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AUSTRIA'S RETURN TO *MITTELEUROPA*

A Postcolonial Perspective on Security Cooperation

Alexandra Schwell

Eastern enlargement of the EU and NATO was not only a technical but also a highly emotional matter. The image of the "East" as untrustworthy, threatening and fundamentally different from an imagined "Western" community is strongly rooted. Drawing upon interviews in Austrian state institutions, this paper argues that the end of the Cold War made it necessary for Austria to redefine its identity as a neutral bridge builder. Using the example of security and police cooperation, it illustrates how Austria's "return to Mitteleuropa" by consequence may be interpreted as a postcolonial project to recover imperial greatness in a contemporary shape. However, this one-sided move did not yield the expected results in the former crown lands, which preferred to treat this endeavor instrumentally.[1]

Keywords: Austria, security, *Mitteleuropa*, postcoloniality, EU enlargement

> Nobody considers Austria a threat. It's just too small.[2]

Europe has developed as an important field of study for scholars within anthropology. Over the last two decades there has been a growing interest in the social, cultural and political implications of the integration process and European institutions (e.g., Borneman & Fowler 1997; Shore 2000; Bellier & Wilson 2000). Furthermore, ethnographic and anthropological approaches within border studies analyze the relations between borders and identity; they illustrate how the European border regime shapes perceptions of self and (threatening) Other, how new boundaries are drawn, old ones perpetuated and new alliances created (e.g., Donnan & Wilson 1999, 2010). Within the EU, the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice, but also the War on Terror in the aftermath of 9/11, provide for a harmonization of policies and practices, as they put an emphasis on cross-border cooperation of police and intelligence agencies. Such cooperation does not only follow functional necessities, but is used strategically and simultaneously shapes imaginations of an exclusive security community and fosters a Europeanization of (in)security.

International cooperation across the East-West divide is particularly fraught with tensions. The mental boundaries between East and West have not dissolved along with the institutional borders, but still remain present among the populations on both sides of the former Iron Curtain. Yet, they are also very much alive in the minds of those people who engage in close cooperation with the "other side", and whose attitude should a priori involve a leap of faith for cooperation to be effective. The article will scru-

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tinize the East-West divide from both a "Western" and specifically an Austrian point of view, with the latter constituting a particular type of postcolonial perspective on the merging of East and West. Drawing upon interviews and conversations with high-ranking police and ministry officials, it will take a close look at the attitudes and stereotypes as well as at the strategies, legitimations and explanations of these actors; it will argue that their worldview is part of an overarching framework, which shapes and informs their actions.[3] I depart from the assumption that events on the micro level always reflect phenomena of the macro level. This macro level, however, is not simply mirrored, but it determines the micro level and poses a challenge for actors who creatively, adaptively or subversively react to it (Burawoy 1991). Thus an analysis of strategies of actors on the micro level enables us to draw conclusions about their context and the power relations that constrain them.

Accordingly, in the first section I will lay out the dominant contextual variables that determine and shape actions on the micro level. Among the influential factors, I have chosen to treat fear of and mistrust towards the East as dominant motives. These take place on several levels: First of all, mistrust towards the East has been a driving force for European integration after 1990. Mistrust, however, is nothing new in this basic context, but has been a constituent factor for Western European identities for centuries. The following section shows that there is nevertheless something specifically Austrian to the country's attitude towards the East and towards its neighboring countries in particular which is deeply rooted in a collective memory. The third empirical section illustrates how the Austrian state institution's mistrust is part of a larger framework, determined by a cultural *dispositif.* I consequently demonstrate that the country's special geopolitical and historical position accounts for specific forms of cooperation with its former socialist neighbors.

European Integration and the East-West Divide

The East-West binary division has been one of the most striking ways to "think" Europe (and non-Europe) during the Cold War. It was a category nobody could escape. Accordingly, the relationship between Eastern and Western Europe was from the beginning of the system change marked by mistrust towards the former antagonistic, and significant, Other. As I will argue, this mistrust towards the East came in the disguise of functional and objective security necessities, but drew upon and continued to be rooted in cultural patterns of thought that can be traced back to much earlier times than the Cold War.

"Security" is a keyword both for political actors and for this analysis: Security is presented by political and security actors as a precondition for European liberty, democracy, welfare and well-being, thus being at the heart of the Europeanization process (cf. Higashino 2004) and the process of integration into the Western value system in general. Security issues are depicted as objective facts that have to be dealt with, if the imagined community does not want to risk these very values. Thus, security is not restricted to its military use, but rather encompasses a wide range of issues that might trouble human beings in social, economic, political, ecological and identity respects – an approach that has been criticized heavily by proponents of the narrow conception of security (e.g., Walt 1991). Drawing upon the insights of securitization theories, I will treat "security", particularly the internal security of the nation state or the EU, as a construction that can strategically be used by specific actors for their own purposes (cf. Buzan, Wæver & Wilde 1998). This securitization of issues depends upon the ability of the actors to convince a given audience of the urgency to counter the identified threat and the historical, social and cultural context the security issue is articulated within (Balzacq 2005; Bigo 2002). Therefore, I will argue that the securitization of Eastern Europe and the Eastern enlargement was particularly successful not because of an objective threat originating from these countries, but because it appealed to a cultural pattern of mistrust towards the East that informed the enlargement process.

It was hardly disputed among Western European leaders that the former Warsaw Pact states should

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quickly join the EU and NATO in order to guarantee stability on the continent and avoid ethnonationalist outbreaks such as those that occurred in the Balkans. The NATO Eastern expansion can be considered an important precursor of and parallel to EU enlargement, as it significantly changed and transformed the geopolitical environment and the European and North Atlantic security structure.[4] The importance of NATO expansion lies not only in the broadened sphere of military influence, but in its meaning as "a process of international socialization (…) of liberal-democratic and multilateralist values and norms" (Schimmelfennig 1998: 198). Thus, the geographer Merje Kuus contends, "the double enlargement is framed in terms of teaching and learning community values and norms" (2004: 474).

The transformations in Eastern and Central-Eastern Europe and the changing international context after the end of the Cold War also exerted considerable impact on the policies and self-image of neutral countries, like Finland, Sweden, Ireland, and Austria, all of which have acceded to the EU, but have not joined NATO. The notion of security thus has been broadening also with reference to neutrality. I will return to this issue in detail below.

Generally, concerns on the part of Western Europe alternated between what would happen if most of Eastern and Southeastern Europe's countries acceded to the EU and what would happen if they did not (cf. Loader 2002: 135). Accordingly, some authors argue that the Eastern enlargement of 2004 "itself can be seen as a policy intended to enhance internal security" (Ibryamova 2004: 6).

The "Frontier"

The accession of parts of the former "enemy camp" to the EU and NATO in 2004 proved to be a great challenge to both security and identity policies on the part of Western Europe, and it raised severe concerns with regard to the candidate countries' capabilities in crime-fighting matters. Since the new member states did not gain full status with EU accession their position was that of a (more or less provisional) buffer zone or *cordon sanitaire* (van Houtum & Pijpers 2005) between the EU-15 and those non-EU members who were believed to be the countries of origin of irregular migration, organized crime, drugs, and terrorism. This buffer zone resembles Turner's depiction of the American Wild West as a "frontier": "the outer edge of the wave – the meeting point between savagery and civilization" (Turner [1920]1996: 3). The frontier is "the spearhead of light and knowledge expanding into the realm of darkness and of the unknown" (Kristof 1959: 270). At the frontier civilization and barbarism merge, and negotiation processes with unclear outcomes take place.

The perception of Eastern Europe as an insecure frontier zone is both homemade and hardly surprising. Walker (2002) identifies two reasons why the accession countries do not appear to be very trustful: As long as border controls are considered the pivotal point of the security continuum, those who are located behind the border are consequently regarded as security risks. Furthermore, both insecure frontier zones and public enemies are indispensable conditions for the security discourse itself which emphasizes the urgency of the mission. Eastern Europe, from the viewpoint of the West, could offer both abundantly. With the Eastern enlargement of the EU and the simultaneous expansion of the security zone, the Western community had to face the task of discarding its long-standing categories of Good and Bad, of Us and Them:

> Accordingly, it perhaps does not overstate the point to say that the political and ideological task within the Union of extending the security frontier is not just about expanding the definition of who counts as a "security friend", but even of relocating many who presumptively belonged to or were vulnerable to the "enemy" camp in the opposite category. (Walker 2002: 26)

These insights lead us to two important findings: (1) The Central European buffer zone was perceived as an insecure border area that is neither in nor out, but instead a "shifting bridge between East and West" (O'Dowd 2002: 23). Likewise, its oscillation between friend and enemy camp not only points to

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the context dependency, but particularly to the constructedness of security issues. (2) Simultaneously, the "buffer zone" provided a Janus-faced comfort for the EU-15, since it put the old members in a dilemma. On the part of the Western community there were fears that their security could be endangered by enlarging to the East. Sociologist Gerard Delanty observes in this context "the increasing salience of the 'imperial' limes, the border as a diminishing zone of control over which the centre loses control of the periphery" (Delanty 2006: 193). A loss of control was the last thing the "West" had in mind with the Eastern enlargement.

Consequently, following the accession of the East-European countries, an "implicit distinction between a 'safe(r) inside' and an 'unsafe(r) outside'" (Monar 2002: 169) remained. Furthermore, Kuus contends that the "dual framing of East-Central Europe as simultaneously in Europe and not yet European" (2004: 473) informs EU and NATO enlargement. Due to alleged issues of instability and the lack of security, the East-European member states did not become full members with EU accession on May 1, 2004. Though they already had accepted the Schengen *acquis* with accession, they did not fully implement it until the end of 2007.[5] Therefore, the new members found themselves in the unsatisfying position of being "junior partners" of the EU-15; the relationship is marked by fundamental asymmetry. Consequently, the new member states were eager to overcome their second-class membership status as quickly as possible and to operate at eye level with the old member states. On the other hand, from the point of view of the EU-15, the new members were perceived as a security risk. This risk, however, had to be accepted and minimized by way of a controlled inclusion, as they are entrusted with a relevant part of the internal security of the EU.

Thus, on May 1, 2004, the door for the new members was only half opened; this was not only due to their allegedly potential economic and political instability or Leninist legacies. It likewise rests on cultural processes and on conceptions of a European identity which after the end of the Cold War and the abolition of the old enemy has hit choppy waters. The accession of the East-European countries has moved the EU external and political border east- and southwards. But the accession countries' leap from the out-group into the in-group has not automatically allayed concerns regarding their trustworthiness. Western Europe's mental boundary no longer runs exactly along the former Iron Curtain, nor has it shifted eastwards at the same rate as the institutional border. European integration has not yet led to an abolishment of predominant asymmetries, but rather to a new coordinate system of hierarchies as to who can be considered more "European".

Austria and its "East"

Mistrust towards Eastern Europe and Russia was neither invented by the Warsaw Pact nor by NATO or the EU. The image of the "East" as untrustworthy, threatening and fundamentally different from an imagined "Western" community is strongly rooted in Western collective memory and goes back much further than the confrontation of the Cold War. The East, such as the "Orient, Balkans, Asia, and even Russia have all served as spatial representations of the *other* in Western thought" (Hagen 2003: 493 [emphasis in the original]; cf. Said 1979; Todorova 1997; Neumann 1999). The "East" is a construction, and the juxtaposition of allegedly Eastern and Western virtues and values draws on well-established strategies of ascription. What nowadays is referred to as Eastern Europe, or Central Eastern Europe, is not and has never been a homogeneous entity, but is a label affixed by Western Europeans. Wolff (1994) has convincingly argued that Western Europeans already in the eighteenth century constructed the image of a backward "Eastern Europe" in order to present themselves in a favorable light. Yet, that was only one side of the coin. Eastern spirituality and wisdom attracted theological and academic interest as well as romantic admiration and desire.

Nevertheless, disregard and mistrust prevailed, and the duality of West and East has been reproduced continuously, almost naturally entailing the dichotomies of individualism vs. collectivism, civic vs. ethnic conceptions of statehood, modern vs. traditional, secularism vs. religiosity. The East is

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constructed as contrasting per se with civilization, enlightenment and modernity, whereas the West, or more precisely the ideal image the "West" constructs about itself, is displayed as the yardstick for development and modernization.

Thus rather unsurprisingly, and consequently, Eastern Europe has been ascribed the status of a cultural laggard after 1990, and its populations were suspected of being stuck in postsocialist traditions and constraints, allegedly lacking what Sztompka (1993) presumptuously termed "civilizational competence". Such derogatory ascriptions, particularly from an "Easterner" himself, reveal much more about the speaker and the discourse he is part of than about the object he is referring to, or, as sociologist Klaus Eder aptly puts it: "The Eastern frontier can be seen as an unsettled boundary defining a space open to a variety of narratives the West produces about itself. In this sense, the East reflects the ambiguity of the West regarding Europe" (2006: 265).

Similarly, Kürti argues that an imagined Eastern European backwardness, rooted in ethnic conceptions and adhering to some mythologized past, is first and foremost the product of colonial Western thinking. He proposes to view the "remaking of European boundaries as an ideological separation of the backward East from the rest [..., which] assists in a new bipolarization and hierarchisation of Europe" (Kürti 1997: 31). The breakup of the Soviet Empire, European integration and the opening of borders did not lead to the disappearance of the East-West divide, but instead to a rebirth of the concept of Central Europe. This Central Europe is wedged between the two concepts of East and West, idealized in Russian Orthodoxy and Western Enlightenment. Its proponents conceive it as a "bridge region", which stretches out between East and West, but belongs to neither. Kürti, however, argues that "the fashioning of Central Europe is, at the same time, a remaking of Eastern Europe" (1997: 46), an attempt of "Easterners" to distance themselves from the even more backward Others, while siding with the reputedly civilized West.

Here we can observe a recurring pattern: Nobody wants to be in the East, this "flaw" is handed on and on from one country to the next, geographically and culturally even more "Eastern" ones (cf. Bakić-Hayden 1995). Alternatively, the label "East" is used in a depreciatory manner within societies to demean certain social groups that, as Sztompka (1993) would put it, are still stuck in their "civilizational incompetence". Buchowski has aptly termed such a labeling an orientalization of the "stigmatized brother", pointing towards "a restructuring of the perception of social inequalities by the hegemonic liberal ideology" (2006: 464). In any case the label "East" is less a geographically but rather a culturally informed category, as is the case with Austria, itself quite an Eastern country in geographical terms, and its neighbors.

Austria and the Idea of Mitteleuropa

A close look at the perception and reception of Austria's history and its use by various actors for present-day purposes allows an analysis of the construction of Austria's national and security identity. In the following section I will elaborate on three factors which are of particular importance for the understanding of Austria's image of self and other, and thus its security identity: (1) the idea of *Mitteleuropa* and the Habsburg myth, (2) the *frontier myth of orientalism*, and (3) the importance of the post-war neutrality issue.

Austria is the "old" EU member with the most East-European neighbor states, namely four. No other old member state shares borders with as many new EU members, all of them having been part of the Habsburg Empire. Central Europe and *Mitteleuropa* are keywords for the study of Austria's relationship with its East-European neighbors, and the Austrian usage of these concepts is both specific and revealing. "Mitteleuropa" is neither simply a German translation for Central Europe nor a geopolitical location, but the idea of *Mitteleuropa* bears different meanings depending on the actor who is using it. Hagen uses the term "imagined geography" to refer to the "ways of perceiving spaces and places, and the relationships between them, as complex sets of cultural and political practices and ideas defined spatially, rather than regarding them as static, dis-

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crete territorial units" (Hagen 2003: 490). Naming a place is always a particularly powerful device, since it implies occupying space and struggling for semantic and ideological hegemony, often with far-reaching practical consequences.

The idea of *Mitteleuropa* is one such contested concept, which has been given various meanings and been instrumentalized by different actors over time. Accordingly, it refers not to a strictly defined spatial order, but rather it is a powerful symbol and rhetorical device. Developed originally as a military concept during the Holy Alliance years in the early nineteenth century, and allegedly even coined by Metternich himself,[6] *Mitteleuropa* on the one hand refers to the concept of the pan-German solution, encompassing Germany and Austria forming "a counter-revolutionary bulwark between the nascent pan-Slavism in the east and the liberal democracies in the West" (Delanty 1995: 103). The *Mitteleuropa* myth was created "as an ersatz ideology, i.e. an ideology replacing the idea of German unity under the leadership of Habsburg" (Weiss 2002: 270). This concept was adapted and advanced by the National Socialists and their violent conflict for a Germanic domination of the continent. Therefore Hagen argues that the use of the concept "as a German imperial project stigmatized the word to such a degree that it now carries definite negative implications (…)" (Hagen 2003: 494f.). On the other hand, there are alternative readings, particularly in the Austrian version. Austro-Marxists of the interwar period pursued a different approach: "For the left, Mitteleuropa held out a promise of a post-imperial unification of the former provinces of the old empires which fell in 1918 (…) the idea of Mitteleuropa suggested an alternative to the tide of nationalism that was sweeping Central Europe" (Delanty 1995: 103).

The idea of *Mitteleuropa* particularly gained momentum during the 1980s, when dissident writers in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland used it as a counter-concept against the Soviet domination and opposition to state-socialist interventions. Authors such as Milan Kundera (1984) aimed at reviving the region as a cultural or moral space, proposing a kind of "third way", which, in turn, again points towards the highly political dimension of this symbolically charged concept. On the other hand, German politics attempted to occupy this semantic space, linking it to the prospect of a reunified Germany (Garton Ash 1990). Hagen (2003) convincingly illustrates, how the struggles over the geopolitics of naming to a large degree discredited the concept as a political and public symbol, not least of all due to its ambiguity.

While *Mitteleuropa* seems to have disappeared from the front stage of political programs, speeches and directives in most Western and Eastern European countries, it appears to be experiencing a comeback in Austria. Or was it ever truly gone? At least since the 1970s Austrian use of *Mitteleuropa* to a large degree has been ignoring both the Austro-communist and the less glorious parts of the concept's history, but prefers to refer to Habsburg hegemony and former greatness in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, ignoring, however, historic fissions and instrumentalizations:

> The Habsburg myth of a pluralistic society and pluralistic state, within which every people found the homeland (Heimat) it was entitled to, was nothing but a propaganda cover for the struggle between the two hegemonic peoples, the Germans of Austria and the Hungarians, a struggle for the defence and extension of their privileges and advantages, presented as being in the general interest and as a "supranational" rationality. (Le Rider 2008: 161)

Accordingly, Kürti argues that economic and cultural differences in the Habsburg Empire "were being translated more and more into an ideology of 'backwardness' and provincialism", with a double effect: "This conveniently masked the values of the central elites, serving both to make them secure in their sense of superiority and to convey to the 'lesser' elites of the nationalities how much they still had to learn" (Kürti 1997: 32). The Austrian concept of *Mitteleuropa* or Central Europe thus carries huge historical and symbolic baggage. The "Austro-nostalgia" (Vidmar-Horvat & Delanty 2008) which emerged

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after the breakup of the Empire and remains until today, is not simply a nostalgic longing for a sunken era of greatness, but signifies an idea of hegemony and a history of colonialism and subjugation.

In addition to, and rather complementing this empire identity, Austria has been cultivating its self-image as a Germanic bulwark against everything oriental. This *Frontier Myth of Orientalism* (Gingrich 1998) is deeply rooted in Austrian popular and everyday culture and extends to the Slavic and Hungarian populations as well, while the "Turkish sieges" remain its main focal point:

> First, the "Oriental" was portrayed not as a distant, backward, and deviant underling but rather as a close, dangerous, potential intruder of almost equal, albeit very different, skills. Second, this dangerously close "Oriental" was a pervasive topic not only in court and "elite" cultures, but even more so in "folk" cultures of all varieties. (…) Third, this type of (folk and elite) frontier Orientalism fed directly into the rise of those nationalisms that had competed in Austria since the late 19th century: pan-Germanic nationalism (leading up to Nazism) and Habsburg imperial-loyalist patriotism (transformed after the 1918 imperial collapse into clerical republican nationalism). (Gingrich 2004: 169f.)

Even though (or because) all East-European neighboring countries were once part of the Habsburg Empire, and political actors (albeit frequently in a patronizing way) tend to refer to this historical bond, the idea of Austria as a frontier did not disappear after 1945. In fact it was reinforced by the strict separation of the Iron Curtain and remained fertile after the end of the Cold War.

Neutrality

Austria's neutrality is an important pillar of the country's self-conception. Although it developed only gradually after World War II not only into one of the Republic's founding myths, but into an important reference point for identification, it can nevertheless be interpreted as a continuation of what had been shaping the country's self-image: Neutrality "was a prolongation of the *Mitteleuropa* idea in the sense of middle-range modernity; Austria did not fully enter *l'Europe*, but remained medium-level European" (Weiss 2002: 280 [emphasis in the original]).

Following World War II and Austria's engagement as part of the German Reich after the accession in 1938, Austria's only way to restore sovereignty was by promising not to align with any of the newly emerged bloc powers. This "neutrality act" was adopted in 1955, followed by the withdrawal of occupation troops. Although the "perpetual" or "permanent neutrality" had been imposed upon the Austrians forcefully, it quickly developed into a reference point for a national identity that, after the war, was searching for a symbolic anchorage in a double sense: The rump state that had remained of the Habsburg Empire after 1918 remained anemic and could not serve yet as an object of projection and affection for a truly Austrian national identity. Moreover, the recent history as an active part of Nazi Germany could not provide the ground for patriotic identification either. Thus, Austrian national identity had to be learned (cf. Johler & Tschofen 2001), but first of all, it had to be invented (cf. Hobsbawm & Ranger 1999). Neutrality, although not welcomed in the first place, provided an excellent opportunity to develop an identity for a country in search of itself. While most would agree that there was no "Austrian nation" to draw upon in creating the new state and developing a national identity, neutrality provided the vehicle and means to promote and develop a feeling of national identity over time: "Since 1955, as a result of the public, political, media and academic discourse, neutrality has become embodied in the collective consciousness as a central myth of Austrian identity. Neutrality steadily grew in importance in line with an acceptance of the Austrian nation and an increase of 'national pride'" (Liebhart 2003: 32).

Furthermore, it underpinned the imagination of the "homo austriacus" (Liebhart & Reisigl 1997), the image of the Austrian "as such", "to a common national culture, history, present and future as well

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as to a type of 'national body' or national territory" (de Cillia, Reisigl & Wodak 1999: 153). Neutrality allowed for dissociation from West-Germany and thus the Nazi past, while presenting oneself as "the first victim" of Nazi Germany (cf. Art 2006, ch. 4).[7] It quickly became a reference point not only for Austria's national security strategy, but also occupied a pivotal role for the country's collective identity:

> Neutrality apparently placed Austrians in the best of all possible worlds: geographically in the centre, politically and economically in the West, and militarily outside Europe, since neutrality was expected to keep the country out of armed conflict despite its vulnerable geostrategic location. (Neuhold 2003: 14)

After the end of the Cold War, Austria had to redefine itself and its role as a neutral member of the changed international environment. It refused to join NATO, but acceded to the EU in 1995. Public assent was due to economic advantages in the Common Market in the first place. Furthermore, by the end of the 1980s EC membership was recognized as being compatible with military neutrality, paving the way to the European Union without having to abandon neutrality. Austria, but also Finland and Sweden were motivated by the will to go beyond the role of the passive spectator and actively participate in the integration process: "They wished rather to attempt to influence the development of the security structures connected to the EU, the WEU and NATO as well as to design their institutional membership within the confines of, and in order to preserve, their military non-alliance" (Ferreira-Pereira 2006: 103). Consequently, the meaning of neutrality in international politics has become blurred, for example, as the neutral countries are cooperating within NATO's Partnership for Peace program (PfP).

Neutrality for Austria had become an end in itself, functioning only as a domestic symbol with little or no international significance. Nevertheless it still fulfilled an important integrative role for an Austrian population in search of itself: "The meaning of the domestic, identity building function of neutrality did not decrease, although the international meaning of neutrality has changed considerably" (Liebhart 2003: 43). Since neutrality as a symbol has increasingly lost meaning, it also functions as a projection screen for other purposes and messages. Accordingly, neutrality has come to serve as a popular vehicle for Austrian politicians and opinion leaders to distance themselves from the European Union, fostering a distinctive Euroskepticism, without, on the other hand, seeking the exclusive national refuge and demand a withdrawal from the EU, as could be expected from a Euroskeptic position. On the contrary, the distant overstretched European Union project in the mind of many Austrian proponents should rather be substituted by a regional solution that promises everything the EU cannot fulfill: proximity, short ways, a feeling of belonging without being too national, in short an enlarged version of Austria or, more precisely, of the Habsburg Empire. As Gingrich shows, this particular Euroskeptic nationalism is shaped by a "tripartite hierarchical ideological pattern" that informs Austrian and other forms of neonationalism in Europe:

> a coherent, culturally essentialised form of "us" is positioned in the centre, and is contrasted against two groups of "them". One group of "them" is constructed, in terms of power, as being "above us": the EU authorities in Brussels and their mysterious associates elsewhere. A second stratum of "them" is perceived as being ranked, in terms of status, "below us": local immigrants and other cultural and linguistic minorities living in the EU, plus their "dangerous" associates in Africa, Asia and elsewhere. (Gingrich 2006: 199)

Austrian tabloids, particularly the country's most successful newspaper, the *Kronen Zeitung*, which more than 40 percent of Austrians read, play an important role in fueling EU-skepticism, constantly reiterating the dichotomy of Us and Them and thereby reinforcing a distinct European-Austrian identity (cf. Karner 2010).

The Austrian *Frontier Myth of Orientalism* and the self-image of a country under siege from heartless

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bureaucrats on the one hand and greedy migrants on the other are both important parts of the picture and function to link the present to historical legacies. Furthermore, Weiss (2002: 282) convincingly illustrates how mistrust towards the European Union in Austria is rooted in the traditional rejection of Europe as a civilizatory project. He argues that the Austrian concept of Europe draws upon Europe as cultural *Erfahrungsraum* (area of experience), and not as civilizatory *Erwartungshorizont* (horizon of expectation). It is here the historical legacies enter the picture again. It can be argued that the renaissance the *Mitteleuropa* myth is currently enjoying relates to reasons resembling those for its initial creation: The "Mittel" in *Mitteleuropa* does not only point to a geographical position, but to a mental map. Its imagined geography is about being European (in the civilized sense) at a medium level, being located between the "primitive" and "uncivilized" East and modernity (West): "Western Europe was *l'Europe* in the French/modern/revolutionary sense. The east was uncivilized anyway: it was 'primitive' in terms of both Occidental *Kulturmission* and European *Zivilisationsmission*" (Weiss 2002: 271). The Habsburg image of *Mitteleuropa* perceived of itself as being exactly in-between not only geopolitical, but cultural conceptions of East and West. The fact that Austria ideologically considers itself as being part of both Western Europe and as a "bridge" between East and West fits neatly into this pattern.

Austria's Police Cooperation with its "Others"

The following section will examine how the appeal to the idea of *Mitteleuropa* is applied in practice. It will attempt to determine to what extent this overarching framework of mistrust and paternalism towards the "East" exerts an impact on, and simultaneously finds its expression in, Austria's international cooperation in security matters. Though neither the perception of the East-European members as junior partners, nor the attempt to appropriate and control them, are exclusively Austrian phenomena, it shall be argued that there is nevertheless a relevant cultural and historical imprint. It is the mixture of a paternalistic feeling of responsibility for the smaller East-European – and former Habsburgian – neighbor states while treating the same countries with suspicion and mistrust regarding their capabilities to act independently. Again this is a common motif among former colonial powers who are still struggling to "forgive" the former colonies for their strife for independence. However, in contrast to the geopolitical situation of most colonial states, Austria's former crown lands are not distant and exotic, but can be found right behind the border, fostering the popular perception of the frontier myth. Thus in the following segment, I will describe the East-West police cooperation, as it illustrates how Austria's motives for collaboration with the former crown lands oscillate between paternalism and self-defense.

Multi- and Bilateral Cooperation

It has been argued that since the end of World War II Austria has based its (security) identity on the issue of neutrality, and it has retained this concept also after joining the EU in 1995 (cf. Kořan 2006). This, however, does not imply that Austria refrains from participating in international security strategies and agreements. Austria engages in international cooperation in or below the framework of the EU regarding internal (such as the Treaty of Prüm) and external security (such as EU Battlegroups). Austria's cooperation with NATO is laid down in the Individual Partnership Program (IPP) and the PfP framework. With regards to internal security Austria attempts to express its advocatory role for Eastern Europe in its cooperative efforts. Two striking examples of multilateral cooperation are the Central-European Police Academy (MEPA) and the security partnership Forum Salzburg.

The Central-European Police Academy was established in 1992. Initially a bilateral Austro-Hungarian endeavor, it quickly developed into a multilateral arrangement – and again the German name "Mitteleuropäische Polizeiakademie" (MEPA) can be interpreted as an allusion to the concept of *Mitteleuropa*. Accordingly, the academy's intention goes beyond mere police interests but assumes a political role:

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> MEPA particularly aims at contributing to the process of European integration. Joint training and further qualification will accelerate the process of finding common European police standards and common organizational and legal measures, and this will contribute to harmonizing any conflicting interests the member countries may have. (MEPA 2007)

The Central-European Police Academy organizes training and courses for police officers from the MEPA member countries, but to a large degree relies on informal practices in the dissemination of knowledge. Establishing networks and thus mutual trust and social capital is considered a precondition for success.[8] This is also stated on MEPA's website: "Officers will meet, stay in contact with and learn to trust colleagues from the member states so later information can be passed on quickly and unbureaucratically, thereby remaining within the existing rules and regulations" (MEPA 2007).

MEPA is an example of Austria's (and Western) mistrust towards the East-European member states and their capabilities in crime-fighting matters. "Contributing to the process of European integration" here means institutional isomorphism regarding procedures, structures, and values (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). Integration and harmonization do not necessarily entail mutual exchange, but this case implies a one-way-street, where knowledge and practices are transferred from the West to the East, from center to periphery, exclusively.

The "Forum Salzburg" was launched on Austria's initiative and under its auspices in 2000 as an explicitly regionally limited and multilateral form of cooperation, currently encompassing Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia (Croatia has an observer status). Provided that different regions in the EU are facing similar tasks and problems, which, in turn, distinguish them from other regions, these regionally limited initiatives are intended to handle the specific interests of the nation states involved below the framework of the EU.[9] The "Forum Salzburg" aims at strengthening the cooperation of its member states in the area of home and security affairs under the direction of Austria. It initially set the specific goal of supporting the East-European states in achieving the requirements of firstly the EU accession criteria and subsequently the Schengen *acquis* (Bundesministerium für Inneres 2001). Currently, the three main tasks include: (1) strengthening operational cooperation in Central Europe, (2) joint lobbying for EU policymaking, and (3) the implementation of a joint external strategy concerning the Western Balkans "in order to further promote security in the heart of Europe" (Ministry of Interior Austria 2011).

Judging from both interviews and the relevant literature, the significance of the "Forum Salzburg" is not as large as has been suggested in official statements. Most significantly, the difference between Schengen members and non-Schengen members has been perceived as obstructive rather than conducive. The "Forum Salzburg" was even deemed as being dispensable as it was suspected to pose "a possible source of competition to the Visegrad framework, creating a certain amount of redundancy in terms of structures" (Kaźmierkiewicz et al. 2006: 61). Furthermore, the Visegrád group has been an important "vehicle for serving some of the requirements and challenges of the actuality of the 'return to Europe'" (Dangerfield 2008: 632) and NATO membership, and continues to play a vital role for cooperation in the postaccession phase. Therefore, the Forum Salzburg appears as a less attractive alternative, at least for the Visegrád countries.

Nevertheless, the Austrian ministers of the interior adhere to the Forum which can be interpreted as an attempt to define a Central European (*Mitteleuropa*) project that differs from other constructions, such as the Visegrád group, and by assuming a leading role in the hope of gaining hegemony. The difference is obvious: an explicit Central European project created solely by the former Warsaw Pact countries would probably not automatically include Austria; hence Austria had to take the initiative in creating this Central-European security partnership in order to be included and play a leading role. The "Forum Salzburg" publications in German

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make explicit use of the notion of *Mitteleuropa* and thus allude to a certain imagination of the region they are addressing (cf. Bundesministerium für Inneres 2010).

All multilateral forms of cooperation are complemented by bilateral arrangements that can either be of a short-term or long-term nature. The former involves the secondment of experts (e.g. in forgery of documents) to other countries' ministries for training purposes or specific target-oriented assistance, as in the case of the preparations for the Schengen enlargement. The latter are generally described by the interviewees as being the most important elements of cross-border cooperation, as it is in this area that mutual trust develops over time. Austria has formed treaties which govern cooperation in police and legal matters with all of its neighboring countries. On the one hand this includes twinning programs, readmission agreements, arrangements concerning information exchange programs, cross-border observation, liaison officers, and hot pursuit across national borders. On the other hand, in a wider, more practical sense and in the case of the East-European neighbor states, this comprises regular meetings of superior officers as well as trainings and language exchange for ordinary police officers, joint patrols and police cooperation centers in border towns such as Nickelsdorf (with Hungary) and Kittsee (with Slovakia). Cooperation began between Austria and Hungary, followed by an Austro-Czech-Slovak triangle. The "rest", as one official reports, apparently was perceived rather diffusely as "Yugoslavia", and thus initially was met with reservations.[10] As interviewees report, all forms of cooperation are initiated top-down on the part of the ministry and implemented locally.

Bilateral and local as they may seem, these practices are, however, deeply entrenched in the wider structure of European security governance, the EU border regime and the idea of a common Area of Freedom, Security, and Justice. Since the new member states had to submit to a homogenizing Europeanization process, they also had to internalize the EU-15's concept of the "threatening other(s)" and shape their bureaucracies and policies accordingly. Generally, we can observe that cooperation increasingly relies on informal relations and mutual trust and, consequently, can be made less and less accountable. Simultaneously, the internal security (identity) of the EU is increasingly characterized by exclusion and mistrust towards everything outside the security community.

Asymmetries and Hierarchies in Police Cooperation

While bilateral forms of cooperation may be motivated by the will to homogenization, isomorphism and integration at least in theory, they are, however, confronted with very practical and mundane problems, particularly relating to different legacies and the welfare gap.

The Forum Salzburg, MEPA and accompanying measures are but a few examples of Austria's attempts to function as a bridge between East and West, while finding it hard to abandon well-established mental patterns of mistrust, paternalism, and the colonial view. Furthermore, Austria's police cooperation with its East-European neighbors cannot be regarded as detached from their position as "junior partners" in the European security field. As interviews with security-political and police actors showed, the East-West asymmetry proves to be of great influence in cooperation and negotiations with the East-European neighbor states. This is especially the case when actors get the chance to actively compare their own living and working conditions with those of the others. The following cleavages were of particular importance:

(1) Cleavages due to differing organizational procedures and socialization in different control and organizational cultures become visible. The contrast of police (West) vs. military style (East) is only the most obvious example. Differing professional cultures generally have been argued to be an important determinant in police cooperation (Bigo 2000: 71). However, in a setting that is a priori marked by an unequal relationship they can be an important structuring factor for cooperation, since actors tend to translate structural differences into cultural stereotypes ("These X's are so obedient to authority").

(2) Technical and financial imbalances (e.g. with

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regard to equipment and salaries), although they cannot be influenced by individual actors, can also reproduce an asymmetric relationship and translate into alleged cultural patterns (cf. Schwell 2008: 199ff.). This duality of structural superiority and inferiority, of civilization and backwardness, has been particularly fostered during the enlargement process due to the fact that it was Western expertise and technical means that ought to support Eastern efforts to catch up, not vice versa. Institutions like MEPA play an important part in the perpetuation and persistence of the duality.

(3) Obvious and suspected misbehavior by the "junior partner" influences the asymmetry, for example with regard to (suspected) corruption or defects in the legal system. Such differences can easily be reduced to postsocialist legacies, can encourage pressure for a catch-up modernization process and can serve to emphasize one's own superiority on the part of the West.

Generally, citizens of democratic states tend to put more confidence in their own, national police (and their own legal system) than that of another nation state. Naturally, the police themselves are not excluded in this respect: "mistrust or suspicion of the foreigner has been built into the foundations of modern police systems. (…) For the police, whose function requires a simple focus of loyalty, this is a difficult legacy to eliminate" (Anderson 2002: 41). Stereotypes and prejudices can fuel such a dichotomic perception of self and other, and in the relations of Eastern and Western Europe, Western feelings of superiority meeting Eastern inferiority complexes are well documented.[11]

All these variables considerably influence the way actors interpret the social world around them and the colleague from the "other side", hence police and security organs must have good reasons to engage in cooperation (cf. Deflem 2000). Otherwise the development of mutual trust and social capital, which is deemed as being indispensable for cooperation on a personal, informal and thus most effective level, will not take place. Security-political and police cooperation in itself is not self-evident, since it touches the state's most sensitive realm, that is, internal security. International cooperation per se is already fraught with issues of trust and mistrust.

The Everyday Asymmetry

While these cleavages point towards a perpetuation of structural and cultural patterns of asymmetry, from an anthropological point of view we should not solely rely on structural determinants, but rather ask how the East-West divide is dealt with in practice. Actors are not simply subject to objective structures and act accordingly, but also creatively, and sometimes subversively, deal with and adapt to the social world that surrounds them. We should therefore recognize agency on the part of both Western and Eastern police and security experts, without underestimating the power relations that govern their social field: "A realistic cultural theory should lead us to expect not passive 'cultural dopes' (...), but rather the active, sometimes skilled users of culture whom we actually observe" (Swidler 1986: 277).

One way to try and overcome existing hierarchies in practice is the attempt to balance asymmetries. Indeed, numerous interview partners confirm that Austrian political and police representatives often appeared as "rich uncles from the West" and displayed their presumed superiority as "old" EU members.[12] On the one hand, Austria considered itself as the neighbors' advocate towards the EU, as a mediator and a helping hand; Austrian expertise, they said, is in great demand, because its experts, as one ministry informant put it, "understand both Northern and Southeastern Europeans," due to both the geopolitical position and historical legacies. Nevertheless, he said, Austrian "Westerners" should be careful to avoid any snotty behavior and treat the Easterners in a condescending way: "You got to be flexible and not Mr. Know-all. It's better to present one's own ideas rather as propositions than as prescriptions: we do it that way, and if you want to you can do it the same way."[13] As this quote illustrates, balancing acts, that is, the attempts to equilibrate structural hierarchies and cleavages, are strategic actions as well and are applied to reach a certain goal. Nevertheless, actors pursuing balancing acts run the risk of reproducing exactly the same paternal-

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istic patterns and stereotypes ("These proud X's are easily offended"). Therefore we can argue that the persistence of the East-West divide is not only a matter of the persistence of dichotomies and their reproduction, but how these dichotomies inform action. The important question is how the East-West divide is handled in practice, that is, how it is transformed and worked out by various actors.

Preparing for Schengen: Cooperation Ratings

The following empirical step will add two important insights to the aforementioned factors. Firstly, a temporal dimension joins the picture: I will elaborate on the preparations for the Schengen enlargement in 2007 and the way both the cooperation of Austria and its neighbors and their mutual relationship changed over time. In my field research I questioned my informants in the ministry of the interior and the police force how they evaluate the cooperation with the East-European neighboring countries in general and with particular regard to the Schengen enlargement.

This perspective will shed some light on the question of how Austrian political and security actors handle the security dilemma in practice, that is, how they reconcile the requirements of the internal security politics of the EU-15 with the cultural pattern of mistrust and paternalism towards the East. I will argue that the Austrian actors deal with this challenge in a quite "bureaucratic" way by developing informal scales of popularity regarding their postsocialist neighbors: at a first glance they "order" their neighbors according to what they consider civilizatory progress, but at the same time they also grade threats and their own mistrust. Doing so is their specific way of dealing with their own ambivalent position as a rich uncle, mediator and mistrustful postcolonial power simultaneously. The following "ranking" therefore is not a result of a predetermined set of questions from my part, but a mode of ordering that reflects the way the officials perceive cooperative efforts.

Slovenia is considered the "beacon" of cooperation by all ministry interviewees. While the population of the adjacent *Bundesland* Carinthia would not be inclined to share this enthusiasm,[14] Slovenia was described by most interview partners as the ministry's "darling", that is, as eager, not complicated and engaged in the cooperation. At the time of my field research Slovenia was the only Southeastern-European member state to have introduced the common currency, thus Slovenia's position as a popular precursor seems not to be a solely Austrian point of view. While in the southern land of Carinthia minority rights of ethnic Slovenians are structurally ignored (cf. Bufon 2002), these events seem to have no or only few repercussions on the cooperation, indicating the relative irrelevance of political events for police cooperation (cf. Deflem 2000).

Judging from a large number of interviews, however, the *Czech Republic* has replaced Slovenia in the number one position on the unofficial ministerial popularity scale. The interview partners justify this change by pointing out that now that Slovenia has fulfilled the criteria for the full implementation of the *acquis,* it is in a position to take a step back and concentrate its energy on other policy fields. Several interview partners expect that this development will continue in other East-European countries. The relations with the Czech Republic were not without complications in the beginning. Czechs are "portrayed in Western Europe as 'poor cousins'" (Horáková 2009: 15). Historically, the relationship has been ambivalent, and the public has increasingly come to view it critically in recent years due to Austria's protest concerning the Czech nuclear power plant Temelín. Nevertheless, the Czechs have been complying in terms of cooperation, which Horáková attributes to a lack of national and civic self-confidence and the belief that "the EU will bring law and order at last. Hence, Brussels and the EU are seen as a cargo cult" (Horáková 2009: 15).

Hungary takes a solid midfield position. On the one hand, Austria's close historical connection with Hungary is emphasized; this is particularly true for *Bundesland* Burgenland, which shares a border of more than 300 km with Hungary and is also co-inhabited by a Hungarian-speaking minority (cf. Gingrich 2004; Hentges 2009). In addition to this rather abstract historical feeling of togetherness, the

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common experience of the opening of the borders, the escape of East-Germans over the Hungarian green border in 1989 and the shared feeling of insecurity regarding the handling of these events seem to have brought together police officials from both sides.[15] However, concerning recent developments, it appears that this built-up trust must nevertheless be sustained. Hence many interview partners deplore the loss of long-standing contact persons that has accompanied the merging of the ministries of the interior and of justice (now the ministry of justice and law enforcement) and the integration of the border guards into the regular police.[16] This development has complicated relations and underlines the importance of mutual trust in police cooperation. To what extent the highly disputed current government led by Viktor Orbán will influence cooperation, would present an interesting case study that lies beyond the scope of this paper.

Slovakia was generally described as being at the bottom of the league: instable political circumstances under the (then prevailing) Mečiar administration, mafia-like structures and accusations of corruption planted mistrust and obstructed stable mutual trust from developing. As in Hungary, contact persons would change constantly in Slovakia, making it difficult for mutual trust to develop in the first place. Furthermore, the location and the size of the Slovakian capital Bratislava contributed to the development of a criminal focal point that would profit from the city's complexity, its proximity to Vienna and its good connection to international road and train networks (cf. Williams, Baláž & Bodnárová 2001; Williams & Baláž 2002; Bitušíková 2009). Interestingly, this problem was mitigated with the Schengen enlargement and a government change in Slovakia. With the abolishment of border controls, a hideout in Bratislava was less and less needed, and criminals approaching Austria from Russia or Poland could now more easily take the shortcut via the Czech Republic.

The Slovakian case deserves a closer look, as it is a revealing example of both transnational solidarity and fear of the security dilemma. The Schengen evaluation of Slovakia in the beginning was ill-omened. As late as 2006, circumstances in Slovakia made entry into the Schengen zone seem highly unlikely. Following the break-up of the Slovakian Dzurinda government, the interim person in charge for the Schengen enlargement showed little ambition to move forward with the Schengen preparations. Interview partners reported that chaos, delays, and confusion were commonplace at that time, meaning that necessary orders for technical equipment did not take place. At this point, Slovakia did something that, according to many interview partners, most of the other countries would have been reluctant to do: They openly asked for help, and help was given. The Czech Republic provided infrared cameras, while Austria assisted in matters of technical equipment and trainings. Other West- and East-European countries came to Slovakia's aid as well. In the end, one informant concludes, Slovakia was much better prepared for Schengen than Austria had been when it acceded.[17]

Their readiness to support Slovakia should not be over-interpreted as a pan-European feeling of solidarity. Rather, the reason for the overwhelming support stemmed from the serious repercussions that were likely to befall not only Slovakia but other member states as well. A negative judgment by the Schengen evaluation group would have endangered the immediate accession of all candidates to the Schengen zone, pushing entry back approximately two years. A successive accession, with Slovakia as the laggard, would have entailed upgrading the Slovakian borders to a temporary external border of the Schengen zone, and thus a huge investment of only a short-term nature. Consequently, a united force rallied behind Slovakia to help the country pull through the Schengen evaluation. It is here that we reencounter the security dilemma, which has already been mentioned, in a new guise: when old and new member states provided material and assistance to support Slovakia in its attempt to fulfill the Schengen requirements, this was not done out of entirely altruistic motives. All of the countries involved attempted to "buy" their own security and, psychologically probably even more relevant, the new members "bought" at least part of their escape

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route from second-class membership. Therefore, the structures of the Visegrád group proved particularly important, as its members as early as 2003 had agreed upon enhanced cooperation and coordination regarding the Schengen enlargement (cf. Dangerfield 2008: 654f.).

The examples of security-political and police cooperation with the East-European member states show that Austria, aside from Slovakia's cry for help, always attempted to play an active role in matters of international and Central-European cooperation. Austria aimed at turning the Central European project into a *Mitteleuropa* project: The former would exclude Austria; the latter would take place under its auspices. A high-ranking official from the Austrian ministry of the interior admits that during the EU and Schengen enlargement processes the ministry more often than not faced a communicative "Eastern bloc", impeding Austrian attempts to act strategically. He reports that there was much internal communication among the Eastern European officials, hence the Austrians had to be careful: if they talked to one of them, he would immediately tell it to all the others, so that everybody would be informed before Austrian officials could even contact them.[18] The East-European neighbor states apparently treated Austria as distinct from their own, if only temporal, in-group of candidate countries, and in a utilitarian way. Likewise, as the example of Slovenia shows, cooperation was instrumentalized for individual aims, not for a common goal, thus impeding long-term developments.

Nevertheless, as emphasized by the informants, good cooperation requires tact, intuition and sensitivity; the Other has to be treated as an equal partner – the East-West asymmetry must in fact be played down. Trust building plays a pivotal role, but this can only occur when there is personal continuity; yet this was not always the case in Slovakia and Hungary. Moreover, the Slovakian example in particular illustrates that the members of the Schengen zone share a "common destiny"; the nation states involved operate in a field of mutual dependency and at the same time strengthening homogeneity of action and institutional isomorphy. Interestingly, several interview partners explicitly positively emphasized this particular aspect of Schengen as a community based on the principle of mutual solidarity: "That's great: if one doesn't play along, then the others immediately feel the effects, because then there's a security flaw."[19] Another respondent, however, suspects that this is not sufficient to keep the new members on board. Since the former junior partners had made such an effort not to rebel against EU regulations and keep still until they had reached their aims, now they would develop a new self-confidence, "complicating things for us. Now we have to define new objectives."[20]

Conclusion: Bridge or Barrier?

The abolition of border controls between neighboring countries is an important mark of confidence which cannot be taken for granted. The creation of an entire political region without institutionalized stationary border controls is an even bigger step, as border security measures are significant signs of the state of the relationship between neighboring countries.

For the Eastern European member states, the enlargement of the Schengen zone was an important step towards overcoming the East-West asymmetry. Their advancement from "junior partners" to the league of full members is strongly connected to a developing self-confidence, as can be observed in the case of Slovenia. As many informants report, the challenge now is to keep the new members on board, although both Austria's influence capabilities and the incentive structure for cooperation have decreased significantly with the successful accession to the Schengen zone. The controlled inclusion which had been working throughout the accession and enlargement process seems to have become less effective, and Austria's neighbors begin to escape the hug in which they found themselves as they no longer rely on their former colonial power's goodwill.

It can be argued that Austria's Eastern neighbors can be considered postcolonial in a double sense: on the one hand, Austria's East-European neighbors were all part of the Habsburg Empire, explaining the alleged historical proximity Austria draws upon

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when attempting to influence the former subjugated people. Accordingly, Gingrich includes Austria into the category of "countries with limited colonial power in more adjacent regions of the Muslim periphery" (1998: 101). This has been discussed in detail above. On the other hand, if we follow David Chioni Moore's (2001) suggestion to conceive of the Soviet expansion as a colonial enterprise, then Austria's postsocialist neighbors, with the exception of Slovenia, can be interpreted in postcolonial terms in this respect as well. Simultaneously we should keep in mind that also "the concept 'postsocialism' may be seen as an imposition from the West in the post-communist world" (Kürti & Skalník 2009: 6). The implications of this specific label therefore have to be taken into account when conducting research in Central and Eastern Europe.

It is this dual coding of Habsburg-postcolonialism and postsocialist-postcolonialism, that accounts for the specific mixture of distance and proximity, of attraction and rejection, the intimacy and mistrust that shapes Austria's relations with its Eastern European neighboring states. Reference to the common history within the Habsburg Empire always entails a history of colonialism and of superiority and inferiority, which is *nolens volens* reproduced in present cooperation and contact. The strategy of ordering mistrust in informal scales of popularity has been discussed as one strategic way of handling the ambivalent position as big brother/rich uncle who simultaneously feels under siege by his former crown lands. The period under socialism on the other hand strengthened Western Europe's perception of the East not only as backward, uncivilized and generally different, relating to the cognitive pattern of the cultural "East", but moreover as part of Ronald Reagan's "Evil Empire" – a hardly favorable ascription.

Austria's *Mitteleuropa* as a political project has waned, but as a political tool and vehicle for a distinct EU-skepticism and as a way of coming to terms with post-1989 realities in the region, the imagined geography of *Mitteleuropa* is pervasive and powerful, as a framework for interpreting the self and the surrounding social world. Austria's fight to appropriate the term *Mitteleuropa* should thus be interpreted not as an attempt at overcoming the East-West divide, but as the expression of a very inward-looking cultural pattern. The "bridge region" will most likely continue to contribute to a persistence of the East-West divide rather than to its dissolution.

In conclusion, the abolition of borders may have brought East and West closer together; it certainly has improved ways and means for cooperation. Nevertheless, the East-West divide still exists as a boundary, not only for obvious and tangible reasons, such as the still remaining prosperity gap or different legal systems and organizational issues. The narrative of the backward Other is still pervasive. The idea of the "East" as the "Other", or even the "dark" side of the West, has been inscribed into the collective identity of the "West", and the process of who is more Eastern or Central or Western remains deeply entrenched in the general collective consciousness, due to the fact that in "this new oscillating geography of centrality and marginality, European states are realigning themselves according to their newly found places inside or outside the EU" (Kürti & Skalník 2009: 6).

Notes

1 An earlier version of this article was presented at the EastBordNet Workshop "The Path Dependence of Borders' Making and Breaking" in Herzliya, Israel, in October 2010. I wish to thank Marie Sandberg, Guido Tiemann and the two anonymous reviewers of this journal for valuable suggestions and helpful comments on previous drafts of this article.

2 Interview with ministry official, Vienna, April 14, 2008.

3 The theoretical and descriptive parts of the text are complemented by empirical research collected in 2008 during four months of field research. I conducted participant observation in the "Security Academy" (.SIAK) of the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior, where I mainly focused on organizational procedures and the production of knowledge concerning security issues. My stay in .SIAK allowed me access to high-ranking officials and information in the Ministry of the Interior, the Federal Criminal Police Office and other police and security units in the Austrian federal states or *Bundesländer*. I conducted qualitative interviews and informal conversations with political actors and practitioners in the security field, all of whom were concerned with dif-

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ferent aspects of the 2007 Schengen enlargement. All interviews have been anonymized. The interviews and conversations as well as my field diary are the primary sources of this article.

4 Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary joined NATO in 1999, other Eastern and Southeastern countries followed, among them Slovakia and Slovenia in 2004. For an analysis of the relationship of these parallel processes, see Fierke and Wiener (1999).

5 The candidate countries had to accept a constantly expanding *acquis*, which they had no possibility of influencing. Beginning with the 2004 Eastern enlargement, EU membership entails not only the compulsory entry into the European Monetary Union, but also the obligatory implementation of the Schengen *acquis*. Unlike Ireland and the UK, new member states do not have the possibility to partially opt out.

6 I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for this information.

7 The declaration of neutrality entailed a simultaneous adoption of Article 4 of the State Treaty of 1955, "which rules out any form of union with Germany; in doing so, it had sent a clear signal of its distinction from Germany" (Liebhart 2003: 33).

8 Interview with ministry official, Vienna, April 14, 2008.

9 A more prominent example is the so-called "Northern Dimension" encompassing the Scandinavian and Baltic countries as well as Russia.

10 Interview with ministry official, March 28, 2008.

11 This applies particularly to the German-Polish relationship (for an overview see Schmidtke 2005), but the overall pattern of othering and alterity can be observed in other cases of East-West contact.

12 Interview with ministry official, Vienna, March 20, 2008.

13 Interview with ministry official, Vienna, April 14, 2008.

14 The relationship between the Austrian majority and the Slovenian minority in Carinthia has been problematic ever since the borders of the Austrian state were drawn. The state treaty provided for far-reaching minority rights which, however, have been ignored and fought particularly by former Carinthian governor Jörg Haider. The issue of bilingual town signs in mixed areas was finally settled in April 2011. For Austria's politics on its ethnic minorities, see Hentges (2009).

15 Interview with police official, Eisenstadt, May 13, 2008; in the interviews, police officials in Burgenland put a strong emphasis on this close bond between them and the Hungarian police dating back to the events of 1989.

16 Interview with ministry official, Vienna, March 20, 2008.

17 Interview with (Austrian) police official, Bratislava, March 9, 2008.

18 Interview with ministry official, Vienna, March 12, 2008.

19 Interview with ministry official, Vienna, March 20, 2008.

20 Interview with ministry official, Vienna, March 20, 2008.

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