

About Political and Economic Development of Austria in Years 1931-1934

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Abstract

The aim of the presented dissertation is the analysis of the Austrian foreign political development in the years 1931-1934 with the emphasis on the general development of the international relations. Furthermore, the selected intra-political events and the economic and social development of Austria will not be omitted as well. The time frame of the presented dissertation, i.e. years 1931 and 1934, has been chosen with respect to the important events which exceeded the Austrian borders because of their significance and impact on the contemporary international politics. The first milestone is connected with publication of the plan of the German-Austrian customs union. Assassination of the Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss represents the second milestone.

There occurs the deficit of the detailed analysis of the Austrian foreign policy, especially in the relationship towards Germany and Italy, in the existing historiography so far. It is particularly the absence of comparison of unpublished documents, Austrian, German and Czechoslovak, with related published sources, contemporary memoirs and press articles as well as scholarly literature. The presented dissertation, which is the result of the four-year intensive scholarly research within the doctoral study program, is aimed at filling up this gap in historiography partially. The author's aim is to achieve new scholarly interpretation of the selected problematic areas or at least confirm or disprove existing scholarly arguments.

The significance of the years 1931-1934, which could be regarded – for many reasons – as the turning point of the Austrian history, became evident not only in foreign and internal politics but in the economic and social areas as well. The most important changes affected the internal system of Austria. The existing conflicting streams in Austrian society,

particularly the considerable contrast between the center and periphery combined with the pillar-type structure of the society, caused bipolar antagonism between the civil and socialistic political blocs. The conflicting streams along with anti-democratic political culture assisted in escalation of the inter-political tensions and also led to absence of dialogue across the political-party spectrum. The contemporary economic and social problems as well as exerting pressure of Germany and Italy on Austria increased the long-term anti-democratic tendencies and contributed to collapse of the parliamentary democracy in Austria.

Johannes Schober and Karl Buresch, the leaders of Austrian diplomacy, preferred – for many reasons – turning away from the neutral line of foreign policy. The former position of neutrality was restored by Engelbert Dollfuss, their successor in office. However, Dollfuss himself was later forced to rethink it under the pressure of the German Nazis. It was the very aggressive politics of the Third Reich, which made Dollfuss to declare preservation of sovereignty – as defined in Article 88th of the Treaty of St. Germain – as the main priority of Austrian foreign policy.

Dollfuss showed the good will to smooth away the existing discords by mutual dialogue for several times. However, Germany was not willing to accept the offers of agreement and ignored the Austrian requirements. Moreover, Germany itself posed the requirements which would considerably restrict the sovereignty of the Alpine republic. The Austrian Nazis, supported by the German party-men and by Hitler, saw the solution of the stalemate in the armed complot. The amateurishly planned coup d'état, during which Dollfuss was assassinated, discredited Germany abroad and plainly revealed the criminal substance of Nazism for the first time.