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## Polish-Austrian Relations at the End of the Cold War in the Light of Polish Diplomatic Sources

STRESZCZENIE

### Relacje polsko-austriackie u schyłku zimnej wojny w świetle polskich źródeł dyplomatycznych

Przyjęte metody badań historycznych miały za zadanie odpowiedzieć na pytanie, czy państwa wschodnie sąsiadujące z Austrią, ograniczone swym systemem gospodarczym i politycznym, mogły liczyć na pomoc w zakresie inicjowania reform politycznych. Dysproporcje pomiędzy demokratycznym Zachodem i komunistycznym Wschodem wpływały na Wiedeń niekorzystnie. Przyjęta teza badawcza dotyczy możliwości i skali zaangażowania Austrii na rzecz reform gospodarczych w Polsce. Austriacy uznali, że równomierny rozwój wschodnich sąsiadów służył rozwojowi Drugiej Republiki i konsekwentnie go wzmacniali. Austria wielokrotnie potwierdzała chęć pomocy Polsce, nie tylko humanitarnej, ale także dyplomatycznej i gospodarczej, bez konieczności negatywnej oceny działań władz komunistycznych. Dlatego charakterystyka Austrii w polskich dokumentach dyplomatycznych i oficjalnych komunikatach prasowych z lat 1985–1989 to obraz sojusznika i partnera. Przykładem skrzętnie wykorzystywanym przez polskie władze było oficjalne stanowisko Austrii i jej negatywna ocena sankcji gospodarczych nałożonych na Polskę przez Zachód. Narracja została podzielona na dwa okresy. Pierwszy dotyczy lat 1985–1986 i relacjonuje odradzanie stosunków po wprowadzeniu stanu wojennego w Polsce. Drugi etap dotyczy wspólnych działań w latach prowadzących do przełomu i „jesieni ludów”. Polityka rządu austriackiego wzmocniła funkcjonujący reżim i przedłużyła rozkład polskiego systemu politycznego. W nieoficjalnych rozmowach reformy gospodarcze w Polsce oceniano w Austrii jako powierzchowne i przewidywano załamanie gospodarcze, mogące mieć katastrofalne skutki dla całej Europy. Władze polskie wykorzystywały

wpływy i pozycję neutralnej republiki do realizacji własnych celów, zwłaszcza do legitymizacji swoich rządów. Bilans stosunków dwustronnych w końcowym etapie zimnej wojny okazał się dla obu krajów niekorzystny.

**Słowa kluczowe:** PRL, Austria, zimna wojna, integracja europejska, upadek komunizmu

ABSTRACT

The historical research methods adopted aim to answer the question of whether the Eastern countries neighboring Austria, constrained by their economic and political systems, could count on assistance in initiating political reforms. The disparity between the democratic West and the communist East had an unfavorable impact on Vienna. The research thesis concerns the possibility and scale of Austria's involvement in economic reforms in Poland. The Austrians recognised that the development of their Eastern neighbors benefitted the development of the Second Republic and consistently strengthened it. Austria repeatedly confirmed its willingness to help Poland not only on a humanitarian basis, but also diplomatically and economically, without having to negatively evaluate the actions of the communist authorities. Therefore, Austria in Polish diplomatic documents and official press releases from 1985–1989 is characterized as an ally and a partner. An example eagerly used by the Polish authorities was the official position of Austria and its negative assessment of the economic sanctions imposed on Poland by the West. The narrative is divided into two periods. The first one covers the years 1985–1986 and reports on the revival of relations after the introduction of martial law in Poland. The second period concerns joint activities in the years leading to the breakthrough and the 'autumn of nations'. The Austrian government's policies strengthened the existing regime and prolonged the decay of the Polish political system. In unofficial talks, Poland's economic reforms were assessed in Austria as superficial and an economic collapse was predicted, with potentially disastrous consequences for the whole of Europe. The Polish authorities used the influence and position of the neutral republic to achieve their own goals, especially to legitimise the government. The balance of bilateral relations in the final stage of the Cold War proved unfavorable for both countries.

**Keywords:** Polish People's Republic, Austria, Cold War, European integration, fall of communism

Austria held a special place in Polish post-war diplomacy. The tradition of good political contacts, common historical and cultural ties with the need for economic cooperation provided a solid basis for developing a partnership that bridged the divide. Growing out of the principle of permanent neutrality, the Second Austrian Republic's independent Eastern policy created new opportunities for countries such as Poland, which remained on

the margins of international politics. Conscious of the social processes taking place on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain, Austria was active in promoting independence of the societies of communist states. It sought its own solutions aimed at integration in the rivalry between *Pax Americana* and *Pax Sovietica*. Acceptance of diversity, tolerance of political distinctiveness and respect for the applicable law were at the heart of regional cooperation. With the subsequent decades of the Cold War, Austrian politicians became convinced that Poland could give the right impetus to the development of neighbouring states. It formulated, for example, its own plans for Europe's security, adapting them to the political and decision-making situation of the day, and constantly strove to alter the rules imposed by the USSR, with a view to building and consolidating its own statehood.

The aim of this publication is to analyse Polish-Austrian relations during the final period of the Cold War, i.e. between 1985 and 1989. After the introduction of martial law, Poland was effectively isolated on the international arena. Warsaw emphasised Austria's goodwill in developing trade and counteracting the negative effects of the economic sanctions introduced by the USA. Due to Austria, Polish diplomats took the first small step towards ending Poland's political isolation. Although the Austrian authorities continued to assess Poland's situation in the mid-1980s as very difficult, they decided to support the Polish cause internationally. The period in question was accompanied by rapid social change, progressive European integration, visible changes in Austrian foreign policy and the collapse of Poland's political system.

The article attempts to balance Austria's political and economic contribution to the development of Poland against the background of other Eastern countries in the late 1980s. Austria was one of many countries which invested in communist states. Changes in the economic structure of Poland and the region were supported through the creation of new branches of production. Initially, Poland was among the countries subject to the autonomous policy of the European Free Trade Association, of which Austria was a member, and foreign trade was conducted under the least favourable institutional conditions for Poland.

The paper adopts historical research methods. Using mainly archival materials, the author applies the method of analysis and synthesis. The research is based on a critical analysis of source

materials, including archival records, diaries and press materials. It relies heavily on archival queries. The key sources used in the study were produced by the state authorities of the Polish People's Republic. The Polish archival sources referred to in the article come from the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw available in the repository of Department IV.

### **Cooperation for the normalisation of bilateral relations**

Two major factors influenced the attitude of the Austrian authorities towards the changes in Poland in the first years of the last decade of the Cold War. Firstly, having been initially favourably disposed towards the development of independent trade unions and their impact on liberalisation of political life, the Austrians noticed with time that the lengthy protests in Poland obstructed the delivery of coal in the planned quantity and at the required time. The second factor was related to the surge in the number of asylum seekers in Austria and exploitation of the visa-free entry policy. The unilateral policy of entry with visa requirement in Austria was introduced on 1 December 1981. Austria did not refuse to help those in need, but only sought to stop the avalanche of asylum seekers from the East<sup>1</sup>. It was recognised to be a transit country for those who wanted to leave Poland for either economic or political reasons. After the first bloody clashes during the martial law, visas for potential victims were resumed, cooperation for aid with other countries was undertaken and international support for Poland was called for.

Between 1981 and 1983, Polish diplomats made intensive efforts to break the political isolation caused by the imposition of martial law. According to Andrzej Paczkowski, it was in the second half of 1983 that the reserve towards Poland among Eastern countries was overcome<sup>2</sup>. In Western countries, this happened at the turn

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<sup>1</sup> S. Knoch, *Flucht oder Migration? Polnische Flüchtlinge in Österreich 1981/82*, [in:] *Österreich – Polen. Stationen gemeinsamer Geschichte im 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. W. Jarzabek, P. Ruggenthaler, Graz–Wien 2021, pp. 223–239.

<sup>2</sup> *Stosunki dyplomatyczne Polski. Informator*, vol. I (*Europa 1918–2006*), eds. K. Szczepanik, A. Herman-Łukasik, B. Janicka, Warszawa 2007, p. 93. Apart from the visits of the USSR delegates, the first official visit of the representatives of the Eastern countries took place in April 1982, when the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Petyr Mladenov, came to Warsaw. In the same month, General Wojciech Jaruzelski went on an official visit to Hungary. Foreign Minister, Stefan Olszowski, went to Prague in December 1982.

of 1984 and 1985<sup>3</sup>. Archival sources show that Vienna sought ways to cooperate with the Polish People's Republic as early as mid-1982. It was feared that freezing economic relations would lead to Poland's collapse and prevent it from repaying its debts, which would directly affect Austria providing financial assistance to Warsaw. Austrian diplomacy was working on its own stance towards Poland and had a different attitude from the one imposed by the US in the form of e.g. economic sanctions towards the region<sup>4</sup>. For Poland, it was vital to re-establish former correct relations at least with some countries, without the need for political concessions or financial consequences<sup>5</sup>.

The second topic refers to the lifting of martial law in July 1983<sup>6</sup>. The Austrian government took a very cautious approach to this decision, guaranteeing itself the right to assess the political and legal situation as well as the decision related to the resumption of border traffic or the process of family reunification. According to the Austrian Foreign Ministry, the process of returning to pre-crisis relations should be gradual and preceded by departmental meetings and talks. Preparations for resuming bilateral contacts at the highest level continued uninterrupted after the introduction of martial law. Poland needed Austria's support in decisive economic matters, which resulted in co-ordinating the work of various ministries and existing economic exchange arrangements as well as probing the possibility of obtaining additional credits. In this respect, Austria was in line with the other Paris Club countries to remain very cautious towards Poland. Its attitude towards technology transfer and broader scientific and technological cooperation also proved attractive to Eastern countries<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> A. Paczkowski, *Dyplomacja polska czasów kryzysu (1980–1989)*, [in:] *Historia dyplomacji polskiej*, vol. VI, eds. W. Michowicz, W. Materski, Warszawa 2010, p. 822.

<sup>4</sup> A. Kisztełińska-Węgrzyńska, *Bruno Kreisky. Polityka zagraniczna i dyplomacja wobec PRL (1959–1983)*, Łódź 2018, pp. 303–307.

<sup>5</sup> At the time, Department IV dealing with Western European affairs was composed of three divisions: Central European, French-Iberian and British-Scandinavian; subsequently, a division for general affairs was established. In 1981, Eugeniusz Noworyta, former ambassador in Madrid, assumed the management of Department IV on the instructions of Józef Czyrek. E. Noworyta, *Polityka i dyplomacja – wspomnienia ambasadora*, Łódź 2008, pp. 117–135.

<sup>6</sup> M. Łętowski, *Ostatnia dekada PRL. Zapiski dziennikarza z lat 1982–1991*, Lublin 2016, pp. 98–99.

<sup>7</sup> A briefing note on the political consultations at the Austrian Foreign Ministry in Vienna on 16–18 April 1985, Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych /

In mid-1985, the international situation was clouded by disarmament talks. The US implementation of the SDI programme, which consisted of installing an anti-missile weapon system in space, created a completely new quality in the field of armaments. The introduction of these weapons made the US safe from a possible retaliatory strike and opened up the possibility of nuclear blackmail<sup>8</sup>. Poland fully supported the USSR's position centred around the establishment of a moratorium on the implementation of nuclear tests, the limitation of research in this area and the distribution of attack space weapons<sup>9</sup>. In addition, it promoted the freezing of the offensive strategic measures of USSR and the US at their existing quantitative level for the duration of the negotiations as well as the suspension of the deployment of US medium-range missiles in Europe<sup>10</sup>. The evidence of goodwill on the part of the USSR lay in the reduction of its strategic nuclear arsenals by 25%<sup>11</sup>.

Poland found itself in the role of a neighbouring frontline state due to positioning of new American missile and nuclear systems in Europe, also in the Federal Republic of Germany, and the continuing armament of the West German army within NATO structures<sup>12</sup>. At the same time, there was an increase in political discussions about the need to address the 'German problem' and revise the arrangements made after the Second World War<sup>13</sup>. This issue resurfaced with every crisis in USSR-US relations, which the Soviet side tended to initiate in previous decades. The topic of the future borders of the unified state, and thus the western border of Poland, returned along with the so-called 'German problem'<sup>14</sup>.

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Archives of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department IV [hereinafter: AMSZ, Dept. IV], Austria, fonds [f.] 13/88, bundle [bdl] 6, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> R.N. Lebow, *The Long Peace, the End of the Cold War and the Failure of Realism*, [in:] *Twentieth Century International Relations*, ed. M. Cox, vol. II (*The Rise and Fall of the Cold War*), London 2006, p. 228.

<sup>9</sup> J. Holzer, *Europa zimnej wojny*, Kraków 2012, pp. 780–799.

<sup>10</sup> O.A. Westad, *The Global Cold War*, New York 2005, pp. 331–364.

<sup>11</sup> Theses for talks between Minister S. Olszowski with the Austrian Foreign Minister L. Gratz of 4 June 1985, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 13/88, bdl 6, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> P. Kengor, *Ronald Reagan i obalenie komunizmu. Zbliżenie na Polskę*, Warszawa 2007, pp. 243–279.

<sup>13</sup> J.J. Sheehan, *The Transformation of Europe and the End of the Cold War*, [in:] *The Fall of the Berlin Wall*, ed. J.A. Engel, Oxford 2009, pp. 36–69; P. Kowal, *Koniec systemu władzy. Polityka ekipy gen. W. Jaruzelskiego w latach 1986–1989*, Warszawa 2015, pp. 374–389.

<sup>14</sup> Research on the international context of the 'German problem' in: S. Sierpowski, *Niemcy jako problem międzynarodowy po II wojnie światowej*, Poznań 2010.



With regard to the assessment of bilateral relations, the Austrian side emphasised its participation in boycotting political and economic sanctions against Poland after the imposition of martial law. The sanctions consisted in halting negotiations on refinancing the Polish People's Republic's debt covered by government guarantees, refusing to grant new loans, blocking existing lines of credit with foreign banks, suspending an agreement on the sale of certain foods at reduced prices, and banning fishing off US shores. Additional restrictions stipulated the loss of the most favored nation (MFN) clause in relation to Polish exports<sup>15</sup>. According to President Kirchschräger, the Austrian approach was not only based on the principle of permanent neutrality, but also on the desire to maintain correct relations with Eastern states<sup>16</sup>, which were, in the opinion of Austria, treated instrumentally in the war between the superpowers. The policy toward Poland after 1981 was intended as an example of creating a regional foothold to be used in the event of political breakdowns on a wider scale<sup>17</sup>.

It is worth noting that the sustained sanctions resulted from strained Polish-American relations. In consequence, the Polish People's Republic was deprived of its status as the communist state most favoured by the US. The most painful repercussion involved cutting off Poland from new loans<sup>18</sup>. In December 1981, Poland attempted to make some gestures indicative of meeting the expectations set by the U.S. yet the rhetoric of its highest official pointed to their hostile attitude to Washington<sup>19</sup>. In addition, the Polish side declared to expand the cooperation with the East. Offers were made to the Comecon countries to use under-utilised products from Polish industrial plants for their own needs, promoting the so-called service processing<sup>20</sup>. This policy underwent a change after the election of Mikhail Gorbachev as General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1985.

<sup>15</sup> L.J. Jasiński, *Blżej centrum czy na peryferiach? Polskie kontakty gospodarcze z zagranicą w XX wieku*, Warszawa 2011, p. 277.

<sup>16</sup> Suggestions for discussions on international issues with the Deputy Secretary General of the Austrian Foreign Ministry – F. Bauer, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 13/88, bdl 6, pp. 6–7.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> P. Kowal, *op. cit.*, pp. 346–355.

<sup>19</sup> A. Paczkowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 859–860.

<sup>20</sup> L.J. Jasiński, *op. cit.*, p. 278.

Foreign Minister Stefan Olszowski went to Austria on a working visit on 11–13 June 1985. This was the first visit by a communist Foreign Minister to a democratic country after the imposition of martial law. Minister Olszowski met with President Rudolf Kirchschläger, Austrian Parliament Speaker Anton Benya, Chancellor Fred Sinowatz and Foreign Minister Leopold Gratz<sup>21</sup>. The Polish Minister's visit was a return visit after his meeting with Minister Gratz in Warsaw in October 1984.

The most important issue raised by Minister Olszowski was the broadly defined dialogue between the East and the West as well as efforts to promote relaxation of international relations. Bilateral relations and issues of future economic cooperation were put on the back burner, which may indicate complete submission of Polish decision-makers to Moscow's political interests. With reference to the most important issues for Poland, Olszowski emphasised his identification with Soviet priorities and their operations implemented at the international forum, pointing out in an official document that he "stressed the readiness of the USSR, Poland and the other Warsaw Pact countries to take all measures to halt the arms race and disarmament"<sup>22</sup>. It seems that the most important task assigned to Minister Olszowski was to establish a common position with that of Austria towards American diplomacy prior to the forthcoming meetings in Helsinki and New York<sup>23</sup>. To this end, emphasis was placed on the joint proposals adopted during the Vienna negotiations, the Stockholm Conference and the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva<sup>24</sup>. Poland strenuously sought to use the international debates to promote Soviet "measures to build confidence and improve security", relinquishing its own political interests<sup>25</sup>.

The Polish Minister strongly criticised US diplomacy and confronted it with the forward-looking policies initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev. Polish documents stressed that the new security

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<sup>21</sup> A briefing note on the official visit of Comrade S. Olszowski, Minister for Foreign Affairs, to the Republic of Austria from 11 to 13 June 1985, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 13/88, bdl 6, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 4 [translation mine].

<sup>23</sup> P. Kengor, *op. cit.*, pp. 291–293.

<sup>24</sup> A briefing note on the political consultations at the Austrian Foreign Ministry in Vienna on 16–18 April 1985, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 13/88, bdl 6, p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> Polish Press Agency's (PAP) release on the visit of Foreign Minister S. Olszowski in the Republic of Austria, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 13/88, bdl 6, p. 2.



strategies promoted by the Western world were driving costs that the Eastern states were unable to bear<sup>26</sup>. In Poland, much concern was raised over plans to revise the resolutions of Yalta and Potsdam. Polish authorities believed that they involved not only issues concerning Poland's western border, but also security in Europe. According to the Polish Foreign Ministry, the discussion of Germany's future was inspired by the NATO alliance<sup>27</sup>. As Minister Gratz saw it, the plans for border revision did not originate in the government circles, of which he was assured by Chancellor Helmut Kohl himself<sup>28</sup>. Austrian politicians were interested in the relations of the Polish People's Republic with the USA and the Federal Republic of Germany, particularly in the prospects for economic development. The Polish side explained that the slow process of normalisation of relations with democratic countries resulted from the pressure within the North Atlantic Alliance<sup>29</sup>. The arms race in Europe was viewed by Austria in multiple ways. The soaring costs of space conquest were being passed on to European countries, including the neutral ones. On the other hand, isolation from the latest technologies generated by armaments excluded most countries and, according to Austria, retarded their development<sup>30</sup>. All this resulted in the support for solutions such as the French Eureka peace project.

Minister Olszowski reiterated his invitation to the Chancellor and the President regarding a visit to Poland and expressed his readiness to organise official meetings still in 1985<sup>31</sup>. The acceptance of the invitation to visit Poland by Chancellor F. Sinowatz provided the prospect of restoring the highest rank to bilateral relations and giving them a model character<sup>32</sup>. However, Poland felt that mutual relations were more influenced by the general

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<sup>26</sup> Suggestions for discussions on international issues with the Deputy Secretary General of the Austrian Foreign Ministry – F. Bauer, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 13/88, bdl 6, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> Suggestions for discussions on international issues with the Deputy Secretary General of the Austrian Foreign Ministry – F. Bauer, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 13/88, bdl 6, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> A briefing note on the political consultations at the Austrian Foreign Ministry in Vienna on 16–18 April 1985, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 13/88, bdl 6, p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> A note from the conversation between the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Polish People's Republic Comrade S. Olszowski and the Federal Chancellor

relations of the Polish People's Republic with the West than before 1981<sup>33</sup>, which largely hampered Polish-Austrian political activity. A memo by Minister Olszowski notes that "It is expedient to continue to cooperate with Austria in the international forum and influence the process of shaping the views, opinions and proposals of the group of neutral and non-aligned countries"<sup>34</sup>.

Poland and Austria strove to improve their economic ex-changes, planning to expand the scope of offsetting transactions, which could contribute to an increase in trade volumes without the need for more loans. Regarding impediments to accessing the Austrian market, attention was drawn to the proposal to lower the tariffs on transactions with Poland. There were also plans to decrease tariffs in accordance with the GATT arrangements. High hopes were raised for the Mixed Economic Commission scheduled for the autumn of 1985, chaired by Deputy Prime Minister J. Obodowski and Vice Chancellor N. Steger<sup>35</sup>. In a conversation with Chancellor Sinowatz, Minister Olszowski listed the major economic obstacles to the development of trade. According to the Polish side, the most difficult barriers included US restrictions and credit blockade by Western countries<sup>36</sup>. Chancellor Sinowatz paid much attention to the domestic situation in Poland. He asked about the state-church relations, trials of oppositionists and the situation in agriculture. At the end of the conversation, he acknowledged that Poland's place on the international arena would strictly depend on its reforms and economic growth, which would strengthen the country's image in the region<sup>37</sup>. At the same time, the Austrians supported Polish efforts to rejoin the International Monetary Fund<sup>38</sup>.

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of Austria F. Sinowatz on 12 June 1985, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 13/88, bdl 6, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> A briefing note on the political consultations at the Austrian Foreign Ministry in Vienna on 16–18 April 1985, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 13/88, bdl 6, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> Suggestions for discussions on international issues with the Deputy Secretary General of the Austrian Foreign Ministry – F. Bauer, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 13/88, bdl 6, p. 12 [translation mine].

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 8.

<sup>36</sup> A note from the conversation between the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Polish People's Republic Comrade S. Olszowski and the Federal Chancellor of Austria F. Sinowatz on 12 June 1985, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 13/88, bdl 6, pp. 1–2.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> A briefing note on the political consultations at the Austrian Foreign Ministry in Vienna on 16–18 April 1985, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 13/88, bdl 6, p. 5.

Austria was Poland's sixth most important partner among free-market countries in the mid-1980s. According to the Central Statistical Office, Polish-Austrian trade turnover in 1982–1984 showed a negative balance. Exports only reached the 1980 level in 1984, amounting to 29 million zloty. Trade turnover, in turn, failed to reach its pre-1980 value<sup>39</sup>. Poland expected that the improvement in Austria's economy would have a positive impact on mutual relations. The Austrian labour market, low inflation and investment expenditures were evaluated very favourably. Exports of Polish goods to Austria were dominated by fuels and energy, chemical industry products and agricultural products. As for imports of Austrian goods, it was electrical machinery products, chemical industry products and metallurgical products that ranked first. Total exports from Poland of the so-called processed goods increased by 10% compared to previous years<sup>40</sup>.

Poland was willing to use Austrian business contacts and redistribute partially processed goods, such as metallurgical and agricultural products. In addition, economic cooperation involved the transit of goods. There was an upward trend in the transport of Austrian merchandise through Polish seaports, with over 15% of cargo passing through them, which represented the third place in Austria's overseas trade. In comparison, 20% of Austrian goods passed through Hamburg, and approximately 15% through Rijeka. The choice of Polish ports was prompted by trade with Sweden and the transportation of ore as commissioned by the Voest-Alpine company from Linz<sup>41</sup>. There were plans to expand transit through Poland, and to this end some supplies were directed to the port of Szczecin. In addition, emphasis was placed on increasing the transit of the so-called general cargo goods, for which receipts were higher than for bulk goods.

The agreement signed with Voest-Alpine for participation in the sale of complete mining equipment in third markets had the greatest impact on successful industrial cooperation, involving several large Polish companies. Voest-Alpine was a contractor independent enough to offer separate loans to the amount of \$6 million for purchases necessary on the part of Polish investors. Joint investments

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<sup>39</sup> A note of 21 March 1985 on economic and trade relations with Austria, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 13/88, bdl 6, p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9.

in Opole (a thermal power plant), Gdynia (a paint and varnish factory), Sandomierz (a glass factory), Swarzedz and Prudnik (furniture factories), Nowy Sącz (a graphite electrode plant) were listed as promising and requiring additional support<sup>42</sup>.

However, there were difficulties in accessing the Austrian market. Due to Austria's membership in the EFTA and the conclusion of a special agreement between the EFTA and the EEC as well as the granting of preferential duties to developing countries (rates of only 50%), Poland found itself in the group of countries from which imports were subject to full duty without preference. This significantly reduced the competitiveness of Polish goods. The Austrian customs tariff had higher rates than those of other EFTA countries, hence Poland repeatedly asked for their reduction<sup>43</sup>. The mixed committees for economic affairs raised this issue on several occasions, requesting the application of tariff reductions on imports of Polish goods for a period of 4–5 years to the level granted to developing countries. The Austrians consistently referred these requests for consideration in the relevant forum, i.e. the GATT<sup>44</sup>. In addition, the Polish side called for a relaxation of the policy on granting work permits to Polish specialists seconded under contracts concluded by Austrian companies<sup>45</sup>.

The second half of the 1980s brought changes in the mutual perception of bilateral relations. The evolution of Austria's relations with Eastern countries was necessitated by international events and political changes within this neutral state. Poland increasingly assessed the current political situation in Austria as clearly aiming at integration into the political and economic structures of Western Europe<sup>46</sup>. Concerns were openly raised about the debate on its accession to the EEC, the rearmament of the Austrian army with

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<sup>42</sup> P. Jaroszewicz, B. Roliński, *Przerywam milczenie... 1939–1989*, Warszawa 1991, pp. 230–232.

<sup>43</sup> A briefing note on the political consultations at the Austrian Foreign Ministry in Vienna on 16–18 April 1985, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 13/88, bdl 6, p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> A note of 21 March 1985 on economic and trade relations with Austria, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 13/88, bdl 6, p. 14.

<sup>45</sup> Suggestions for discussions on international issues with the Deputy Secretary General of the Austrian Foreign Ministry – F. Bauer, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 13/88, bdl 6, p. 7.

<sup>46</sup> A note on the conditions and existing impediments to the development of the relations between the Polish People's Republic and Austria and the activities of the Embassy of the People's Republic in Austria, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 17/89, bdl 3, p. 1.

modern military equipment or its favourable stance towards the activities of the NATO countries<sup>47</sup>.

The political and social activities mentioned in the diplomatic reports were supposed to indicate Austria's continued interest in Polish affairs. Meanwhile, its political and economic involvement regarding the eastern region was visibly waning to the benefit of broader exchanges with the Federal Republic of Germany and the US. Not without significance were the political failures of the Social Democrats, previous allies of the good neighbourhood policy. The lost presidential elections and early parliamentary elections not only changed the political landscape of the republic but also brought in new leaders willing to re-evaluate Austrian foreign policy<sup>48</sup>.

In November 1986, despite the fact that the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) retained its position as the strongest party in the parliamentary elections, its sixteen-year period of unchallenged dominance came to an end. New political trends emerged, including mainly the strengthening of conservative-right forces, with robust nationalist elements. In addition, a new political option emerged in the form of the Green Party, which grew out of environmental slogans. There was also a major generational change: a number of distinguished political leaders were replaced by younger politicians with a more pragmatic and managerial way of operating<sup>49</sup>. The aforementioned trends contributed mainly to the presidential election victory of Kurt Waldheim, the conservative candidate. Shortly after his election, Social Democratic Chancellor Fred Sinowatz stepped down as head of government, and former Finance Minister Frantz Vranitzky, a representative of the SPÖ's right wing, was appointed to the post. Shortly thereafter, at the congress of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), which was the SPÖ's coalition partner until then, there was a change in the party's chairman. The former chairman Norbert Steger, a liberal, Vice-Chancellor and Trade Minister, was defeated in a direct

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<sup>47</sup> Polish-Austrian bilateral relations, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 17/89, bdl 3, p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> A note on the conditions and existing impediments to the development of the relations between the Polish People's Republic and Austria and the activities of the Embassy of the People's Republic in Austria, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 17/89, bdl 3, p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> A political report of the Embassy in Vienna for 1986, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 17/89, bdl 3, p. 1.

electoral confrontation with Jörg Haider from the right-nationalist wing. In the wake of these events, the SPÖ terminated the coalition agreement, which led to early parliamentary elections held on 23 November 1986 instead of April 1987.

The election campaign was short and practically transformed into the Chancellor's election. The large parties were afraid to openly criticise their rivals due to the subsequent need to form coalitions. This benefited small parties, which attracted the electorate opposing past reforms and younger voters. As a result of the November 1986 elections, both major parties suffered defeats: the SPÖ with 43.3% and 80 mandates (losing 10 seats compared to the 1983 elections), the ÖVP with 41.3% and 77 mandates (losing 4 seats). The FPÖ party gained 9.7%, or 18 seats, an increase of 6 seats compared to 1983. The Green party obtained 4.6% and 8 seats<sup>50</sup>. The Social Democrats owed the high result to the resignation of Chancellor Sinowatz after his defeat in the presidential election. The election campaign focused on the young and energetic Finance Minister translated into electoral support. Vranitzky also had the support of a potential coalition partner, the ÖVP conservatives centered around the economic and trade union lobby.

Political changes also affected the national elections in September 1986. In Styria, the SPÖ suffered heavy losses, especially in industrial areas and metropolitan centers. For the first time, the Greens entered Styria's national parliament. Austrian voters expected economic reforms. The main reason for weaker 1985–1986 economic growth was the decline in foreign demand for Austrian goods, which was high only with regard to the EFTA countries, the EEC and Japan whereas it fell significantly on the part of the US, OPEC and Comecon countries<sup>51</sup>. In this situation, industrial production was sustained by domestic consumer and investment demand. Debt represented another major problem, amounting to 600 billion shillings (or \$40 billion) at the end of 1986, 75% of which was internal debt. Interest on this debt swallowed up 20% in 1986<sup>52</sup>. Nationalised

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<sup>50</sup> J. Miecznikowska, *Austriacy Zieloni na drodze do władzy*, "Przegląd Zachodni" 2022, no. 4, pp. 97–114.

<sup>51</sup> A political report of the Embassy in Vienna for 1986, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 17/89, bdl 3, p. 5; J. Miecznikowska, *Europeizacja partii i systemu partyjnego Austrii*, Warszawa 2018, pp. 237–245.

<sup>52</sup> A political report of the Embassy in Vienna for 1986, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 17/89, bdl 3, p. 5.



companies accounting for one-fifth of Austria's total industry also needed reform. These enterprises closed the year 1985 with a deficit of 12.5 billion shillings, mainly due to unsuccessful oil speculation deals. Corrective programmes centered around reducing less profitable lines of production, investment in industries in demand, changes in management and a rational hiring policy.

Austria was subject to considerable political pressure from the international environment. The countries of the North Atlantic Alliance, mainly the US and the Federal Republic of Germany, supported the process of expanding military infrastructure on its territory while blocking the transfer of new technologies to the East. On several occasions, the Representatives of President Reagan's administration, particularly Defense Minister C. Weinberger, stressed the importance of Austria's geostrategic position and its role for NATO forces<sup>53</sup>. During his visit to Vienna in May 1986, Weinberger encouraged the purchase of missile weapons. In the following months, Austria signed an agreement with Sweden for the purchase of 24 Saab-Draken J35 interceptor jets, which generated a number of controversies as the purchase of this type of armament required the consent of the signatories of the 1955 State Treaty<sup>54</sup>. According to the Austrian government, the presence of such armaments did not threaten anyone, whilst their absence degraded the modern army in international opinion<sup>55</sup>. In the following years, missile weapons were tested and armoured units were modernised. The impact of the conservatives on the Defence Ministry in the following years was significant<sup>56</sup>.

Critical attitudes of international opinion towards Austria escalated in the 1980s, resulting from the polarisation of the country's political scene. This was undoubtedly influenced by the discussion surrounding the past of Kurt Waldheim, the presidential candidate, the takeover of the FPÖ by Jörg Haider, and the debate over

<sup>53</sup> P. Kengor, *op. cit.*, pp. 282–287.

<sup>54</sup> J. Barcz, "Die sowjetische Hypothek". *Die Gestaltung der Sicherheitspolitik Österreichs Anfang der 1990er Jahre im Lichte der politischen Wende in Mittel- und Osteuropa*, [in:] *Austria w polskim dyskursie publicznym po 1945 roku. Österreich im polnischen öffentlichen Diskurs nach 1945*, ed. A. Kisztelińska-Węgrzyńska, Kraków 2016, p. 10.

<sup>55</sup> A political report of the Embassy in Vienna for 1986, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 17/89, bdl 3, p. 10.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 11.

Nazi sentiment in the Austrian society<sup>57</sup>. As a consequence, there were a number of spectacular gestures relating to their negative foreign reception, such as the dismissal of the Israeli ambassador, the treatment of President Waldheim as *persona non grata* and a delegation of observers to the November elections. There were also some clashes in bilateral relations with the Federal Republic of Germany (over the construction of the Wackersdorf plant), Italy (the official language in Alto Adige), France (introduction of a visa requirement for Austrians) and Czechoslovakia (border incidences)<sup>58</sup>.

Although Poland consistently promoted Austria as a country striving to revitalise the process of relaxation and build a bridge between East and West, the activity of the Second Republic underwent visible changes<sup>59</sup>. The economic gains from increasing co-operation with the EEC and Vienna's declining interest in Eastern countries could be seen and felt behind the Iron Curtain. The process of westernisation described at length in the 1990s, consisting in Austria's integration into the political and economic structures of the West, began in fact with the government of F. Vranitzky<sup>60</sup>. Westernisation treated as following in the footsteps of Western countries was in opposition to the principle of permanent neutrality adopted after 1955<sup>61</sup>. Austria's own path pursued after the war was a vital part of its identity, providing a sense of satisfaction and

<sup>57</sup> K. Franczak, *Kalający własne gniazdo. Artyści i obrachunek z przeszłością*, Kraków 2013; B. Bailer-Galanda, W. Garscha, *Der österreichische Staatsvertrag und die Entnazifizierung*, [in:] *Der Österreichische Staatsvertrag 1955. Internationale Strategie, rechtliche Relevanz, national Identität*, eds. A. Suppan, G. Stourzh, W. Mueller, Wien 2005, pp. 632–643; M. Tomczak, *Austriacy w poszukiwaniu tożsamości*, "Przegląd Zachodni" 1997, no. 1, pp. 117–132.

<sup>58</sup> The subject of the border dispute with Czechoslovakia arose in 1984. Minister Olszowski intervened successfully as a mediator at the time. A briefing note on the political consultations at the Austrian Foreign Ministry in Vienna on 16–18 April 1985, AMSZ Austria, f. 13/88, bdl 6, p. 8.

<sup>59</sup> B. Kreisky, *Im Strom der Politik. Erfahrungen eines Europäers*, Wien 1988, p. 211.

<sup>60</sup> E. Schmidl, *Austrian Security Policy after the End of the Cold War*, [in:] *Austria's International Position After the End of the Cold War*, eds. G. Bischof, F. Karlhofer, New Orleans 2013, Contemporary Austrian Studies, vol. XXII, p. 108; J. Sheehan, *What Does it Mean To Be Neutral? Postwar Austria from a Comparative Perspective*, [in:] *ibidem*, pp. 138–140; F. Cede, Ch. Prosl, *Anspruch und Wirklichkeit Österreichs Außenpolitik seit 1945*, Innsbruck 2015, p. 270.

<sup>61</sup> E. Bruckmüller, *Staatsvertrag und Österreichsbewusstsein*, [in:] *Der Österreichische Staatsvertrag 1955...*, pp. 923–947.

fulfilment among its citizens<sup>62</sup>. The decline in the turnover with Eastern countries, including the largest partner, the USSR, was considerable, with exports falling by 15 per cent and imports by 24 per cent. This trend should not only be explained by the efforts of the Federal Republic of Germany and the USA, but also by the economic needs of the Austrian society.

Polish-Austrian relations practically came to a standstill in 1986. Occasional meetings, including a visit by A. Beny in April and a return visit by Alfred Miodowicz in November, formed part of some expectations of Poland regarding the need to continue the dialogue resumed in 1984<sup>63</sup>. Most visits planned by the Austrian side were cancelled, including those of the Chancellor, the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Austrian Parliament and visits by Deputy Foreign Ministers, while the 11<sup>th</sup> Session of the Intergovernmental Commission for Economic, Industrial and Scientific-Technical Cooperation was postponed<sup>64</sup>. It should be acknowledged that the situation in Poland did not invite attention<sup>65</sup>. The growing economic crisis, social discontent and catastrophic macro-economic indicators heralded economic collapse<sup>66</sup>. Even Wojciech Jaruzelski's closest advisers admitted that the turn of 1986 and 1987 had been the worst stage of reforms in the 1980s<sup>67</sup>. The reform plans implemented by Prof. Zbigniew Messner's government encountered inefficient economic mechanisms. The economic transformation was hampered by the extremely slow introduction of changes with free market characteristics and strong resistance to them from the party apparatus<sup>68</sup>. Messner did not envisage radical changes yet their course was to be adapted to Russian expectations. The changes were supposed to be contained

<sup>62</sup> U. Plassnik, *On the Road to a Modern Identity: Austrian Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the European Union*, [in:] *Austria's International Position...*, p. 93; H. Hösele, *Die österreichische Identität*, "Zeitreise Österreich. Menschen. Gesellschaft. Geschichte" 2015, no. 2, pp. 38–39.

<sup>63</sup> W. Jarząbek, *Österreich in den Jahren 1918 bis 1989 aus polnischer Perspektive*, [in:] *Österreich – Polen. Stationen gemeinsamer...*, p. 262.

<sup>64</sup> A political report of the Embassy in Vienna for 1986, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 17/89, bdl 3, p. 19.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 24.

<sup>66</sup> P. Kowal, *op. cit.*, pp. 75–152.

<sup>67</sup> M.M. Przeperski, *Premier kontraktowy. Zbigniew Messner w systemie rządów Wojciecha Jaruzelskiego*, [in:] *Kryzys w Partii, Partia w Kryzysie. Ostatnia dekada PZPR*, eds. T. Kozłowski, M. Siedziako, Warszawa 2023, p. 173.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 183.

within the existing system. The process was referred to as limited economic reform, implemented half-heartedly in line with the consensus reached with the trade unions before 1981 and bearing the hallmarks of market socialism<sup>69</sup>.

Growing foreign demand for Austrian goods became a factor in the economic upturn. Particular interest in importing products from Austria was noted from Japan, the Arab countries, the EEC and the Comecon. At the same time, the export growth rate to the Comecon countries increased by a mere 7% and was generated mainly by the USSR, the CSRS and Poland. The progressive economic integration with the EEC countries was visible and became a subject of open debate in Austria. This activity was given prominence, which was confirmed by the frequency of visits by Chancellor Vranizky and the Minister of Foreign Affairs to Brussels or other EEC capitals. In addition, a special EEC representation was established in Vienna<sup>70</sup>.

### **On the path to a breakthrough**

The debate on Austria's inclusion in the EEC structures concerned both the exchanges within the coalition and the dispute over competences between Chancellor Vranizky and the Christian Democrat Foreign Minister A. Mock as well as the international circles. The USSR's strong protest and attention paid to the necessity of revising the State Treaty prevented the Christian Democrats from attempting to submit an official application to join the community. The Soviet position on the future of Austria's integration into the EEC structures was unequivocal. Although the Chancellor and the Foreign Minister travelled to Moscow trying to offset the USSR's reluctance on the issue, they remained unsuccessful. The Russians consistently spoke, and with them the other Eastern countries, of the "impossibility of reconciling full EEC membership with the principle of Austria's permanent neutrality"<sup>71</sup>.

Observing trends in the development of economic cooperation in Europe, Eastern countries wished to benefit from this process. Austria's integration aspirations contributed to a warming of

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<sup>69</sup> L.J. Jasiński, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

<sup>70</sup> A political report of the Embassy in Vienna for 1986, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 17/89, bdl 3, p 12.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13 [translation mine].

relations with these countries. According to the representatives of the Polish Embassy in Vienna, Eastern countries could gain greatly from this situation. Examples of ways to improve bilateral relations included the reintroduction of visa-free travel with Poland from 1 January 1988, the opening of cultural institutes in Czechoslovakia, and joint organisation of international trade fairs with Hungary in Vienna and Budapest in 1995<sup>72</sup>. The reintroduction of visa-free travel brought many social problems. There was a significant increase in the number of Polish citizens entering Austria and a growth in transit traffic through this country<sup>73</sup>, which resulted in a rise in the number of asylum applications from Poles. In the first quarter of 1988, as many as 2,000 such applications were made, while there were 96 in the same period of 1987<sup>74</sup>. A large number of participants of organised tours stayed in Austria, and even tour buses of Polish travel agencies drove directly to the Taraiskirchen camp. This situation forced the Austrian authorities to change the procedure for granting asylum to Poles, Hungarians and citizens of Yugoslavia. The period for processing applications and appeals was shortened. The number of positive decisions dwindled, amounting to a mere 4–5% at the end of 1988. The head of the Ministry of the Interior, Karl Blecha, explained that Poland's ongoing reforms excluded the category of political refugees in relation to Polish citizens.

Lifting the visa-free regime also led to a surge in arrivals of Polish nationals for seasonal or longer-term work purposes without the need to apply for asylum. This was reflected in doubling the number of applications for multiple border crossing clauses, which were granted to an average of 250 persons per month, also causing an increase in customs and financial offences committed by Poles, detected directly at border crossings or during their stay in Austria. These phenomena placed an additional workload on consular departments reporting on current problems and incidents<sup>75</sup>. Relations between the Consular Section of the Polish Embassy and the

<sup>72</sup> M. Graf, P. Ruggenthaler, *Entspannung trotz Krisen? Zu den Beziehungen zwischen Österreich und Polen vom Staatsvertrag bis zum Ende des Kalten Krieges 1955–1990*, [in:] *Österreich – Polen. Stationen gemeinsamer...*, p. 191.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 193.

<sup>74</sup> A political report of the Embassy in Vienna for 1988, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 1/92, bdl 1, p. 34.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibidem*.

Austrian offices improved considerably at that time, which was facilitated by regular consular consultations at the level of departmental directors.

The 19<sup>th</sup> CPSU Conference in the USSR, orchestrated by Mikhail Gorbachev in June 1988, proved significant for Polish affairs. In historiography, it is compared to Khrushchev's 1956 paper. The idea was to break away from the bad past and renew the idea of universal suffrage. A. Gromyko, who opposed the changes in Poland, was removed from power. General Jaruzelski argued that the personnel changes in Poland were to copy Soviet patterns. Promoted were those functionaries who supported Soviet perestroika, including Rakowski, Orzechowski and Baka<sup>76</sup>. Aligning the changes in Poland with the transformation process in the USSR presented a situation for obtaining a better international position<sup>77</sup>. The visit of President Reagan to Moscow in May/June 1988 and the plans to build a 'common home in Europe' were intended to serve this purpose<sup>78</sup>.

Soviet plans regarding Europe assumed greater cooperation with Western countries. It was considered that an integrating Western Europe could become a competition for the United States and it would be appropriate to benefit from this trend. In addition, it was recommended that contacts with the social democratic parties of Western countries be exploited. In Gorbachev's view, the future agreement with the emerging European Union lay in cooperation with the existing economic partners and neutral states. An additional solution consisted in creating a new security system through the disarmament negotiations in Vienna. This was to be achieved by reorganising the Warsaw Pact and giving it a decidedly defensive character by reducing the armed forces by 70,000 soldiers<sup>79</sup>.

In 1988, Austria supported General Jaruzelski's plan to reduce armaments and increase confidence in Central Europe through organising a meeting of the Presidents of the Parliaments of Europe, the USA and Canada in Warsaw, which took place on 24–25 November. Austria was represented by the President of its

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<sup>76</sup> A. Skrzypek, *Mechanizmy klientelizmu. Stosunki polsko-radzieckie 1965–1989*, Pułtusk–Warszawa 2008, p. 339.

<sup>77</sup> J. Lévesque, *The Emancipation of Eastern Europe*, [in:] *Ending the Cold War. Interpretations, Causation, and the Study of International Relations*, eds. R.K. Herrmann, R.N. Lebow, New York 2004, p. 113.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 107–131.

<sup>79</sup> A. Skrzypek, *op. cit.*, p. 340.



Parliament, former Foreign Minister L. Gratz. In line with Moscow's suggestions, cooperation between parties was being intensively developed, which was later to result in a European round table. To this end, the Polish Sejm initiated bilateral and multilateral parliamentary contacts<sup>80</sup>. Cooperation with Austria developed thanks to a visit in Vienna by the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Sejm of the Polish People's Republic, J. Czyrek, in November of that year, and a visit in Warsaw by Hans Fischer, Vice-Chairman of the SPÖ (later President of the Republic)<sup>81</sup>. Party contacts included a meeting between an ÖVP delegation and representatives of the United People's Party. There was also greater regional cooperation with an agreement signed between the Lower Austrian state and the Skierniewice province.

In March 1988, a visit by the Vice-Chancellor and Minister for Foreign Affairs, A. Mock, took place<sup>82</sup>. He came at the invitation of Foreign Minister M. Orzechowski. Mock assured that although there were debates on Austria's accession to the EEC structures, the country's commitment to the principle of permanent neutrality remained unchanged. In addition, the Vice-Chancellor confirmed his willingness to include Austrian companies in the Polish investment programme through the supply of facilities and equipment<sup>83</sup>. The following months also saw the arrival of Robert Graf, Ferdinand Lacina, Robert Lichal, Hans Tuppy and Egmont Foregger<sup>84</sup>. The revival of bilateral contacts did not only concern Austria, but was the result of a new orientation in Polish foreign policy. Austrian politicians assessed this new trend very positively and perceived Poland as the closest ally of the USSR. They also drew attention to the fact that other Eastern states were critical of Polish reforms<sup>85</sup>.

Chancellor Vranitzky's government showed restraint with regard to social unrest in Poland in April, May and August (strikes in Gdańsk and Nowa Huta). A wave of strikes followed in August 1988, just after Gorbachev's visit to Poland. Forceful solutions

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 341.

<sup>81</sup> A political report of the Embassy in Vienna for 1988, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 1/92, bdl 1, p. 18.

<sup>82</sup> Guidelines for the work of the Embassy of the Polish People's Republic in Vienna for 1988, *ibidem*, p. 2.

<sup>83</sup> A political report of the Embassy in Vienna for 1988, *ibidem*, p. 18.

<sup>84</sup> M. Graf, P. Ruggenthaler, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 192.

were abandoned and talks with the opposition were declared<sup>86</sup>. General Kiszczak proposed a round table, to which the Solidarity leaders responded by ending the strikes<sup>87</sup>. In order to offset the repercussions of the anti-Polish resolutions, the contacts of the All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions with the Austrian trade unions were invoked. An accelerated procedure for the examination of asylum applications of Polish citizens was introduced in Austria on the assumption that the process of democratisation and reform in Poland virtually eliminated the category of political refugees. Meanwhile, democratisation proceeded spontaneously because, for the first time in several decades, the Soviet authorities did not give Poland any political instructions. A process of pluralism began. Polish decision-makers saw that the pace of change in the country was far slower than that in the USSR<sup>88</sup>. The political upheaval lasted for several weeks, with the formation of the cabinet of Mieczysław Rakowski, the last communist Prime Minister in Poland, in September<sup>89</sup>. Rakowski replaced Zbigniew Messner, a former protégé of Wojciech Jaruzelski, who had held the post since November 1985<sup>90</sup>. The process of reducing the apparatus of the nomenklatura caused the disintegration of the Polish United Workers' Party and a change of government<sup>91</sup>. Prime Minister Rakowski's visit to Vienna in November of that year was to be the culmination of improved relations with Austria<sup>92</sup>. Relations with the Federal Republic of Germany and the USA also revived, which was to give a boost to Poland's economy<sup>93</sup>.

Perestroika envisaged an intensification of relations between the Comecon and the EEC, placing emphasis on the freedom of individual states to establish partnerships<sup>94</sup>. Gorbachev stressed the USSR's exemplary relations with France and the Federal Republic

<sup>86</sup> A. Kemp-Welch, *Polska pod rządami komunistów 1944–1989*, Kraków 2010, pp. 460–463.

<sup>87</sup> A. Skrzypek, *op. cit.*, p. 334.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 343.

<sup>89</sup> M. Przeperski, *Mieczysław F. Rakowski. Biografia polityczna*, Warszawa 2021, p. 321.

<sup>90</sup> *Idem*, *Premier...*, pp. 151–183.

<sup>91</sup> M. Graf, P. Ruggenthaler, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

<sup>92</sup> A note on the balance of bilateral relations with Austria in 1988, and the nodal tasks with respect to Austria in 1989, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 1/92, bdl 1, p. 2.

<sup>93</sup> A. Kemp-Welch, *op. cit.*, pp. 466–467.

<sup>94</sup> J. Lévesque, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

of Germany, which he called the most active partner of Eastern states<sup>95</sup>. Benefiting from international trends, Polish-Austrian economic cooperation also continued to develop at that time. After a steep decline in turnover in 1986–1987 resulting from the fall in prices of energy raw materials, a slight increase in trade was recorded in 1988. Polish exports to Austria reached 3.6 billion shillings and were 7% higher than in the corresponding period of 1997, while imports amounted to 4 billion shillings, increasing by 11%<sup>96</sup>. Exports of services from Poland to Austria began to play a key role in mutual relations. However, the employment of Polish construction workers in Austria, which was recorded in Polish statistics, was counted as part of the turnover of goods. It amounted to 8% of the value of exports in goods in 1998<sup>97</sup>. Additionally, exports of transport and freight forwarding services were counted, including the handling of transit cargo to and from Austria via Polish seaports.

For Mieczysław Rakowski's government, it was the improvement of the state's finances that was the most difficult task in implementing the modernisation plans. Without an inflow of capital, the reforms stood no chance of success<sup>98</sup>. Thus international initiatives in this regard were essential<sup>99</sup>. During Prime Minister Rakowski's visit to Austria in November 1988, the Polish side invoked a 'new opening' in relations with the West and obtained Vienna's agreement to the cooperation on the debt issue by-passing the Paris and London Clubs. This solution, however, could not be applied during talks with other creditors as confidentiality of negotiations was reserved<sup>100</sup>. In his diaries, the Prime Minister noted that during the Vienna meeting, Chancellor Vranizky enquired about the nature of reforms in Poland and Hungary. He expressed concern about their pace being too abrupt. The Polish Prime Minister responded that this was the requirement of time<sup>101</sup>. Yet the nature of the reforms in Poland and Hungary was different,

<sup>95</sup> A. Skrzypek, *op. cit.*, p. 341.

<sup>96</sup> A political report of the Embassy in Vienna for 1988, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 1/92, bdl 1, p. 23.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>98</sup> M. Przeperski, *Ostatnia próba modernizacji PRL. Rząd Mieczysława Rakowskiego (1988–1989)*, "Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość" 2016, no. 27, p. 216.

<sup>99</sup> *Idem*, *Mieczysław F. Rakowski...*, pp. 332–340.

<sup>100</sup> *Idem*, *Ostatnia próba...*, p. 217.

<sup>101</sup> M.F. Rakowski, *Dzienniki polityczne 1987–1990*, Warszawa 2005, p. 300.

and the Polish authorities were reluctant to admit that they would result in decreasing the standard of living of its citizens<sup>102</sup>.

Two treaties on economic cooperation and investment protection were signed in November 1988. Austria was the third Western economic partner of Poland after the Federal Republic of Germany and Great Britain<sup>103</sup>. For Austria, in turn, Poland was a lower-ranking partner, occupying the sixteenth position in total turnover and the fifth among the Eastern countries (after the USSR, Hungary, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, the German Democratic Republic), with a turnover of 0.9%<sup>104</sup>. Some Austrian banks and companies were involved in investment projects in Poland, although the development of such activities was hampered by the decision of the Kontrollbank, which withheld loan guarantees for exports to Poland in June 1988 due to Poland's refusal to sign a negotiated agreement on repayment terms and interest rates for outstanding obligations<sup>105</sup>. To facilitate commercial exchange, Poland prepared a law on undertaking economic activity, which allowed enterprises of all ownership sectors to trade freely with foreign countries<sup>106</sup>. The following months saw the implementation of an economic adjustment programme prepared in cooperation with the International Monetary Fund. It included the spread of the market mechanism, combating inflation through the reduction of budget deficit, liquidation of unprofitable enterprises, sale of state assets and creating conditions for a significant inflow of foreign capital. The catalogue of measures recommended for Poland by the IMF in March 1989 included the introduction of a hard monetary policy, devaluation of the exchange rate, budget deficit reduction by raising coal prices and drastically reducing preferential loans<sup>107</sup>.

Among the tasks to develop bilateral relations in 1989, Poland planned to increase the frequency of contacts at the ministerial level, which was to be facilitated by more extensive parliamentary

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<sup>102</sup> M. Przeperski, *Mieczysław F. Rakowski...*, p. 333; A. Kemp-Welch, *op. cit.*, p. 485.

<sup>103</sup> M. Graf, P. Ruggenthaler, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

<sup>104</sup> A political report of the Embassy in Vienna for 1988, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 1/92, bdl 1, p. 22.

<sup>105</sup> A note on the balance of bilateral relations with Austria in 1988, and the nodal tasks with respect to Austria in 1989, *ibidem*, p. 3.

<sup>106</sup> L.J. Jasiński, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

<sup>107</sup> M. Przeperski, *Ostatnia próba...*, p. 218.

contacts as well as cooperation of social, party and youth organisations. Economic growth was to be secured by joint investments in transport and construction. Consideration was given to concluding a bilateral communications agreement in the event of Austria's accession to the EEC and to developing cooperation in joint ventures. According to Polish politicians, intensive efforts were sought to improve scientific cooperation<sup>108</sup>, which involved preparing and driving forward a programme of joint research in areas particularly useful from the perspective of the country's needs. Admittedly, Eastern states deplored the blockage of technology transfer from democratic countries<sup>109</sup>.

As Andrzej Paczkowski notes, it was not easy to explain the Polish road to freedom to all communist leaders. It was treated in terms of capitulation or abandonment of socialist ideals and a threat to the entire Eastern camp. Moreover, no one could provide answers or predict where these changes were about to lead<sup>110</sup>. Efforts to restructure companies failed to produce the intended results<sup>111</sup>.

Western states were primarily concerned that the transition be peaceful and evolutionary as this guaranteed stability in Europe and in the USSR itself, where national conflicts were coming to the fore. The Polish Round Table Talks took place between February and April 1989<sup>112</sup>. Moscow accepted the scenario in which the opposition would come to power under the condition of maintaining political and economic relations with the USSR<sup>113</sup>. During the Round Table, the government pledged to hold new parliamentary elections with a pool of seats given to the opposition party, create a Senate and a presidential office which was to be occupied by General Wojciech Jaruzelski<sup>114</sup>. The Round Table was followed by a series of visits by foreign leaders, including the new US President George Bush. Poles appealed for financial aid to support reforms. The West demanded reforms to be able to invest in the reviving

<sup>108</sup> W. Jarzabek, *op. cit.*, pp. 262–264.

<sup>109</sup> A note on the balance of bilateral relations with Austria in 1988, and the nodal tasks with respect to Austria in 1989, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, f. 1/92, bdl 1, p. 4.

<sup>110</sup> A. Paczkowski, *op. cit.*, p. 861.

<sup>111</sup> M. Przeperski, *Ostatnia próba...*, p. 229.

<sup>112</sup> A. Kemp-Welch, *op. cit.*, pp. 489–495.

<sup>113</sup> A. Skrzypek, *op. cit.*, p. 350.

<sup>114</sup> P. Kowal, *op. cit.*, pp. 538–548.

country<sup>115</sup>. The implementation of the reforms was by no means simple in conditions close to monetary chaos<sup>116</sup>. Economic issues were not the most important at the Round Table, and differences of opinion over further changes within the party itself only made it more difficult to reach a compromise. The main question concerned supporting unprofitable enterprises and protecting workers and their jobs<sup>117</sup>. The first months of transition were marked by Poland's disastrous economic situation. An extremely high budget deficit, lack of control over the money supply and the abolition of food price controls led to galloping inflation<sup>118</sup>.

The elections were held on 4 June 1989. Although the ruling party went to great lengths to retain power, the opposition won a landslide victory and thereby outlawed the Polish United Workers' Party, depriving it of its mandate to continue in power<sup>119</sup>. The Soviet side accepted these results calmly, seeking to preserve only the mechanism of military alliance<sup>120</sup>. As Prof. Skrzypek argues, "Poland still remained a member of the Warsaw Pact and the Comecon, and the existing economic ties within the socialist community appeared to form a permanent link. Moreover, General Wojciech Jaruzelski, a friend of the USSR, was elected President. Replacing the Chairman of the Council of State with the function of President, with the opposition still there, was an act in line with Gorbachev's thinking as it was soon to be seen"<sup>121</sup>.

The democratic government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki formed in August 1989 faced many pressing problems, including the foreign policy. The opening up of Poland to Western Europe involved defining new political and economic priorities. The unfavourable conditions for bilateral cooperation with Austria also resulted from the different market mechanism and the imperfections of the banking system<sup>122</sup>.

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<sup>115</sup> A. Paczkowski, *op. cit.*, p. 862.

<sup>116</sup> L.J. Jasiński, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

<sup>117</sup> P. Kowal, *op. cit.*, p. 546.

<sup>118</sup> J. Witkowska, *Bezpośrednie inwestycje zagraniczne w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej*, Łódź 1996, p. 64.

<sup>119</sup> P. Kowal, *op. cit.*, pp. 560–565.

<sup>120</sup> A. Skrzypek, *op. cit.*, p. 352.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 352 [translation mine].

<sup>122</sup> M. Graf, P. Ruggenthaler, *op. cit.*, p. 194.



Austria was keenly interested in supporting Poland during the historic transition period. Economic successes were needed to strengthen the potential for cooperation with Western countries. In addition, Austria's aid concerning the provision of food and necessities was evident<sup>123</sup>. The first contacts with the new government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki were reinforced by a visit in Poland of Vice Chancellor Josef Riegler and Minister of Economic Affairs Erhard Busek in September 1989. Busek had come to Poland many times previously and kept in touch with Solidarity members as a representative of the ÖVP in the 1980s<sup>124</sup>.

The first official visit of the Polish Foreign Minister of the new government, Krzysztof Skubiszewski, took place on 5–8 November 1989. It resulted in the first economic agreements and the opening of Austrian banks to Poland. The Austrian side openly admitted that a deepening of mutual relations would be possible if reforms in Poland were to proceed in the spirit of the free market economy.

Acting on its own during the Cold War, post-war Austrian diplomacy had several clear strategic goals after 1955. The most important one was to set and consolidate the principles of active neutrality, an important element of its post-war national identity<sup>125</sup>. After 1989, some of the previous paradigms relating to Austria's place in Europe changed<sup>126</sup>. The new challenges posed by the collapse of the bipolar world brought a different perspective on the position of the Danube Republic.

The balance of bilateral relations in the 1980s closed with two agreements on the extension of the repayment of Polish debt and government guarantees for Austrian loans to Poland. Moreover, four bilateral treaties facilitating economic exchange were signed during that period. The most difficult stage of these relations was the year 1986 and the extremely negative forecasts concerning Poland's development and future. Poland's ability to repay its debt was definitely overestimated and aid plans were formulated

<sup>123</sup> L.J. Jasiński, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

<sup>124</sup> A note on the balance of bilateral relations with Austria in 1988, and the nodal tasks with respect to Austria in 1989, AMSZ, Dept. IV, Austria, 1988, f. 1/92, bdl 1, p. 3.

<sup>125</sup> D. Binder, E. Bruckmüller, *Essay über Österreich. Grundfragen von Identität und Geschichte 1918–2000*, Wien 2005, pp. 103–111.

<sup>126</sup> E. Brix, E. Busek, *Nowe spojrzenie na Europę Środkową. Czy od niej zależy przyszłość Europy?*, Kraków 2019, pp. 19–36.

based on these assumptions<sup>127</sup>. Austria perceived Poland as a country of high hopes<sup>128</sup>. Poland's systemic transformation proceeded in a spontaneous and diverse manner. The negative consequences were caused by the lack of integration strategies on the part of Western countries with regard to influencing or even supporting this process. Investment plans or cooperation activities with newly emerging markets, supported by the struggle for human rights, proved insufficient for the needs of Eastern societies<sup>129</sup>. The integration potential of the post-communist countries lay in neighbourly and regional cooperation as well as commonality of purpose. Before 1989, the USSR had successfully not only hampered the tendencies of cooperation within the Eastern Bloc, but also fuelled antagonisms. The opportunity to take a fresh look at the conditions and possibilities for political and economic exchange after 1989 bore fruit in the first years of the transition<sup>130</sup>. The Austrian neighborhood policy, which had been promoted for decades, came to the fore and pointed to new opportunities and tools for development in the form, for example, of the European Union Strategy for Danube Region (EUSDR)<sup>131</sup>. It should be noted, however, that this development took place without Austria's dominant role. The priorities of the above strategy include the need which was identified by Austrian politicians and reinforced for decades to develop waterways, expand railroads, protect the environment and water quality or develop renewable energy sources. Scientific and technical cooperation was to be an additional pillar of cooperation.

Austria was useful to Poland as a Western partner that, unlike other democratic states, was not to be feared and wished to help define Poland's role as a leader in the region. Poland used the diplomacy of a neutral Austria to strengthen its international position. The Social Democrats played a decisive role in shaping a positive image of their country in the Polish public space. Austria's positive attitude towards Eastern states, shaped by several decades of bilateral relations, resulted from a number of factors, including the participation of Austrian elites in the construction of a new

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<sup>127</sup> S. Długosz, *Jak zadłużyłem PRL*, Warszawa 1995, p. 43.

<sup>128</sup> B. Kreisky, *Z Polską wiązałem zbyt duże nadzieje*, "Prawo i Życie" 1991, no. 32, p. 13.

<sup>129</sup> E. Brix, E. Busek, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>130</sup> J. Witkowska, *op. cit.*, pp. 64–73.

<sup>131</sup> E. Brix, E. Busek, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

national identity, creation of independence in relations with the EEC and the need to search for alternative areas of cooperation, construction of independence from Germany, or historical motifs in relations with the Eastern states.

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