

Austria bludgeoned by European Union

The Haider case: Who stands to gain from the EU overreaction to the center-right Austrian coalition government? Anno Hellenbroich reports.

The diplomatic isolation imposed by European Union (EU) heads of state, under the leadership of the head of the Socialist International and EU Council president, Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Guterres, against Austria on Feb. 3, in response to the formation of the center-right government coalition of the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), is an outrageous assault against the sovereignty of a European nation. Clearly, certain political circles intend to create a precedent with this bludgeon, swung with ideological venom against the alleged danger of having Jörg Haider and his FPÖ in the government.

The torrents of verbiage have already achieved something, in any case: Bogey-man Haider can now claim he is the hero. Far more than the 30% of the Austrian electorate who voted for Haider, as a protest against the miserable stagnation of the grand coalition, would now vote for Haider in a new round of early elections.

It is claimed that Austria's President, Thomas Klestil, spoke with French President Jacques Chirac and representatives of the Socialist Party of Austria (SPÖ) during the Holocaust conference in Stockholm, and that he there asked his Social Democratic friends for "action" to thwart the looming center-right coalition. What sort of gambit of "wished-for interference in the internal affairs" of a country is that supposed to play out? Is it the case that, as some cynics assert, Vienna is supposed to be made into a new Belgrade? What other European nation will the EU bureaucracy next target with political sanctions?

Haider the populist

To be sure, Haider is a populist who cleverly juggles "hot potatoes." As his several political twists and turns attest (sometimes against the EU, sometimes for), he is often an insufferable opportunist. But is not the chairman of the Jewish Council in Germany, Paul Spiegel, shooting a bit over the target when he claims in an interview, "Whoever takes the saying seriously, 'Nip it in the bud,' has to stop these developments in Austria before they get out of hand. Haider is a wolf in sheep's clothing, but Adolf Hitler also began small." However, Simon Wiesenthal warned against playing

up Haider too much. "As a direct danger, Haider is overestimated," Wiesenthal, the director of the Jewish Documentation Center in Vienna, told the Feb. 2 *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Haider, according to Wiesenthal, is not a neo-Nazi, but rather a right-wing populist. Wiesenthal noted that Haider has never said anything openly against Jews or against Israel.

In an interview with the Spanish daily *El País*, Haider claimed that there was a rethinking going on at U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's State Department, despite the attempts of mostly socialist circles in Stockholm and certain circles in Vienna to smear him.

Do some of the "defenders of human rights" who are hammering away at Austria have something entirely different up their sleeves, something which ultimately coincides with the destabilization scandals against Germany involving a Karlheinz Schreiber: namely, to forge a new political instrument for interfering in the affairs of EU nations, and thereby crush the resistance to the globalization fanatics and monetarists, and to test out this instrument on the relatively harmless Haider in a small country with 8 million inhabitants?

One week prior to the developments in Austria, President Bill Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair were singing hallelujahs to globalization, and intoned that there should be no additional barriers erected against its inevitable process. There was talk about the end of those principles which were the foundation of the Peace of Westphalia (which ended the Thirty Years' War, 1618-48), including the end of the prohibition against interference in the internal affairs of sovereign nations.

The Austrian International Progress Organization (IPO), a UN non-governmental organization, correctly sees the proclamation of the EU heads of state as a violation of the Treaty of Amsterdam. It terms the assault against Austria "hypocritical," because there has been no response to the problems in other states with ethnic minorities—e.g., France, Spain, and England. To threaten Austria with sanctions for violations which have not even occurred yet, violates the spirit of the Treaty of Amsterdam.

Wall Street, U.S. Republicans, and Haider

Some of Haider's political friends, who do not necessarily agree with his liberal economic policy (e.g., his support for privatization), speak about Haider "kow-towing to Wall Street, and reaping nothing in return." Be that as it may, political observers point to Haider's close connections to circles in the U.S. Republican Party, connections which are rather covertly cultivated.

One of the contact people to these American circles is FPÖ Member of the European Parliament (and former leading candidate of his party) Peter Sichrovsky, who has a house in Hollywood, and who flew to the United States from Brussels just before the Vienna coalition took shape on Feb. 3. In 1996, Sichrovsky drew attention to himself through his work on the autobiography of the head of Frankfurt, Germany's Jewish community, the late Ignatz Bubis, when that collaboration apparently led to some friction with Bubis. Last year, he campaigned among other MEPs—as a Jew—for the establishment of an Orthodox Jewish association in Berlin, which also led to conflict. And, following Haider's electoral success in Kärnten, he organized four rabbis to sign a declaration certifying Haider's politically correct bill of health.

Haider—whose economic policy is rather close to that of former British Prime Minister Lady Margaret Thatcher—looks more like an "allied project" of the Conservative Revolution of a Newt Gingrich (whose role models are Robespierre and the Jacobins) than the much-touted "danger from the right." After all, the predecessor of the FPÖ, the Association of Independents, a collection pot for Nazi sympathizers, was set up by the "allies" in the 1950s and '60s (similar to the German NPD) in the context of the postwar arrangements.

So, what gambit are German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, Irish MEP Patrick Cox, and French MEP Daniel Cohn-Bendit really playing when they fire their cannonades of verbiage (which cost them nothing) against Austria? These "great democrats" and "Europeans," who were so eager to have a war over Kosovo, have accomplished nothing to reconstruct the devastated Balkan region. Austria would surely play a crucial role in such a reconstruction, just as the country was active in the past in difficult situations as a diplomatic bridgehead between East and West, and North and South.

The European Union bludgeon has wreaked immense damage.

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Book Reviews

Fighting like hell to live till tomorrow

by Gail G. Billington

First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers

by Loung Ung

New York: HarperCollins, 2000

256 pages, hardbound, \$23

April 17, 2000 marks the 25th anniversary of a major event, one that will not likely be celebrated by Cambodians. April 17, 1975 was the day the Khmer Rouge seized power in Phnom Penh, Day One of Year Zero, the beginning of a reign of radical ideology-driven terror that would lead to the deaths of perhaps more than one in five Cambodians until the combined forces of Cambodian nationals and Vietnamese soldiers drove the Khmer Rouge from power in 1979. The nightmare did not end then, as Cold War geopolitical maneuvering among the great powers on the UN Security Council continued to insist that the Khmer Rouge have a seat in peace talks up until the 1993 UN-sponsored election. And even afterward, political maneuvering preserved the Khmer Rouge as the crucial "wild card" that continued to threaten progress toward stability until the end of 1998, when the last surviving senior leaders surrendered. Many believe that the Khmer Rouge is still a threat.

Loung Ung's book is a memoir of the members of her family's lives, and deaths, during the Khmer Rouge years. It is also a tribute to who she has become. She is the national spokesperson for the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation's Campaign for a Landmine-Free World. In an interview with the Feb. 3 *USA Today*, Loung Ung said of her book: "I hope that people will take away from it that it's more than a war story, that it's more a story of love and family and hope and just fighting like hell to live until the next day."

This is not an easy book to read, but it compels the reader to keep going. Every Cambodian has a story, every family was affected by this reign of terror, but there is always a hesitation: Are *you* prepared to hear that story? Are *they* prepared to tell it?