

INTRODUCTION



Günter Bischof and Michael Burri

The longtime Austrian statesman and chancellor (1970–1983) Bruno Kreisky has not received a lot of attention from Anglo-American scholarship in the past years, even though distinguished journalist Paul Lendvai calls Kreisky “perhaps Austria’s most important statesman in the twentieth century.” As chancellor he gave Austria the “international splendor that it never had before.”¹ Kreisky’s three-volume memoirs were published in an abbreviated English translation.² Before that, the political scientist Pierre Secher published a biography³ and the journal *Contemporary Austrian Studies* dedicated a volume to him.⁴ Given that Kreisky played a major role in Near Eastern politics when he was Austria’s chancellor in the 1970s, one might think there might be more interest in his role of promoting a “two-state solution” between Israel and the Palestinians, particularly at this time when a war is raging in Gaza. He was the first international statesman to deal with Yasser Arafat as the legitimate spokesman of the Palestinians through his leadership of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Kreisky allowed the PLO to establish a representation in Vienna in the early 1980s and helped to bring Arafat into the international limelight as a statesman.⁵

Kreisky’s career in Austrian politics after the World War II was spectacular. After his World War II exile in Sweden, he returned to Austria briefly to join the Foreign Service, to be dispatched back to Scandinavia again to re-establish good relations and secure aid for postwar Austrian reconstruction, and he was very successful in getting aid and support. He returned at the beginning of 1951 to work briefly in the Economics Division of the Foreign Affairs section in the Federal Chancellery, only to join the newly elected President Theodor Körner’s cabinet as a foreign policy adviser. His steep ascent to power occurred in 1953, when he was appointed State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, the number two position after the

ÖVP Foreign Minister (the Socialist Kreisky, balancing the conservative Foreign Minister Karl Gruber and then Leopold Figl), thus initiating a bipartisan foreign policy).⁶ Kreisky remained in that position until 1959—and helped to negotiate the final rounds of the State Treaty in 1955—when he became the Foreign Minister himself, insisting that it become a separate ministry, no longer situated in the Federal Chancellery.

Kreisky played an important role after World War II in defining Austrian foreign policy. That is why this volume is dedicated to his foreign policy. Kreisky redefined Austrian neutrality to be an “active” one. He was the first Western statesman to travel to the neighboring Communist states behind the Iron Curtain, ringing in an early détente between Austria and the Communist bloc. He made Vienna an international meeting place by bringing the Cold War summit between President John F. Kennedy and Soviet Communist Party leader Nikita Khrushchev to the Austrian capital in early June 1961. When the conservative People Party (ÖVP) won the election in 1966 and formed a one-party government—in the process ending the “great coalition” with the SPÖ (Social Democratic Party) that had governed since 1945, bringing calm into Austrian domestic politics—Kreisky was elected Socialist party leader in the same year. His party won the election in 1970. Kreisky became chancellor of a minority government. He arranged for new elections in 1971 when his party won a majority, and he continued as chancellor until 1983.⁷

Domestically, Kreisky became a “reform chancellor” with important initiatives in domestic policy like a new penal code being passed by parliament and abortion being permitted in the first trimester of a pregnancy, next to education reforms and “Keynesian” economic policy to maintain full employment.⁸ He above all put his stamp on foreign policy, which he continued to dominate as chancellor. He continued his visits to the Communist bloc and the two superpowers and began his hectic schedule of Near Eastern diplomacy. He continued to maintain Vienna in neutral Austria as a Cold War meeting place such as the summit between President Jimmy Carter and Leonid Brezhnev and by bringing important Cold War negotiations to the Austrian capital such as the “Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions” (MBFR) negotiations (1973–1989) between East and West. With the International Atomic Energy Agency already being located in the Austrian capital since the 1950s, Vienna became the third United Nations (UN) city after New York and Geneva during Kreisky’s chancellorship. He was hot and cold on the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) that became the high point of détente. In his final term in office he pushed the Cancún summit in 1982 to institute a “Marshall Plan for the Third World” but failed.

The essays in this volume address the foreign policy issues in greater detail. Oliver Rathkolb, a Vienna historian who personally worked with Bruno Kreisky on his memoirs, provides a lively introduction with his essay on Kreisky’s

accomplishments in terms of domestic reforms and foreign policy. He also touches upon his personal relationships with National Socialists after the war and his fight with “Nazi hunter” Simon Wiesenthal, who attacked Kreisky to include people with a National Socialist past in his cabinet.

The first section then deals with Kreisky’s intimate relationship with the United States. Michael Burri looks at the relationship between two of the top “intellectuals” in Austrian politics after the war, namely Kreisky and the long-term ÖVP Education Minister Heinrich Drimmel. He concentrates on Drimmel’s “involvement” with the United States. Drimmel was not an intimate “friend” of the United States like Kreisky, but he engaged the country throughout his life inside and outside of politics. He founded the Austrian Cultural Institute in New York when he was minister and wrote one of the rare books on Austrian-American relations from the nineteenth century to World War I in retirement.⁹ He remained critical of the United States as he did in many of his newspaper pieces in the conservative Catholic weekly *Die Furchen*, as Burri shows. So Drimmel’s record on the United States remained “mixed.” He realized how important a country it had become after World War II as a “superpower,” but as a conservative who had served the fascist Dollfuss regime and fought in the war, he could never develop real enthusiasm for the United States.

In his contribution, Christoph Beitzl analyzes four of Kreisky’s visits to the United States in great detail while he was chancellor (two state visits and two “private” visits with lots of official agenda such as visits to the White House). Beitzl stresses how media savvy Kreisky was (Austria’s “first media chancellor”) and how closely the Austrian Embassy in Washington and the Austrian, American, and global media followed Kreisky’s visits to the United States. Kreisky managed to get into many of the most important media channels in the country.

Given Bruno Kreisky’s lifelong deep interests in foreign affairs, it should not come as a surprise that the section on “foreign policy” is the focus of this volume. Paul Luif grapples with Kreisky’s interest and definition of neutrality. He was deeply involved in negotiating Austrian neutrality with the new leadership of the Soviet Union in the spring of 1955 and in persuading skeptical SPÖ party leaders to embrace it. The lawyer Kreisky always knew that neutrality was above all a concept in international law and that Austrian foreign policy had to be mindful of that. But he also was aware that, for Austria, neutrality was “the most suitable foreign policy.” Luif also covers Austrian failed attempts to join the European Common Market in the 1960s and 1970s. He also looks at Kreisky’s travel frequency as well as Austrian UN votes, siding with the West or with the East. Kreisky was very aware that “Austrian neutrality is only a function of an international equilibrium.” Luif agrees here with Steven Verburg (see below). In that sense Austria benefitted from East-West détente.

Günter Bischof deals with Kreisky’s lifelong fascination with the Marshall Plan and its main features (the counterpart mechanism and the International

Payments Union fostering inter-European trade, as well as the European Recovery Program's principal role in European integration). Kreisky wanted to push a "Marshall Plan for the Third World" in the 1982 Cancún Summit meeting. After careful preparation he fell sick and could not personally advocate for his idea in Cancún. The summit occurred but Kreisky's idea fizzled out.

We have two substantial papers in this volume by young scholars on Kreisky's Near Eastern policy. Based on extensive oral histories, Daniel Aschheim, a young Israeli diplomat, analyzes Kreisky's ambiguous relationship with Arafat in great detail. Kreisky tried to make Arafat acceptable to the international community. He introduced him to his friend Willy Brandt, the former German chancellor and leader of the Socialist International. Kreisky recognized the PLO as the legitimate representative organization of the Palestinians and accepted the PLO opening an office in Vienna in 1980. Kreisky befriended the senior PLO official Issam Sartawi, a cardiologist who had practiced in the United States. When Kreisky wanted to bestow an award on him and the PLO rejected it, Sartawi lost Arafat's protection and was murdered by PLO radicals in Portugal, while attending a meeting of the Socialist International. Kreisky was deeply upset about losing this close friend and ended his relationship with Arafat.

Steven Verburg, a young Dutch scholar, stresses the importance of *détente* in Kreisky's Near Eastern policy. He was highly conscious of the fact that Austrian neutrality would only prosper in an international climate of agreement between East and West, of a balance of power between the blocs. Since Austrian neutrality had been the product of *détente* since the 1950s and the Arab-Israeli conflict posing a threat to *détente*, finding a solution to the Palestinian conflict was the key to solving the problem. Kreisky worked hard to resolve the divergent views of Israel and the PLO. Kreisky wanted the Near Eastern conflict included in the negotiations for the CSCE but failed.

Anna Graf-Steiner's contribution on the CSCE explains why the Soviets did not want the Near Eastern issue included in the CSCE negotiations; neither did anyone else but Malta. This was a big disappointment to Bruno Kreisky, who wanted the Near Eastern issue included on the agenda of the final meeting of the CSCE in Helsinki in August 1975. The idea for a CSCE meeting came from the Soviets, who above all wanted the borders in Eastern Europe confirmed by the international community ("Basket 1"). The price the West wanted the Soviet Union to pay was agreement on humanitarian issues like freedom to travel ("Basket 3"). Austrian diplomats along with other neutral states played a major role in pushing "Basket 3" in the preliminary negotiations in Geneva to the Helsinki meeting. Kreisky did not think highly of the diplomatic process and made fun of the "junior diplomats." He also wanted the final meeting to take place way before "Basket 3" was negotiated, in the process undermining his diplomats. Kreisky saw the main benefit of the CSCE above all in the role it played for *détente*. So furthering *détente* in the 1970s played a crucial role in Kreisky's

consummate foreign policy. Kreisky's very active foreign policy surely gave small Austria a larger role in the international arena than was its due.

Matthew P. Berg opens up the small section in this book on Austrian domestic politics. He does not talk about electoral politics or Kreisky's reform program when he was chancellor. He, rather, is interested in Kreisky's socialization as a Social Democrat in the 1920s and 1930s. Being from a well-to-do bourgeois Jewish family in Vienna, his path to Socialism was not so clear. He was one of the few Jews to return to Austria from his exile in Sweden and find a new path in the Socialist Party, some of whose leaders were antisemitic. Berg is interested in the "*habitus*," the "attitudinal dispositions" of Social Democrats like Kreisky.

Martin Schmid offers a totally new approach to the Kreisky era from a "socio-ecological" perspective. He argues that from an environmental history perspective, the picture of a Janus-faced decade emerges; sociopolitical progress and democratization in form of a broad reform program (e.g., education, family and criminal law, and other reforms) on one hand,¹⁰ mass motorization, mass consumption, mass tourism, and a rapidly emerging "throwaway society" on the other hand. Schmid defines the 1970s from his socioecological perspective as the "decade" starting in 1973 with the oil crisis and ending in the mid-1980s with a declining GDP (gross domestic product). It was a decade characterized by affluence, consumerism, and the "throwaway society," next to a democratic and sociopolitical awakening with more gender equality. So the 1970s is considered a decade of economic crisis after the period of accelerated economic growth starting with the postwar reconstruction period ("*Wiederaufbau*"). Schmid's innovative new perspective is much welcomed in this volume. It complements the social changes going on in the field of environmental history during the Kreisky era.

Finally, Lonnie Johnson gives a very detailed overview of the intricate maneuvering to establish a Chair of Austrian studies in the United States as an Austrian Bicentennial gift to the United States. He shows how Kreisky was personally involved in the fundraising effort (in the Austrian population with private donations being matched by the government) and in the final decision to locate this chair at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. Kreisky wanted the chair to go to a public university and not a private institution like Yale University. Since enough money was raised, Stanford University received the "consolation prize" of a smaller endowment than Minnesota. Kreisky personally traveled to Minneapolis with a sizable delegation to hand the chair endowment to the leadership of the University of Minnesota in 1977.¹¹ Kreisky would have liked this chair to engage in contemporary issues, not the history and culture of the Habsburg Empire. If one looks at what the Minneapolis center has accomplished in the past almost fifty years, one would have to say this was a wise decision to locate the chair in the Midwest. Kreisky's personal role in the funding of the chair and the selection of the institution that received the chair merits such a detailed treatment—the first of its kind. Given the Austrian Center in Minnesota's great role in Austrian

Studies over the past fifty years, we want to publish Johnson's essay with all of its minute details.

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Michael Burri is the editor of the *Journal of Austrian-American History*; he was President of the Austrian Studies Association. His articles have appeared in the *German Studies Review* and in *Contemporary Austrian Studies*. He teaches FMA at Temple University in Philadelphia.

Notes

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4. Günter Bischof, Anton Pelinka, and Oliver Rathkolb, eds. 1994. *The Kreisky Era in Austria* (Contemporary Austrian Studies = CAS, vol. 2) (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publisher); the most recent best-selling biography by Wolfgang Petritsch has not been translated into English, see *Bruno Kreisky: Die Biografie* (St. Pölten: Residenz Verlag, 2010).
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