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Austrian-Russian memory dialogues: modern contexts of historical narratives on the Red Army's actions in Austria

According to the Moscow Declaration issued by the Allies on 1 November 1943, Austria was the first country to fall victim to Nazi aggression (Rauchensteiner 2015: 14). That document anticipated the idea of the Second Republic as a peaceful community, destined to play a positive role in the reconstruction of postwar Europe. This vision proved far-reaching. Following the signing in 1955 of the State Treaty that ended ten years of Allied occupation, Austria became a country that was active on the international stage, while its status of permanent neutrality, reinforced by an economic boom, enabled it – both during and after the Cold War – to play the role of a bridge between East and West.

The defeat of Hitler and the rebuilding of Austria's statehood took place, to a significant if not decisive degree, as a result of Soviet policy, in particular the uncompromising military actions of the Red Army. This self-critical assessment, to be found, for example, in the memoirs of future chancellor Bruno Kreisky, is nonetheless a rarity in Austrian society. Almost 70 years after the 1955 withdrawal of Soviet troops, their image in Austria is immutably negative, strongly coloured both by the ill renown of that army, as recorded in biographical memory, and by Austrians' attitudes to Russia's present-day internal and foreign policy (cf. Zöchling 2012).

This article will identify the specific features and current contexts of the contemporary narratives presented on the pages of opinion-forming magazines from Austria and Russia, representing different political viewpoints, concerning the actions of the Red Army in Austria near the end of the Second World War and after it. The author aims to answer the following research questions:

- What are the differences in and the factors affecting contemporary historical narratives about the Second World War, present in the dominant historical and media discourses in Austria and Russia?
- What are the specific features of narratives concerning the USSR and Russia created by educational institutions and press publications linked to the "reformed" Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) since 2005?
- Is it possible to speak of an Austrian–Russian dialogue of memory, understood as a bilateral process of exchange of views and efforts to develop shared, compromise-based content and forms for historical narratives about the Second World War?

The questions posed are important in so far as history – now more than ever, it seems – serves as a symbolic weapon, a tool in the struggle for truth, justice, identity. It is used to legitimise defined ideas and policies, and even the existence of particular states in a specific form; it is capable of effectively blocking international understandings, and even simply the initial process of dialogue. It can also serve to overcome prejudices and injustices, and thus to give the green light to a long, gradual and arduous process of reconciliation. However, misinterpretation of the lessons of history may lead to political and human tragedies, as evidenced by the events following 24 February 2022, the date of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine.

Coming to terms with history

In what sense do the aforementioned diagnoses relate to the historical identity of Austria and Russia? In the case of both countries one may speak of ambivalences concerning both coming to terms with key facts of twentieth-century history, and the shrouding of those facts in social amnesia.

The historical identity of Austrians after the Second World War was founded on two myths: concerning the heritage of the multicultural, tolerant monarchy of the Habsburgs, and concerning Austria's being "Hitler's first victim" (cf. Timms 1991: 898–907; Karner 2008: 168; Żakowska 2020: 247–254). In distinction from the process of "overcoming" or coming to terms with the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) initiated in the Federal Republic of Germany, which from the 1960s onwards sometimes aroused controversy, but progressed relatively freely, similar efforts in Austria as a rule met with much greater resistance. The "victim myth" (*Opfermythos*) enabled the creation of conditions in which the problem of National Socialism could be externalised and treated as secondary for the Austrians, as it was supposedly a part of Germany's history

only, and not of the history of their country (Lepsius 1989: 247–264; cf. Berg 2008: 48).

In the 1980s, however, several factors led to the opening of a debate about the *Opfermythos*: the controversies related to the election of Kurt Waldheim as president of the Second Republic; the rise in the popularity of Jörg Haider as leader of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) and the later renaissance of the extreme right in Austrian politics; and reflections connected with the 50th anniversary of Anschluss together with generational replacement, as manifested in the Austrian political culture that sought to come to terms with the past, as well as in the academic world and in art (Berg 2008: 48).

As a result of the transformations which can be considered to correspond to the changes in Germany's historical identity in the late 1960s, a public opinion survey conducted in 1991 revealed that only one-third of Austrians still considered their country Hitler's first victim (Bukey 2000: 233). Social changes were accompanied by changes on the political stage. Chancellor Franz Vranitzky announced in parliament on 8 July 1991 that Austrians bore shared responsibility for the suffering of individuals and whole nations, while on 15 November 1995 President Thomas Klestil admitted, in an address to the Knesset, that some of the Nazi regime's worst cruelties had been perpetrated by Austrians (Berg 2008: 53–54).

Together with political declarations came an atmosphere of repentance and a will to repair historical wrongs. In 1995 the Austrian parliament established a National Fund, recognising Austria's duty to compensate victims of Nazi terror, and in 1997 it proclaimed the fifth of May, the date of the liberation of Mauthausen concentration camp, a Day of Reflection on Violence and Racism. In 1998, Chancellor Viktor Klima set up an independent Commission of Historians, which would investigate matters of the appropriation of Jewish property and the use of forced labour by firms that had been nationalised by the Second Republic, and would draw up offers of compensation (ibidem: 53–54). This resulted in the Fund for Reconciliation, Peace and Cooperation (*Fonds für Versöhnung, Frieden und Zusammenarbeit*), which in 2000–2005, among other things, paid sums of compensation amounting to several thousand euro to former forced labourers, and frequently received money from private donors (Ruff 2014: 32, 121).

Austrians also became more open to criticism of their country from outside. In 2000 most Austrians did not deny the legitimacy of the concerns of international public opinion regarding the formation of a coalition between the conservative ÖVP and the extreme right-wing populist FPÖ. Changes in the Austrian culture of memory are also evidenced by the anniversary events

of 2005, which were imbued with the presence of self-critical introspections concerning the history of the Third Reich.

At the same time, Austrian public opinion became less and less tolerant of statements by public figures that undermined the aforementioned critical consensus. This is shown by the media storms that erupted around more or less controversial pronouncements by individual politicians. In April 2005, FPÖ activist John Gudenus expressed a lack of sympathy for a proposal to rehabilitate deserters from the Wehrmacht, put forward in parliament by the socialists and Greens, and was backed by party colleague Siegfried Kampl, who claimed that de-Nazification in Austria had gone too far. Following a press scandal, the latter toned down his statement, underlining the importance of reconciliation and of pardons for deserters, National Socialists, displaced persons and the Sinti and Roma communities, but this did not cool the mood in the media. They considered it unacceptable that he treated Austrians subjected to de-Nazification as belonging to the same category of victims of the Third Reich as concentration camp prisoners; journalists meanwhile entirely ignored the part of his statement appealing for nationwide reconciliation. This may suggest – in the view of Matthew P. Berg – an "increased sensitivity to insensitivity", that is, an aversion to continued acceptance of the forms of communicative memory that took root immediately following the war, whereby Austrians awarded themselves the status of victims (Berg 2008: 54–69).

Combating the "slanderers"

Russians' postwar national identity, on the other hand, was essentially founded on a single myth – the old, multifaceted Messianic myth linked to a vision of an unyielding, undefeated victor-power, a liberator and defender of other nations. Moreover, memory policy in that country was shaped – and to a large degree continues to be shaped – from above, by an authoritarian state and in the spirit of a state ethos (Curanović 2020: 101–141).

Public opinion surveys indicate the key – and still growing – role of the USSR's victory in World War II as the only positive experience that integrates the younger and older generations of Russians. It arouses the greatest sense of pride out of all events in the more than thousand-year history of that country; in 1996 it was named in that context by 44% of respondents, and by 2003 that number had risen to 87% (Гудков 2005: 86–90).

In Stalin's totalitarian state, the Great Patriotic War and the victory achieved therein served above all to reinforce the authority of the country's leader, but

further to cement the division between "foreigners" and "our own". The main line of division was based on the dichotomy of "victors" (the nation and the party) and the "defeated" (Germany and fascism). This logic led to actions that from today's point of view are incomprehensible, such as the Soviet authorities' punishment of Soviets who had been POWs and forced labourers for the Third Reich – for betraying the fatherland, in that they had "refused" to fight to liberate their country, or had even worked for the enemy (Ruff 2014: 39). In the 1970s, under Brezhnev, the place of the "defeated" in official memory concerning the war was taken by the "liberated" – since it was their very liberation that legitimised the USSR's hegemony in Eastern Europe. Also at that time the ninth of May was designated Victory Day, a day off work and holiday for ordinary Russians, especially veterans (Лангеноль 2005: 415–417).

It was only close to the end of the Soviet Union's existence, in the second half of the 1980s, that there arose a new way of conceptualising the narrative about the war – similar to the approach described above that was adopted in Germany in the late 1960s and in Austria in the 1980s – namely viewing it from a perspective of perpetrators and victims. Anti-Soviet intellectuals began to characterise both the victors and the liberated as victims of the Soviet regime. In consequence, the Soviet authorities, and later in particular the first president of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin, decided on actions related to "coming to terms with history", such as the opening of the Soviet archives and disclosure of previously unspoken or falsified facts, including the truth about the secret protocol accompanying the Ribbentrop–Molotov pact, or about the Katyn massacres. These also had an international dimension: they were linked to support for the idea of reconciliation in Russia's relations with the newly developing democracies of Central and Eastern Europe (ibidem: 416–418).

In internal policy, the aforementioned transformations were reflected in, among other things, deeper discussion of the exceptionally high price paid for victory over fascism and of the need to rehabilitate and compensate a wide range of victims of the Nazi and Soviet regimes. One of the consequences of this was a law signed by Yeltsin in 1995 "On the restoration of statutory rights to Russian citizens being former Soviet prisoners-of-war and civilians who during the Great Patriotic War and in the postwar period were repatriated". This law gave such persons equal status to veterans, and the infamy they had experienced in Soviet times was removed. It should be noted that this was also achieved to a significant degree through the compensation that former Soviet forced labourers received from Austria and Germany (Ruff 2014: 156).

The process related to demythologisation, the "unbronzing" of World War II memory in the 1990s, nevertheless also led to conflict between Russian dem-

ocratic circles, who took a critical attitude to the era of communism, and a significant part of society, including those in authority. Many of those living in the Russian Federation saw this phenomenon as a symptom of a social crisis among Russians and an important factor linked to the erosion of their country's good name in the international arena. The two decades of Vladimir Putin's rule can be seen as a period when reference was made to all of the aforementioned memory cultures, but with the main emphasis placed on cultivating the heritage of the Soviet war heroes and victims and on counteracting any interpretations of history that deviated from the Kremlin's line.

At the present time it may be said, with a degree of simplification, that the memory of the Second World War in the countries of Western Europe contains many shared components – that in this sense it is a universalised memory. In the 21st century in Russia, however, a partially opposite phenomenon can be observed, involving the petrification and reinforcement of a specifically Russian vision of history. After 2008, and particularly since 2014, in connection with the outbreak of war in eastern Ukraine, the dispute over the USSR's role in World War II has even become a tool in a "historical war", serving as a component in the multifaceted confrontation between the West and Russia (Clarke, Wóycicka 2019: 84–85). An event viewed in Russia as manifesting a desire for such Cold War-style confrontation was the 2008 decision of the European Parliament to declare the twenty-third of August, the anniversary of the signing of the Ribbentrop–Molotov pact, a European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism.[1] A similar interpretation was given in the West to the law signed by Putin on 5 May 2014 serving to prevent the rehabilitation of Nazism, including Holocaust denial. Consternation was aroused by a provision of that law which placed criminal liability on institutions and persons that accused the USSR of participating in starting the Second World War, and also in war crimes and the occupation of Eastern Europe (ibidem: 78–109).

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[1] For example, historian Nikolai Starikov claims that "excessive" concentration on the victims of the Stalinist regime leads to a diminishment of the crimes committed against Soviet citizens by the Third Reich: "First it began to be said that the USSR was culpable for the outbreak of war with Hitler no less than Hitler was himself. Then, that the Soviet Union's losses in the struggle were on the conscience of that country itself, and the Führer was simply compelled to defend himself on 22 June 1941. At present the thesis on the comparability of Hitler to Stalin has become a common denominator in the thinking of Western politicians and Russian liberals" (Стариков 2017: 5).

The unnecessary truth about the *grand peur*?

Due to the different circumstances related to the shaping of memory and historical policy in Austria and in Russia, narratives about the Second World War and the realities of the early postwar years contain different points of emphasis in the two countries. In a situation where since the turn of the century there has been increasing public debate in Austria concerning the myth of that country's being "Hitler's first victim", analysis is also made of the problem of the country's "liberation" and of the "liberators" themselves. In educational discourse this is reflected in attempts to confront different perceptions of reality with each other, and by the same token, in the avoidance of definitive judgements in relation to historical facts. Klaus Bachmann believes that the only fully understandable point of reference then becomes the perspective of ordinary people, individuals, being not so much actors as mute witnesses and often victims of "great history" (Bachmann 2005: 163–169).

A central element of Austrians' perception of the Second World War is the memory of National Socialism and the Holocaust. The topic of the Soviet Union, although that country played a key role in the creation of the Second Republic, is addressed in a reticent and parsimonious manner. School textbooks contain matter-of-fact accounts relating to international policy, including the diplomatic negotiations of the Cold War era, but not relating to the specifics of Austro-Soviet relations. The subject of the fighting carried on in Ostmark territory by the disintegrating Third Reich is covered very concisely, in single sentences speaking of the "particularly heavy battles" fought by the Red Army in Burgenland and its capture of Vienna. Material used as a stimulus for discussion includes a Soviet poster referring to the liberation of Vienna on 13 April 1945 and containing text from the Allies' Moscow Declaration of 1943. The poster is not accompanied by commentary; it appears only in a revision aid for high school students, whose authors suggest one way in which it might be interpreted: "Although the Red Army – together with the other Allies – made a significant contribution to the ending of Nazi rule, the liberation [of the country] by the Red Army was not seen that way by all groups of the population, and particularly not by supporters of the Nazi regime" (Staudinger, Ebenhoch, Scheucher et al. 2013: 77). Also noteworthy is, among other things, a source text that mentions Austrian prisoners-of-war in the USSR and their repatriation. Although it raises thorny humanitarian questions, it fulfils criteria linked to the aim of making the message as objective as possible:

> The USSR was (like Yugoslavia) one of the countries […] that held prisoners-of-war for the longest time, and the conditions in the Soviet camps were decidedly the worst […]. It should be noted here that the Soviet Union, alongside Poland, was the country that suffered most due to the actions of the Wehrmacht. The labour of prisoners-of-war – including Austrians – was treated by Moscow […] as a legitimate part of reparations. (Eisterer 1997: 167, quoted by Staudinger, Ebenhoch, Scheucher et al. 2014: 20)

As regards the description of great politics, the USSR is presented on the pages of history textbooks simply as one of the Allied powers and later occupying powers, while Austria before 1955 is shown as a passive "bargaining chip" and "hostage of the Cold War" (cf. Żakowska 2020: 254–255).

Against the background of the cited narratives, the content of contemporary Russian history textbooks that describe the Red Army's conquest and occupation of Austria seems quite curt. However, in contrast to the Austrian educational material, it consists not of commentaries aimed at disproving myths and breaking down an established culture of memory, but of messages built around the package of information, repeated for decades, about the victorious, liberating march of Soviet forces. From all of the textbooks analysed by the author, one may learn, indirectly or expressly, that Red Army troops, "conducting a powerful attack from the Baltic to the Carpathians", liberated Poland, Yugoslavia, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and then **freed** Austria.[2]

The monumentalism and pathos of the extensive accounts and photographs of battles fought in Central and Eastern Europe, found in the analysed textbooks, are well illustrated by a quotation from the war memoirs of Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky, which – although his battle route did not pass through Austria – in fact refers to the totality of Soviet and Russian narratives about the final stage of the Second World War:

> The roads of Germany were lined not only with sad columns of prisoners. On the roads, simple human joy floated through the country. Crowds of people hailed us with cries

[2] All bolding by the present author. Cf. "Hungary's exit from the war and the capture […] of Bratislava opened the road to Austria; its capital Vienna **was freed**" (Волобуев, Карпачев, Клоков 2021: 200); "Simultaneously with the Vistula–Oder offensive, Soviet troops conducted a powerful attack on a wide front from the Baltic to the Carpathians, in which Poland and Yugoslavia were liberated; they also began to **liberate Austria**" (Волобуев, Клоков, Пономарев, Рогожкин 2020: 178); "On 16 March [1945] the Vienna offensive began, in which […] troops of the second and third Ukrainian fronts completely cleared Hungary, followed by a significant part of Czechoslovakia, and on 13 April after seven days of fighting **entered Vienna**" (Никонов, Девятов 2020: 258–259); "Also in 1945 Soviet troops carried out the liberation of Czechoslovakia and Hungary **and entered the territory of Austria**" (Пазин, Морозов 2019: 260).

> of triumph, greeted us in all languages of the world. One's heart stopped at the sight of this multinational human sea. Many were in rags, nightmarishly emaciated, they could barely stand on their feet, and were holding each other up so as not to fall. But in their eyes – happiness. These were yesterday's prisoners of fascist camps, people whom death had awaited. We liberated them, restored them to life – we, Soviet soldiers […]. (Rokossovsky 1968, quoted by Никонов, Девятов 2020: 259)

There is likely no exaggeration in the words of Austrian journalist Christa Zöchling, who noted, referring to the accounts of Red Army veterans, that the words they associated with Austria were "spring, victory, youth, waltzes, and love" (Zöchling 2012).

The cited narratives, dominant in educational discourses in Austria and Russia, nonetheless remain silent on many facts that would show the military actions conducted in Austria in 1945 in a far grimmer light. Western historians agree that most residents of the Ostmark supported the Nazi regime to the end, and were united above all by a "fear of disorder and Bolshevism" (Bukey 2000: 227). Under the influence of many years of anti-communist propaganda and terrible accounts of events in East Prussia, in the last months of the war they were overcome by what Salzburg historian Ernst Hanisch called the *grand peur*, the fear of a great threat from the East, which went back to stories of medieval Hungarian invasions and of the Turkish wars of the seventeenth century (Rauchensteiner 2015: 220).

Was this justified? On 10 April 1945 the Russians entered Vienna, which had been partly destroyed due to artillery bombardment, but where there had not previously been any fierce hand-to-hand fighting with the civilian population. Theft and looting occurred, begun by the city's inhabitants themselves, and later there were incidents of rape and violence, mainly committed by Red Army soldiers (Bukey 2000: 225). The terror felt by Austrians in connection with the presence of the Red Army, not even in the role of aggressor, is documented by an extract from the chronicles of the Benedictine abbey in Vorau that recounts events of 16 April 1945, when Russian troops marched through:

> A patrol of 10 men (Russians) came first […]. Soon there arrived […] a whole division of people, horses, and vehicles. We were overwhelmed by an indescribable parade of victors. There were trophies from Hungary, horses, cars, beautiful carpets, whole masses of plunder, beds, equipment, everything imaginable. Whole herds of cattle and horses, then again a car looking like a sale display, with pictures of Lenin and Stalin. Their entry to Vorau took place the same as in Hungary and everywhere else. They took a Ukrainian woman off to the hospital, where she was raped by more than 40 Russians. (Rauchensteiner 2015: 268–269)

Also telling are the selection and content of a set of documents reflecting events relating to the Soviet occupation of Austria, collected and published by a team of Austrian and Russian historians in 2005. Many of them are transcripts of conversations and extracts from diplomatic correspondence of leading politicians and military commanders from the two countries. They include examples of subtle attempts by the Austrians to negotiate Russian concessions in relation to the powers of the occupying authorities and the scale of war reparations, as well as efforts on the part of the Soviet authorities to display to Austrians the USSR's humanitarian attitude, which "shows that we are not exacting revenge, especially on Austria".[3] The collection also includes, among other things, many papers previously kept secret, such as documents describing problems with breach of discipline by Red Army divisions in Austria, which refer to "isolated criminal elements" who "forget about military obligations and find pleasure in a decadent way of life, a lust for enrichment, and the satisfaction of base instincts".[4]

Also deserving of attention are contemporary documents recording the concern of the Soviet authorities in Austria about the strong and effective propaganda aimed at the USSR, referring to the ethos of the "bridgehead of Europe" and a "wall protecting Western culture from Bolshevism" – namely slogans analogous to those that had previously been present in Nazi rhetoric.[5] Indeed, how much was borrowed from the rhetoric of the Third Reich by Austrian journalists, politicians, and even priests may be evidenced by a statement by the future bishop of Linz, Josephus Calasanz Fließer, who in a pastoral letter distributed to the faithful in the summer of 1945 claimed that one of the greatest punishments to the German nation for its sins had become the social and ethnic problem of many thousands of shamed German women and their children who would possess "contaminated genetic material, foreign to the race and the nation".[6]

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[3] Document 44: transcript of a conversation of marshal Ivan Konyev with chancellor Karl Renner on the situation in Austria, 9 July 1945. Source: Karner, Stelzl-Marx, Tschubarjan 2005: 207.

[4] Document 127, from "not later than 11 December 1946". Source: Karner, Stelzl-Marx, Tschubarjan 2005: 631.

[5] Document 153 of 19 November 1946: report by USSR secret services on the attitude of the SPÖ to the USSR using the example of a report of a statement by the editor of *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, Oscar Pollak, at a conference of socialist parties in Britain. Source: Karner, Stelzl-Marx, Tschubarjan 2005: 715.

[6] Supplement to *Linzer Diözesanblatt* 1945, no. 9, p. 3, after: Putz 2008: 265–267.

The Red Army in Austrian and Russian media discourse in 2005-2022

In the following analysis I will examine on how large a scale and in what context matters relating to the end of the war and the presence of the Red Army in Austria are raised in the contemporary popular and opinion-forming press in Austria and in Russia. To obtain a picture of press discourses representing as broad as possible a spectrum of political views and sections of society, I decided to select the following titles:

- two Austrian weeklies with a left-liberal leaning (*Profil* and *Der Standard*) and one that espouses strictly liberal values (*Kurier*), as well as the conservative daily *Die Presse*; the analysis also included titles associated with the extreme right-wing FPÖ party (*Neue Freie Zeitung*, *Unzensuriert.at*, *Wochenblick*, *Info Direkt*, *Die Aula*, *Freilich*) and information materials placed on the website of that party's educational institute (FPÖ-Bildungsinstitut);
- the largest independent newspaper in Russia, representing right-liberal views (*Kommersant*[7]), the Russian newspaper with the largest readership, printed in tabloid format (*Komsomolskaya Pravda*), and other socially influential titles (*Moskovskij Komsomolets*, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Argumenty i Fakty*); also analysed were media that may be strictly categorised as taking an anti-Kremlin stance (*Novaya Gazeta*, TV Dozhd, the Ekho Moskvy website).

The selection of particular articles published between 2005 and 2022 was made using keyword search engines available on the websites of the aforementioned publications (and media portals) and on the FPÖ-Bildungsinstitut site. A search was made for texts containing the following keywords: in German, *Rote Armee*, *Zweiter Weltkrieg*, *Sowjetunion*, *Moskauer Deklaration*, *Denkmal*, *Mahnmal*, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, *Opfermythos*; in Russian, *Вена 1945* and *Победа 1945*. The articles thus selected were analysed qualitatively based on the methodology of critical discourse analysis.[8]

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[7] Up to the time of the tightening of rules of media censorship in Russia after 24 February 2022.

[8] The term "discourse" is understood here, following Michel Foucault, as a "unity constituting a given set of utterances". According to Foucault: "The analysis of the discursive field is orientated in a quite different way; we must grasp the statement in the exact specificity of its occurrence; determine its conditions of existence, fix at least its limits, establish its correlations with other statements that may be connected with it, and show what other forms of statement it excludes. We do not seek below what is manifest the half silent murmur of another discourse; we must show why it could not be other than it was, in what respect it is exclusive of any other, how it assumes, in the midst of others and in relation to them, a place that no other could

As a result of this search, the author collected and studied approximately 70 articles referring directly to the issues mentioned at the outset. The following sections contain synthesised conclusions relating to the threads that most frequently occur in the selected texts, with particular attention to articles that are expressly devoted to the specific historical identity and political views of contemporary Austrians and Russians.

Rape and nationalism

Analysis of the informational articles and texts obtained from Austrian sources revealed significant differences between the mainstream press and the publications linked to the FPÖ. The conservative, liberal and left-liberal press, apart from a self-critical approach to the country's native history, take an equally critical view of the foundations of Russia's current historical policy.

The longest article that the author identified was Christa Zöchling's extensive "recent history study" devoted to the presence of Red Army troops as an occupying army in postwar Austria. This is *de facto* an account of the mentality, motivations and everyday life of the Soviet soldiers. The journalist can be seen attempting to distance herself from and "undemonise" the dark myths surrounding the men of the Red Army, while also recognising the "grain of truth" they contain. It is observed that she tries to understand the Soviet soldiers, who when crossing Austria's borders "had behind them the [war] march that had brought the greatest losses […] during the battle of Vienna alone, with its fervent struggles for every house, another 20,000 of them had perished"; people who "came as saviours but were not regarded as such" (Zöchling 2012). Zöchling devotes much space to the "dark side of the occupation" in the form of 270,000 rapes of Austrian women committed by Red Army soldiers, quoting statistics that imply that as many as one in every two Soviet troops who entered the territory of the Third Reich may have been a rapist. The author does sometimes attempt, however, to understand the how the rank-and-file Russians must have felt when arriving in wealthy Western cities such as Vien-

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occupy." Thus, "if we isolate […] the occurrence of the statement/event […] it is in order to be sure that this occurrence is not linked with synthesising operations of a purely psychological kind […] and to be able to grasp other forms of regularity, other types of relations. Relations between statements […] between groups of statements thus established […] relations between statements and groups of statements and events of a quite different kind (technical, economic, social, political)" (Foucault 1972: 28–29).

na and being exposed there to the temptations of a life of pleasure. The Red Army soldiers suffered miserable conditions, complained of starvation rations, and "did not understand why their chief commissar, in the first months of the occupation, ordered provisions for the army to be distributed among the Austrian civilian population". Ironically, Zöchling writes, what absorbed the Soviet command's particular attention was "wreath-laying ceremonies at the graves of Austrian composers" (ibidem).

Apart from articles dealing directly with the difficult history of the presence of Soviet troops in Austria, a significant number of the selected items are texts with commentaries on the postulates of historical policy in Putin's Russia, particularly since 2012. It can be generally stated that a focus on getting a feeling for the specific national identity of contemporary Russians is more characteristic of the left-leaning weekly *Der Standard* than of the liberal *Kurier*. An example might be a text that appeared in *Der Standard* on the occasion of the Russian celebrations of the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War:

> Nowhere in Europe had Hitler's war raged with such cruelty as in the Soviet Union. As a war of destruction aimed at conquering "Lebensraum in the East", it was also directed with all its brutality at the civilian population – the elderly, women and children. Almost 30 million Soviet citizens lost their lives. Not only as a result of military action, but also through war crimes, such as the mass murder of Jews and the siege of Leningrad […] In connection with the complicated history of contemporary Russia, in which experiments with socialism and wild capitalism have caused great shedding of blood, [Victory Day] serves as the only celebration that fills all residents […] with pride. (Ballin 2020)

On the other hand, an article by Paul Lendvai in the same magazine, titled "Liberation and slavery", is more critical. This Austrian journalist with Hungarian roots writes that "the history of the Second World War is being written anew by Putin's nationalist 'Great Russia' regime, and the celebration of the anniversary on 8 May is being used instrumentally by falsifying long-known historical facts" (Lendvai 2020). The author takes a critical attitude not only to the nationalist slogans that Moscow promotes, but to the broader phenomenon of the distortion of history and its treatment as a weapon "serving the political interests of the current rulers" in other countries in the eastern part of our continent. In this context Lendvai comments on Russian–Polish relations and on the historical policies currently being pursued in Poland and Hungary. He sees these policies as an example of the "unbroken continuation of nationalism and antisemitism", negative phenomena that cast a shadow over the "day of liberation" (ibidem).

In an essentially polemic fashion, the subject of Russian memory of the Second Word War is taken up by the weekly *Kurier*, combining criticism of a specific historical policy with personal reflections regarding Vladimir Putin. For example, it is stated in a 2013 article that a proposed Russian law introducing punishments for the denial of Nazi crimes in fact concerns "criticism of the cruelties committed by the Red Army" and aims to "silence critics of the Kremlin" analogously to an earlier law that laid down punishments for offending religious feelings (Kreml stellt Kritik… 2013).

Texts published in *Kurier* also feature a tendency to use irony, particularly in reference to the militarised, monumental, imperial setting of Moscow's Victory Day celebrations:

> Russia's president wished to pay homage, in a huge cathedral, to the Red Army, Stalin, and himself […] May 9 was to be his day. Thousands of soldiers in Red Square, cannons roaring, flags fluttering. An uplifting sense of victory, national unity, superiority; Vladimir Putin in the centre, surrounded by such Western politicians as Emmanuel Macron. […] Things didn't go as intended. The president's plans were scuppered – and for the second time in a short period – by the coronavirus. In April, Putin had already had to grit his teeth and postpone the referendum that was to enable him to prolong his time in power. (Peternel 2020)

In turn, the discourse concerning the USSR and Russia delivered by press titles and educational institutions linked to the FPÖ after 2005 alludes distinctly to that party's criticism of the Austrian "policy of shame" and the principles of "political correctness" that are propagated – according to the party's leaders – in left-wing circles in particular. The Freedom Party of Austria, led from 2005 to 2019 by Heinz-Christian Strache, and since 2016 officially collaborating with the Kremlin's United Russia party, sees a positive, "healthy" model of state-created historical policy in the actions taken in that regard by Putin's regime (cf. Hobek 2018: 192–200).

How does this fact influence the FPÖ-linked commentaries on the actions of the Red Army towards the Third Reich? Immediately noticeable is the absence of topics relating to the presence of Soviet troops in Austria itself. This omission is symptomatic in as much as the subject of "thousands of acts of vengeance" wrought by the Red Army is visible at least in articles concerning the martyrdom of the German population expelled from countries of Central Europe after the war (Kluibenschädl 2021).

Secondly, these journalists place strong emphasis on the controversies aroused in Russia by the effacing, in countries such as Poland, of memory of the Soviet fallen and war heroes. For example, an article published in January

2018 in the magazine *Info-Direkt* notes that "the Polish government on 21 October 2017 approved a controversial law on the dismantling of Soviet monuments, as a result of which as many as 230 monuments to the Red Army are to be removed". Similar actions arouse objections from the Russian side, because, according to the writer, "during the Second World War in the Polish lands 600,000 Soviet soldiers died and around 700,000 to one million Soviet POWs [were buried]" (Neues Gesetz… 2018). The removal of Soviet monuments can thus be implicitly understood as a manifestation of the Polish government's policy of "erasing" history.

Supporters of the FPÖ, a party that traditionally opposes the "blackening of the name" of "ordinary Austrians" who, according to the party's rhetoric, simply fought and died for their fatherland in the ranks of the Wehrmacht, might thus identify with the words contained in an article titled "What we might learn from Russia" that appeared in 2017, again in *Info-Direkt*:

> Russia has a more open-minded attitude to the past [than Austria]. For us Austrians, who have accepted the road to Canossa as part of our lives, this is something new. Street actors dressed as Stalin offering photos to tourists, equestrian statues of Russian national heroes decorating every major square, and candles and wreaths placed against the Kremlin walls to commemorate the fallen heroes of the nation. In Russia one can see what it means to be a nation of victors. (Magnet 2017)

Particularly noteworthy, in my view, is the activity undertaken by the FPÖ's Educational Institute (*FPÖ-Bildungsinstitut*) relating to the commemoration of selected events from World War II history, with the participation of important figures from Russian cultural and political life. From the institute's website we learn of a ceremonial showing of the Russian film *Sobibor: The Indestructibility of What is Brittle*, which tells of the revolt and escape of Jewish, Polish and Soviet prisoners from the Nazi concentration camp at Sobibor, which were organised by a Red Army soldier. Those attending the screening and taking part in the discussion that followed included the Russian ambassador to Austria. The rank of the event is evidenced by the fact that extensive commentaries on the "pro-Russian" happening also appeared in the Austrian opinion-forming press. For example, *Der Standard* suggested with apprehension that the event's main message concerned supposed threats to Austria and the entire Western world linked to the inflow of Muslim immigrants (Sulzbacher 2018). This was not without reason: one of those attending the event, FPÖ politician Klaus Nittman, declared in his speech – which was then quoted on the website of the *Bildungsinstitut* – that he is "terrified by the heightening of antisemitism that is spreading [in Europe at the present time] due to uncontrolled mass migration" (ibidem).

Analysis of the quantity and content of articles concerning the actions of the Red Army in Austria did not reveal any marked change of emphasis or narrative threads after 24 February 2022. I would like to consider four articles as examples of efforts by Austrian journalists to address issues relating to Russia's aggression against Ukraine. The conservative daily *Die Presse*, in an article about the "commemoration of Soviet victims, but without Putin", noted that "the Russian foreign ministry has once again reminded the Austrian government about the 26,000 Soviet soldiers who gave their lives for the liberation of Austria". However, Matthias Kaltenbrunner adds in the next sentence, in a form of personal commentary, that this action "is one of many examples of the present-day instrumental treatment of the Soviet World War II dead to give justification for the unprecedented attack on Ukraine" (Kaltenbrunner 2022).

The left-liberal *Der Standard*, in a symbolic but extensive article published on 9 May 2022, emphasised that "the war in Ukraine overshadows the ceremonies celebrating the end of the war". David Krutzler noted that international opinion was waiting with bated breath for Putin's speech:

> The Russian president will no doubt complain once again that Red Army's famed victory has been smeared with mud in the West. And there will be verbal attacks on NATO and the USA. Putin will also announce some victory, as he must. But what kind? (Krutzler 2022)

In the view of the present author, however, the strongest criticism of Russia is manifested in articles published in the liberal *Kurier*. For example, a text of 7 May 2022 titled "How the Russian occupiers entered Austria" states unforgivingly that "Austria's liberation by the Red Army in May 1945 had terrifying consequences for hundreds of thousands of Austrian women". We read in the first paragraph:

> When some weeks ago the media published the first pictures of the incoming Russian army, historian Barbara Stelzl-Marx shared the following reflection: How long will it last before this war too reveals all of its terrifying sides? Plunder, rape, senseless violence against the civilian population? (Kramar 2022: 5).

These words carry notable symbolic weight, as they contain accusations against both contemporary Russia and the Soviet Union from which it emerged; not only against soldiers of the army of the Russian Federation today, but against the men of the Red Army, who on arriving in Austria, according to the article's author, lived up to the legend of the "Russian horde" that had gone before them (ibidem).

The fourth of the selected texts also includes some noteworthy content. A long article published on 8 May 2022 in the extreme right-wing *Unzensuriert* relates the views of Herbert Kickl, present leader of the FPÖ, that the end of the Second World War in no way signified for Austrians the "start of an era of happiness and satisfaction" and as such should not be treated as an occasion for celebration. Kickl ascribes much more value to the neutral status that Austria negotiated for itself in 1955, although he maintains that the legacy related to this may be wasted if the Second Republic "irresponsibly" accedes to the idea of an embargo on energy goods that the EU currently wishes to impose on Russia (FPÖ-Chef Kickl… 2022).

The Viennese tuning fork and forgotten heroes

Analysis of Russian press discourse concerning the Red Army's liberation and occupation of Austria indicates the presence of narrative paradigms that differ from those found in the Austrian media. In the whole of the analysed period from 2005 to 2022, neither the popular press close to government circles nor the relatively independent liberal press, nor the tabloids, nor even radio stations and magazines taking an explicitly anti-Kremlin stance took up subjects that were controversial with regard to the dominant Russian historical policy and memory.[9] Demands which come close to the idea of "unbronzing" history can nevertheless be observed in the context of articles in *Kommersant* that refer ironically to the omnipresent political correctness and fears of "summoning the demons of the past", published in 2005, a year described as "drowning in official celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War". This was the paper's response to "Vienna Liberated", an exhibition that was neutral in form and content, prepared jointly and displayed successively by the Austrian and Russian sides (Толстова 2005).

Among the articles in the Russian press alluding to the shared history of Austrians and Russians, particularly those from before 2014, note may be taken of the texts presenting Austria as a positive example of a country that not only refrains from issuing anti-Russian propaganda, but also supports the Russian vision of a world based on multipolarity. An example is an extensive article that appeared on the pages of *Komsomolskaya Pravda* in November 2008.

[9] Attention should be drawn, however, to the continuously deteriorating situation of such media institutions as TV Dozhd, the Ekho Moskvy radio station, and the independent *Novaya Gazeta*. All of these were closed down by the authorities in March 2022.

Titled "The Viennese tuning fork for a worldwide 'orchestra'", it extols Vienna in nostalgic terms as a city with an "established spirit of harmony, [which] no world problems and cataclysms of history have been able […] to change":

> Let us take, for example, the Vienna opera. In 1945, when Soviet troops […] liberated the city from the fascists, a bomb fell there which directly struck the stage. The theatre suffered colossal losses […]. The building's reconstruction lasted 10 years. In Vienna, however, no one pins the blame for that on, let's say, the Russians […]. [Moreover] in spite of the postwar occupation […] in Austria no one calls that period a tragic one. (Венский камертон… 2008)

Greater amounts of criticism addressed to Austria, including the Austria of 1945, can be found in the Russian press after 2014. For example, the analysed mainstream papers consider it important to inform readers of further cases of "desecration by vandals" of the Soviet war memorial in central Vienna. Journalists also see a link between those acts and current politics. In a 2015 report about Schwarzenbergplatz, where the monument stands, readers learn that "this is not the first desecration of the monument, [because] last year the cube at its base was painted in the colours of the Ukrainian flag, and in previous years the monument had been covered with red paint". The fact that such events ought not to occur is reiterated in the final sentence of the article, in which the *Kommersant* journalist recalls that "according to the international agreement of 1955 that restored sovereignty to Austria, war memorials in the country are under the protection of and are maintained by the Austrian authorities" (Вандалы… 2015).

In 2020 alone, many articles appeared amplifying the contents of documents made public by the Russian defence ministry on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the "liberation of Vienna from German-fascist occupation" (Минобороны… 2020). The press reacted in particular to the information on the fates of Soviet POWs who had been held in Nazi concentration camps. I would like to discuss the content of two texts on this subject. An extensive article in the daily *Kommersant* recalls the actions of Red Army soldiers who on the night of 1–2 February 1945 broke through the wall and barbed wire surrounding the Mauthausen camp, paying particular attention to the experience of the mere nine escapees who survived the attempt. The writer, Alexei Alexeyev, does not spare readers the chilling details of the hunt ordered by the camp commanders, which involved not only SS and Wehrmacht units, but also local farmers and Hitlerjugend members. The action came to be known locally as the "Mühlviertel rabbit hunt". However, the article focuses mainly on the importance of the memory of the escape – and the death of almost 500 Soviet soldiers – for today's Austrians and Russians:

> As for the actions of the prisoners of block 20 of the Mauthausen concentration camp, for a long time in the USSR nothing was known about them. According to the views of comrade Stalin, they were not heroes, but traitors, since they had got themselves taken prisoner. […] The country learned about the actions of the camp prisoners only in 1963, when Sergey Smirnov's book *Heroes of the Death Block* was published. […] But after that they were again forgotten. They were remembered only in the 2000s, when hardly any of the heroes were still alive. In Russia, articles appeared in the press and online, as well as television reports and a documentary film. In Austria several books about the escape from Mauthausen were published, and the repentance-filled film *Rabbit Hunt*[10] became the most popular film of 1994. (Алексеев 2020)

The second article appeared in April 2020 on the pages of *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. Its author, Igor Yakunin, asserts as a fact that the Russians' martyrdom at the hands of the Nazis is comparable only to that suffered by the Jews. It is in this accusatory manner that the journalist writes of the hellish experience of the Russian POWs held at the Nazi concentration camp in Kaisersteinbruch, 46 kilometres from Vienna:

> Apart from Russians, the camp held British, Americans, French, Serbs, Poles, Romanians. But only the huts for the Russians were surrounded by additional barbed wire, and were not heated in winter. […] Because of the lack of food, beatings, and excessive labour in the camp, the incidence of tuberculosis rapidly increased. […] The sick […], without receiving the necessary treatment, were forced to go a distance of 15 km daily on the way to their hard labour, and were condemned to die. People lost consciousness, and in an unconscious state were buried alive. […] Also characteristic was the way in which the Nazis treated prisoners after their death. A camp cemetery was set up for them outside the walls of Kaisersteinbruch. For the British and Americans a separate fenced area was provided; every grave had a cross and a plaque with forename and surname, date of birth and nationality. Dead Russians were thrown in several rows into 100-metre pits and then covered with earth, and on the top a sign was stuck into the ground showing the number buried. (Якунин 2020)

Yakunin sums up his recollections of the grisly story of the Kaisersteinbruch camp by referring to the need to "give a reminder of the Nazi crimes to all those who blame the Red Army 'for bestial behaviour on the territory of Europe' in 1945" (ibidem).

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[10] Original title: *Hasenjagd – Vor lauter Feigheit gibt es kein Erbarmen*; also given the English title *The Quality of Mercy*.

Conclusions

Taking for exemplary purposes the above analysis of Austrian and Russian press discourse, I believe that several conclusions can be drawn concerning the contemporary contexts of historical narratives concerning the actions of the Red Army in Austria and the Austrian–Russian dialogues of memory. Above all, journalists from both countries derive significant inspiration to recall the events of 1945 from the commemorative events on successive anniversaries of the end of the Second World War and of the signing of the treaty on Austrian sovereignty, such as those of 2005. Particularly in the past decade, however, a factor that has generally inflamed discussion concerning the end of the war has been the events playing out at the present time, such as Russia's conflict with Ukraine after 2013, as well as the "historical wars" conducted by Russia with respect to Poland, for example.

The mainstream Austrian press places its narratives about Russia within the paradigm of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, but they are related less to the unbronzing of Austrian history, and more to criticism of the FPÖ's nationalist rhetoric and the analogous historical policy of the Russian Federation. The articles published there are also marked by a general critical stance towards states and political regimes that violate liberal-democratic values. However, there are also discourses directed towards an "understanding", empathetic view of Russia past and present, although these are less visible than in the German left-wing press, which is associated with the *Russlandversteher* phenomenon (cf. Żakowska 2020: 284–290).

The opposite can be observed in the press and educational institutions linked to the extreme right-wing FPÖ. Its press takes a positive view of many aspects of the political, economic and cultural realities of contemporary Russia, including the nationalist paradigm that is obligatory in Russian historical policy. It also has a tendency not so much to "unbronze" but simply to stay silent about historical facts that may provide a counterbalance to the aforementioned picture. This very likely indicates a tendency towards a utilitarian, pragmatic treatment of history by politicians and journalists who sympathise with the FPÖ. One of the goals of the historical discourses that they create is undoubtedly to contest or even discredit the current official Austrian historical policy, which FPÖ activists believe to be based excessively on guilt, shame and repentance. Selectiveness and utilitarianism in references to the past are also features of the historical policy pursued by the *FPÖ-Bildungsinstitut*; its conciliatory nature is very likely a tool enabling rapprochement and cooperation between the FPÖ and the conservative Russian establishment.

In mainstream Western historical discourses, including Austrian ones, one often finds the idea that a society can set out on the road towards normality only when it begins to challenge the taboo that protects memory and myths from merciless self-criticism (Berg 2008: 70–71; cf. Siddi 2017: 465–467). The liberal order of the Second Republic has enabled Austrians to debate the subject of past national conflicts and neuroses (Bukey 2000: 233), but at the same time makes them sensitive to nationalist, anti-liberal attitudes in other countries. It is partly in this context that we should interpret the fact that when Austrians were asked at the start of this century which country posed the greatest threat to their own, as many as 47% named Russia (Binder 2005: 109).

In turn, in today's Russian Federation, where the period of critical "reworking" of history came in the years of the fall of the Soviet Union and painful "shock therapy", historical memory is perceived to a large degree as an element of "ontological security", a foundation for the "healthy" consciousness of any nation. Russian historian Alexander L. Nikiforov, writing about the laws that govern historical memory, claims that:

> It stores knowledge about cultural and military triumphs and victories, and maintains that about tragedies, but only when they relate to the country's own heroism and sacrifice. That memory cannot, however, contain a vision of crimes in which the whole of society took part. That would be too destructive to the national identity and the nation as such. (Nikiforov 2017: 54)

This diagnosis may be taken as the motto of the contemporary Russian historical narratives about 1945 that have been analysed above. Their strength is the ability to unite citizens in pride in their own nation and state, and to line up to defend its honour. Here also lies their weakness, however. In the discourses conducted within the nationalist paradigm, the goal is not so much dialogue as the correction and condemnation of any interpretations of Russian politics and history that are inconvenient for the Kremlin (Миллер 2009: 13–20; Clarke, Wóycicka 2019: 108).

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ABSTRACT

This article identifies the specific features and current contexts of the contemporary narratives presented on the pages of opinion-forming magazines from Austria and Russia, representing different political viewpoints, concerning the actions of the Red Army in Austria near the end of the Second World War and after it. The main hypothesis is that the analysed narrative threads relate to or reflect the dominant paradigms in contemporary memory policies in Austria and Russia. The author hypothesises further that their frequency and content are significantly influenced not only by the anniversary events related to 1945, but also by current international politics. The author applies the method of critical discourse analysis to press texts published in 2005–2020, which were selected using the quantitative method of keyword research. The study confirms the initial hypotheses, and concludes that Austrian–Russian memory dialogue takes place primarily between right-wing circles in the two countries.