



Austrian Issue in the Mirror of Russian Media (1945–1955)

I was about ten years old when I first learnt that from 1945 till 1955 Austria had been occupied by the Soviet troops. It was 1965, and once I asked my classmate where he was born. “In Vienna!”, – he replied proudly even with some tint of superiority (at those times only few Russians could travel abroad). “Wow, really?, – I was surprised, – And why?”. “My dad is an officer and was stationed there after the war”. However I was disappointed: having asked to tell me about Vienna in details, my friend grumbled that he did not remember anything since he was just a baby when Soviet troops returned home, and Vienna for him was just a pretty word in his passport.

Later I happened to meet other kids whose birthplace was Vienna...

It should be pointed out that the attitude of Russians to Germany and to Austria at that time, as well as earlier, was always different. Nazi's Germany was considered an evil aggressor, who annexed peaceful Austria in 1938, by force involving it into the World War II and so on.

The confirmation of my empirical observations can be easily found in the official Soviet press. For instance, still before the invasion of Vienna in April 1945, the main state newspaper of the Soviet Union “Pravda” wrote that *“Austria fell the first victim of the German aggression. (...) terrorist occupation by Germany, its predatory policy evoked in Austrian people feeling of hatred of Germans as those who're guilty of all the hardships for the last seven years”* [Kiselev, 1945, p.4].

Certainly, the Soviet government did not put the sign of equality between Austria and, for example, Poland. Should an opportunity arise, the Kremlin press would use it to underline that *“Austria is responsible for the participation in the war on a Hitler's side...there are certain circles in Austria that though proclaimed “neutral position” relating to German-fascists' occupation, in fact supported the regime of the German terror”* [Kiselev, 1945, p.4]. And the permanent mouthpiece of the Red Moscow- TASS (Telegraph Agency of Soviet Union) was indignant that during the November elections in 1945 in some regions of Austria *“where the influence of Hitler's men was stronger”, only 40–45% of people took part in elections* [TASS, 1945, p.4].

As known, Soviet Union always had a lot of enemies, among which the major ones stood out. From 1941 till 1945 it was Nazi's Germany. During the cold war of the late 40s till middle 80s – the USA. In 1949 – Yugoslavia. In late 60s-70s – China, and so on. Western Germany (at

least until the 70s) was also considered to belong to the enemy's camp, as a puppet of the militaristic America. It is clear that with that background, Austria occupied a very modest place in Soviet media.

For example, I have counted that from 1946 to 1956 the USSR produced about a dozen of openly anti-American films (including famous movies “Russian Issue” and “Secret Mission” by M.Romm). There were even more anti-Nazi films about the horrible 1941–45. Meanwhile Austrian issue was represented only in several official documentaries, mainly dryly informing about the diplomatic and state negotiations. I looked through several volumes of the Soviet satirical magazine “Crocodile” and found dozens, if not hundreds of anti-American and anti-Nazi caricatures. However I have not seen a single satire against Austria...

Moreover, in the sixties among the few American movies that were shown in the USSR, the famous “Sound of Music” was a huge success. An Austrian aristocrat, who hated Nazis, is fleeing to neutral Switzerland together with children and a lover... To some extent it was an image of an “unconquered Austrian, an heir of the great culture of the past”, who did not want to submit to the Hitler's power...

By the way, during the occupation years of Austria by the Soviet troops, totalitarian regime of Stalin more than once tried to show “who's the boss”. Thus, at the high point of the “cold war”, in 1949 the Kremlin issued a following statement in “Pravda”: *“Recently the Austrian authorities with the permission of American, British and French authorities began a mass admission of the dislocated people to Austrian citizenship, which is a rude violation of the previous agreements of the four occupying countries. According to official data, more than 107 thousand of dislocated people got the Austrian citizenship. Moreover, more than 72 thousand people got the right of the long period residency in Austria...At the sitting of the Allies' Council the Soviet representative General of the Army Kurasov demanded the immediate prohibition of the Austrian citizenship admission to the dislocated”* [TASS, 1949d, p.4].

As it is known, a considerable part of the so-called “dislocated” people was the former citizens of the Soviet Union, captured and taken away to work in the Third Reich. Deportation to motherland, demanded by Stalin, meant for the most of these people years and years in Siberian work camps if not execution. Thus, the humane act of the Austrian government was perceived by the Kremlin as the imprudent disobedience to the regime. On the other hand, this publication in “Pravda” was Kremlin's indirect recognition of the fact that dozens of thousands of Russian people decided to emigrate.

The same year Austrian government was accused by the Soviet press in connivance at Nazis. *“Impunity of the neo-Nazi propagandists in Austria, – informed TASS, – led*

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to their more and more outrageous sallies. Thus, a few days ago in different streets of the 14th district of Vienna (French sector) there appeared a fascist's sign painted on the walls. Similar facts were noticed in other city districts. The indignation of the working people compelled the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Austria to make a statement in which it promised to take measures against the fascist provocations" [TASS, 1949b, p.3]. Considering these events the Kremlin demanded to keep the traitors of the independence of Austria (1938), war criminals, away from participation in any political activity [TASS, 1949c, p.3].

However the main enemy of the "cold war" epoch was the United States. Soviet press of the end of the 40s worried about the influence of the American army authorities in Austria. They were seriously disturbed by the possibility of Austria allying with the American partners [TASS, 1949a, p.3]. Relating to this, the influential army newspaper of the USSR "Krasnaya Zvezda" (The Red Star) wrote that "besides the existing common police of more than 30 thousand people, Austrian government, against the control agreement of the Allies' Council on December 10, 1945 "About the Prohibition of Any Army Activity in Austria", created under the cover of the so called "guard corps" 8 infantry battalions, an engineer battalion, 3 armored companies, and other army subdivisions" [TASS, 1955e, p.4].

Who knows how the destiny of Austria would have turned turn if the powerful dictator Stalin had not died in March 1953, but would have lived for another ten years... However after Stalin's death and the execution of his closest man – L. Beria the political situation in the USSR started to change gradually. In February 1955 the first Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR and Minister of the Foreign Affairs V. Molotov who earlier was known for his hard attitude, made an unexpected for many foreign politicians announcement in press: "The Soviet Union attaches a great importance to the regulation of the Austrian issue. The issue of the complete restoration of the national independence of the democratic Austria, according to the interests of the maintenance and strengthening of peace in Europe. Soviet government considers any delay in signing the agreement with Austria unjustified... Austria must agree not to enter any coalitions or war unions" [Molotov, 1955, p.3].

Such a statement technically meant one thing - the Soviet Union decided to give up its ambitious plans to make Austria its obedient satellite like Bulgaria or Romania in exchange of its independent but neutral status. It was made certainly due to pragmatic reasons. The Kremlin was sure that "right after the end of the World War II the United States of America set its course for turning Austria into its army base" [Popov, 1955, p.4; Ivanov, 1955, p.4]. And, seeing the unpopularity of the

Communist party in Austria and its inability to take the power in the country, the Soviet Union chose the lesser of the two evils – withdrawal of Austria from the army blocs of any kind. The Soviet government also underlined that such a solution should be found that would "exclude the possibility of another German invasion" [TASS, 1955f, p.2].

In the beginning of 1955 main Soviet newspapers were interspersed with announcements related to the forthcoming visit of the governmental delegation of Austria to Moscow. It was mentioned that the delegation "will hold the position that will assist the achievement of the coordinated decisions, that will lead to the regulation of the Austrian issue in the interests of the Austrian people and strengthening of the peace and international cooperation" [TASS, 1955d, p.3].

Almost simultaneously both press and radio issued series of reports about "people of Austria celebrating the day of their liberation by the Soviet Army" [TASS, 1955c, p.4]. In this connection memoir articles were published, telling about the war events of April 1945. For instance, M. Nedelin wrote: "During the battles for Vienna the soviet troops, leading hard street engagements, saved not only peaceful citizens, but also the art, historical and cultural valuables of the city. (...) With joy and gratitude Austrians were greeting Soviet troops, that provided freedom and independence to the Austrian people... The way of national revival opened before Austria. (...) However during the years following the end of war, governments of the Western countries pursued a policy that had nothing in common with the aims of the creation of a free, independent and democratic Austria" [Nedelin, 1955, p.3].

Soon another positive gesture of Kremlin followed. During the meeting in April "the Soviet delegation announced to the Austrian delegation that the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR expressed its agreement... to return back to their motherland those Austrians who were imprisoned by the Soviet courts" [TASS, 1955g, p.1]. The special correspondent of "Pravda" in Austria V. Mikhailov enthusiastically informed his readers that Austrian people are happy about the results of Moscow negotiations [Mikhailov, 1955b, p.3]. Another journalist – I. Alexandrov also represented Kremlin views: "The treaty with Austria – is an important factor of securing peace in Europe. (...) it is known that some influential circles in the West have long plotted to include Austria in war blocs, using its territory for new military bases. The results of the negotiations destroy these plans of aggressive circles. (...) international cooperation remains the only way of the regulation of after-war problems" [Alexandrov, 1955, p.3].

Developing his earlier propositions, V. Molotov, arriving at Vienna, told "Austria is recovering as an independent and completely sovereign state. Thus, a great deed has



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been made, both for the Austrian people and for the promotion of peace in Europe. Let me cordially greet and congratulate people of the famous Vienna and whole Austrian people on that [TASS, 1955a, p.3].

Probably, the interest of the Soviet media to the “Austrian issue” was the highest in May 1955. Radio messages and pages of the press almost daily optimistically covered the triumphant end of the state negotiations and joyful reception of the Soviet delegation in Vienna: *“Vienna people are happy, all Austrian people are happy. It is the joy of the people who gained their independence. (...) And no matter how angry militarists in Bonn are, it is clear for Austrians that shouts from Bonn will not change the course of the history”* [Mikhailov, 1955?, p.3; Pavlov, and Mikhailov, 1955, p.4].

The correspondent of “Krasnaya Zvezda” A.Leontiev wrote about the negotiations especially emotionally: *“The crowd chants: Mo-lo-tov. Every public appearance of V.M.Molotov is met with applause and effusive shouts. Vienna rejoiced until late in the night”* [Leontiev, 1955, p.3].

Following withdrawal and demobilization of the Soviet troops were also covered in the media of that time. July 28, 1955 TASS announced that *“independent status of Austria that provides its neutrality creates positive prerequisites for the future development of the country. The Soviet Union, acknowledging the important, all-European significance of the withdrawal of the occupational troops from Austria, made a new step at the Geneva conference, contributing to the relaxation of the international tension. The Chairman of the Council of the Ministers of the USSR N.A.Bulganin announced to the participants that the Soviet government made a decision to demobilize the troops that were drawn from the territory of Austria”* [TASS, 1955b, p.4].

Good-spirited mood prevailed in the reports from Austria of that time. “Pravda” wrote that *“the farewell of the Soviet soldiers turned into the demonstration of friendship between two nations – Austrian and Soviet”* [Mikhailov, 1955b, p.4], and “Krasnaya Zvezda” approvingly quoted the speech of the Colonel of the troops Ivanov: *“Leaving Austria the Soviet soldiers and officers take in their hearts feeling of the respect for the hard-working Austrian people, their aspiration for friendship with other nations”* [Orlov, and Shurlakov, 1955, p.3].

Beginning from 1956, the Austrian topic was moved to the background of the Soviet media again. Only in the end of the 1970s a famous actor and singer Vladimir Vysotsky decided to make the first Russian feature film about the years of the Soviet occupation in Austria entitle “Vienna Vacation”. The script was written and the cast chosen... but because of the sudden death of Vysotsky in July 1980 these plans were never realized...

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