

Anti-Semitism in Austria 2013

Austrian's political and cultural elite (except those of FPÖ) and mainstream media as a rule didn't transport explicit anti-Semitism. But mostly they refused to recognize anti-Semitism when it was hidden behind "critique" against Israel or attired in anti-Capitalism. For Example in spring 2013 Austrian's Ministry of Justice rejected further legal actions against FPÖ-leader Heinz-Christian Strache, who had posted a cartoon of a financier with Star of David cufflinks and a hooked nose on *Facebook* in summer 2012. In May 2013 Abraham Foxman, National Director of Anti-Defamation League, showed disappointment at Austrian judiciary during a visit of Interior Minister Johanna Mikl-Leitner. Already in summer 2012 Foxman mentioned to *The Jerusalem Post*: "Strache himself is all the proof anyone needs to see that he has not given up his anti-Semitic beliefs." ADL-Director added that "now, he's promoting the anti-Semitic canard that Jews control international finance and manipulate governments to enrich themselves at the expense of non-Jews. Strache brings shame to Austrian politics and should be repudiated for his anti-Jewish bigotry."

Freedom Party (FPÖ) and anti-Semitism

Beside the elections in Salzburg (17%, +4%) and the national Assembly elections (20.5%, +3%) FPÖ suffered election defeat in Carinthia (16.9%, -28%), Tyrol (9.4%, -3.1%) and Lower Austria (8.2%, -2.3%). Campaigns were conducted with racist (anti-Muslim) slogans and also with anti-Semitic undertones. Appearances of FPÖ Chairman Heinz-Christian Strache attracted a range of neo-Nazis. On numerous recordings of FPÖ rallies, Hitler Salutes were clearly recognisable.

In the reference period FPÖ-politicians caused indignation again. In March 2013 FPÖ-top politician Johann Gudenus lately revealed, that the military overcome by the allies in 1945 was not liberation for him and his peers: He spoke of "disaster and break down". The spokesperson for the party's Vienna branch Stefan Gotschacher was fired in April 2013 for posting lyrics from wartime Nazi marching songs on his *Facebook* page.

Faced with populist electoral competition from the *Team Stronach*, some FPÖ-functionaries resorted to demagoguery. Once more leading the way in this regard were the men around Member of the European Parliament Andreas Mölzer, denouncing Frank Stronach as a friend of the Jews. A special supplement to Mölzer's weekly *Zur Zeit* (No. 7/2013) pointed out that Stronach had made donations to Jewish and Israeli institutions and imputed "ulterior motives." The lateral entrant to politics is reported to have been honored for his generosity by "Zionist and Israeli entities". Stronach's attorney, Michael Krüger, reacted by accusing Mölzer of trying "to stir up anti-Semitic resentment".

Already in January Martin Pfeiffer expressed in his column for *Zur Zeit* (No. 3/2013) outrage at the conviction of neo-Nazi-leader Gottfried Küssel (see below), judging it „unworthy of a State under the rule of law.“ In Pfeiffer's assessment, the *Alpen-Donau* hate website "propagated a worldview that is incompatible with the current system of government in Austria." The countless criminal offenses committed on and by *Alpen-Donau*, such as dangerous threats or instigation to and endorsement of criminal activities, were belittled by Pfeiffer as "propaganda offenses" that were punished far too harshly, putting Austria in line with dictatorial regimes like China or North Korea. At the same time, *Zur Zeit's* editor-in-chief and co-editor Andreas

Mölzer, sarcastically criticized a Judiciary which, in his opinion, was one-eyed: “Much too light was the sentence of nine years of imprisonment without probation – in fact, one should plainly call for the death penalty!” According to Mölzer, the sparsity of “national-liberals” in the Judiciary had the latter proceed “with relentless rigor” against the far right.

In early 2013, the extent to which personnel overlaps between the FPÖ and the neo-Nazi milieu exist became evident yet again, particularly in Upper Austria. In Mid-February, for instance, it became known that Michael Lindner, a municipal councilman and local chairman of the FPÖ youth organization RFJ, had published an extract from a poem used by the Hitler-Youth on his *Facebook* page. In a picture also posted on *Facebook*, Lindner can be seen sporting a T-shirt of *Ad Hominem*, a neo-Nazi band whose songs include one titled “Auschwitz rules.” The FPÖ party leadership declared it wanted to await the outcome of potential litigation against Lindner before possibly taking action.

Fabian Wetter, another FPÖ municipal councilman and local party chairman, is a German native and former activist for the neo-Nazi NPD. On his *Facebook* page, he characterized “Schindler's List” as “Jewish propaganda movie” and claimed that the “Zionist World Congress” had declared “economic war” on Germany in 1933. In late December 2012 he spread a picture of German chancellor Angela Merkel, showing her wearing a Star of David marked “Zion” and declaring her a “traitor to the Fatherland.” After these incidents became known, Wetter immediately resigned. Shortly afterwards, it came to light that Mario Moser, a FPÖ official in Linz, had promoted the neo-Nazi band *Zillertaler Türkenjäger* and a rally of German neo-Nazis on his *Facebook* page, whereupon he quitted the party.

In April 2013, Michael Gruber, a municipal councilman in Upper Austria too, had to decline all political and party functions for omitting to inform the party leadership about his previous conviction: the former neo-Nazi had been sentenced to a term of probation for dangerous threat in 2004. Two years prior to the conviction, he had threatened the then scientific director of the Austrian Resistance Archive (DÖW), Wolfgang Neugebauer, by e-mail with killing him.

At the height of this wave of scandals, the FPÖ's chairman for Upper Austria, Manfred Haimbuchner, saw himself forced to promise to take action against the “right fringe”: “It is better not to nominate anybody than to nominate questionable people. I will do away with the people that cause problems on the right fringe.” Haimbuchner's promise, however, did not even last a full week. On April 6th, he claimed in a press release that the FPÖ did not have a neo-Nazi problem, but was “constantly slinged brown mud at by left-wing extremists.”

This self-serving declaration was spectacularly debunked by Sebastian Ortner, the FPÖ's municipal council whip in Linz, shortly afterwards: the daily *Kurier* published a video that showed Ortner participating in one of the paramilitary practices held by Gottfried Küssel's neo-Nazi gang VAPO in the late 1980s. Already prior to that revelation, it had been common knowledge that Ortner – under his former name of Müllegger – appeared as a VAPO cadre on a list assembled by Küssel and that he had served as the leader of another neo-Nazi gang in Upper Austria. Ortner, however, reiterated that he had broken with his neo-Nazi past and not entertained contacts with that scene since the early 1990s. When it became known that he had given a talk for a neo-Nazi association that was disbanded by the Austrian authorities soon afterwards, as late as 1995, Ortner asserted that his withdrawal from neo-Nazism took place in several stages. For the moment local FPÖ leaders gave Ortner encouragement, but after *Kurier* could prove, that Ortner participated a meeting of German neo-Nazis in

Dresden still in 2006, he must resign from all administrative bodies and FPÖ membership.

According to the weekly journal *News* (22. 8. 2013) inside the enclosed *Facebook*-group called „We stand by FPÖ“ several postings were published in which Hitler was worshiped openly and Muslims and Jews were threatened with murder. The *Facebook*-group, which had ca. 150 members, among them many FPÖ politicians, was personally recommended by FPÖ-leader Strache. After the scandal became public, the more prominent FPÖ politicians dissociated themselves from the *Facebook*-group. But the administrator, FPÖ-local politician Andrea Kellner refused to do so. And FPÖ general secretary Herbert Kickl denied the facts and suggested, that they were without any meat.

Other anti-Semitic incidents

In mid-January 2013, Gottfried Küssel, Felix Budin and Christian W. Anderle were sentenced to nine, seven and four and a half years, respectively, by a jury in Vienna. The neo-Nazis had been accused by the prosecution to have, between March 2009 and their detention in the spring of 2011, operated the *Alpen-Donau* website which had glorified violence in an extreme fashion, and the corresponding internet forum with about 350 registered users. The court substantiated the verdicts by pointing to Küssel's leading position within the neo-Nazi scene, relevant previous convictions (Küssel, Anderle) and the extent of re-engagement in National Socialist activities (Budin), respectively. The prosecutor particularly highlighted the uniqueness and dangerousness of *Alpen-Donau's* hate speech: never before had neo-Nazis in Austria so openly called for murder and extermination and so gravely offended against the human dignity of Jews and other minorities and of political adversaries. Correspondent to Küssel's central role within the international neo-Nazi scene, rallies and demonstrations were held immediately after the proclamation of sentence in various German cities, including Dortmund, Munich and Göppingen. Banners were mounted near Straubing (Bavaria), demanding “Freedom for Küssel!“, among other things. While hardly any similar activities took place in Austria, *Stolz und Frei* website commented on the “disgraceful decision in the Viennese dissidents' trial“: according to *Alpen-Donau's* successor website, the three neo-Nazis were convicted for “allegedly voicing an inconvenient opinion” and under a law that had been established “by Stalin's henchmen in the Russian occupation zone in 1945 to combat their political opponents.” The judgement, however, was not going to silence the “national opposition”, but rather boost their determination. In other online meeting places, e.g. *Altermedia*, neo-Nazis called for a violent response to the trial's outcome.

A letter addressed to Federal President Dr. Heinz Fischer was published in mid-February on the website of *European Action*, a neo-Nazi group based in Switzerland (Bernhard Schaub) with branches in Germany and Austria. The letter was dated from December 24th 2012 and authored by Wolfgang Fröhlich. In it, the Holocaust denier accuses the Judiciary of malpractice for applying the Nazi Prohibition Act of 1947, which Fröhlich deems “unconstitutional and violating human rights.” In his opinion, the law has “put many a honest and truth-loving citizen behind bars” and formed “the pseudo-legal basis for political terror for twenty years.” In all seriousness, Fröhlich claims to have been convinced by “judges and prosecutors in countless private conversations” that “enormous pressure is being imposed on them.”

On February 1st 2013, the neo-Nazi website *Altermedia* published a letter from a group of neo-Nazis that had paid Fröhlich a visit in prison in January. According to the letter writers, Fröhlich hoped to get released in March 2013. He is represented as a “lone fighter” and “offender by conviction” who “does not back off one bit from his convictions and is willing to keep proclaiming them publicly when the need arises.” Frank words like these may have reduced the odds of Fröhlich being released prematurely. At any rate, he remains in prison by the beginning of 2014.

In October 2013 the police arrested a 20-year-old youngster in who admitted to having defaced more than 30 stepping stones in Salzburg (city), which are commemorating the names of people murdered during the holocaust. The youngster, who is unemployed and has no permanent address, is responsible not just for a series of anti-Semitic sprayings, but was already convicted by the court last year after he had published hate speech on *Facebook*. Another four youngsters are under suspicion having assisted the main culprit.

In November 2013 several stepping stones in Salzburg again were smeared with black material similar to lacquer oil or alternatively to motor oil. On the 75th Anniversary of Crystal Night, the synagogue in Salzburg has been damaged. Vandals smeared the intercom, security system as well as door bell and shield with black paint and glued the door locks. This is not the first time that vandalism was perpetrated against the synagogue. The external devices of the synagogue were regularly damaged and had been replaced already in the past. Also those crimes could be imputed to a young neo-Nazi, who got collared too.

In November visitors found anti-Semitic statements on the Evangelical Church in Leopoldstadt, Vienna: a swastika along with the words “Hitler” and “Heil” engraved on the memorial to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. The church filed a complaint. “This is a disgrace, it is a profanation” said the priestess, Ursula Arnold. In 2009 the parish, together with the association “stones of remembrance” had put up the memorial at the entrance to the Church. The damage was discovered on the day of the 75th Anniversary of the Crystal Night Pogrom. Arnold suspects that the “racial message” was engraved a few days earlier. The Memorial to the Jewish victims of the Nazi regime, which is part of the “Path of Remembrance at Leopoldstadt”, will be reinstalled.

National broadcasting ORF marked the 75th anniversary of Crystal Night by transmitting *Defamation*, an anti-Israeli propaganda film, which denies the anti-Semitic threats.

During a city council meeting in Gföhl (Lower Austria) early in December conservative mayor Karl Simlinger (ÖVP) shouted: „I hate the crappy asylum seekers, but it’s all because of the journalists, who are like the Jews and should be hanged.” After Simlinger had denied the quotation for a couple of days, he had to retire at last.

In the End of December the memorial monument to the victims of the Nazi regime in Salzburg (city) was sprayed with the words “Horst Wessel”. The double S in the name WESSEL was written in the Nazi style.

Data

In 2013 national authorities reported on 37 anti-Semitic actions (2012: 27). The *Forum against Anti-Semitism* was informed about 137 anti-Semitic incidents in 2013 (2012: 135), among them there were seven physical assaults (2012: one), six damages to property (2012: two) and 21 threats and obscenities (2012: twelve).