

The Propaganda of the Austrian State Treaty in the Hungarian Radio, 1955

Irén Simándi

Sixty years ago, on the 15th May 1955 the Austrian State Treaty was signed, and the country regained its sovereignty. Multiple important international negotiations formed the treaty. On the last of the peace conferences after the Second World War, in Potsdam, from June to July 1945, the Soviet Union, the USA and Great Britain defined the common principles of their Austrian policies. The Allied powers considered Austria a liberated country, not an enemy. Hence instead of a peace treaty, a state treaty was signed with the country.

In July 1949, during the Paris negotiations of the secretaries of the foreign affairs of the four great powers, the participants agreed to restore the Austrian borders correspondently to the situation in 1st January 1938. They also agreed that the Austrian State Treaty must guarantee the minority rights of the Slovenian and Croatian minorities. They could not demand war compensations from Austria, however the four great powers awarded Yugoslavia the right to confiscate, keep or erase any Austrian properties or interests in the territory of the country. The Soviet Union got 150 million dollars from Austria in convertible currency that it must repay within six years.

In 1954 the great powers allowed the Austrian government to take part on the negotiations of the state treaty, even as equal partners. During the turn of 1954–1955 the treaties were paused. Moscow feared that Austria would collapse and the western part becomes a military base of the NATO, which later could be annexed by the re-armed Germany.

On 8th February 1955, during the actual session of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union Minister of Foreign Affairs, V. M. Molotov, reported *“About a World Situation and Foreign Policy of the Government of the USSR”*. He declared that 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. Two conclusions of Molotov were: *“With the state treaty that restore the sovereign and democratic Austria a decision must be declared, which eliminates the possibility of a new Anschluss by Germany. [...] Austria must incur an obligation to not to join any coalition or military alliance against any of the great powers that participated in the war against Germany and the liberation of Austria, and to not allow foreign military bases in its territory.”*

Thus, the new Soviet proposals intended to solve the Austrian question on the base of the neutrality of the sovereign Austria. These proposals — contrary to the Soviet



standpoints during the 1954 Berlin talks — envisaged the withdrawal of the armies of the four great powers from Austria, even before the ratification of the peace treaty with Germany. This declaration of the Soviet government in February induced great interests in the circles of the Austrian government.

On 24th February 1955, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union adopted a resolution on the negotiations with the Austrian government. The secretary of the foreign affairs, Molotov was charged to negotiate with Ambassador Bischof about the standpoint of the Austrian government. The standpoint of the Austrian government in some extent was influenced by the explicit pressure of the western powers that were “genuinely anxious” because of the invitation of Raab to Moscow.

On 9th April 1955, the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed the American, British and French governments in memorial about the preliminary talks with the Austrian government and the trip of the Austrian delegation to the Soviet Union.¹

The Hungarian Radio followed the occurrence of the Austrian state treaty in its comments of world policy. In the broadcast “Ten minutes world policy” (*Tíz perc külpolitika*) on 15th April 1955 the commentator Péter Földes² spoke about the Moscow agreement about Austria. The negotiations began on 12th April, with Austrian chancellor Raab. A closing declaration was issued at noon on 15th April about the successful agreement. The negotiating partners declared that the “atmosphere of the talks was friendly”, and “*remarked that both the governments of the Soviet Union and Austria would like to sign the state treaty that restore the sovereign and democratic Austria as soon as possible, according to the national interests of the Austrian people and the strengthening of peace in Europe.*”

The delegacy led by the Austrian chancellor “*declared definitely that in the spirit of the declaration of the 1954 Berlin negotiations Austria does not intend to join any military alliance, and will not allow to establish military bases on its territory. Austria will follow independent policy with all states. This policy must guarantee the fulfillment of this declaration. The Soviet Union accepted that the troops of the four occupying powers must be withdrawn after the ratification of the Austrian State Treaty, but at least until 31 December, 1955.*”

The declaration spoke about “*the agreements between the two countries about economic questions that comes from the legal states of the German firms in the Second World War*”. The Soviet Union for example “*assigns the properties, ships, portal infrastructure to Austria for reasonable offset*”. In the 35th article of the State Treaty the concerned stated

1 V. MUSZATOV, *Az osztrák államszerződés és a Szovjetunió*, in: *História*, Vol. 5, 2005, <http://www.historia.hu/archivum/2005/0505muszatov.htm>, [cit. 2015–04–12].

2 Péter László Földes (1918–1997). A journalist who worked for the Hungarian Radio from 1 April 1952. From 1953 he was a member of the Party opposition around Imre Nagy. In 1956 he was one of the leaders of the Free Kossuth Radio. He was sentenced to 16 years in prison in 1960. After his release in 1969 he worked as translator of technical materials. From 1 November, 1989 he worked for the Hungarian Radio again as senior fellow, until the end of 1994. He was founding member of the Történelmi Igazságtétel Bizottság (Committee of Historical Justice). Central Archives of the MTVA (hereafter Archives), personal dossiers. See also: <http://allamszocializmus.lapunk.hu/?modul=oldal&tartalom=718660>, [cit. 2015–04–12].

that they also reached an agreement in the question of the “oil fields and refineries owing to the Soviet Union”. *“For a certain volume of crude oil the Soviet Union is ready to assign these to Austria.”* The declaration encompassed that negotiations will begin soon to *“arrange the trade connections”* between the two countries.

The Soviet negotiator informed the Austrian delegacy that complying the request of President Theodor Körner the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union will examine *“the cases of Austrians, who are under punishment by Soviet jurisdiction in the Soviet Union, thus after the withdrawal of the Soviet occupying forces from Austria there would be no Austrian prisoner of war or civil prisoner in the soviet Union”*.

Péter Földes told about the declaration that *“it is still too fresh”* to examine or analyse *“in its full significance, in its effects on the European peace and international détente”*. Appraising the credits of the Soviet Union in clapping up the Austrian State Treaty Földes told that the results would widely depend on the agreements with *“the other three occupying powers, namely the United States of America, England and France”*. It depends on *“how, in what level, and how fast these negotiations will be realized, and it widely depends on the governments of the western great powers”*. Földes supposed that *“it is certain that just as until now, hereafter these will try a lot of things avowedly or undercover, to coerce the instant, unambiguous and full restoration of the Austrian sovereignty. Their behavior directly accrues from all of their policies hitherto, from the policies of war alliances and combative military bases, of which they so wanted — and apparently still they want — to make Austria a part. Those forces that for years now have been maneuvering to arrange the possibilities of a new Anschluss, apparently would not abandon their intent without hesitations in the new situation, but with all kind of underground and aboveground allies, with all their warmonger policies they will try to encumber the Austrian policy to independence, the policy to stay away from any combative blocs.”*

The Hungarian government stated that the leadership of the country *“for years has been endeavouring consistently”* to *“improve”* the relations with Austria. The declaration issued in Moscow *“is open for the new perspective, the forthcoming birth of the free Austria, since the elimination of the danger of an Anschluss could help and ease the further development of the relations between the two neighboring countries”*.³

The content of the closing communique, the results of the Soviet-Austrian negotiations soon became top news of the world press. The *“Ten minutes world policy”* of the Hungarian Radio followed the events. In the broadcast on 22nd April 1955 it reported the reception of the news about the Moscow accord in Austria. *“The Austrian public buildings, many private houses were decked with national flags. It was the sign of happiness that thanks to the Soviet-Austrian negotiations and the successive efforts of Soviet diplomacy the restoration of the sovereignty is closer now than anytime during the last decade. »A real jubilation flooded over Austria. What was only a distant hope for Austrians now could realize soon, already in this very year« — wrote the Neues Österreich.”*

The program informed its listeners also about the further development of the negotiations. That some days after the Moscow meeting *“it was the Soviet Union again that made a new, significant step to cancel the Austrian case from the list of unsolved international problems”*. Soviet Minister of the foreign affairs Molotov *“handed a memorial*

3 Tíz perc külpolitika: A moszkvai megegyezés Ausztria ügyében, April 15, 1955. Archives, line-up dossier. Aired on 15 April, 1955, 22:15–22:25.

to the Moscow ambassadors of the western powers in the beginning of this week". In this memorial the Soviet government initiated that a conference should be held with the participation of the ministers of the foreign affairs of the four great powers and the representative of Austria. For location the Soviet leaders proposed Vienna.

It was also told that "the Austrian government supports the efforts to realize the negotiations of the four powers as soon as possible", and agrees with the Soviet politicians in the question of the location as well. Austrian chancellor Raab in his declaration proposed 11 May as the date of the conference.

The interest of the Hungarian government was constant in the events. "[...] for the Hungarians the fortune of Austria itself is far from being incurious." It is national interest that the neighbouring country would be "an independent Austria, nonparticipant of military blocs, which is not menaced by German militarism". Also the Hungarian government considered the Soviet-Austrian accord to be the guarantee for the realization of this aim. The Prime Minister András Hegedűs emphasized this in his speech in the Parliament, and he said he trusts that the accord in the case of Austria would advance "the good-neighbourly relations, in which both people — the Hungarian and the Austrian — are interested".⁴

"The Soviet-Austrian accord gave a marked impetus for international politics." The Soviet memorandum on 27th April 1955 accelerated the events — began its commentary the Hungarian Radio in the "Ten minutes world policy" aired on 27th April 1955. Evaluating the situation the commentator stated that a positive answer arrived to the first memorandum of Moscow on 22nd April, "the western powers agree with the assembling of the ministerial conference". In their memorandum the western governments "first proposed a conference of the ambassadors in Vienna for some preliminary tasks". They proposed 2nd May as the date of this meeting, nevertheless they emphasized that "as the necessary arrangements are accomplished, the date of the meeting of the secretaries of foreign affairs must be decided as soon as possible".

The Soviet leadership sent its answer to the "western ministries of foreign affairs" on 26 April. According to the document they were "satisfied" that "the three western powers are ready to take part in the four-power ministerial conference". In this memorandum Moscow stated that "the conference of the ambassadors is not the shortest path, and in the opinion of the Soviet government the conference of the secretaries of foreign affairs is already fully possible. Even so, the Soviet government accepts the plan of the conference of the ambassadors, if the task of it is the arrangement of the ministerial conference as soon as possible."

According to the information he shared with his listeners the world policy expert of the Hungarian Radio submitted that the ambassadors and the Austrian government "on 2 May could begin the actual elaboration of the state treaty". The commentator esteemed as a huge success of Soviet diplomacy that "hardly four weeks after the Moscow declaration the four-power negotiations began about the Austrian State Treaty, though still not on ministerial level". The change of memorandums "proved again to the world that the Soviet foreign policy, which aims to ease the international tensions and to secure peace and safety, not only established the opportunity of the arrangement of the Austrian question but moves the international diplomacy towards a fast and final result".

⁴ Tíz perc külpolitika: Ausztria ügye és a négyhatalmi értekezlet. Archives, line-up dossier. Aired on April 22, 1955, 22:15–22:25.

In its world political broadcast the Hungarian Radio searched for the answer, why the western politicians insist on the conference of ambassadors on the 2nd May? The commentator stated that *“the international public is already suspicious about the temporizer maneuvers of Washington, London and Paris, and urging positive actions”*. In the broadcast the speaker quoted the correspondent of *The Times* in Vienna, who *“wrote in two successive reports to draw the attention of the British public to the disappointment and delusion in Austria because of the laggardness of the western powers”*. *“The Austrians hoped — he said — that the western powers would be satisfied with the Moscow agreement, but instead they are making no headway and moodily fumbling the declaration, only despising instead of acting”*. The already mentioned Soviet memorandum changed this situation on 19th April. All this is connected to the interior political situations of the three western powers. In England will be elections, French Prime Minister Edgar Faure *“committed himself to the urgency of the four-power conference repeatedly, and in America the Democrats have already begun to exploit the impotency and lagging of the government”*.⁵

Foreign political expert of the Hungarian Radio Ervin Réti⁶ reported the events of the conference of ambassador held on 2nd May on the already known broadcast *“Ten minutes of world policy”*. The correspondent presented the mood of the streets of Vienna. *“As in all years successively, as in last year, millions celebrated on the streets. However, this May has new traits, this May is about new hopes. [...] This year was the first one, when the people marching on the streets of Vienna could believe that the sovereignty of Austria is already so close, so reachable that the country could soon regain its independent state status.”*

“The next 24 hours approved” the keeping of peace and safety. The fresh event of the day that *“in this very hours a significant negotiation began in Vienna between the ambassadors of the United States, England and France. The task of the ambassadors is to formulate the Austrian State Treaty, to finalize its text and prepare it to be signed; this would make possible to end the »Austrian problem«, which is more than a decade old already.”* According to the commentator, the conference of the ambassadors *“is another sign of quickening. The world policy began to move, the events are accelerating”*.⁷

“In Vienna, which is full of flags, with the ovation and burst of applause of tens of thousands, boom of bells the Austrian State Treaty was signed yesterday at noon (15 May, 1955).” Austria regained its sovereignty, and entered again among the independent European states — reported Ervin Réti about the illustrious day in the *“Ten minutes of world policy”* one day after the ceremonial signing. One of the most important points of the state treaty is that Austria *“will follow a neutral policy in the future, independently from military alliances. Thus in the center of Europe besides the neutral Switzerland*

5 *Tíz perc külpolitika: Négyhatalmi tárgyalások Ausztria ügyében.* Archives, line-up dossier. Aired on April 27, 1955, 22:15–22:25.

6 Ervin Réti (1928–2015). A journalist who was graduated at the Eötvös Loránd University of Sciences. Between 1946 and 1956 he was member of more youth organizations. From 1950 until 1956 he was the foreign policy editor of *Szabad Ifjúság*, between 1956 and 1992 he had the same post at *Esti Hírlap*. Several times he worked for the Hungarian Television as foreign policy expert. <http://www.hirado.hu/2015/01/09/elhunyt-reti-ervin-ujsgairo/>, [cit. 2015_04–12].

7 *Tíz perc külpolitika: Májusi remények Bécsben — és másutt.* Archives, line-up dossier. Aired on May 2, 1955, 22:15–22:25.

there will stand a neutral Austria as well.” According to Réti for the Hungarians “this arrangement of the Austrian question” was especially joyful. For the country “it is not the same” what stands in its western borders: “the advanced Alpine strongholds of the Atlantic alliance, or an honestly neutral, independent state”. The Hungarian political leadership, told Réti, is sure that the signing of the state treaty will shed a good influence on the connections between the two countries and “will further deepen” the good-neighbourhood.

Conjuring up the historical past Ervin Réti told that “the Austrian problem has been laboured for a decade. The representatives of the great powers negotiated about it more than 260 times — not with much success.” A lot of politicians thought that it was an unsolvable question. “And now it became clear that these fortune-tellers were bad fortune-tellers. It was possible to solve the Austrian question, and it is solved indeed.” The commentator mainly put the result on “the consistent efforts and peace policy” of the Soviet Union. During this decade the Soviet government successively elaborated its proposals to set the Austrian question agoing. Réti emphasized again that “the present signing of the state treaty itself is the result of the last, maybe most significant Soviet initiative, the successful bilateral negotiations”. He added that “these agreements made impossible that West-Austria would become — as some western plans wished — a strategic field of troops of the Atlantic alliance”. The neutrality “was the innermost desire of the Austrian people itself”.

In his commentary Réti told as well that peaceful people’s hope “is strengthened by the news of the Austrian arrangement” all over the world. The state treaty is significant in itself, but could be even “the herald of further steps”. “All is well that ends well — told Austrian chancellor Raab about the state treaty.” Quite true, since in the case of Austria “one put the point at the end of the phrase”. About the general international situation he told that “the Vienna agreement could be the beginning of a lot of things, since it was the first significant European question, which was solved by common agreement of the four European great powers”.

In his speech in Vienna secretary of foreign affairs Molotov emphasized: “The Austrian treaty will contribute to the détente of the international relations, and this is the particular significance of it. [...] The successful accomplishment of the preliminary efforts of its signing is evidence for there are chances to solve the international problems”.⁸ The Austrian State Treaty closed the first phase of the Cold War.⁹ The iron curtain rang down and only one small door remained open — Berlin.

Irén Simándi | Kodolányi János Főiskola — Kodolányi János University, Székesfehérvár Fürdő u. 1, 8000 Székesfehérvár, Hungary, simandiiren@upcmail.hu

⁸ Tíz perc külpolitika. Archives, line-up dossier. Aired on May 16, 1955, 22:15–22:25.

⁹ The Hungarian declaration of the neutrality issued on 1st November 1956 during the Hungarian revolution and war of independence in 1956 was strongly affected by the Austrian State Treaty and Austrian neutrality. More detail: L. T. VIZI, *Kihívások és alternatívák a rendszerváltás magyar külpolitikája előtt*, in: B. BESZTERI — P. MAJOROS (Eds.) *Változó világ: társadalmi és gazdasági útkeresés*, Veszprém 2012, pp. 105–106; L. T. VIZI, *Narratives of the Hungarian Neutrality in the 20th Century*, in: J. SIMON (Ed.), *Central European Political Science Review*, Budapest 2013, pp. 119–121.