

## The USSR and the Fate of Austrian Communism 1944-1956

di Wolfgang Mueller

### Abstract – The USSR and the Fate of Austrian Communism 1944–1956

*The essay focuses on post-war Stalinist policies towards Austria as a laboratory for strengthening Communist influence in a country on the Cold War border line. In 1945 Moscow instructed the Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ) to pursue a cautious national-front policy. Indeed, the strong distrust of a large part of the Austrian population towards Communism combined with Soviet post-war crimes in Austria contributed to the KPÖ's electoral disaster in November 1945. From 1947 on, the KPÖ switched to a more confrontational line as was later pursued by the Kominformburo. While Soviet support for the KPÖ was strong enough to cement the latter's image as a «Soviet party», it was never strong enough to bring the KPÖ to power.*

**Key words:** communism, austrian communist party, Soviet union, Austria, postwar

**Parole chiave:** comunismo, Partito comunista austriaco, Unione sovietica, Austria, dopoguerra

As was common practice in Soviet policy at the end of WWII, the leaders of the Communist Party of Austria (Kommunistische Partei Österreichs, KPÖ) were sent from Moscow back to their homeland in the baggage train of the victorious Red Army. Between the wars, this tiny faction had struggled to overthrow the existing order and to incite a revolution, but had never achieved political power. Under Nazi rule, it had paid a high price for organising resistance. However, in April 1945, it managed to establish itself as one of three nominally equal coalition partners within the provisional Austrian government. The communists successfully claimed the post of one of three deputy heads of government and succeeded in taking control of the police apparatus and the ministries of interior and of education. In their public statements, KPÖ politicians called for a «people's democracy». Although they failed to win the fateful elections of November 1945, the communists, in the decade of the quadripartite (Soviet, US, British, and French) occupation in Austria, gained more importance and more public attention than their share of votes would suggest. Due to their radical cold-war rhetoric, several forceful attempts to destabilize the government, and, above all, their close relationship to the Soviet authorities in Moscow and Austria, they seemed to be on the brink of reaching for power. With communist takeovers in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet zone of Germany, fears were high in Austria that the country might become the next victim of a red putsch or a partition.

Beginning with the 1960s, the KPÖ's post-war policy and its cooperation with the Soviet Union became the subject of historiography. While, in the 1960s, most historians agreed that the KPÖ with Soviet help had tried to push Austria towards

communism after the war<sup>1</sup>, this consensus was questioned by a younger generation of revisionist scientists who claimed that the Soviet Union had not been interested in promoting any change of Austria's socio-political order and, therefore, forced the Austrian communists to give up any such plans. The KPÖ's demand of 1945 for «people's democracy», these historians argued, did not have its later meaning<sup>2</sup>. The relations between the Austrian communists and the Soviet Union were portrayed as having been strained by numerous fundamental conflicts. With this disagreement among historians and with neither Soviet nor Austrian-communist internal documents available, it seemed both unclear which political aim the Austrian communists pursued after 1945 and what kind of political system the Soviet Union wanted to achieve in post-war Austria. It was not until the late 1990s and early 2000s that internal strategic documents of the KPÖ leadership were published<sup>3</sup> and that Soviet archival documents were taken into account<sup>4</sup>.

In this chapter, I draw on these sources, especially on Russian documents I discovered in the last years mostly in the archives of the Russian Foreign Ministry and the former party archives of the CPSU, as well as several recently discovered Yugoslav documents<sup>5</sup>. My aim is to make the following points:

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank László Borhi and Michael Portmann, for providing me with insights into Hungarian and Yugoslav archives.

W. Lloyd Stearns, *The Soviet Union and the Occupation of Austria: An Analysis of the Soviet Policy in Austria, 1945-1955*, Siegler, Bonn 1961; J. Toch, *Enklave KPÖ*, in *Bestandsaufnahme Österreich 1945-1963*, a c. di J. Hannak, Forum, Vienna 1963, pp. 63-82; W. B. Bader, *Austria between East and West*. Stanford, Univ. Pr., 1966; A. Pelinka, *Auseinandersetzung mit dem Kommunismus*, in *Österreich: Die Zweite Republik*, a c. di E. Weinzierl, K. Skalník, vol. 1, Styria, Graz 1972, pp. 169-201; K. Vogelmann, *Die Propaganda der österreichischen Emigration in der Sowjetunion für einen selbstständigen österreichischen Nationalstaat 1938-1945*, Ph. D. Diss., Vienna 1973; H. Maimann, *Politik im Wartesaal: Österreichische Exilpolitik in Großbritannien 1938-1945*, Böhlau, Vienna 1975.

<sup>2</sup> W. Aichinger, *Sowjetische Österreichpolitik 1943-1945*, Diss., Vienna 1977, p. 176 and pp. 185-186. Cf. H. Gärtner, *Zwischen Moskau und Österreich: Die KPÖ – Analyse einer sowjetabhängigen Partei*, Braumüller, Vienna 1979; A. Lichtblau, Albert, M. Winter, *Die Entwicklung der KPÖ im Spiegel ihrer Parteitage*, in *Zwischen Koalition und Konflikt: Österreichs Parteien seit 1945*, a c. di P. Gerlich, W. Müller, Braumüller, Vienna 1983, pp. 91-108; A. Stalzer, *Zwischen Anpassung und Isolation: Zur Integration der KPÖ in das politische System Österreichs nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Diss., Vienna 1986.

<sup>3</sup> F. Keller, *Die KPÖ 1945-1955*, in *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung 1994*, pp. 104-121; O. Rathkolb, *Wie homogen war Österreich 1945? Innenpolitische Optionen*, in *Inventur 45/55: Österreich im ersten Jahrzehnt der Zweiten Republik*, a c. di W. Kos, G. Rigele, Sonderzahl, Vienna 1996, pp. 157-180; M. Mugrauer, *Die Politik der KPÖ in der Provisorischen Regierung Renner*, Studienverlag, Innsbruck 2007. Currently Manfred Mugrauer is working on a Ph.D. Thesis on the KPÖ 1946-1950.

<sup>4</sup> W. W. Mueller, *Sowjetbesatzung, Nationale Front und der «friedliche Übergang zum Sozialismus»: Fragmente sowjetischer Österreich-Planung 1945-1955*, in *Mitteilungen des österreichischen Staatsarchivs 50/2003*, pp. 137-155; N. Lebedeva, *Österreichische Kommunisten im Moskauer Exil 1943-1945*, in *Die Rote Armee in Österreich*, a c. di S. Karner, B. Stelzl-Marx, Oldenbourg, Vienna 2005, pp. 39-60; P. Ruggenthaler, *Warum Österreich nicht sowjetisiert wurde*, in *Die Rote Armee in Österreich*, a c. di S. Karner, B. Stelzl-Marx, pp. 649-726; W. W. Mueller, *Die sowjetische Besatzung in Österreich 1945-1955 und ihre politische Mission*, Böhlau, Vienna 2005.

<sup>5</sup> I am greatly indebted to Michael Portmann for sharing with me documents he found in Belgrade.

1) In contrast to what historians argued in the 1970s, the KPÖ's tactic was in line with the Soviet national-front strategy aiming at a «peaceful [i.e. non-revolutionary] transition to socialism» in Europe.

2) Soviet policy in Austria had the goal of improving the KPÖ's position in the struggle for power and for a transition to people's democracy. Soviet support, especially financial aid, seems to have been considerable.

3) However, in their policy, the Soviets refrained from the systematic use of force and from supporting a communist putsch or a partition of the country into a Western and a communist state along the Korean or German model.

4) This ambivalent policy reflected, on the one hand, Soviet interests in not giving up the perspective of making Austria a «people's democracy» and, on the other hand, the low priority the country had for the Soviets.

*Moscow planning for post-war Austria: A «bloc of anti-fascist parties», a «democratic people's republic», and «peaceful transition to socialism»*

In a memorandum of 11 January 1944, Ivan Maiskii, Soviet ambassador to London and then head of a Commission on post-war planning and reparations, stated that it would be in the Soviet interest if the various governments in post-war Europe were created «in the spirit of the popular front»<sup>6</sup>. In several advanced European countries such as France, the Netherlands, Belgium or Czechoslovakia, Maiskii predicted, such popular-front governments would emerge «by themselves». In others, such as Germany, Italy, Hungary, Rumania, they would be formed under the guidance of the allies. Given its past as part of the «Third Reich» after 1938, Austria seems to have been tacitly considered as member of the second group.

The popular- (or national-) front strategy dated back to the VIIIth World Congress of the Comintern in 1935 that, in the face of the rising fascist threat, had called for the closing of ranks of communists, social democrats and conservatives. Discarded during the Soviet-German flirt of 1939-41, the national-front policy was revived immediately after Hitler's aggression toward the Soviet Union and remained dominant in Soviet strategy for post-war Europe until mid-1947<sup>7</sup>. Since Stalin, with an eye on Soviet exhaustion after the war, wanted to avoid a conflict with the Western powers, the communists were instructed to abstain from instigating a

<sup>6</sup> Memorandum Maiskii to Molotov, 11 January 1944. In: Kynin, Georgii P.; *SSSR i Germanskii vopros 1941-1949: Dokumenty iz Arkhiva vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoj Federatsii*, vol. I, a c. di J. Laufer, *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*, Moscow 1996-2003, pp. 333-360. Cf. A. M. Filitov, *V komissiiakh Narkomindel*, in *Vtoraia mirovaia voina: Aktual'nye problem*, a c. di O. A. Rzheshhevskii, et al., Nauka, Moscow 1995, pp. 54-71 and 56-57; V. O. Pechatnov, *The Big Three After World War II: New Documents on Soviet Thinking about Post-War Relations with the United States and Great Britain*, «Cold War International History Project Working Paper», n. 13, 1995.

<sup>7</sup> *Komintern i vtoraia mirovaia voina. 2 vols*, a c. di N. Lebedeva, M. Narinskii, *Pamiatniki istoricheskoi mysli*, Moscow 1994-1998; V. Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: The Stalin Years*, Oxford Univ. Pr., New York 1996; E. Mark, *Revolution by Degrees: Stalin's National-Front Strategy 1941-1947*, in «Cold War International History Project Working Paper», n. 31, 2001.

socialist revolution. They should rather call for a «cooperation of all anti-fascist democratic forces» and adopt outwardly moderate programmes of «denazification» and «democratisation». As the «Declaration on Liberated Europe» signed by the Big Three in Yalta in February 1945 proved, these principles were accepted and even whole-heartedly embraced by the Western powers too – although they had a different understanding of the key words «cooperation», «denazification», and «democratisation» than Stalin.

According to the Soviet expectations, the communists should not only join the other anti-fascist forces to rebuild democracy, but also make sure that their countries would never again turn against the Soviet Union and that their «new democracies» would be different from their «bourgeois» predecessors. Since the communists were considered by Stalin as the only trustworthy forces, they should control the police, jurisprudence, mass media, and education. The expropriation of former owners of big estates and industries, nationalisation programmes, and land reform should destroy the «roots of fascism» and turn the tables against the formerly ruling classes. Under these circumstances, the communists should increase their power step by step, overshadow their political competitors, win over the masses, and, without a revolution, build «people's democracy» and, then, socialism. As Maiskii estimated in 1944, it would take 30 to 50 years to reach this goal<sup>8</sup>.

Austria seems to have been seen as another domino in this scheme. When Andrei Zhdanov, CPSU secretary for ideology and communist parties abroad, penned some notes in the summer of 1944 concerning the future of Germany, Austria, and Hungary, he mentioned their future «peaceful transition to socialism» – unfortunately without going into further detail<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, an Austrian «people's democracy», a «socialist» Austria – together with a similar Germany (not in the sense of 1949 but as an integrated whole) – would have carried Soviet influence and communist power across the lines reached by the Red Army in 1945. As far as the question of power in post-war Europe was concerned, plans on a division of the continent into Soviet and Western spheres of influence had been made since the beginning of the war<sup>10</sup>. It was only in October 1944 that Churchill consented to an informal agreement on Soviet and British influence in Eastern and Central Europe. Austria – on whose reconstruction as an independent country agreement had been reached among the allies in the autumn of 1943<sup>11</sup> – was not mentioned.

In the following months, Deputy Foreign Commissar Litvinov prepared several drafts on the subject of Soviet and Western spheres of influence<sup>12</sup>. The Soviet sphere

<sup>8</sup> Memorandum Maiskii to Molotov, 11 January 1944.

<sup>9</sup> Quotation in: T. V. Volokitina, *Stalin i smena strategicheskogo kursa Kremlia v kontse 40-ch godov: ot kompromissov k konfrontatsii*, in: *Stalinskoe desiatiletie kholodnoi voiny: fakty i gipotezy*, a c. di A. Chubar'ian et al., Nauka, Moscow 1999, pp. 10-22, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> A. Resis, *Spheres of Influence in Soviet Wartime Diplomacy*, in «Journal of Modern History», n. 53, 1981, pp. 417-439.

<sup>11</sup> G. Stourzh, *Um Einheit und Freiheit: Staatsvertrag, Neutralität und das Ende der Ost-West-Besetzung Österreichs 1945-1955*, Böhlau, Vienna 2005, pp. 11-28.

<sup>12</sup> V. O. Pechatnov, *The Big Three after World War II*, cit.

was meant to consist of the East-European and Balkan states and Scandinavia, the Western sphere of France, the Benelux countries, and the Mediterranean. Germany, Italy, Switzerland, and Austria were to be a neutral cushion-zone. It was expected that the latter would be liberated and occupied not only by the Red Army, but also by American and British forces. With every army imposing its political imprint on the country occupied – as Stalin foresaw<sup>13</sup> – Soviet influence would compete with Western influence<sup>14</sup>. Since he expected the Americans to withdraw from Europe within two years and Britain to be too weak to implement its policy in Central Europe, Stalin relied on a moderate long-term strategy.

The Austrian comrades got the message. Between 1935 and 1939, their handful of illegal activists had struggled to create an «anti-fascist» popular front – something that in semi-fascist Austria before the *Anschluss* was doomed to fail. After the intermezzo of 1939-41, they revived this propaganda line and developed the concept for the reconstruction of an independent Austria. On 12 July 1941, the London-based communist-controlled Council of Austrians, acting according to the Comintern directives issued shortly before<sup>15</sup>, called all political groups in exile to join forces for this struggle, and, six months later, the Free Austrian Movement was founded as a non-partisan umbrella organisation. From Moscow, the *Free Austria* radio programme aired several appeals to form an all-party Austrian Liberation Front and, in 1942, reported about the Front's constitution and call for a joint effort of all suppressed political groups against Nazi rule<sup>16</sup>. A broadcast of spring 1944 informed listeners about the Austrian Liberation Front's aim to contribute to the formation of a «bloc of all democratic parties and organisations». Not only in the Liberation Front's name but also in their own, the communists invited the other parties to join forces. Ernst Fischer, a KPÖ politburo member in Moscow, underlined in an interview in June that the communists were ready to cooperate with social democrats, Catholics, and «bourgeois-capitalist-democratic forces»<sup>17</sup>. A few days later, this «readiness» was backed by the KPÖ's manifesto «The Rebirth of Austria»<sup>18</sup>. There, the communists distanced themselves from any revolutionary aim and rather harped on national-patriotic themes, confirming the rights to own private property and to practice religion. Only the wording of the manifesto's aim, the construction of a «free independent *democratic people's republic* Austria», hinted at the true goals of its authors.

Before their leaders were sent home to Austria from Moscow in April 1945, the KPÖ leadership-in-exile, together with the CPSU foreign department (Otdel mezhdunarodnoi informatsii, OMI) drafted an action programme. An early version,

<sup>13</sup> M. Djilas, *Gespräche mit Stalin*, Fischer, Frankfurt 1962, p. 146.

<sup>14</sup> V. Mastny, *Soviet Plans for Postwar Europe*, in *The Failure of Peace in Europe, 1943-48*, A. Varsori, E. Calandri, Palgrave, Basingstoke 2002, pp. 59-74, p. 66.

<sup>15</sup> Comintern directives, June 1941. In N. Lebedeva, M. Narinskii, *Komintern*, cit., pp. 91-111.

<sup>16</sup> K. Vogelmann, *Propaganda*, cit., pp. 55-57, pp. 115-119.

<sup>17</sup> Record of a conversation between Mr. Smollett and Er[n]st Fischer, 24 June 1944. In Public Record Office, London, FO 371/38829, 119-128, 123.

<sup>18</sup> *Die Kommunisten im Kampf für die Unabhängigkeit Österreichs*, a. c. di KPÖ, Stern, Vienna 1955, pp. 153-156.

presumably sketched by Ernst Fischer, surfaced in the 1990s in his personal papers<sup>19</sup>. This programme envisaged the formation of a Liberation Front consisting of communists, social democrats, Catholics, «bourgeois democrats» and independents. The Front's tasks after the war were described as the nomination of candidates for the national assembly, the organisation of elections, and, finally, the formation of a government. The post of the head of government should be left to a «well known non-partisan person (a university professor or the like)». Within the government, the communists, however, would claim the Ministries of the Interior, of Economy, and of Education. Furthermore, the police department, «especially the political police», should be «organised and led by communists».

The political system sketched in this programme had characteristics of a «people's democracy». Even if the final version explicitly conceded the existence of political parties and mass organisations, the principle remained unchanged that they should not act independently but only within the Liberation Front or, as the final version called it, the Bloc of Democratic Parties and Mass Organisations<sup>20</sup>. Democratic competition was excluded from the outset, thus creating an advantage for the weak communist party organisation. Within the bloc, the communists could expand their influence by creating a unity of action, and later bringing about the fusion, with the social democrats, and by integrating and influencing the independents and the leaders of the mass organisations. The attached programme for the government seemed to be as moderate as in the earlier versions: the restoration of Austria as a «democratic republic», the liquidation of Nazi rule, the prosecution of Nazi criminals, and freedom of speech and of religion. However, the «denazification and democratisation» of the political apparatus, the nationalisation of the big industries, and land reform offered the chance to «purge» not only former Nazis but all kinds of potential opponents, to substitute old elites with new ones, to gain economic power and popularity and even to reward newly gained followers among the workers, peasants, and the intelligentsia.

This programme, based on the Soviet political line, was approved in April 1945 by the head of OMI Georgii Dimitrov. When he met with KPÖ leaders Johann Kopenig and Ernst Fischer, all agreed that the class struggle would not be over. The former Comintern secretary asked if the KPÖ would be the leading force in Austria. Fischer answered that it would not be the biggest party from the beginning but that it would «consider all problems of the transition to socialism in a constellation where it would be able to achieve its goals gradually»<sup>21</sup>. The national front and the «democratic republic» were in communist and Soviet thinking only temporary

<sup>19</sup> O. Rathkolb, *Wie homogen*, cit., pp.167-168.

<sup>20</sup> Khvostov to Paniushkin and Dimitrov, Political Platform of the KPÖ, April 1945. In: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii, Moscow, (hereafter RGASPI) 17/128/781/22-27. Text published in *Sowjetische Politik in Österreich 1945-1955: Dokumente aus russischen Archiven: Sovetskaia politika v Avstrii 1945-1955gg: Dokumenty iz Rossiiskikh arkhivov*, a c. di W. W. Mueller, A. Suppan, N. M. Naimark, G. Bordiugov, ÖAW, Vienna 2005, pp. 116-123.

<sup>21</sup> E. Fischer, *Erinnerungen und Reflexionen*, Rowohlt, Reinbek 1969, p. 467.

and transitional goals inseparably linked with the gradual installation of communist control and the final goal of transition to «people's democracy» and socialism – also in the case of Austria. Dimitrov approved this strategy.

### *Building a popular front, 1945*

Two days after the Red Army entered Austrian territory, on 2 April 1945, Dimitrov received an urgent phone call from the Kremlin. It was Stalin, who told him to select trustworthy Austrians for a mission in their homeland<sup>22</sup>. Such an order was nothing unusual but rather part of Soviet policy in 1944/45 to send leading foreign communists from Moscow back to their countries where they should start political activities and propaganda and take over certain key positions. The German comrades-in-exile had received a similar order two months earlier<sup>23</sup>.

Dimitrov called the OMI desk officer for German and Austrian affairs, Vladimir Khvostov, as well as Koplemig and together they compiled a list consisting of four Austrian communists-in-exile, among them Koplemig and Fischer themselves, and of four leaders of the Moscow-based Anti-fascist Bureau of Austrian POWs which had been founded in November 1944. Furthermore, Dimitrov recommended bringing nine Austrian comrades who had joined Tito's partisans back into their homeland<sup>24</sup>. Most of them were assigned certain political tasks, such as a «leading function» on the national level, «work among the intelligentsia» or a «leading political function». After the proposal had been sent to Stalin on 3 April, Dimitrov on the following day again received Khvostov, Koplemig, and Fischer to examine and discuss Fischer's KPÖ draft programme of action and to give instructions<sup>25</sup>. After a last meeting with Dimitrov on 7 April, the Austrians were sent by plane to their homeland.

Together with them, a group of Soviet experts led by Vladimir Dekanozov, the deputy foreign commissar and newly appointed political advisor for Austrian affairs<sup>26</sup>, also departed. Their draft instructions ordered them to delay the formation of the allied control apparatus. In the meantime, the Soviet high commander in eastern Austria should, without the participation of the Western allies, confiscate industrial assets and appoint new political leaders. While «activities of bourgeois political parties» were «not to be allowed», the Austrian communist party had «to be given

<sup>22</sup> Entry, 2 April 1945. In *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov, 1933-1949*, a c. di I. Banac, Yale Univ. Pr., New Haven 2003, pp. 365-366.

<sup>23</sup> *Nach Hitler kommen wir. Dokumente zur Programmatik der Moskauer KPD-Führung 1944/45 für Nachkriegsdeutschland*, a c. di P. Erler, H. Laude, M. Wilke, Akademie, Berlin 1994, 115.

<sup>24</sup> Dimitrov to Stalin, 3 April 1945. In W. Mueller et al., *Sowjetische Politik: Sovetskaia politika*, pp. 108-111.

<sup>25</sup> Entry, 4 April 1945. In *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov*, a c. di I. Banac, cit., p. 366; E. Fischer, *Erinnerungen*, cit., pp. 467-469.

<sup>26</sup> Politburo Decision 108, 7 April 1945. In: RGASPI 17/3/1052/24.

the possibility to start its work to collect its forces [and] to consolidate its influence among the masses»<sup>27</sup>.

It is unclear whether this directive was enforced. Its orders were implemented only partially. On 2 April, the Soviet high command had ordered the Red Army to take over the supreme authority in eastern Austria, to appoint native provisional administrators in all towns, and even prepare for the formation of a provisional Austrian government<sup>28</sup>. When Soviet officers selected the native administrators of their towns, they, in many cases, resorted to communists<sup>29</sup>. More than 50 percent of the provisional district mayors and district police officers of Vienna were communists; in St. Pölten, the second largest city of the province, and in industrial towns like Steyr, the Russians appointed communists as mayors and chiefs of police. However, with mushrooming local initiatives by activists of other political parties, the lack of communist cadres became clear and their party remained far from being the dominating force.

In the meantime, however, another Austrian was quick to offer the formation of a provisional government. From the town to which he had retired in 1938, Karl Renner contacted on 3 April a Soviet officer and suggested helping in the «rebuilding [of] Austria». The following day, Stalin was informed and immediately instructed the Soviet commander Fedor Tolbukhin to «trust him»<sup>30</sup>. After two weeks, the veteran social democratic leader received permission to form a government consisting of representatives of all anti-fascist parties in equal numbers. This step enabled Stalin to speed-up the constitution of an Austrian government acceptable to the Western allies before the latter's armies reached Austria<sup>31</sup>. Some days later, the order was given to all political parties to register with the Soviet *komendatura* in order to obtain the right to become legally active. The KPÖ reacted by giving up its attempt to form a communist-led Liberation Front and joined Renner in his efforts to create a provisional government.

When Renner refused to grant the KPÖ three out of twelve governmental posts, the three-party negotiations were threatened by failure. It was Tolbukhin's political officer in charge who seems to have convinced the designated chancellor to fulfil

<sup>27</sup> Draft directive on the duties of the political group for Austrian affairs, [April 1945]. In: Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii, Moscow, (hereafter AVPRF) 06/7/26/325/4-9. Extracts published in W. Mueller, *Die sowjetische Besatzung*, cit., pp. 239-242.

<sup>28</sup> Order high command to 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian front, 2 April 1945. In W. Mueller et al., *Sowjetische Politik: Sovetskaia politika*, cit., pp. 106-109.

<sup>29</sup> A. Schärf, *April 1945 in Wien*, Volksbuchhandlung, Vienna 1948, pp. 33-35; J. Rauchenberger, *Bezirksvertretungen in Wien*, RR, Vienna 1990, pp. 451-455; Conversation military council 3rd Ukrainian front with Austrian communists, 16 May 1945. In W. Mueller et al., *Sowjetische Politik: Sovetskaia politika*, cit., pp. 145-155, p. 149.

<sup>30</sup> Stalin to Tolbukhin, 4 April 1945. In W. Mueller et al., *Sowjetische Politik: Sovetskaia politika*, cit., pp. 112-113.

<sup>31</sup> Stalin seemed to be particularly in a hurry to do so after a Provisional Austrian National Committee in Paris had announced its activities in January 1945 and taken steps that were likely to be interpreted by the Soviet secret service as preparation of a bourgeois Austrian government-in-exile. W. Aichinger, *Sowjetische Österreichpolitik*, 160.



the communists' demands<sup>32</sup>. The provisional government formed in late April 1945 consisted of twelve members; three of them were social democrats, three communists, four conservatives, and two non-partisan experts. The communists Franz Honner and Ernst Fischer administered the Ministries of Interior and of Education. In the highest governmental body, the political cabinet council, which was formed by Renner himself and one representative of each party, Johann Koplenig represented the communists. When the provisional provincial governments were constituted, the Soviets also hinted that they wanted all three parties to have a roughly equal share of the power – a demand which the other parties did not dare to ignore openly<sup>33</sup>.

The communist participation in the government, their control of the police, and the leftist majority in virtually all important political bodies constituted an outwardly strong political position of the KPÖ which it had not received without Soviet support. However, many of these gains were neutralised by various factors. The first among them was the legal construction and the governmental practice of Renner's provisional cabinet. The tricky old fox had never trusted the other political parties and implanted two principles that were likely to hamper all attempts of one party to take over control in the government: every minister received two deputies from the two other parties, and all decisions had to be taken with unanimity. Whenever unanimity was not reached in the cabinet, the presiding chancellor (Renner), on the basis of the state of emergency, claimed the right to cast the decisive vote – a practice which made him subject to communist accusations of establishing a «presidential dictatorship»<sup>34</sup>. These mechanisms neutralised communist efforts and fostered the formation of an anti-communist majority of conservatives and rightist social democrats within the government. These groups had decided that it was essential to overcome the cleavage between their parties that had pushed pre-war Austria into civil war. Therefore, they aimed at a partition of power among themselves and at forestalling any deeper changes of the political system as envisaged by the KPÖ. In late summer 1945, the communists charged the other parties with ganging up on them and obstructing virtually every political initiative.

The most important initiatives of the communists within the government included their proposal for a «democratisation» of the administrative apparatus, of the economy and of education, for a nationalisation of the heavy industry, and for a thorough «purge». All parts of public life should be «cleansed» not only of Nazis, but also of their «reactionary» precursors and opened-up to «new people», «democrats» and former resistance fighters. While the communists were able to implement most of their own ideas in the police apparatus and to make it a stronghold of their party, other initiatives were blocked by the conservatives and social democrats. The communists resorted to a mobilisation of their followers, but did not achieve a substantial change of their coalition-partners' policy. In the discussion about a new constitution, the parts were assigned the other way round: Renner pushed for a restoration

<sup>32</sup> E. Fischer, *Das Ende einer Illusion: Erinnerungen 1945-1955*, Molden, Vienna 1973, p. 67.

<sup>33</sup> M. Rauchensteiner, *Die Zwei: Die Große Koalition in Österreich 1945-1966*, ÖBV, Vienna 1987, pp. 44-46.

<sup>34</sup> Quotation in: H. Gärtner, *Zwischen Moskau*, cit., p. 75.

of the pre-war constitution while the communists tried to forestall this. They did not officially bring forward their plans for a «Democratic People's Republic Austria»<sup>35</sup>, but rather pleaded for a transitional law modelled after similar regulations adopted in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia<sup>36</sup>. Their public appeals for the creation of a «true people's republic»<sup>37</sup> made clear what kind of constitution they wanted. However, Renner did not give them much time to elaborate on their proposals. After a lengthy discussion in the cabinet with no unanimity reached, he declared the pre-war constitution adopted and the dumbfounded communists could only file their protests. If the communists had calculated that they could push through their agenda with support of the social democrats and some of the non-partisan experts, they found themselves increasingly isolated and confronted with an alliance of conservatives and social democrats<sup>38</sup>.

Not only inside, but also outside of the government, the KPÖ in 1945 suffered several momentous setbacks. The first among them was the failure of the communist plan to create outwardly non-partisan mass organisations, a key element of the national-front strategy. While communists and Soviet authorities succeeded in convincing the other parties to create the all-party daily *Neues Österreich: Organ der Demokratischen Einheit* (New Austria: Organ of Democratic Unity), the social democrats did not give up the idea of reviving their own traditional professional, youth, women's, and sports organisations. Therefore, the communist initiatives for a non-partisan Free Austrian Youth Movement or a League of Democratic Women failed. When these organisations were founded, the communists remained alone. In a similar development, communist plans for a non-party trade union were frustrated by social democratic trade unionists forming a faction within the board of trade unions<sup>39</sup>.

The second major setback for the communists was their failure to create a «unity of action of the working class» with the social democrats. As the Czechoslovak and the German examples show<sup>40</sup>, this question was crucial for any communist take-over. At first, the KPÖ succeeded in convincing the social democrats to organise joint party rallies in May, and a liaison committee of both parties met for several meetings. However, when the date for general elections was set for the fall of 1945, the rightist social democratic leadership decided that it would be unwise to ally itself too closely with the communist party, which was associated by the population

<sup>35</sup> M. Mugrauer, *Die Politik der KPÖ*, cit., pp. 64-75. On the KPÖ's position concerning the constitution: pp. 132-144.

<sup>36</sup> Protocol Council of Ministers, 13 May 1945. In *Protokolle des Kabinettsrates der Provisorischen Regierung Karl Renner 1945. vol. 1: «im eigenen Haus Ordnung schaffen»: Protokolle des Kabinettsrates 29. April bis 10. Juli 1945*, a c. di G. Enderle-Burcel et al., Berger, Horn 1995, pp. 62-92.

<sup>37</sup> Report Kopenig to KPÖ conference Vienna, 13 May 1945. In: RGASPI, 495/80/561/84-90.

<sup>38</sup> On the KPÖ's initiatives concerning the «democratisation» of the administrative apparatus, for the nationalisation of the heavy industry, and for denazification: M. Mugrauer, *Die Politik der KPÖ*, cit., pp. 145-200.

<sup>39</sup> A. Pelinka, *Auseinandersetzung*, cit., p. 179.

<sup>40</sup> On Czechoslovakia: K. Kaplan, *Der kurze Marsch: Kommunistische Machtübernahme in der Tschechoslowakei*, Oldenbourg, Munich 1981, pp. 142-145, pp. 225-242. On Germany: N. M. Naimark, *Die Russen in Deutschland: Die Sowjetische Besatzungszone 1945 bis 1949*, Propyläen, Berlin 1999, pp. 319-333.

with the unpopular Red Army. This decision was also influenced by the British Labour Party leadership, which felt extremely frustrated by Soviet policy in Eastern Europe and advised to the Austrian social democrats not to continue the national-front policy, but rather to seek a settlement with the conservatives and contain communist power<sup>41</sup>.

The Soviet authorities tried to forestall these developments. Already in May, they were alarmed by the communist leadership's complaints about the informal coalition of the other parties against the communists and about the restorative tendencies within the provisional government. Aleksei Zheltov, Soviet deputy high commander in Austria in charge of political affairs, advised the communist leaders to «win over the masses [...] Once the masses are won by the communists, they can achieve every situation that seems necessary to them»<sup>42</sup>. As a reaction to this unwanted course of events, the Soviets started a series of political interventions in which Zheltov and the political advisor Evgenii Kiselev urged Renner to speed-up the sentencing of high-ranking Nazis, at the same time sparing the rank and file, to reform the constitution, to draw on «new democrats» for the administrative apparatus, and to create a «unified party commission» in order to take into account the wishes of *all* political parties – all demands the communist had voiced several times<sup>43</sup>. Renner reacted flexibly, outwardly regretting his mistakes, but without seriously changing his policy. As long as the Western powers, which due to Soviet procrastination arrived in Vienna in the late summer only, had not yet recognized the provisional government created under Stalin's auspices, it seemed unlikely that the Soviet officers would interfere too openly in the government's affairs. This would have reduced the chances of a quick recognition of their own creature.

One condition for Western recognition of the provisional government was the holding of general elections. The continuation of the national-front policy after the elections was, on Soviet enquiry, guaranteed by Renner personally, thus making elections acceptable to them<sup>44</sup>. Both Soviets and communists were optimistic about the KPÖ's electoral performance. Estimates between 8 and 25 percent<sup>45</sup> seemed justified – even against the background of the communist results in the recent French (26 percent) and Hungarian (17 percent) elections. Socialism and communism were popular and advancing in Europe in 1945, especially in the West<sup>46</sup>. Within parliament, a social-democratic-communist majority which – provided that there was unity of action of both parties – would have given the communists a strong lever seemed to be a safe bet. In a membership rally in the fall, the communists appealed

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<sup>41</sup> F. Weber, *Der Kalte Krieg in der SPÖ: Koalitionswächter, Pragmatiker und Revolutionäre Sozialisten*, Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, Vienna 1986, pp. 35-37.

<sup>42</sup> Conversation military council 3rd Ukrainian front with Austrian communists, 16 May 1945. In W. Mueller et al., *Sowjetische Politik: Sovetskaia politika*, cit., pp. 145-155, p. 153.

<sup>43</sup> W. Mueller, *Die sowjetische Besatzung*, cit., pp. 128-132.

<sup>44</sup> «*Österreichische Zeitung*», 22 September 1945.

<sup>45</sup> Hexmann to CPSU on Austrian elections, 8 December 1945. In: W. Mueller et al., *Sowjetische Politik: Sovetskaia politika*, cit., pp. 222-233, p. 222.

<sup>46</sup> T. Judt, *Post-War: A History of Europe*, Penguin, New York 2005, pp. 79-83, pp. 130-132.

to leftist social democrats who were disappointed with their rightist party leadership, to smallholders fed-up with the conservative party, and even to rank and file Nazis who – according to a directive of Stalin<sup>47</sup> – were invited to become members of the communist party. After the rally, the party that prior to 1934 had had only a few hundred followers<sup>48</sup> and in 1945, as in most East-European countries, had started with a handful activists and resistance fighters counted more than 120,000 members, thus reaching the pre-WWI level of the social democrats<sup>49</sup>. The electoral campaign seemed to proceed well, too<sup>50</sup>. Soviet authorities supported the communists by providing them with trucks, additional paper, and by showing themselves from their best side and creating a positive atmosphere<sup>51</sup>.

However, hopes of preserving or even strengthening communist influence in Austria were disappointed. In the general elections of 25 November 1945, the KPÖ, which was widely associated by the Austrian population with the Red Army and its rapes, murders, and sequestration of economic assets, suffered a crushing defeat (5.42 percent). Austrian communist leaders and their permanent representative in Moscow, Friedrich Hexmann, had to justify themselves in separate reports to Stalin. The main reason for the weak showing of the communists, they explained, was that «the Austrian people in its overwhelming majority neither fought against fascism nor against the war»<sup>52</sup>. As a further explanation they referred to the «25-year long baiting of the communists and the Soviet Union which, in these days, together with the exploitation of the known incidents [!] was driven to a peak».

There seems to be some truth in this. Recent studies argue that there was «some correlation between the magnitude of the resistance [during] and communist political successes immediately after the war»<sup>53</sup>. In West-European countries with strong

<sup>47</sup> In January 1946 the German communist leader Wilhelm Pieck noted down after a meeting with the Soviet high commander in Germany: «Stalin's consent on: tactical line for treatment of Nazi members – distinguish – fight active Nazis as before, draw on formal rank and file members of the Nazi party, tell them, that they can count on our support, if they are loyal, that we will give them work (Similar to message St[alin] to Austria)». Meeting with Marshall Bokov, 23 January 1946. In *Wilhelm Pieck: Aufzeichnungen zur Deutschlandpolitik 1945-1953*, a c. di R. Badstübner, W. Loth, Wilfried, Akademie, Berlin 1994, pp. 63-65, p. 63.

<sup>48</sup> On the KPÖ 1918-1933: J. Ehmer, *Die Kommunistische Partei Österreichs*, in *Handbuch des politischen Systems Österreichs: Erste Republik 1918-1933*, a c. di E. Tálos et al., Manz, Vienna 1995, pp. 218-230; on the KPÖ after 1945: Id., *Die Kommunistische Partei Österreichs*, in *Handbuch des politischen Systems Österreichs*, a c. di H. Dachs et al., Manz, Vienna 1992, pp. 275-285.

<sup>49</sup> Hexmann to CPSU on Austrian elections, 8 December 1945. In W. Mueller et al., *Sowjetische Politik: Sovetskaia politika*, cit., pp. 222-233, p. 227. In July 1947, the party membership reached 155,000. In: Arhiv Srbije i Crne Gore, Beograd, (hereafter ASCG) Fond 507/IX, 6/I-30, 44.

<sup>50</sup> Conversation Ernst Fischer with Martin Herz, 11 November 1945. In *Understanding Austria: The Reports of Martin F. Herz, Political Officer of the US Legation in Vienna 1945-1948*, a c. di R. Wagnleitner, Neugebauer, Salzburg 1980, pp. 64-65.

<sup>51</sup> W. Mueller, *Die sowjetische Besatzung*, p. 173.

<sup>52</sup> Kopenig and Fürnberg to Stalin, 18 December 1945. In W. Mueller et al., *Sowjetische Politik: Sovetskaia politika*, cit., pp. 233-243, p. 233.

<sup>53</sup> D. Sassoon, *The Rise and Fall of West European Communism 1939-48*, in «Contemporary European History», n. 1, 1992, pp. 139-169, p. 151.

communist parties such as France, Belgium and Italy, the communist resistance record against Nazi occupation was among the strongest motivations to vote for the communists. However, the principal incentive was Soviet prestige resulting from the victory against Nazi-Germany. In Austria the situation was different. Communist resistance – although it had paid a high price – had never become popular, and the Soviet Union, due to Goebbels' propaganda and the disastrous behaviour of its army in Austria (the «known incidents»), was soon discredited. The competitors of the communists had only to placard the motto: «Those who love the Red Army vote for the KPÖ!». A certain role in this development was also played by the friction between the allies and the beginning of the Cold War, both indicating that the Western powers did not agree with Soviet policy and that therefore the Western-minded parties would receive Western backing if they resisted the communists.

The Soviet side seems to have been as stunned about the electoral disaster as the communists and drew its own consequences. In Germany, the campaign for a social-democrat-communist party merger, which had already begun earlier, was accelerated; registration of «small» Nazis was relaxed; and the communist party leadership was warned by the Soviets of «elections – danger – Austria»<sup>54</sup>.

### *The policy of the Austrian CP 1946–1953*

After the 1945 elections, the KPÖ's participation in the government was restricted to one ministry (ironically, the department of electricity, reminding of Lenin's famous formula: «communism is Soviet rule plus electrification»). However, it soon became clear that the remaining ministerial post was rather a burden than a lever to actual influence on governmental policy. The communist minister Karl Altmann had no choice but to follow his colleagues in the council of ministers and, in many instances, to vote against the political line of his party<sup>55</sup>. The KPÖ was therefore held co-responsible by the population for the political stagnation and the economic crisis. This made it increasingly difficult for the communists to communicate their position as semi-oppositional party. It is hardly surprising that the KPÖ was looking for a way out of the calamity. Confronted with their loss of power, the communists were already in 1946 playing with the idea of leaving the coalition and provoking new elections. As party leader Johann Koplenig and party secretary Friedl Fűrberg pointed out in a letter to Stalin, they expected new elections to bring 10 percent for the KPÖ and a solid social-democrat-communist majority<sup>56</sup>. Such a result, they had calculated earlier, would increase the pressure on the social democratic leadership

<sup>54</sup> Ulbricht on conversation with Bokov, 22 December 1945. In L. Badstübner, P. Wilhelm, 62; Conversation Makukhin with Ackermann, 15 December 1945. In Kynin; Laufer, SSSR II, 305-308.

<sup>55</sup> M. Rauchensteiner, *Die Zwei*, cit., pp. 107-108; p. 111. In Summer 1947, the communist minister voted even in favour of an Austrian participation in the Marshall Plan.

<sup>56</sup> Koplenig and Fűrberg to Stalin, 2 November 1946. In W. Mueller et al., *Sowjetische Politik: Sovetskaia politika*, cit., pp. 341-351, p. 347.

to cooperate with the communists, to create a «unity of action», and, probably, even to merge into a «unified workers' party»<sup>57</sup>.

According to the custom in communist parties, the KPÖ leadership asked Stalin for his «advice», rather his decision. We do not know if they received an answer. Obviously the Kremlin neither questioned their belief nor vetoed their proposal. In January 1947, the Austrian comrades embarked on a course of sharp opposition to the other coalition parties and called for new elections. In light of the economic malaise in post-war Austria, the disastrous winter of 1946/47 and the unsatisfactory situation of the population, the aggressive new course of the communists soon produced first results. From spring 1947 on, demonstrations and strikes became more frequent, and on 5 May approximately 5000 workers, in an action inspired by the KPÖ, stormed the federal chancellor's office in Vienna<sup>58</sup>. The Soviet side approved of the confrontational policy aimed at inciting popular unrest and class struggle. In a meeting on 15 May, high commissioner Vladimir Kurasov told Fürnberg that it would be incorrect *not* to expect «political changes» in Austria that would «gain pace in the course of the class struggle»<sup>59</sup>.

For some months it seemed that the Soviet scenario would materialise and the Austrian government appeared to be under extreme pressure. The communist actions certainly shook the coalition as much as the deep economic crisis within and the events around Austria. Only a few weeks after the May riots, Ernst Fischer launched another attempt either to boost communist influence in the government or to break the coalition<sup>60</sup>. The communist had played «the Russian card» and told the other coalition parties in separate secret talks that Stalin would never grant the Austrians a peace treaty unless there were more reliable, i.e. communist or pro-Soviet, ministers in the government. When the talks became public (a few days after the communist attack against the Hungarian Prime Minister Ferenc Nagy had stirred up the West), they created a huge scandal. However, neither the popular unrest nor Fischer's scheme, which in light of the concurrent events in Budapest took on the air of an international general communist offensive, undermined the cooperation between the conservatives and the social democrats. The two parties seemed to be even more determined to withstand communist pressure or temptation and they remained cautious enough neither to opt for bolder communist participation in the government nor to provoke new elections.

It remained up to the communists to withdraw from the coalition. They did so in line with the new directives Zhdanov had given to the communist parties at the founding conference of the Cominform after the end of communist participation in

<sup>57</sup> Memorandum Kopenig, 5 June 1946. In: RGASPI, 17/128/907/85-99.

<sup>58</sup> A. Kurth Cronin, *Great Power Politics and the Struggle over Austria 1945-1955*, Cornell, Ithaca 1986, pp. 51-52.

<sup>59</sup> Meeting Kurasov with the KPÖ leaders, 15 May 1947. In: RGASPI, 17/128/297/114-122.

<sup>60</sup> N. Gehler, «*This nine days wonder*»? *Die «Figl-Fischerrei» von 1947: Eine politische Affäre mit Nachspiel*, in *Politische Affären und Skandale in Österreich: Von Mayerling bis Waldheim*, a. c. di N. Gehler, H. Sickinger, Kulturverlag, Thaur 1995, pp. 346-379.

the French and Italian government and the announcement of the Truman doctrine and the Marshall plan. The Soviet reaction to these events basically meant the abandonment of cooperation and moderation at the international on the national levels in east and west. At the Cominform meeting, the CPSU secretary had criticised French and Italian comrades for having followed the path of the national front and «parliamentary illusions» of a peaceful transition to socialism. He had also put out the motto that the world was divided into two antagonistic camps. After the United States had launched the Marshall plan, all communists, Zhdanov declared, had one task: to fight American influence<sup>61</sup>. Anti-Americanism replaced anti-fascism. With the anti-Hitler alliance between the United States and the USSR on the international level broken, there was no reason for the communists to continue the national-front cooperation. They were ordered to give up moderation and launch a sharp opposition policy against their former coalition partners. The Austrian communists, while still in government, had already done so from the beginning of 1947. When they finally resigned from the coalition in November (on the occasion of the Austrian adoption of a currency reform), nobody really cared. The social democrats did not join them as Koplénig had expected; the government continued to function; and the communists found themselves alone in opposition.

This unsatisfactory situation for the KPÖ was made even worse by the expectation that, in the future, their Soviet protectors might leave the country. The first US initiative for an Austrian State Treaty was launched in June 1946, and in the spring of 1947, the official negotiations started. With an eye to these prospects, the communists took refuge to increasingly radical ways for gaining and keeping political power. Preliminary stages of this strategy can be found in Koplénig's letters to Stalin from 1946 where he suggested a Soviet takeover not only of the former German economic assets in eastern Austria (as was agreed at the Potsdam conference 1945) but of the whole economy in the Soviet zone<sup>62</sup>. The leading positions in the economy should be given to communists, with industrial production, export, and import oriented to the USSR. Furthermore, Koplénig called for a Soviet support-programme for the eastern zone which would «strengthen the influence of the Soviet Union» there<sup>63</sup>. Such a strategy would have split Austria into a communist-controlled Soviet protectorate and a western part. Probably in view of this very prospect (and due to

<sup>61</sup> Report Zhdanov on the international Situation, 25 September 1947. In *The Cominform: Minutes of the three conferences 1947/ 1948/ 1949*, a c. di G. Procacci et al., Feltrinelli, Milano 1994, pp. 216-251, pp. 450-461, pp. 459-461. On the creation of the Cominform: L. Gibianskii, *Kak vznik Kominform: Po novym arkhivnym materialam*, in «*Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*», n. 4, 1993, pp. 131-152; G. Adibekov, *How the First Conference of the Cominform Came About*, in *The Cominform*, a c. di G. Procacci et al., cit., pp. 3-9; A. di Biagio, *The Establishment of the Cominform*, in Id., pp. 11-34; G. Adibekov, *Das Kominform und Stalins Neuordnung Europas*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt 2002, pp. 69-120. Cfs. C. Bekes, *Soviet Plans to establish the Cominform in Early 1946: New Evidence from the Hungarian Archives*, in «Cold War International History Project Bulletin», n. 10, 1998, pp. 135-137.

<sup>62</sup> Koplénig and Fürnberg to Filippov [=Stalin], 20 March 1946. In: RGASPI, 17/128/907/81-83.

<sup>63</sup> Koplénig and Fürnberg to Stalin, June 1946. In W. Mueller et al., *Sowjetische Politik: Sovetskaia politika*, cit., pp. 262-267, p. 267.

the lack of Soviet interest and means), no such action was implemented by the Soviet occupation authorities and Koplénig's proposals were left unanswered.

Given their desperate situation, the KPÖ leadership continued to consider a partition of the country as a strategy to regain power at least in the eastern zone. The issue was brought up in a secret meeting of Friedl Fűrberg and Franz Honner with the CPSU Central European desk officer Georgii Korotkevich in Budapest in the night to 20 October 1947. The Austrian delegation had had talks on the subject with Hungarian Party leader Mátyás Rákosi and they were planning to travel to Belgrade in order to get Tito's advice<sup>64</sup>. The partition of Austria was mentioned as one of several scenarios that the KPÖ leadership wanted to discuss with Stalin and Molotov. Tito seems to have reacted positively to the perspective of an Austrian partition.

Not so the Soviet Union. In February 1948, Koplénig and Fűrberg were summoned to Moscow where Zhdanov told them that he had learned about their opinion that «a division of Austria would be better than any other alternative»<sup>65</sup>. He stated that this was not acceptable. Fűrberg answered that, if no end to the occupation could be reached, a partition of the country «would be the best way» and that «the Yugoslav comrades» were of the same opinion. However, on the eve of Stalin's controversy with Tito, this seems to have made the plan even more unacceptable (and later served as one of the Soviet charges against the Yugoslav dictator<sup>66</sup>). Only two days earlier, Stalin had had talks with Bulgarian and Yugoslav delegations<sup>67</sup> and was certainly not in the mood to create problems over Austria as long as the question was unresolved, the Berlin blockade was taking shape, and the German question in limbo. The KPÖ leaders had to recant their strategy. Zhdanov told them that they should obey the declaration of the Cominform stating that the power of the «democratic forces» was gaining ground everywhere, also in Austria, which would thus one day be «in the hands of the communists». He did not elaborate on how this should come about nor did he mention that, as long as the Western powers occupied the west of Austria, a division of the country would have provided them with the strategically more important part of the country. The Soviet zone, on the other hand, with its 1.5 million inhabitants was too small and economically too weak to be worth taking such a risk and to be viable as an independent state. It seems to have been clear to the Soviet leadership that a partition of the country

<sup>64</sup> Korotkevich to Baranov, 25 October 1947. In: RGASPI, 17/128/1089/18-19. Unfortunately, no documentary evidence was found in Hungarian or Serbian archives.

<sup>65</sup> Conversation Zhdanov with Koplénig and Fűrberg, 13 February 1948. In W. Mueller et al., *Sowjetische Politik: Sovetskaia politika*, cit., pp. 452-465. Cf. Id., *Die Teilung Österreichs als politische Option für KPÖ und UdSSR 1948*, in «*Zeitgeschichte*», n. 32, 2005/1, pp. 47-54.

<sup>66</sup> On 18 March 1948 the International Department of the CPSU reported that Tito had supported the partition plan in order to strengthen its position in the Danubian countries. G. Muraschko, A. Noskova, T. Wolokitina, *Das Zentralkomitee der VKP(B) und das Ende der «nationalen Wege zum Sozialismus»*, in «*Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung*», 1994, pp. 9-37, pp. 24-25.

<sup>67</sup> L. Gibianskii, *The Soviet Bloc and the Initial Stage of the Cold War: Archival Documents on Stalin's Meetings with Communist Leaders of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, 1946-1948*, in «Cold War International History Project Bulletin», n. 10, 1998, pp. 112-134.



between east and west could have led to a new *Anschluss* of western Austria to West Germany – something Stalin wished least of all. Regardless of the Soviet goal of creating a communist-led government in Austria, a solution including a partition of the country was unacceptable to the Kremlin.

With the «GDR model» ruled out for Austria by the Kremlin itself, the Soviets and their Austrian hands had to resort to other strategies. Perhaps the most comprehensive project to weaken their competitors and to bring the communists back to power was the attempt to split the non-communist parties and to create new political alliances under the leadership of the KPÖ. In 1946, the Soviet Element of the Allied Commission for Austria and the communists had established clandestine contacts with a social-democratic dissident, Erwin Scharf, who, after expulsion from his party, founded the Socialist Workers' Party<sup>68</sup>. The Soviets supported this secession in the hopes of splitting the moderate social democratic party and of winning over the working masses to the communist cause. On the eve of the general elections of 1949, Scharf joined the communists, thus forming the Leftist Bloc which was inspired and funded by the Soviet element in order to serve as a nucleus for a new pro-Soviet «unity front of the democratic and patriotic forces»<sup>69</sup>. Despite these efforts, the communist share of the vote stagnated at 5.08 percent.

On the eve of the next general elections, the pro-Soviet Democratic Union, also by invitation of the Soviets<sup>70</sup>, joined the bloc with the communists and the leftist socialists. It was led by Josef Dobretsberger, a leftist-conservative university professor, who as early as 1946 had been chosen by the communists and the Soviets to split the ruling People's Party<sup>71</sup>. In order to better appeal to the former Nazi electorate and to weaken its favoured party VdU, the communists (with Stalin's consent) also funded an organisation for former Nazis, the National League<sup>72</sup>. In October 1951, the Politburo of the CPSU told the Austrian comrades that it was «desirable [...] to unify all democratic and patriotic forces» in an All-Austrian Front of Peace or National Front including the Leftist Bloc, the Democratic Union, the Austro-Soviet friendship society, and even the National League<sup>73</sup>. In November 1952, this National Front, called People's Opposition, was presented to the public. Basically, this new bloc was a coalition of the KPÖ with itself and its recruiting branches

<sup>68</sup> F. Weber, *Der Kalte Krieg in der SPÖ*, cit., pp. 165-186.

<sup>69</sup> Head of Soviet propaganda dept. in Austria Dubrovitskii on the elections in Austria, 27 October 1949. In W. Mueller et al., *Sowjetische Politik: Sovetskaia politika*, cit., pp. 605-629, p. 627.

<sup>70</sup> High commissioner in Austria Sviridov to CPSU, 21 March 1953. In W. Mueller et al., *Sowjetische Politik: Sovetskaia politika*, cit., pp. 818-891, p. 845.

<sup>71</sup> Conversation of high commissioner Kurasov with the leaders of the KPÖ, 16 September 1946. In W. Mueller et al., *Sowjetische Politik: Sovetskaia politika*, cit., pp. 307-335, p. 331.

<sup>72</sup> Kopenig and Fürnberg to Filippov [=Stalin], 21 October 1950. In: RGASPI, 82/2/1121/18-20. On the National League cf. F. Keller, *Stalinistischer Populismus: Die Nationale Liga*, in *Populismus in Österreich*, a c. di A. Pelinka, Junius, Vienna 1987, pp. 110-122.

<sup>73</sup> Politburo Decision No. 84 «*Osobaia Papka*» (Special File), 18 October 1951. In W. Mueller et al., *Sowjetische Politik: Sovetskaia politika*, cit., pp. 771-773. Finally, the National League was not included into the People's Opposition because the KPÖ feared that this coalition would be unacceptable to the former Nazis.

rather than a broadening of its political and organisational spectrum. Among the social democrats and the conservatives, Soviet backing of the merger soon became known, and Dobretsberger, who was nominated front runner of the People's Opposition, was nicknamed by the social-democratic media as «Professor Sovietsberger» for his pro-Soviet inclination.

The strategy to found and/or fund new organisations controlled by the communists in order to split existing parties and then to include them in a multi-party bloc can be observed in Germany as well, where the SED created the Democratic Peasants Party and the National Democratic Party aimed at weakening respectively the Christian democrats and the liberals, or at integrating former Nazis into the communist bloc<sup>74</sup>. The motto of creating a National Front was also revived by Soviet and communist propaganda in Germany in the early 1950s. However, in Austria these ambitious plans – which were never wholeheartedly implemented by the reluctant communists – were frustrated by the third defeat of the KPÖ in general elections, on 22 February 1953 with only 5.28 percent of the vote.

Between these two electoral setbacks, the KPÖ tried to use a massive strike for destabilising the government. The outbreak of war in Korea had triggered a series of economic problems in Europe. When rioting communist workers demonstrated against rising prices and stagnating incomes and flooded the streets in a massive attempt at a general strike the Austrian government feared a Soviet military intervention would try to tilt the relation of forces and bring the communists to power. The Soviets provided the strikers with machines, trucks, propagandistic support, political backing, and protection. Soviet commanders prevented police units from becoming active against rioters, and the CPSU Politburo even issued an order to the high commissioner to «forbid any measures of the Austrian authorities against democratic elements and participants of the strike»<sup>75</sup>. However, there was no direct armed support: «Confronted with the dilemma of either allowing the Communist Party to suffer a crushing defeat or committing the Soviet troops necessary to stave off such a setback, the Russians [...] refused to intervene directly. Soviet troops had never been used directly in the creation of 'people's democracies' throughout Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union did not break this pattern in Austria»<sup>76</sup>. After a few days, and in view of the massive counterpropaganda of the government and the social democratic trade union leadership, and due to counteraction by social democratic workers, the strike movement broke down.

<sup>74</sup> On DBD and NDPD: M. Kaiser, «*Es muss demokratisch aussehen*»... *Moskau und die Gleichschaltung des Parteiensystems in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands 1944/45-1948/49*, in *Gleichschaltung unter Stalin? Die Entwicklung der Parteien im östlichen Europa*, a c. di S. Kreuzberger, M. Görtemaker, Schöningh, Paderborn 2002, pp. 265-299, p. 295; on the National Front: G. Wettig, *Bereitschaft zu Einheit in Freiheit? Die sowjetische Deutschlandpolitik 1945-1955*, Olzog, Munich 1999, pp. 168-171.

<sup>75</sup> Politburo Decree 78/335, 25 October 1950. In: RGASPI, 17/3/1566/335.

<sup>76</sup> Bader, Austria, 181. Cf. J. Lewis, *Austria 1950: Strikes, «Putsch», and their Political Context*, in «European History Quarterly», n. 30, 2000, pp. 533-552.

This disastrous experience seems, however, not to have deterred the KPÖ from planning another attempt. One year later, in the fall of 1951, the CPYu was informed about a KPÖ plan to organise a general strike on the occasion of a currency reform and devaluation in Austria<sup>77</sup>. The Soviet Union was said to be ready to take care of the strike fund and even to provide strikers who lost their jobs with new ones in the Soviet enterprises in Austria. In the fall of 1952, the Yugoslavs got information on KPÖ plans for armed attacks on US facilities in Austria<sup>78</sup>. However, none of these plans was realised.

Although the party was able more or less to maintain its position in general elections, it became increasingly isolated and excluded from political power. Like their West European comrades, Austrian communists, due to their radical propaganda and actions and their close relationship to the USSR, were perceived and depicted by their political competitors as enemies of democracy, as a threat to freedom, and as a fifth column of the Kremlin. With their uncritical endorsement of the Stalin cult, their «internationalist» loyalty to all Soviet political moves, their radical anti-American and anti-social-democratic propaganda, and their violent riots and massive strikes, the communists did their best to confirm this impression, thus becoming actors and victims of the Cold War.

A certain role in this development was played by the friction between the great powers. Although Austria was of secondary importance to the great powers, its location between the two emerging blocs and the determination that it not be lost to the other side made Austria – together with Germany – a source of tension. The first clash had happened in May 1945 when Stalin, without consulting the Western powers, empowered the provisional government. This seeming parallel to Soviet behaviour in Eastern Europe raised fears in the West that Stalin might try to turn Austria into a communist country. Although tension eased, the Western authorities continued to consider Austria a test case for containing communism. The Cold War led to a rift within the country between the pro-Western anti-communist coalition government representing 83–95 percent of the electorate and the communists who tried to destabilize the government with strikes and riots. Both sides looked for new supporters within Austria, especially among former Nazis. As a consequence, denazification was scaled back and, eventually, stopped. Both sides also pressed their external allies by exaggerating their fears in an effort to maximize support, thus contributing to the spiralling internal and international tension.

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<sup>77</sup> Reports on the KPÖ, the internal political situation of Austria, and the planning of actions of the KPÖ for the moment of an devaluation of the Schilling, 24 October 1951. In: ASCG, Fond 507/IX, 6/I-78.

<sup>78</sup> The Yugoslav report was referring to a KPÖ meeting on 21 October 1952 where communists were informed that the propaganda campaign against the United States was no longer sufficient. Armed attacks were to be launched after the end of the World Peace Congress. Weaponry was said to be stored in many Soviet enterprises in Austria. Plans for communist attacks against the Western powers, 29 October 1952. In: ASCG, Fond 507/IX, 6/I-113.

*Forms and limits of Soviet support to the KPÖ*

The relation between the Austrian communists and the Soviet Union followed the principles of «Proletarian Internationalism»<sup>79</sup>. This implied that the communists had to consult with the Soviet leadership and to observe the Kremlin's directives and general political line. At the same time, the comrades could count on Soviet support whenever their wishes did not contradict the interests of the USSR. This was underlined in May 1945 when deputy high commander Zheltov told the KPÖ leadership: «You have to stay in close contact with us [...]. Whenever there are problems you have to tell us and we will do all we can to help»<sup>80</sup>.

The communist debacle of November 1945 caused a break in the Soviet attitude towards Austria. Russian reports emphasized that the results of the elections had complicated the political situation and had changed the «correlation of forces» in favour of the «reactionary» ones. The Soviet reaction to this unpleasant development was to give up their sunshine policy towards the other political parties and to increase their support for the communists<sup>81</sup>. In the early 1950s, the aim of «supporting Austria's democratic [i.e. communist] organizations by consolidating their influence in the Soviet zone and in the Soviet companies and by raising their profile in the country's social and political life»<sup>82</sup>, as a decree of the USSR Council of Ministers reads, became one of the most important tasks of the Soviet authorities in Austria.

Soviet support for the KPÖ had various forms. The financial aid seems to have been considerable. On 11 December 1946, the Politburo of the CPSU decided to grant the Austrian «friends» a subsidy of two million Schillings<sup>83</sup>. In the following years, the amounts grew quickly<sup>84</sup>. After clandestine financial support for foreign communist parties was transferred from the CPSU to the International Fund for Leftist Workers' Organizations, subsidies worth 530,000 dollars for the Austrian comrades were approved in 1951, thus making the KPÖ one of the most highly subsidized such parties (the French communists received 600,000 dollars)<sup>85</sup>. In to-

<sup>79</sup> W. Mueller, «*Genosse Filippov*» und seine österreichischen «Freunde»: Fallstudien zur «Macht der Schwachen» im Verhältnis zwischen der KPdSU und einer Bruderpartei, in *Osteuropa vom Weltkrieg zur Wende*, a. c. di W. Mueller, M. Portmann, ÖAW, Vienna 2007, pp. 133-160.

<sup>80</sup> Conversation military council 3rd Ukrainian front with Austrian communists, 16 May 1945. In W. Mueller et al., *Sowjetische Politik: Sovetskaia politika*, cit., pp. 145-155, p. 155.

<sup>81</sup> W. Mueller, *Stalin and Austria: New Evidence on Soviet Policy on a Secondary Theatre of the Cold War, 1938-1953/55*, in «Cold War History», n. 6, 2006/1, pp. 63-84, pp. 68-69.

<sup>82</sup> Decree of the council of ministers of the USSR on the mission of the Soviet element of the allied commission for Austria, 20 February 1952. In W. Mueller et al., *Sowjetische Politik: Sovetskaia politika*, cit., p. 778-789.

<sup>83</sup> Politburo Decision No. 288 «*Osobaia Papka*» (Special File), 11 December 1946. In: RGASPI, 17/162/38/140.

<sup>84</sup> Politburo Decision No. 328 «*Osobaia Papka*» (Special File), 2 May 1949. In: RGASPI, 17/162/40/147.

<sup>85</sup> Protocol No. 84 of the Politburo, 1 December 1951. In: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii, Moscow, (hereafter RGANI) 89/38/26/1-2. On the history of the «Fund»: J. Foitzik, *Aus der Buchhaltung der Weltrevolution: Finanzhilfen der regierenden kommunistischen Parteien für den internationalen Kommunismus*, in «*Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung*», 1994, pp. 140-147; T. Kuzmicheva, *V tseliakh okazaniia material'noi pomoshchi zarubezhnym levym partiiam...: Ob uchrezhdenii i deiatel'nosti odnogo mezhdunarodnogo fonda*, in: «*Istochnik*», 2002/4, pp. 68-72.

tal, the CPSU in the years from 1946 to 1955 approved subsidies for the Austrian Communist Party and various «special operations» in Austria of at least 68.9 million Schillings (today about 40 million Euros)<sup>86</sup>.

Other economic and political support included Soviet orders for companies owned by the KPÖ and, politically even more important, the conversion of the former German industrial assets in eastern Austria into a stronghold of communism. These factories and companies constituting more than 30 percent of the industrial capacity of the eastern provinces were taken over by the USSR in accordance with the Potsdam agreements of 1945. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, their workers were subjected not only to increasing Soviet and communist propaganda, but also to pressure either to join the KPÖ or to lose their jobs. In 1954, approximately 28,000 out of 46,600 workers in Soviet enterprises in Austria were communists, leftist-socialists, or members of the communist Free Austrian Youth organisation. The enterprises thus constituted 20 percent of the KPÖ membership and formed a «refuge for communists» within a mostly anti-communist environment. Communists presided in 73.8 percent of the shop committees in the Soviet enterprises and functioned as personnel and cultural officers in most companies<sup>87</sup>.

The Soviet organisational and propagandistic support for the KPÖ was active especially in pre-election times. Ten days before the general elections of 25 November 1945, the head of the 3<sup>rd</sup> European Department, Andrei Smirnov, asked Deputy Foreign Commissar Andrei Vyshinskii to publish a declaration on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and the Austrian Government, adding: «These measures have to be taken in the next days in order to enable our friends [i.e. the communist party] in Austria to make use of them in the election campaign»<sup>88</sup>. This kind of support turned out to be as fruitless as the Soviet special donations of paper to the Austrian communists. Nevertheless, the Soviet authorities stuck to this strategy until the end of the occupation. The instructions of the Soviet apparatus in Austria for the elections of 1949 included «helping the KPÖ and the leftist socialists [...] to bring the election slogans to every productive man»<sup>89</sup>. Soviet propaganda in Austria did its best to fulfil these instructions<sup>90</sup>. Their efforts were paralleled by *Pravda* articles denouncing the non-communist parties as «enemies of the Austrian people». Similar efforts were made on the eve of the 1953 elections<sup>91</sup>.

Furthermore, the Soviet Union tried to support its Austrian «friends» by coordinating Soviet measures in Austria with the policy of the KPÖ. As early as 1945, the Soviet representatives had pressed Karl Renner to fulfil wishes that were on the agenda of the Austrian communists, such as a better cooperation of the three

<sup>86</sup> Cf. W. Mueller, *Die sowjetische Besatzung*, cit., p. 172.

<sup>87</sup> Report Soviet dept. of internal affairs in Austria on the Soviet enterprises in Austria, May 1954. In W. Mueller et al., *Sowjetische Politik: Sovetskaia politika*, cit., pp. 929-941, pp. 932-933.

<sup>88</sup> Smirnov to Vyshinskii, 15 November 1945. In: AVPRF, 066/25/119/9/121-122.

<sup>89</sup> Deputy high commissioner Zheltov to CPSU commission for foreign policy, 19 August 1949. In W. Mueller et al., *Sowjetische Politik: Sovetskaia politika*, cit., pp. 592-605, p. 605.

<sup>90</sup> See, for instance: *Österreichische Zeitung*, 8-9 October 1949.

<sup>91</sup> W. Mueller, *Die sowjetische Besatzung*, cit., pp. 174-175.

political parties within the national front, the integration of communists into the state apparatus, a land reform, and a faster denazification – with little success as it turned out<sup>92</sup>. After the elections, when the Soviets and the communists expressed their criticism more openly, the Soviet Element of the Allied Commission launched its propaganda campaigns parallel to those of the communists<sup>93</sup>. Communist members of the Austrian parliament submitted their proposals in coordination with the Soviet declarations in the Allied Council. In February 1948, the KPÖ proposed an amnesty for «less implicated Nazis», and, in the next meeting of the Allied Council, the Soviet high commissioner followed suit. In January 1951, on the eve of the Austrian presidential election, the communist leaders asked the Soviet element to veto the electoral law in the Allied Council. This request was granted<sup>94</sup>. In 1946 and 1949, the KPÖ used its special relationship to Moscow to influence the negotiations on the Austrian State Treaty<sup>95</sup>. In 1952, it was the Soviets who warned the KPÖ that preterm elections were around the corner.

The various schemes to split the other parties and to support new ones responsive to communist control were implemented mostly by the KPÖ with Soviet knowledge and help. Once the communists started to be pushed out of their strongholds in the administration and police by the two other parties, the Soviet element tried to stop this development. After the elections of 1945, several communist civil officers, mayors, members of local assemblies and provincial governments who, according to the election results, had to resign were ordered by the Soviet authorities to stay. When social democrats and conservatives tried to reduce the number of communist police officers or to «neutralise» them by shifting them into the western zones of the country, the Soviets vetoed these moves or themselves tried to «neutralise» the effect of such shifts by firing non-communist policemen in their zone.

The close coordination between the Soviets and the KPÖ led to tension between the two partners. Communists complained about Soviet interference; Russian reports criticised the communists' reluctance to implement certain details of Soviet advice; insiders pointed out that the interests of the Austrian communists were often ignored by Soviet officers. Despite these problems, the basic consensus of political cooperation was never openly questioned.

<sup>92</sup> Report by Renner on meeting with Soviet officials, 7 August 1945. In *Protokolle des Kabinettsrates der Provisorischen Regierung Karl Renner 1945*, vol. 2, «Right or wrong – my country!» *Protokolle des Kabinettsrates 17. Juli 1945 bis 5. September 1945*, a c. di G. Enderle-Burcel et al., Verlag Österreich, Vienna 1999, pp. 211-212.

<sup>93</sup> J. Luger, *Parlament und alliierte Besatzung 1945-1955*, Ph.D. Diss., Vienna 1976, p. 133.

<sup>94</sup> Gribanov to Vyshinskii, 31 January 1951. In: AVPRF, 066/32/160/56/14-16. Cf. *Foreign Relations of the United States 1951*, vol. 4, Government Printing, Washington 1985, pp. 1022-1023.

<sup>95</sup> On the KPÖ's critique on the US proposal for the State Treaty in 1946 see: G. Stourzh, *Um Einheit und Freiheit: Staatsvertrag, Neutralität und das Ende der Ost-West-Besetzung Österreichs 1945-1955*, Böhlau, Vienna 2005, 47. In 1949 the KPÖ's intervention aimed at discrediting the non-communist parties for their pro-American position. W. Mueller, *Gab es seine verpasste Chance? Die sowjetische Haltung zum Staatsvertrag 1946-1952*, in *The Austrian State Treaty 1955: International Strategy, Legal Relevance, National Identity*, a c. di A. Suppan, G. Stourzh, W. Mueller, ÖAW, Vienna 2005, pp. 89-120, p. 106.

However, there were certain limits to the Soviet support for the communist cause in Austria. Although the Russians tried to forestall the full disempowerment of the KPÖ on the provincial and communal levels and in the police<sup>96</sup>, there was no systematic policy either to force the social democrats into a merger with the KPÖ (as happened in East Germany) or to terrorise the other political groups and squeeze them into exile (as happened in Eastern Europe). Their representatives were frequently summoned before Soviet authorities, yelled at, bullied and indirectly threatened. Some social democratic and conservative politicians and journalists, including the members of the Lower Austrian provincial assembly Franz Gruber, Ferdinand Riefler, and Herbert Schretter and the editor-in-chief of the social democratic daily Hans Bögl, were imprisoned and charged with anti-Soviet propaganda. Gruber and Schretter died in Soviet labour camps<sup>97</sup>. The undersecretary in the ministry of trade and reconstruction, Margarete Ottilinger, and several Austrian police officers were also sent to Siberia on charges of anti-Soviet espionage or anti-democratic activities. However severe these losses were, Soviet intervention remained occasional and no member of the government was imprisoned or so threatened as to go into exile. The most important limit to Soviet support for the KPÖ seems to have been the Kremlin's unwillingness to embark on a course that would have led to either a partition of Austria or a confrontation with the Western powers.

There are various possible reasons for this restraint. Austria was not regarded by the Kremlin as part of the core sphere of Soviet influence. Albeit it was occupied partially by Soviet soldiers and the Soviet leadership seemed to hope in 1945 to be able to strengthen communist influence in the country, the Soviets did not push hard once they encountered resistance. Although their policy in Austria in 1945 in many instances resembled their policy in Eastern Germany and Eastern Europe, in later years it became similar to the Kremlin's cautious approach in Italy<sup>98</sup>. That Austrian communism did not rank high in Stalin's priorities (not even as high as Italian communism) was underlined by the fact that the KPÖ was not invited to join the Cominform as suggested by the Polish communist Jakub Berman in 1946<sup>99</sup>. The contact between the Cominform and the KPÖ seems to have been maintained through the office of the Soviet information service in Vienna. Whenever matters with regard to Austria or the KPÖ were discussed at Cominform meetings KPÖ delegates were invited<sup>100</sup>. Although most of the KPÖ leadership had spent the war years in Moscow and Koplénig and Fürnberg were Comintern veterans and both wrote frequently to Stalin, the Soviet leader seemed not to consider them important enough to see them

<sup>96</sup> W. Mueller, *Die sowjetische Besatzung*, cit., pp. 175-179. Cf. M. Rauchensteiner, *Der Sonderfall: Die Besatzungszeit in Österreich 1945 bis 1955*, Styria, Graz 1995, pp. 253-254.

<sup>97</sup> K. D. Mulley, *Die Rote Armee in Niederösterreich 1945-1947*, in: *Die Rote Armee in Österreich*, a c. di S. Karner, B. Stelzl-Marx, Barbara, Oldenbourg, Wien 2005, pp. 469-485, p. 478.

<sup>98</sup> S. Pons, *A Challenge Let Drop: Soviet Foreign Policy, the Cominform and the Italian Communist Party*, in *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War, 1943-53*, a c. di F. Gori, Francesca, S. Pons, Macmillan, Basingstoke 1996, pp. 246-263.

<sup>99</sup> L. Gibianskii, *Kak vznik Kominform*, cit., p. 140.

<sup>100</sup> Report on the Cominform office in Vienna, 27 October 1952. In: ASCG, Fond 507/XI, 6/I-109.

personally<sup>101</sup> – even before they were sent to Austria in 1945 and when they were summoned to Moscow in 1948. Further reasons for Soviet restraint seem to have been the Western armed presence in Austria and the danger of a new *Anschluss* of the western part of the country to West Germany in case of a partition of Austria. On the other hand, the Soviet zone of Austria – in contrast to the one in Germany – was not big enough to be viable as an independent state. In short, Austria was not worth high Soviet risks. Most probably for these reasons, a harsher policy toward Austrian non-communists, a communist putsch and a split of the country were ruled out. This was the case both in February 1948 and in October 1950, when the Soviet side avoided responding in a way that could have led to one of these scenarios.

### *Summary*

When the Soviets, together with the Western powers, left Austria after having signed the State Treaty in 1955, their record was not very favourable. Since entering the country, they had tried to strengthen the communists with various political, propagandistic, and economic means. In 1945, they had instructed the communists to follow a moderate national-front strategy in order not to provoke conflict and to expand their power step by step until they were in control. After this strategy had miscarried in the elections of November 1945, the KPÖ, in accordance with the international situation and the beginning of the Cold War, was emboldened by its Soviet godfathers to push harder for the transition to socialism. The constant Soviet support for the Communist Party and the Soviet-sponsored formation of the Leftist Bloc in 1949 and the People's Opposition in 1952 reveal the Soviets' intention of strengthening communist influence in Austria and, thus, of inducing the creation of a communist-led government.

However, given the country's low priority and the watchful presence of the Western powers, the Soviets in Austria – unlike in Eastern Europe and East Germany – refrained from systematically using excessive force and fraud in order to change the political situation and bring their «friends» to power. This was a policy of low risk and low chances for success.

The chances of reaching the Soviet and communist goal of achieving Austria's transformation into a «people's democracy» by a «sovietisation with a pulled hand brake»<sup>102</sup> virtually did not exist after 1945 as long as the Western allies were in the country and the Austrian majority, and especially the social democratic party leadership, remained fiercely anti-communist. Nevertheless, the Soviet authorities

<sup>101</sup> In their letter from December 1947, Kopenig and Fürnberg asked Stalin to receive a KPÖ delegate «as last year». Kopenig and Fürnberg to Filippov, 29 December 1949. In: RGASPI, 17/128/1089/126-128. Such a meeting could have happened when Ernst Fischer, as a member of the Austrian delegation to the Council of Foreign Ministers traveled to Moscow in spring 1947. However, we do not know for sure if any Austrian communist was received by Stalin personally or not.

<sup>102</sup> M. Schmeitzner, *Buchbesprechungen*, in «*Totalitarismus und Demokratie*», n. 3, 2006, 2, p. 381.



followed this line until Stalin's death. This inflexibility was, on the one hand, a symptom of the growing ideological and political paralysis of Soviet policy in the late Stalin period and a result of miscalculations and ideological preconceptions that postulated the ultimate victory of the Soviet system and thus prevented the Soviet side from objectively reassessing its policy. On the other hand, it was the only option left if the Soviets did not want to confess their political defeat and give up their struggle against «Western influence» and «reactionary forces».

The KPÖ, on many occasions, tried as much as possible to exploit the limited Soviet support and the Soviet authorities, within the framework of their limited interference in Austrian inner affairs, helped as much as possible. In fact, this aid did not help very much. On the one hand, it provided the communists with limited advantages only; on the other hand, it reinforced the widespread prejudice that the KPÖ was nothing more than a fifth column of the Russians, thus making the communists unacceptable to the broad majority of the Austrian population. Whenever communist proposals or actions ran counter to Soviet interests, as in the case of a partition of Austria or a possible putsch, the «centre» or *instantsia* either ignored them or (if they were too serious to be ignored) forced the Austrian comrades to recant. The KPÖ, in return, slavishly followed Soviet advice through all zigzags of Stalinist policy, be it the Cold War, the campaign against Tito<sup>103</sup> (who had many secret admirers in the KPÖ) or the various ideological outgrowths of late Stalinism. According to the Soviet line, the tactical repertoire of the KPÖ consisted of the moderate national front (in 1945), enforced class struggle (as in 1947 and 1950), and attempts to form a national front with new pro-Soviet partners (1949–1953).

In 1956 the communists, now on their own after Soviet withdrawal, managed to be re-elected to the Austrian National Assembly, although by the usual narrow popular vote of approximately five percent. Deeply shaken by Khrushchev's revelations in the XXth CPSU congress about Stalin's cruelty, they remained loyal even when Russian tanks crushed the 1956 Hungarian people's revolution against the communist dictatorship<sup>104</sup>. The communists had to pay dearly for their inhuman stance, their allegiance to the Stalinist Soviet Union and their former close relationship to the unloved Red Army. After 1957, they were not re-elected any more.

In her book on France and the Soviet Union, Julie M. Newton states: «It is rewarding when a bilateral state [or party] relationship of tertiary strategic importance focuses our attention on fundamental questions of international relations»<sup>105</sup>. The Soviet policy in Austria, the fate of the KPÖ, and the comparison to the fate of Eastern Europe and East Germany allow us to focus on such questions and to

<sup>103</sup> The KPÖ supported the Cominform's anti-Tito campaign. In the 1950s, the CPYu suspected the Austrian party to organise, on behalf of the Cominform, the infiltration of their country with Soviet agents via the Austrian-Yugoslav border. Report on the Cominform meeting in Budapest and the KPÖ, 11 August 1952. In: ASCG, Fond 507/XI, 6/I-109, 4-5.

<sup>104</sup> M. Mugrauer, *Zwischen Erschütterung, neuer Offenheit und «Normalisierung»: Die KPÖ, der 20. Parteitag der KPdSU und die Ungarnkrise 1956*, in: *Osteuropa vom Weltkrieg zur Wende*, a. c. di W. Mueller, M. Portmann, ÖAW, Vienna 2007, pp. 257-298.

<sup>105</sup> J. M. Newton, *Russia, France, and the Idea of Europe*, Palgrave, Basingstoke 2003, p. 1.

draw another conclusion. The forceful sovietisation (and, in the case of Germany, division) of Eastern Europe was neither an unavoidable consequence of an uncontrollable drive intrinsic to all Soviet policy nor was it the unforeseen and unwanted result of a policy initiated by local hard-liners or uncontrolled subaltern officers. As their reluctant policy in Austria shows, the Soviet leadership knew what means it could afford to apply, what risk it would be able to take, and what price it would be ready to pay. The Cold War and the division of Europe in general and of Germany in particular was the price Stalin was ready to pay in order to build his empire. The rest of the bill, the denial of freedom and democracy and the destruction of thousands of lives, had to be paid by the victims of communism in Eastern Europe.

In contrast to Eastern Europe and East Germany, Austria was lucky enough to have the backing and armed presence of the Western powers who supported the country not only economically through the Marshall Plan but also curbed Soviet claims upon it and emboldened it not to give up hope. Its population had the privilege of deciding in free elections which system was to rule. And this decision, right or wrong, was clear. It went against communism.