



**THE RISE OF ASIA IN GLOBAL HISTORY AND PERSPECTIVE**  
**60 years after Belgrade – what non-alignment in a multipolar world?**

Université Le Havre Normandie, 11 February 2021

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**AUSTRIA AND NON-ALIGNMENT**

Statement

After World War II, Austria regained its independence on the basis of a constitutional commitment to a non-aligned foreign policy. In the Moscow Memorandum of 15 April 1955, the Austrian government declared to work for the adoption of a law that would enshrine in the Constitution a provision of permanent neutrality according to the model of Switzerland. The law was to be passed after the ratification of a “State Treaty” with the four Allied Powers on the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Austrian territory. Following the conclusion of the Treaty on 15 May 1955 and the completion of the ratification process on 27 July of the same year, the Austrian Parliament, on 26 October 1955, decided that Austria will permanently refrain from joining military alliances and will not allow any foreign military basis on its soil. This happened exactly on the day after the last foreign soldier had left Austria, as was stipulated in the State Treaty.

As the country’s negotiators made clear at the time, Austria’s concept of neutrality was not to be understood as equidistance vis-à-vis ideological blocs, a position they polemically described as “neutralism” (and which some commentators, later, attributed to the Non-aligned Movement [NAM]). Austria always saw itself as part of the Western world. “Military neutrality,” tied to a commitment to “comprehensive national defense” (enshrined in Art. 9a of the Federal Constitutional Law) has become a defining element of Austrian state identity ever since the post-World War II period.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, in the era shaped by Chancellor (Prime Minister) Bruno Kreisky, Austria practiced a so-called policy of “active neutrality,” which meant, *inter alia*, support to causes of the then-Third World, in particular for the establishment of a New International Economic Order, the struggle against *apartheid*, and the aspirations of the Palestine Liberation

Organization for the establishment of an independent state. This was the time of Austria's constructive engagement with the Non-aligned Movement. Austria also played an active role in the debates on development policies and North-South dialogue. The Chancellor, a founding member of the North-South Commission ("Brandt Commission"), entertained close relations with non-aligned leaders such as Indira Gandhi, Tito or Yasser Arafat. Together with President José López Portillo of Mexico, he convened the North-South Summit of October 1981 in Cancún ("International Meeting on Cooperation and Development")\* where the Prime Minister of China suggested the establishment of a "New International Economic Order." At the European level, within the framework of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), Austria also coordinated its foreign policy with Yugoslavia, in an effort aimed at the implementation of the Helsinki Accords of 1975.

The Austrian Chancellor also took an active interest in, and was supportive of, conferences convened by the International Progress Organization on the New International Economic Order (held in Vienna in April 1979, and attended by Austria's Minister of Finance), the Question of Palestine (held in Vienna in November 1980, and inaugurated by Austria's Foreign Minister), and the Principles of Non-alignment (held in Baghdad in May 1982, with Leo Mates, Chief of Staff to President Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia when NAM was founded in 1961, as General Rapporteur of the Conference). In the summer of 1983, at the initiative of Bruno Kreisky, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi attended an International Dialogue Conference at the Austrian mountain village of Alpbach.

In the context of the policy of active neutrality, Austria saw its position as neutral meeting place and facilitator of dialogue. This was evident in two of the major superpower summits of the Cold War period that were hosted in the Austrian capital, namely the meetings between President John F. Kennedy of the United States and Premier Nikita Khrushchev of the Soviet Union in June 1961, and between President Carter and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev in June 1979. The latter meeting concluded with the signing of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT II). Also, since 1960, Austria has provided non-combatant troops for United Nations peacekeeping and observer missions, e.g. in Syria, Lebanon, and Cyprus. Since the 1960s, Austria has become the host country of an increasing number of intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (Preparatory Commission), the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

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\* Because of his health condition, he was represented at the summit by Austria's Foreign Minister Willibald Pahr.

After the end of the Cold War, the country's focus shifted to full integration with the European Community (later, European Union). Immediately after the accession to the European Union on 1 January 1995, Austria joined NATO's "Partnership for Peace" on 10 February of the same year. As member of the European Union, the country also takes part in "EU Battlegroups" within the Union's Common Security and Defense Policy. The integration into the intergovernmental structures of the EU has been perceived by many as incompatible with the country's status of permanent neutrality and, thus, its Constitution. Accordingly, the Parliament amended the neutrality law of 1955, inserting an article into the Constitution that allows for the active participation in military operations within the framework of Austria's EU membership.\*\*

Currently, Austria's relationship with the Non-aligned Movement is mainly of historical importance. The actual relationship is rather formal, or ceremonial. Together with other neutral European countries and some NATO members, such as the United States or the United Kingdom, Austria is listed, by NAM, as "Guest Country" (not, "Observer Country"). In this capacity, it is invited – on an ad hoc basis – to the opening and closing ceremonies of Non-aligned Summits and Ministerial Conferences.

Austria's foreign and defense policies are oriented towards the European Union and, to a certain extent, the United States and NATO. Also, in recent years, Austria did not adopt a clear position regarding neo-liberal globalization. This has meant a constant erosion of the country's neutrality in favor of Western-centered realpolitik. It is worthy of note, however, that the majority of Austrians, unlike the governing elite, still adhere to a more traditional understanding of neutrality in the sense of strict non-alignment. They consider a non-aligned foreign policy as indispensable for preserving the country's independence.

In spite of the obvious paradigm change in Austria's foreign policy since the Cold war era, the country's continued commitment to multilateralism and its active participation in the movement against nuclear arms could open the way for constructive cooperation, albeit limited in scope, with countries of the Non-aligned Movement.

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\*\* Article 23j(3) of the Federal Constitutional Law, in reference to Art. 43(1) of the Treaty on European Union that provides, *inter alia*, for the deployment of "combat forces in crisis management."

### Additional reading

- *Friends with Enemies: Neutrality and Nonalignment Then and Now*. International Conference, Vienna, 2-3 March 2020. Summary by Patrick McGrath. Vienna: International Institute for Peace, 2020, <https://www.iipvienna.com>.
- Hans Köchler (ed.), *The New International Economic Order: Philosophical and Socio-cultural Implications*. Studies in International Relations, Vol. III. Guildford (England): Guildford Educational Press, 1980. (Conference convened by the International Progress Organization in Vienna, Austria, 2-3 April 1979)
- Hans Köchler (ed.), *The Principles of Non-alignment: The Non-aligned Countries in the Eighties – Results and Perspectives*. London / Vienna: Third World Centre, 1982.
- Hans Köchler (ed.), *The New International Information and Communication Order: Basis for Cultural Dialogue and Peaceful Coexistence among Nations*. Studies in International Relations, Vol. X. Vienna: Braumüller, 1985. (Conference convened by the International Progress Organization in Nicosia, Cyprus, 26-27 October 1984)
- Hans Köchler, "Non-Aligned Movement," in: *Encyclopedia of Global Studies*, Vol. 3. Los Angeles / London / New Delhi / Singapore / Washington DC: SAGE, 2012, pp. 1248-1250.
- Paul Luif, *Die Bewegung der blockfreien Staaten und Österreich*. Informationen zur Weltpolitik, Vol. 3. Vienna: Austrian Institute for International Affairs, 1981.