

Austria as bridge or barrier, or:

The ever-lasting persistence of the East-West divide

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The abolishment of controls at the borders with the Eastern European neighbours in the course of EU and Schengen enlargement was not only a technical but also a highly emotional matter. The borders along the former Iron Curtain have undergone fundamental changes and have been in flux since the end of the Cold War. Nevertheless, the mental boundary between East and West has not shifted eastwards at the same rate, but remains remarkably stable on the part of Western Europe. The image of the “East” as untrustworthy, threatening and fundamentally different from an imagined “Western” community is strongly rooted. Drawing on field research in Austrian state institutions, the paper argues that the end of the Cold War made it necessary for Austria to redefine its identity as a neutral bridge-builder. On the example of security and police cooperation it shows how Austria’s “return to Mitteleuropa” can consequently be interpreted as postcolonial project to recover imperial greatness in a contemporary form – a one-sided move that however did not find the expected repercussions in the former crown lands who preferred to treat it instrumentally.

“Nobody considers Austria a threat. It’s just too small”.¹

1. Introduction

After 1990 the wider Europe was perceived by police and security professionals as a single criminal-geographical space where criminal activities would hardly be impeded by national borders – thus police and intelligence services should follow suit: “The old external threat of communism was replaced by an external threat established by mass immigration, organized

¹ Interview with ministry official, Vienna, 14 April 2008.

crime, and imported terrorism, the penetration of which would, like the old threat, lead to the destabilization of ‘well-balanced’ western societies (Anderson *et al* 1995: 165). This cooperation departed from the assumption that functional necessities would lead to a quickly developing, dense and, to a large degree, informal network of contacts among practitioners that would facilitate cooperation, crime-fighting, proactive policing and criminal prosecution. While this prospect sounded appealing to proponents of the cooperation at least in theory, it turned out to be rather complicated in practice.

As previous research has shown, cooperation of security professionals of different nation states is commonly hampered by several factors: Different institutional and organizational legacies, control cultures, legal systems and, last but not least, mutual prejudices and stereotyping can hinder cooperation (cf. Sheptycki 2000, Schwell 2008). All these variables considerably influence the way actors interpret the social world around them and the colleague from the “other side”, hence police and security organs must have good reasons to engage in cooperation (cf. Deflem 2000). Otherwise the development of mutual trust and social capital, which is deemed indispensable for cooperation on a personal, informal and thus most effective level, will not take place (cf. Putnam *et al* 1993). Security political and police cooperation in itself is not self-evident, since it touches the state’s most sensible realm: internal security. International cooperation *per se* thus is already fraught with issues of trust and mistrust.

International cooperation, be it police or security-political, thus in practice does not necessarily have to run as smoothly as the introductory remarks suggested. For the purpose of this paper yet another complicating dimension is added to the picture: the East-West-divide. The paper argues that, even with border controls abolished between what is commonly referred to as Eastern and Western Europe, mistrust towards the “East” is not only a recurring motive, but a decisive determinant. The mental boundary between East and West has not dis-

solved together with the institutional borders, but is still present among the populations on both sides of the former Iron Curtain. It is, however, also very much alive in the minds of those people who engage in close cooperation with the “other side” and whose attitude should *a priori* involve a leap of faith.

This paper will scrutinize the East-West-divide from both a “Western” and specifically Austrian point of view, with the latter constituting a particular type of postcolonial perspective on the merging of East and West. It will take a close look at the attitudes and stereotypes and at the strategies, legitimations and explanations of actors in the Austrian ministry of the interior, and it will argue that their world-view is part of an overarching framework which shapes and informs their actions. I depart from the assumption that events on the micro level always reflect phenomena of the macro level. This macro level, however, is not simply mirrored, but it determines the micro level and poses a challenge for actors who creatively, adaptively or subversively react to it (Burawoy 1991). Thus an analysis of strategies of actors on the micro level enables us to draw conclusions on their context and the power relations that constrain them.

Accordingly the paper will in a first step lay out the dominant contextual variables that determine and shape actions on the micro level. The overarching motives are fear of and mistrust towards the East, and these take place on several levels: First of all, mistrust towards the East has been a driving force for European integration after 1990. This mistrust, however, is nothing new, but has been a constituent factor for Western European identity for centuries. Finally, there is nevertheless something specifically Austrian to the country’s attitude towards the East and towards its neighbouring countries in particular which is deeply rooted in collective memory. Hence the Austrian state institution’s mistrust is part of a larger framework, determined by a cultural dispositive. I consequently demonstrate that the country’s special geo-

political and historical position accounts for specific cooperations with its former socialist neighbours.²

2. European integration and the East-West-divide

The east/west binary division has been one of most striking ways to think Europe (and non-Europe) during the Cold War. It was a category nobody could escape. Accordingly, the relationship of Eastern and Western Europe from the beginning of the system change on was marked by mistrust towards the former antagonistic, and significant, Other. As I will argue, this mistrust towards the East came in the disguise of functional and objective security necessities, but draws upon and is rooted in cultural patterns of thought that go back much further than the Cold War. It was hardly disputed among Western European leaders that the former Warsaw Pact states should quickly join the European Union in order to guarantee stability on the continent and avoid ethno-nationalist outbreaks like on the Balkans. Concerns on the part of Western Europe alternated between what would happen if Eastern Europe acceded to the EU and what would happen if it did not (Loader 2002: 135). Accordingly some authors argue that the Eastern enlargement of 2004 “itself can be seen as a policy intended to enhance internal security” (Ibryamova 2004: 6).

“Security” is a keyword both for political actors and for this analysis: Security is presented by political and security actors as a precondition for European liberty, democracy, welfare and well-being, thus being at the heart of the Europeanization process (cf. Higashino 2004). Security issues are depicted as objective facts that have to be dealt with, if we do not want to risk these very values. Security thus is not restricted to its military use, but encompasses a wide range of issues that might trouble human beings in social, economic, political,

² The theoretical and descriptive parts of the text are complemented by empirical research collected in 2008 during four months of field research in the Austrian ministry of the interior, the Federal Criminal Police Office and other police and security units in the Austrian *Bundesländer*. I conducted qualitative interviews and informal conversations with political actors and practitioners in the security field, all of whom were concerned with different aspects of the 2007 Schengen enlargement. All interviews have been anonymised.

ecological and identity respects – an approach that has been criticized heavily by proponents of the narrow conception of security (e.g. Walt 1991). Drawing upon the insights of Securitization Theories, in this paper I will treat “security” as construction that can strategically be used by specific actors for their own purposes (Buzan *et al* 1998, Wæver 2004). This “securitization” of issues depends upon the ability of the actors to convince a given audience of the urgency to counter the threat identified and the historical, social and cultural context the security issue is articulated within (Balzacq 2005, Bigo 2002). Thus I will argue that the securitization of Eastern Europe and the Eastern enlargement as a security issue was particularly successful not because of an objective threat originating from these countries, but because it appealed to a cultural pattern of mistrust towards the East that informed the accession process.

Due to alleged issues of security and stability the East-European member states did not become full members with EU accession on 1 May 2004. Though they already had accepted the Schengen *acquis* with accession, they did not fully implement it until the end of 2007. Furthermore, in order to be promoted to the “first league” and overcome the asymmetrical constellation the new members have to join the Eurozone – which by the time of this paper only Slovenia, Slovakia and Estonia have accomplished.³ Resistance was loud, but futile. The EU was in a position to dictate the conditions for membership, since for the new members “the ultimate objective [...] is simply to join the club” (Walker 2002: 27). Consequently, the new member states were eager to overcome their second-class membership status as quickly as possible and to operate at eye-level with the old member states.

³ The candidate countries had to accept a constantly expanding *acquis*, while they had no possibility of influencing it. Beginning with the 2004 Eastern enlargement, membership *à la carte* is no longer an option: EU membership entails not only the compulsory entry into the European Monetary Union, but also the obligatory implementation of the Schengen *acquis*. Since the Treaty of Amsterdam came into force in 1999, the Schengen Agreements have been part of the EU *acquis* and, as such, part of the First and the Third Pillar. Moreover, Article 8 of the supplementary protocol to the Treaty of Amsterdam states that the Schengen *acquis* must be fully accepted by countries wishing to accede. Unlike Ireland and the UK, new member states do not have the possibility to partially opt out. As a result, before the first Eastern enlargement no country had to fully accept the Schengen *acquis* with accession.

The “frontier”

The accession of parts of the former “enemy camp” to the EU in 2004 proved to be a great challenge to both security and identity policies on the part of Western Europe, and it raised severe concerns about the candidate countries’ capabilities in crime-fighting matters. Since the new member states did not gain full status with accession their position was that of a buffer zone or *Cordon Sanitaire* (van Houtum and Pijpers 2005) between the EU-15 and those non-EU members who were believed to be countries of origin of irregular migration, organized crime, drugs and terrorism. This buffer zone reminds of Turner’s depiction of the American Wild West as a “frontier”: “the outer edge of the wave – the meeting point between savagery and civilization” (Turner 1996 [1920]: 3). For Kristof the frontier is “the spearhead of light and knowledge expanding into the realm of darkness and of the unknown” (1959: 270). At the frontier civilization and barbarism merge, and negotiation processes with unclear outcomes take place.

The perception of Eastern Europe as an insecure frontier zone is both homemade and hardly surprising. Walker (2002) identifies two points why the accession countries do not appear to be very trustful: As long as border controls are considered the pivotal point of the security continuum, those who find themselves behind the border are consequently regarded as security risks. Furthermore both insecure frontier zones and public enemies are indispensable conditions for the security discourse itself which emphasizes the urgency of the mission. Eastern Europe from the view point of the West could offer both abundantly. With the Eastern enlargement of the EU and the simultaneous expansion of the security zone the EU had to face the task to discard its long-standing categories of Good and Bad, of Us and Them:

“Accordingly, it perhaps does not overstate the point to say that the political and ideological task within the Union of extending the security frontier is not just about expanding the definition of who counts as a ‘security friend’, but even of relocating

many who presumptively belonged to or were vulnerable to the ‘enemy’ camp in the opposite category” (Walker 2002: 26).

These insights lead us to two important points: (1) The Central European buffer zone was perceived as an insecure border area that is neither in nor out, but a “shifting bridge between East and West” (O'Dowd 2002: 23). Likewise its oscillation between friend and enemy camp points not only to the context dependency, but particularly to the constructedness of security issues; (2) simultaneously, the buffer zone provided a Janus-faced comfort for the EU-15, since it put the old members in a dilemma. The Eastern external border of the EU is assessed an extremely sensitive area, and it is suggested that the quality of control at the external border is decisive for the internal security of Western Europe. Hence on the part of the old member states there were fears that their security could be endangered by enlarging the borders to the East. Delanty observes in this context “the increasing salience of the ‘imperial’ limes, the border as a diminishing zone of control over which the centre loses control of the periphery” (Delanty 2006: 193). A loss of control was the last thing the old members had in mind with the Eastern enlargement.

Consequently, also after the accession of the East-European countries to the EU an “implicit distinction between a ‘safe(r) inside’ and an ‘unsafe(r) outside’” (Monar 2002: 169) remained. On the one hand it appears that the new members find themselves in the unsatisfying position of “junior partners” of the EU-15; the relationship is marked by a fundamental asymmetry. On the other hand the new members from the point of view of the EU-15 are perceived as a security risk. This risk, however, has to be accepted and minimized by way of a controlled inclusion, because they are entrusted with a relevant part of the internal security of the EU.

Thus on 1 May 2004 the door for the new members was only half opened, and this is not only due to their allegedly potential economic and political instability or Leninist legacies. It

likewise rests on cultural processes and on conceptions of a European identity which after the end of the Cold War and the abolition of the old enemy has hit choppy waters. The accession of the East-European countries on 1 May 2004 has moved the EU external and political border east- and southwards. But the accession countries' leap from the out-group into the in-group has not automatically allayed concerns regarding their trustworthiness. Western Europe's mental boundary does not anymore run exactly along the former Iron Curtain, but it has not shifted eastwards at the same rate as the institutional border. European integration with regard to the Eastern enlargement of the EU has not yet led to an abolishment of predominant asymmetries, but to a new coordinate system of hierarchies as to who can be considered more "European".

3. Austria and its "East"

Mistrust towards Eastern Europe and Russia was neither invented by the Warsaw Pact nor the NATO or the European Union. The image of the "East" as untrustworthy, threatening and fundamentally different from an imagined "Western" community is strongly rooted in Western collective memory and goes back much further than to the confrontation of the Cold War (cf. Neumann 1999). The "East" is a construction, and the juxtaposition of allegedly Eastern and Western virtues and values draws on well-established strategies of ascription. What nowadays is referred to as Eastern Europe, or Central Eastern Europe, is not and has never been a homogeneous entity, but is a label affixed by Western Europeans.

Wolff (1994) has argued convincingly that Western Europeans already in the 18th century constructed the image of a backward "Eastern Europe" in order to present themselves in a favourable light. At least since then the duality of West and East has been reproduced continuously, almost naturally entailing the dichotomies of individualism vs. collectivism, civic vs. ethnic conceptions of statehood, modern vs. traditional, secularism vs. religiosity. The

East is constructed as contrasting *per se* with civilization, enlightenment and modernity, whereas the West, or more precisely: the ideal image the “West” constructs about itself, is displayed as the yardstick for development and modernization in the face of barbarism.

Thus rather unsurprisingly, and consequently, Eastern Europe has been ascribed the status of a cultural laggard after 1990, and its populations were suspected to be stuck in post-socialist traditions and constraints, allegedly lacking what Piotr Sztompka (1993) presumptuously termed “civilizational competence”. Such derogatory ascriptions, particularly from an “Easterner” himself, reveal much more about the speaker and the discourse he is part of than about the object he is referring to, or, as Eder aptly puts it: “The Eastern frontier can be seen as an unsettled boundary defining a space open to a variety of narratives the West produces about itself. In this sense, the East reflects the ambiguity of the West regarding Europe” (Eder 2006: 265).

Similarly Kürti argues that an imagined Eastern Europe backwardness, rooted in ethnic conceptions and adhering to some mythologized past, is first and foremost the product of colonial Western thinking. He proposes to see the “remaking of European boundaries as an ideological separation of the backward East from the rest [..., which] assists in a new bipolarization and hierarchisation of Europe” (Kürti 1997: 31). The break-up of the Soviet Empire, European integration and the opening of borders did not lead to the abolition of the East-West-divide, but to a rebirth of the concept of Central Europe. This Central Europe is wedged between the two concepts of East and West, idealized in Russian Orthodoxy and Western Enlightenment. Its proponents conceive of it as a “bridge region” which stretches out between East and West, but belongs neither to the East nor to the West. Kürti, however, argues that “the fashioning of Central Europe is, at the same time, a remaking of Eastern Europe” (Kürti 1997: 46), an attempt of “Easterners” to distance themselves from the even more backward Others and side with the reputedly civilized West.

Here we can observe a recurring pattern: Nobody wants to be in the East, this “flaw” is handed on and on from one country to the next, even more Eastern one (cf. Bakić-Hayden 1995). Alternatively, the label “East” is used in a depreciatory manner within societies to demean certain social groups that, as Sztompka would put it, are still stuck in their “civilizational incompetence”. Buchowski has aptly termed such a labeling an orientalization of the “stigmatized brother”, pointing towards “a restructuring of the perception of social inequalities by the hegemonic liberal ideology” (2006: 464). In any case the label “East” is less a geographically but rather a culturally informed category, as is the case with Austria, itself quite an Eastern country in geographical terms, and its neighbours.

Austria and the idea of Mitteleuropa

A close look at the perception and reception of Austria’s history and its use by various actors for present-day purposes allows an analysis of the construction of Austria’s national and security identity. In the following I will elaborate on three points which are of particular importance for the understanding of Austria’s image of self and other, and thus its security identity: (1) The idea of *Mitteleuropa* and the Habsburg myth, (2) the *frontier myth of orientalism*, and (3) the importance of the post-war neutrality issue.

Austria is the “old” EU member with the most East-European neighbour states, namely four. No other old member state shares borders with as many new EU members, all of them having been part of the Habsburg Empire. Central Europe and *Mitteleuropa* are keywords for the study of Austria’s relationship with its East-European neighbours, and the Austrian usage of these concepts is both specific and revealing. “Mitteleuropa” is neither simply a German translation for Central Europe nor a geopolitical location, but the idea of *Mitteleuropa* bears different meanings depending on the actor who is using it. On the one hand it appeals to the concept of the Pan-German solution, encompassing Germany and Austria forming “a counter-

ing “a counter-revolutionary bulwark between the nascent pan-Slavism in the east and the liberal democracies in the West” (Delanty 1995: 103). The *Mitteleuropa* myth was created “as an ersatz ideology, i.e. an ideology replacing the idea of German unity under the leadership of Habsburg” (Weiss 2002: 270). This concept was adapted and advanced by the National Socialists and their violent strife for a Germanic domination of the continent. The Austro-Marxists of the interwar period, however, followed a different reading: “For the left, *Mitteleuropa* held out a promise of a post-imperial unification of the former provinces of the old empires which fell in 1918 [...] the idea of *Mitteleuropa* suggested an alternative to the tide of nationalism that was sweeping Central Europe” (Delanty 1995: 103).

Current Austrian use of *Mitteleuropa* to a large degree ignores both the communist and the less glorious parts of the concept’s history but prefers to refer to Habsburg hegemony and former greatness in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, ignoring, however, historic fissions and instrumentalizations:

“The Habsburg myth of a pluralistic society and pluralistic state, within which every people found the homeland (Heimat) it was entitled to, was nothing but a propaganda cover for the struggle between the two hegemonic peoples, the Germans of Austria and the Hungarians, a struggle for the defence and extension of their privileges and advantages, presented as being in the general interest and as a ‘supranational’ rationality” (Le Rider 2008: 161).

Accordingly, Kürti argues that economic and cultural differences in the Habsburg Empire “were being translated more and more into an ideology of ‘backwardness’ and provincialism”, with a double effect: “This conveniently masked the values of the central elites, serving both to make them secure in their sense of superiority and to convey to the ‘lesser’ elites of the nationalities how much they still had to learn” (Kürti 1997: 32). The Austrian concept of *Mitteleuropa* or Central Europe thus carries a huge historical and symbolic rucksack. The

“Austro-nostalgia” (Vidmar-Horvat and Delanty 2008) that emerged after the break-up of the Empire and lasts until today is not simply a nostalgic longing for a sunken era of greatness, but signifies an idea of hegemony and a history of colonialism and subjugation.

Notwithstanding, but rather complementing this empire identity Austria has been cultivating its self-image as Germanic bulwark against everything oriental. This *Frontier Myth of Orientalism*, as elaborated by Gingrich (1998), is deeply rooted in Austrian popular and everyday culture and extends to the Slavic and Hungarian populations as well:

“First, the ‘Oriental’ was portrayed not as a distant, backward, and deviant underling but rather as a close, dangerous, potential intruder of almost equal, albeit very different, skills. Second, this dangerously close ‘Oriental’ was a pervasive topic not only in court and ‘elite’ cultures, but even more so in ‘folk’ cultures of all varieties. [...] Third, this type of (folk and elite) frontier Orientalism fed directly into the rise of those nationalisms that had competed in Austria since the late 19th century: pan-Germanic nationalism (leading up to Nazism) and Habsburg imperial-loyalist patriotism (transformed after the 1918 imperial collapse into clerical republican nationalism)” (Gingrich 2004: 169f.).

Even though (or because) all East-European neighbouring countries have been part of the Habsburg Empire, and political actors (albeit frequently in a patronising way) tend to refer to this historical bond, the idea of Austria as a frontier did not disappear after 1945. In fact it was reinforced by the strict separation of the Iron Curtain and remained fertile after the end of the Cold War.

Neutrality

Austria’s neutrality is an important pillar of the country’s self-conception, and although it developed only slowly after World War II into one of the Republic’s founding myths, it can

nevertheless be interpreted as a continuation of what had been shaping the country's self-image: Neutrality "was a prolongation of the *Mitteleuropa* idea in the sense of middle-range modernity; Austria did not fully enter *l'Europe*, but remained medium-level European" (Weiss 2002: 280 [emphasis in original]).

Following World War II and Austria's engagement as part of the German Reich after the accession in 1938, Austria only way to restore sovereignty was by promising not to align with any of the newly emerged bloc powers. This "neutrality act" was adopted in 1955, followed by a withdrawal of occupation troops. Although the "perpetual" or "permanent neutrality" had been imposed upon the Austrians forcefully, it quickly developed into a reference point for a national identity that after the war was searching for a symbolic anchorage in a double sense: The rump state that remained of the Habsburg Empire remained anaemic and could not serve yet as an object of projection and affection for a truly Austrian national identity. Moreover, the recent history as active part of Nazi Germany could not provide the ground for patriotic identification either.

Thus, Austrian national identity had to be learned (cf. Jöhler and Tschöfen 2001), but first of all, it had to be invented (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1999). Neutrality, although not welcomed in the first place, provided an excellent opportunity to develop an identity for a country in search of itself. While there was no "Austrian nation" to draw upon in building the new state and develop a national identity, neutrality provided the vehicle and means to promote and develop a feeling of national identity over time: "Since 1955, as a result of the public, political, media and academic discourse, neutrality has become embodied in the collective consciousness as a central myth or Austrian identity. Neutrality steadily grew in importance in line with an acceptance of the Austrian nation and an increase of 'national pride'" (Liebhart 2003: 32).

Furthermore, it underpinned the imagination of the “homo austriacus” (Liebhart and Reisingl 1997), the image of the Austrian ‘as such’, “to a common national culture, history, present and future as well as to a type of ‘national body’ or national territory” (de Cillia *et al* 1999: 153). Neutrality allowed for dissociation from West-Germany⁴ and thus the Nazi past, while presenting oneself as “the first victim” of Nazi Germany (cf. Art 2006, ch. 4). It quickly became a reference point not only for Austria’s national security strategy, but also occupied a pivotal role for the country’s collective identity:

“Neutrality apparently placed Austrians in the best of all possible worlds: geographically in the centre, politically and economically in the West, and militarily outside Europe, since neutrality was expected to keep the country out of armed conflict despite its vulnerable geostrategic location” (Neuhold 2003: 14).

After the end of the Cold War, Austria had to redefine itself and its role as a neutral member of the changed international environment. It refused to join NATO, but acceded to the EU in 1995; public assent was due to economic advantages in the Common Market in the first place (cf. van de Port 1999). Neutrality had become an end in itself, functioning only as a domestic symbol with no or few international significance. Nevertheless it still fulfilled an important integrative role for an Austrian population in search of itself: “The meaning of the domestic, identity building function of neutrality did not decrease, although the international meaning of neutrality has changed considerably” (Liebhart 2003: 43).

As Neutrality as a symbol has increasingly become emptied, it functions also as a projection screen for other purposes and messages. Accordingly neutrality has come to serve as a popular vehicle for Austrian politicians and opinion leaders to distance oneself from the European Union, fostering a distinctive Euroskepticism, without, on the other hand, seeking the exclusive national refuge. On the contrary, the distant overstretched European Union project

⁴ The declaration of neutrality entailed a simultaneous adoption of Article 4 of the State Treaty of 1955, “which rules out any form of union with Germany; in doing so, it had sent a clear signal of its distinction from Germany” (Liebhart 2003: 33).

ject to the mind of many Austrian proponents should rather be substituted by a regional solution that promises everything the EU cannot fulfil: proximity, short ways, a feeling of belonging without being too national, in short: an enlarged version of Austria or, more precisely, of the Habsburg Empire. As Gingrich show, this particular mixture of Euroskeptic nationalism is shaped by a “tripartite hierarchical ideological pattern” that informs Austrian and other forms of neo-nationalism in Europe:

“a coherent, culturally essentialised form of ‘us’ is positioned in the centre, and is contrasted against two groups of ‘them’. One group of ‘them’ is constructed, in terms of power, as being ‘above us’: the EU authorities in Brussels and their mysterious associates elsewhere. A second stratum of ‘them’ is perceived as being ranked, in terms of status, ‘below us’: local immigrants and other cultural and linguistic minorities living in the EU, plus their ‘dangerous’ associates in Africa, Asia and elsewhere” (Gingrich 2006: 199).

Austrian tabloids, particularly the country’s most successful newspaper *Kronen Zeitung*, which is reaching a coverage of more than 40%, play an important role for EU-skepticism, constantly reiterating the dichotomy of Us and Them and thereby reinforcing a distinct European-Austrian identity (cf. Karner 2010).

The Austrian *Frontier Myth of Orientalism* and the self-image of a country under siege from heartless bureaucrats on the one hand and greedy migrants on the other are both important parts of the picture and function to link the present to historical legacies. Weiss (2002: 282) likewise shows convincingly how mistrust towards the European Union in Austria is rooted in traditional rejection of Europe as a civilizatory project. He argues that the Austrian concept of Europe draws upon Europe as cultural *Erfahrungsraum*, and not as civilizatory *Erwartungshorizont*. It is here where the historical legacies enter the picture again. It can be argued that the renaissance the *Mitteleuropa* myth is currently enjoying relates to reasons re-

sembling those for its initial creation: The “Mittel” in *Mitteleuropa* does not only point to a geographical position, but to a mental map. It is about being European (in the civilized sense) at a medium level, between “primitive” and “uncivilized” East and modernity (West): “Western Europe was *l’Europe* in the French/modern/revolutionary sense. The east was uncivilized anyway: it was ‘primitive’ in terms of both Occidental *Kulturmission* and European *Zivilisationsmission*” (Weiss 2002: 271). The Habsburg image of *Mitteleuropa* perceived of itself as being exactly in-between not only geopolitical, but cultural conceptions of East and West. The fact that Austria ideologically considers itself both as part of Western Europe and as “bridge” between East and West fits neatly into this pattern.

4. Austria’s police cooperation with its “others”

The following section attempts to investigate how this overarching framework of mistrust and paternalism towards the “East” exerts an impact on and simultaneously finds its expression in Austria’s international cooperation in security matters. Though neither the perception of the East-European members as junior partners nor the attempt to appropriate and control them is exclusively Austrian phenomena, it shall be argued that there is nevertheless a relevant cultural and historical imprint. It is the mixture of a paternalistic feeling of responsibility for the smaller East-European – and former Habsburgian – neighbour states while treating the same countries with suspicion and mistrust regarding their capabilities to act independently.

Again this is a common motif among former colonial powers who are still struggling to “forgive” the former colonies their strife for independence. However, in contrast to the geopolitical situation of most colonial states Austria’s former crown lands are not distant and exotic, but can be found right behind the border, fostering the popular perception of the frontier myth. Thus in the following, I will describe the East-West police cooperation, since it il-

illustrates how Austria's motives for collaboration with the former crown lands oscillate between paternalism and self-defence.

Multi- and bilateral cooperation

It has already been argued that Austria since the end of World War II had based its (security) identity on the issue of neutrality, and it has kept insisting on it even after it joined the EU in 1995 (cf. Kořan 2006). This, however, does not imply that Austria keeps out of international security strategies and agreements. Besides other forms of international cooperation in or below the framework of the EU (like the Treaty of Prüm), Austria attempts to express its advocacy role for Eastern Europe in its cooperative efforts. In the following I will introduce two striking examples of multilateral cooperation: the “Central-European Police Academy” (MEPA) and the security partnership “Forum Salzburg”.

(1) Already in 1992 the Central-European Police Academy was established. Initially a bilateral Austro-Hungarian endeavour, it quickly developed into a multilateral arrangement – and again the German name “Mittleuropäische Polizeiakademie” (MEPA) can be interpreted as an allusion to the concept of *Mittleuropa*. Accordingly the academy's intention goes beyond mere police interests but assumes a political role: “MEPA particularly aims at contributing to the process of European integration. Joint training and further qualification will accelerate the process of finding common European police standards and common organizational and legal measures, and this will contribute to harmonizing any conflicting interests the member countries may have”.⁵

The example of MEPA stands for Austria's (and Western) mistrust towards the East-European member states and their capabilities in crime-fighting matters. “Contributing to the

⁵ <http://www.mepa.net/Englisch/ueberuns/Pages/Ziele.aspx> (accessed 15/09/2010).

process European integration” here means institutional isomorphy regarding procedures, structures, and values. Integration and harmonization do not necessarily entail exchange, but a one-way-street, where knowledge and practices are transferred from the West to East exclusively.

(2) The “Forum Salzburg” was launched on Austria’s initiative and under its auspices in 2000 as an explicitly regionally limited and multilateral form of cooperation, currently encompassing Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia (Croatia has an observer status). Provided that different regions in the EU are facing similar tasks and problems, which, in turn, distinguish them from other regions, these regionally limited initiatives are intended to handle the specific interests of the nation states involved below the framework of the EU.⁶ The “Forum Salzburg” aims at strengthening the cooperation of its member states in the area of home and security affairs under the direction of Austria. Initially it set the specific goal to support the East-European states in achieving the requirements of firstly the EU accession criteria and subsequently the Schengen *acquis* (Bundesministerium für Inneres 2001). Currently three main tasks are in the focus: (1) strengthening regional cooperation concerning internal security, institutionalized in the so-called “Central European Operational Network” (CEON), (2) cooperation and common lobbying in the EU, and (3) the implementation of a joint external strategy concerning the Western Balkans.⁷

Judging from interviews and the literature, the significance of the “Forum Salzburg” is not as huge as is suggested in the official statements. Most significantly before 2007 the difference between Schengen members and non-Schengen members has often been perceived as obstructive rather than conducive. The “Forum Salzburg” was deemed even dispensable since

⁶ A more prominent example is the so-called “Northern Dimension” encompassing the Scandinavian and Baltic countries as well as Russia.

⁷ See the forum’s website <http://www.salzburgforum.org/>

it was suspected to pose “a possible source of competition to the Visegrad framework, creating a certain amount of redundancy in terms of structures” (Każmierkiewicz *et al* 2006: 61). Nevertheless the Austrian ministers of the interior adhere to the Forum which can be interpreted as an attempt to define a Central European (*Mittleuropa*) project that differs from other constructions, like the Visegrad group, and by assuming a leading role gain hegemony. The difference is obvious: an explicit Central European project invented by the former Warsaw Pact countries would probably not automatically include Austria; hence Austria had to take this Central-European security partnership in its own hand in order to be included and play a leading role. The “Forum Salzburg” publications in German language make explicit use of the notion of *Mittleuropa* and thus allude to a certain imagination of the region they are addressing (cf. Bundesministerium für Inneres 2010).

All multilateral forms of cooperation are complemented by bilateral arrangements. Austria has concluded treaties which govern cooperation in police and legal respect with all of its neighbouring countries. On the one hand, this concerns arrangements on information exchange, cross-border observation and hot pursuit. On the other hand, in a wider, more practical sense and in the case of the East-European neighbour states, this includes regular meetings of superior officers as well as trainings and language exchange for ordinary police officers, joint patrols and police cooperation centres in Nickelsdorf (with Hungary) and Kittsee (with Slovakia).

As interviewees report, all forms of cooperation are initiated top-down from the part of the ministry. They are generally described by the informants as being the most important elements of cross-border cooperation. While bilateral forms of cooperation in theory may be informed by the will to homogenization, isomorphy and integration, they are, however, con-

fronted with very practical and mundane problems, particularly relating to different legacies and the welfare gap.

Asymmetries and hierarchies in police cooperation

The Forum Salzburg, MEPA and accompanying measures are but a few examples for Austria's attempt to function as a bridge between East and West, while finding it hard to abandon well-established mental patterns of mistrust, paternalism, and the colonial view. Furthermore, Austria's police cooperation with its East-European neighbours cannot be regarded as detached from their position as "junior partners" in the European security field. As interviews with security-political and police actors showed, the East-West asymmetry proves to be of great influence in cooperations and negotiations with the East-European neighbour states. This is particularly the case when actors get the chance to actively compare their own living and working conditions with those of the others. The following cleavages were of particular importance:

(1) Cleavages due to differing organisational procedures and socialisation in different control and organisational cultures become visible. The contrast of police (West) vs. military style (East) is only the most obvious example. Differing professional cultures generally have been argued to be an important determinant in police cooperation (Bigo 2000: 71), but in a setting that is *a priori* marked by an unequal relationship they can be an important structuring factor for cooperation, since actors tend to translate structural differences into cultural stereotypes ("These X's are so obedient to authority").

(2) Technical and financial imbalances (e.g. with regard to equipment and salaries), even though they cannot be influenced by individual actors, can also reproduce an asymmetric rela-

tionship and translate into alleged cultural patterns (cf. Schwell 2008: 199ff.). This duality of structural superiority and inferiority, of civilization and backwardness, has been particularly fostered during the enlargement process by the fact that it was Western expertise and technical means that ought to support Eastern efforts to catch up, not vice versa. Institutions like MEPA play an important part in the perpetuation and persistence of the duality.

(3) Obvious and suspected misbehaviour by the “junior partner” influences the asymmetry, e.g. with regard to (suspected) corruption or defects in the legal system. Such differences can easily be reduced to post-socialist legacies, can encourage pressure for a catch-up modernisation process and can serve to emphasise one’s own superiority on the part of the West.

Generally, citizens of democratic states tend to put more confidence in the own, national police (and the own legal system) than that of another nation state (cf. Goldsmith 2005). Naturally, the police themselves are not excluded in this respect: “mistrust or suspicion of the foreigner has been built into the foundations of modern police systems. [...] For the police, whose function requires a simple focus of loyalty, this is a difficult legacy to eliminate” (Anderson 2002: 41). Stereotypes and prejudices can fuel such a dichotomic perception of self and other, and in the relations of Eastern and Western Europe Western feelings of superiority meeting Eastern inferiority complexes are well documented.⁸

The everyday asymmetry

While these three features point towards a perpetuation of structural and cultural patterns of asymmetry, from an anthropological point of view we should not simply rely on structural determinants, but rather ask how the East-West-divide is dealt with in practice. Actors are not

⁸ This applies particularly for the German-Polish relationship (for an overview s. Schmidtke 2005), but the overall pattern of othering and alterity can be observed in other cases of East-West contact.

simply subject to objective structures and act accordingly, but creatively, and sometimes subversively, deal with and adapt to the social world that surrounds them. Therefore we should recognise agency on the part of both Western and Eastern police and security experts, without underestimating the power relations that govern their social field: “A realistic cultural theory should lead us to expect not passive ‘cultural dopes’ [...], but rather the active, sometimes skilled users of culture whom we actually observe” (Swidler 1986: 277).

One way to try to overcome existing hierarchies in practice is the attempt to balance asymmetries. Indeed, numerous interview partners confirm that Austrian political and police representatives often appeared as “rich uncles from the West” and displayed their presumed superiority as “old” EU members.⁹ On the one hand, Austria considered itself as the neighbours’ advocate towards the EU, as mediator and as helping hand; Austrian expertise, they said, is in great demand, because its experts, as one ministry informant put it, “understand both Northern and South-Eastern Europeans”, due to both the geopolitical position and historical legacies. Nevertheless, he said, Austrian “Westerners” should be careful to avoid any snotty behaviour and treat the Easterners in a condescending way: “You got to be flexible and not Mr. Know-all. It’s better to present one’s own ideas rather as propositions than as prescriptions: we do it that way, and if you want to you can do it the same way”.¹⁰

As this quote shows, balancing acts, i.e. to try to equilibrate structural hierarchies and cleavages, are strategic actions as well that are applied to reach a certain goal. Nevertheless actors pursuing balancing acts run the risk of reproducing exactly the same paternalistic patterns and stereotypes (“These proud X’s are easily offended”). Therefore we can argue that the persistence of the East-West divide is not only a matter of the persistence of dichotomies and their reproduction, but how these dichotomies inform action. The important question is

⁹ Interview with ministry official, Vienna, 20 March 2008.

¹⁰ Interview with ministry official, Vienna, 14 April 2008.

how the East-West divide is handled in practice, i.e. how it is transformed and worked out by various actors.

Preparing for Schengen: cooperation ratings

The following empirical step will add two important insights to the aforementioned factors. Firstly, a temporal dimension joins the picture: I will elaborate on the preparations for the Schengen enlargement 2007 and the way both the cooperation of Austria and its neighbours and their mutual relationship changed over time. In my field research I asked my informants in the ministry of the interior and the police how they evaluate the cooperation with the East-European neighbouring countries in general and with particular regard to the Schengen enlargement.

This perspective will shed some light on the question how Austrian political and security actors handle the security dilemma in practice, i.e. how they reconcile the requirements of the internal security politics of the EU-15 with the cultural pattern of mistrust and paternalism towards the East. I will argue that the Austrian actors deal with this challenge in a quite “bureaucratic” way: by developing informal scales of popularity regarding their post-socialist neighbours they “order” not simply what they consider civilizatory progress, but threats and their own mistrust. Doing so is their specific way of dealing with their own ambivalent position as rich uncles, mediator and mistrustful postcolonial power simultaneously.

(1) **Slovenia** is considered the “beacon” of cooperation by all ministry interviewees.

While the population of the adjacent *Bundesland* Carinthia would not be inclined to share this enthusiasm,¹¹ Slovenia was described by most interview partners as the ministry’s “darling”,

¹¹ The relationship of the Austrian majority and the Slovenian minority in Carinthia has been problematic ever since the borders of the Austrian state were drawn. The State Treaty provided for far-reaching minority rights which however have been ignored and fought particularly by former Carinthian governor Jörg Haider. The issue

i.e. as eager, not complicated and engaged in the cooperation. Since at the time of my field research Slovenia was the only East-European member state to have introduced the common currency, Slovenia's position as popular precursor seems not to be a solely Austrian point of view. While in the southern land of Carinthia minority rights of ethnic Slovenians are ignored and the people are discriminated against (cf. Bufon 2002), these events seem to have no or only few repercussions on the cooperation, indicating the relative irrelevance of political events for police cooperation (cf. Deflem 2000).

(2) Judging from a large number of interviews, however, the **Czech Republic** has replaced Slovenia in the number one position on the unofficial ministerial popularity scale. The interview partners justify this change by pointing out that now that Slovenia has fulfilled the criteria for the full implementation of the *acquis*, it is in a position to take a step back and concentrate its energy on other policy fields. Several interview partners expect that this development will continue in other East-European countries. The relations with the Czech Republic were not without complications in the beginning. Czechs are “portrayed in Western Europe as ‘poor cousins’” (Horáková 2009: 15). The relationship has historically been ambivalent, and the public has come to perceive of it increasingly critically in recent years due to Austria's critique concerning the Czech nuclear power plant Temelín. Nevertheless Czechs have been complying in terms of cooperation, which Horáková attributes to a lack of national and civic self-confidence and the belief that “the EU will bring law and order at last. Hence, Brussels and the EU are seen as a cargo cult” (Horáková 2009: 15).

(3) **Hungary** takes a solid midfield position. On the one hand, Austria's close historical connection with Hungary is emphasised; this is particularly true for the Burgenland which

of bilingual town signs in mixed areas has only been settled in April 2011. For Austria's politics on its ethnic minorities see Hentges (2009).

shares a border of more than 300 km with Hungary and is also co-inhabited by a Hungarian-speaking minority (cf. Gingrich 2004, Hentges 2009). In addition to this rather abstract historical feeling of togetherness, the common experience of the opening of the borders, the escape of East-Germans over the Hungarian green border in 1989 and the shared feeling of insecurity regarding the handling of these events seem to have brought together police officials from both sides.¹² But when it comes to recent developments, it appears that trust that had once been built up must nevertheless be sustained. Hence many interview partners deplore the loss of long-standing contact persons that has accompanied the merging of the ministries of the interior and of justice, now ministry of justice and law enforcement, and the integration of the border guards into the regular police.¹³ This development has complicated relations and underlines the meaning of mutual trust in police cooperation.

(4) **Slovakia** was generally described as being at the bottom of the league: instable political circumstances under the Mečiar administration, mafia-like structures and accusations of corruption planted mistrust and obstructed stable mutual trust from developing. Like in Hungary, contact persons changed permanently in Slovakia, making it difficult for mutual trust to develop in the first place. Furthermore, the location and the size of the Slovakian capital Bratislava contributed to the development of a criminal focal point that would profit from the city's complexity, its proximity to Vienna and its good connection to international road and train networks (cf. Williams *et al* 2001, Williams and Baláž 2002, Bitušíková 2009). Interestingly, this problem was mitigated with the Schengen enlargement. With the abolishment of border controls, a hideout in Bratislava was less and less needed, and criminals approaching

¹² Interview with police official, Eisenstadt, 13 May 2008; particularly police officials in the Austrian land of Burgenland in the interviews put a strong emphasis on this close bond between them and the Hungarian police dating back to the events of 1989.

¹³ Interview with ministry official, Vienna, 20 March 2008.

Austria from Russia or Poland could now more easily take the shortcut via the Czech Republic.

The Slovakian case deserves a closer look, being a revealing example of both transnational solidarity and fear of the security dilemma. The Schengen evaluation of Slovakia in the beginning was ill-omened. As late as 2006, circumstances in Slovakia made entry into the Schengen zone seem highly unlikely. After the breakup of the Slovakian government, the interim person in charge showed little ambition to move forward with the preparations. Interview partners reported that chaos, delays, and confusion were commonplace at that time, meaning that necessary orders for technical equipment did not take place. At this point, Slovakia did something that, according to many interview partners, most of the other countries would not have been reluctant to do: They openly asked for help, and help was granted. The Czech Republic provided infrared cameras, and Austria helped in matters of technical equipment and trainings. Other West- and East-European countries came to Slovakia's aid as well.¹⁴

Their readiness to support Slovakia should not be over-interpreted as a pan-European feeling of solidarity. Rather, the reason for the overwhelming support stemmed from the serious repercussions that were likely to befall not only Slovakia but other member states as well. A negative judgement by the Schengen evaluation group would have endangered the immediate accession of all candidates to the Schengen zone, pushing entry back approximately two years. A successive accession, with Slovakia as the laggard, would have entailed upgrading the Slovakian borders to a temporary external border of the Schengen zone, and thus a huge investment of only a short-term nature. Consequently, a united force rallied behind Slovakia to help the country pull through the Schengen evaluation. It is here where we reencounter the security dilemma, which has already been mentioned, in a new guise: when old and new

¹⁴ Interview with (Austrian) police official, Bratislava, 9 March 2008.

member states provided material and ideal aids to support Slovakia to pass the Schengen test, they did not do this out of entirely altruistic motives. All of them attempted to “buy” their own security and, psychologically being probably even more relevant, the new members “bought” at least part of their escape route from second class membership.

The examples of security-political and police cooperation with the East-European member states show that Austria, aside from Slovakia’s cry for help, always attempted to play an active role in matters of international and Central-European cooperation. Austria aimed at turning the central European project into a *Mitteleuropa* project: The former would exclude Austria; the latter would take place under its auspices. A high ranking official from the Austrian ministry of the interior admits that during the EU and Schengen enlargement processes the ministry more often than not faced a communicative “Eastern bloc”, impeding Austrian attempts to act strategically. He reports that there was much internal communication among the Eastern European officials, hence the Austrians had to be careful: if you talked to one of them, he would immediately tell it to all the others, so everybody would be informed before Austrian officials could even contact them.¹⁵ The East-European neighbour states apparently treated Austria as distinct from their own, if only temporal, in-group of candidate countries, and in a utilitarian way. Likewise, as the example of Slovenia shows, cooperation is instrumental for a different aim than a common goal, thus impeding long-term developments.

Nevertheless, as emphasized by the informants, good cooperation requires tact, intuition and sensitivity; the other has to be treated as an equal partner – the East-West asymmetry has in fact to be played down. Trust-building plays a pivotal role, but this can only occur when there is personal continuity. This was not always the case in Slovakia and Hungary. Moreover, the Slovakian example in particular shows that the members of the Schengen zone share a “common destiny”; the nation states involved operate in a field of mutual dependency, at the

¹⁵ Interview with ministry official, Vienna, 12 March 2008.

same time strengthening homogeneity of action and institutional isomorphy. Interestingly, several interview partners explicitly positively emphasized this particular aspect Schengen as a community based on the principle of mutual solidarity: “That’s great: if one doesn’t play along, then the others immediately feel the effects, because then there’s a security flaw”.¹⁶ Another respondent, however, suspects that this is not sufficient to keep the new members on board. Since the former junior partners had made such an effort not to rebel against EU regulations and keep still until they had reached their aims, now they would develop a new self-confidence, “complicating things for us. Now we have to define new objectives”.¹⁷

5. Conclusion: Bridge or Barrier?

The abolition of border controls between neighbouring countries is an important mark of confidence which cannot be taken for granted. The creation of a whole area without institutionalised stationary border controls is an even bigger step, since the relationship of neighbouring countries is not at least expressed in the way they mutually secure their borders.

For the Eastern European member states, the enlargement of the Schengen zone was an important step towards overcoming the East-West-asymmetry. Their advancement from “junior partners” to the league of full members is strongly connected to a developing self-confidence, as can be observed in the case of Slovenia. As many informants report, the challenge now is to keep the new members on board, although both Austria’s influence capabilities and the incentive structure for cooperation have decreased significantly with successful accession to the Schengen zone. The controlled inclusion which had been working throughout the accession and enlargement process apparently seems to become less and less effective, and Austria’s neighbours begin to escape the hug as they do no longer rely on their former colonial power’s goodwill.

¹⁶ Interview with ministry official, Vienna, 20 March 2008.

¹⁷ Interview with ministry official, Vienna, 20 March 2008.

It can be argued that Austria's Eastern neighbours can be considered postcolonial in a double sense: on the one hand, Austria's East-European neighbours all have been part of the Habsburg Empire, explaining the allegedly historical proximity Austria draws upon when attempting to lay hand on the former subjugated people. Accordingly Gingrich counts Austrian into the category of "countries with limited colonial power in more adjacent regions of the Muslim periphery" (1998: 101). This has been discussed in detail above. On the other hand, if we follow David Chioni Moore's (2001) suggestion to conceive of the Soviet expansion as a colonial enterprise, then Austria's post-socialist neighbours, with the exception of Slovenia, can be interpreted in postcolonial terms in this respect as well. Simultaneously we should keep in mind that also "the concept 'postsocialism' may be seen as an imposition from the West in the postcommunist world" (Kürti and Skalník 2009: 6). The implications of this specific label therefore have to be taken into account when researching into Central and Eastern Europe.

It is this dual coding of Habsburg-postcolonialism and postsocialist-postcolonialism which accounts for the specific mixture of distance and proximity, of attraction and rejection, intimacy and mistrust that shapes Austria's relations with its Eastern European neighbouring states. Reference to the common history in the Habsburg Empire always entails a history of colonialism and of superiority and inferiority, which is *no lens volens* reproduced in present cooperation and contact. The strategy of ordering mistrust in informal scales of popularity has been discussed as one strategic way of handling the ambivalent position as big brother/rich uncle who simultaneously feels under siege by his former crown lands. The period under socialism on the other hand strengthened Western Europe's perception of the East not only as backward, uncivilized and generally different, relating to the cognitive pattern of the cultural "East", but moreover as part of Ronald Reagan's "Evil Empire" – a hardly likeable ascription.

The abolition of borders may have brought East and West closer together, and it certainly has improved ways and means for cooperation. Nevertheless the East-West divide still exists as a boundary, but not only for obvious and tangible reasons, like the still existing prosperity gap or different legal systems and organizational issues. The narrative of the backward Other is still pervasive. The idea of the “East” as the “other” or even the “dark” side of the West has been inscribed into the collective identity of the “West”, and the process of who is more Eastern or Central or Western has not for a long time yet come to an end, for in “this new oscillating geography of centrality and marginality, European states are realigning themselves according to their newly found places inside or outside the EU” (Kürti and Skalník 2009: 6).

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