty also guaranteed that Austria would not join a new union with Germany (*Anschluss*), as had happened in 1938.

Eastern Europe after the Cold War

After the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, its members joined NATO and the EU. They saw NATO as a protection against Russia and the EU as a return to Europe. After brief internal debate, they did not opt for neutrality. Other East and Central European states remained outside the alliance. NATO followed the “open door” policy, leaving the possibility of membership open without yet inviting them to join. Neutrality might be one alternative option to NATO membership for these Eastern and Central European states. Within some of these states, e. g. Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, this option is controversial, since some domestic forces are pursuing NATO membership.¹ Russia remains suspicious to the neutrality option because it does not trust that NATO would respect it. After a conversation between U.S. Secretary of State James Baker and Soviet President Michael Gorbachev in 1990, some Russian officials and related commentators developed the narrative that Russia believed that NATO would not expand to the East; they claimed that NATO enlargement was a broken promise.

¹Andrew Cottey, “Introduction: The European Neutral States,” in Andrew Cottey, (ed.), *The European Neutrals and NATO: Non-alignment, Partnership, Membership?* (Palgrave-Macmillan: London), 2017, pp. 1-20.

The Final Report and Recommendations of the Panel of Eminent Persons on European Security as a Common Project of November 2015 formulated some practical lessons for the OSCE from the crisis in and around Ukraine. It sought to provide reassurance to Eastern European countries that find themselves “in-between” Russia and the West. The proposals include elements such as: a treaty on European security; alliance membership; military co-operation outside the alliance framework; permanent or time-limited neutrality; neutrality but with military links to NATO; and understandings on what neutrality means in the present context. As a diplomatic solution, the Austrian model could be an interesting alternative for the “in-between states”.² The Austrian EU presidency in the second half of 2018 offers another opportunity to address the issue of neutrality for Eastern European States, including Moldova and Belarus.

Are there lessons learned from Austria’s experience with neutrality to these countries? I examine options for the security architecture in the Eastern Partnership countries, including the role of NATO, the OSCE and neutrality/military non-alignment. I look at options for neutrality and military non-alignment, drawing on the experience of Austrian neutrality.

The Eastern European countries (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus) are part of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), which focuses on relations with the EU in such areas as trade and investment, finance, energy, and transport, among others. These states are caught in a “geopolitical dilemma”³ in their foreign and security policy orientation towards Brussels and Moscow: closer political association and economic integration with the EU, on the one hand, versus improved partnership with Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU; comprised of Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan), on the other hand. Neutrality of these countries could facilitate closer economic cooperation between the EU and the EEU and end their in-between-status, which is unsustainable and undesirable.⁴

² Instead, Austria’s Chairmanship identified other priorities on how it would address the current threats and challenges in the OSCE area. First, since violent conflicts with numerous victims, displacements and destruction are becoming worse (or worsening), Austria intended to contribute to solve them. Second, radicalization and violent extremism was a major focus of the Chairmanship. Austria saw this as an imminent security risk in the entire OSCE area. A general goal was that Austria wanted to re-establish trust and confidence between states as well as citizens and facilitate confidence-building.

³ Velina Tchakarova, “Competing geopolitical approaches towards Eastern Europe,” Austria Institute for European and Security Policy (AIES), Fokus 4/2017.

⁴ Alexandra Vasileva, “Engage! Why the European Union Should Talk with the Eurasian Economic Union,” Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Perspective, September 2017.



The Austrian Model

In October 1955, the Austrian National Assembly adopted Austria's permanent neutrality. It was Austria's guarantee to the Great Powers that the country would not join any Eastern or Western military alliance. Ever since, neutrality has been at the center of Austria's foreign and security policy. In Austria's early, formative years, neutrality was synonymous with independence. It helped Austria to develop a strong identity for the first time since World War I, which is why Austrians cling to neutrality by more than a two-thirds majority. The core of Austria's neutrality depends on its military nature. Military neutrality is enshrined in the Declaration of Neutrality: Austria may not join any military alliances, nor may foreign troops be stationed on its territory. The legal principle that neutral states are not allowed to participate in a war, in the sense of international law, was not regulated directly in the Declaration of Neutrality, but resulted from the prevailing understanding of neutrality.

The Federal Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Konrad Adenauer, rejected the concept of neutrality out of hand. He suspected conspiratorial tactics.⁵

While Chancellor Adenauer saw the concept of "armed neutrality" in Austria as a put-to-sleep-tactic by the Kremlin, at that time, it had been supported by U.S. President Eisenhower.

⁵ Konrad Adenauer, *Erinnerungen 1953-1955* (Deutsche Verlagsanstalt: Stuttgart, 1966), pp. 441-442.

At a press conference in May 1955 Eisenhower said:

“It seems that the idea has developed that one could build a number of neutralized states from North to South through Europe. Now, remember: The Treaty regarding the neutralization of Austria does not mean that Austria would be disarmed. It is not a void, not a military void, it is along the lines of Switzerland. ... This kind of neutrality is very different from a military vacuum.”⁶

During the Hungarian uprising 1956 the Soviet Union suspected the rebels would use Austria’s territory as their hinterland. The State Department of the newly re-elected Eisenhower Administration warned Moscow to respect Austria’s neutrality and even stated that its violation would be a case for a Third World War.⁷

Austria’s neutrality protected Austria from outside intervention by a bloc member. During the period of bipolarity in the Cold War, the blocs were least informally recognized by the leading powers of the other bloc. Therefore, Eisenhower did not come to the aid of the Hungarian insurgents although the United States supported them rhetorically; President Johnson was silent during the uprising of the Prague spring 1968; President Reagan only verbally supported the Polish protests in 1981. Using this analogy, Ukraine eventually cannot rely on the United States to go to war with a nuclear armed Russia.

In spite of the negative reaction towards Stalin’s notes on a “coalition free” Germany in 1952, there suggestions were made for a neutral Central Europe after Austria’s neutrality (and after Stalin’s death). George F. Kennan, the U.S. ambassador to Moscow after 1947 and the father of the policy of “containment,” suggested in 1956 and 1957 to create a neutral Central Europe, because he did not believe there would be another way to unify Germany.⁸ He called Central Europe the “in-between-zone.”⁹ German Chancellor Adenauer called this proposal “suicidal.”¹⁰ Nevertheless, there were other attempts. U.S. Senators Hubert H. Humphrey and William F. Knowland started a bipartisan initiative. Their plan of 1956-1957 was to create a buffer zone and a simultaneous withdrawal of U.S. and Soviet troops from Germany and from the members of the Warsaw Pact. Eventually, such a buffer zone would be linked to the existing neutral states, Austria, Finland, Sweden and Switzerland. Similar ideas came from the chairman of the British Labour Party, Hugh Gaitskell.¹¹ U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles said at a classified meeting of the National Security Council on February 6, 1958 that the United States and the Soviet Union agreed that a unified neutral Germany in the center of Europe could not be controlled and that unification should not be a goal of U.S. policy. Meanwhile the United States should do everything to “keep the Germans happy.”¹²

⁶ Dwight D. Eisenhower, press conference 18 May 1955, quoted in Adenauer, op. cit., p. 442.

⁷ *Bild-Telegraph*, November 7, 1956.

⁸ George F. Kennan, cited in Adenauer, op. cit., pp. 146–148.

⁹ George F. Kennan, *Im Schatten der Atombombe: Eine Analyse der amerikanisch-sowjetischen Beziehungen von 1947 bis heute* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1982), p. 21.

¹⁰ Adenauer, op. cit., p. 474.

¹¹ Andreas Hillgruber, *Europa in der Weltpolitik der Nachkriegszeit 1945–1963*, (Munich/Vienna: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1979), pp. 60–61.

¹² National Security Council, 242. Memorandum, Discussion at the 354th Meeting of the National Security Council, February 6, 1958.

Some neutral countries—such as Sweden and Switzerland—did experiment with the development of nuclear weapons, even as they sought to stay out of the military blocs of the Cold War. Western-bloc nations such as Canada and Germany did the same. But Austria already provided in the mid-1950s a different model.¹³ After declaring its neutrality in the second half of the 1950s, Austria became a model for the concept of a geographic zone without nuclear weapons in Central Europe—a concept known as the Rapacki Plan, after the Polish foreign minister who expanded upon the idea and formally introduced it to the world. It was a plan based on disengagement of the blocs and a nuclear-free status of the participating states. Austria’s State Treaty, which was adopted in the same year (1955) as the Treaty on Neutrality, requests a nuclear-free status for Austria: “Austria shall not possess, construct or experiment with—a) Any atomic weapon, b) any other major weapon adaptable now or in the future to mass destruction and defined as such by the appropriate organ of the United Nations ...”¹⁴

According to the Rapacki Plan, Poland, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany should become neutral, as was Austria. Because of the emerging concept of Mutual Assured Destruction, however, the plan was not implemented, although it never died.¹⁵

Neutrality has been increasingly supplemented with an active foreign policy. Contrary to the Swiss model of “sitting still,” Austria joined the United Nations the same year (1955), the Council of Europe in 1956, and the European Free Trade Association in 1960. Austria presented itself as a meeting point, by hosting, for example, meetings between the Presidents of the United States and of the Soviet Union, John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev in 1961, and Richard Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev in 1973, both in Vienna. Last, but not least, thanks to this policy of neutrality, Vienna was chosen as the third UN capital and seat of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), UN specialized agencies (e.g. UNIDO) and the secretariats of OPEC and OSCE (formerly CSCE).

Conclusion

In addition to its neutrality law, a State Treaty separate of the neutrality laws also guaranteed that Austria would not join a new union with Germany (Anschluss), as it had happened in 1938. In the case of Eastern and Central European States, such a prohibition to join Russia or parts of it together with neutrality could guarantee its unity. At the same time Russia has to recognize that an independent Ukraine, - also of the Russian Federation – is the result of the political process of forming a Ukrainian state.¹⁶ In addition, in the Austrian State Treaty, minority rights were regulated and certain capabilities of Austria’s military were limited. In the case of Ukraine, such a State Treaty could expressly detail the Russian minorities within the country’s borders, as well as clarify the future status of Crimea with its different ethnic and language groups (Russians, Ukrainians and Crimean Tartars), whereby the unity of Ukraine should be guaranteed.

¹³ See also Heinz Gartner, “A neutral state’s perspective on the ban—and a compromise,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, August 15, 2017.

¹⁴ State Treaty for the re-establishment of an independent and democratic Austria. Signed at Vienna, on 15 May 1955.

¹⁵ On the website of the Austrian Foreign Ministry one can find a modernized plan for a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Europe.

¹⁶ Dmitri Trenin, “To Understand Ukraine: A New Stage in the Russian State Project,” *Russia in Global Affairs*, December 27, 2017.

Of course, there can be no neutrality between democracy and dictatorship, between a constitutional state and despotism, between the adherence to human rights and their violation. The Austrian neutrality law does not relate to these questions. It is defined in negative terms as the non-membership in a military alliance, non-participation in foreign wars, and the non-deployment of foreign troops on Austrian territory. There can be no neutrality between the condemnation and the tolerance of human rights violations, between right and wrong, or between democratic and authoritarian forms of government. Even during the Cold War, Austria remained firmly grounded in the community of Western values.