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Environmental Controversy and Environmental Awareness in Austria – a Short Online Environmental History

To my students: Knowledge of the contents of this survey is the basis for the "Austria" aspect of class work. The relevant chapters will therefore have to be ***prepared before the respective class discussions***. The ***content of the footnotes*** is as important for your exams as is the text: ***Do not neglect them*** but treat the footnotes as a kind of ***parallel text*** which has been relegated to the lower part of the page in order not to interrupt the flow of the main narrative.

To the Internet reader: This survey of Austrian environmental history has evolved from handouts which I have in the course of the years prepared for classes taught for Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien, Universität Wien, St. Lawrence University, New York/Vienna, and other Austrian and American institutions. Photos are by **Peter Weish** unless otherwise indicated. For language editing I am grateful to **Marjorie Fiebinger** and **Sandra Lang** from Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien, to **Paula Stibbe** from Vienna, and to **Pratima Mitchell** from Oxford. I hasten to add that all remaining mistakes are mine. Nobody is ferpect. Suggestions for improvement (typos, language, contents) are welcome and should be mailed to: neuwirth@wu-wien.ac.at.

** This short environmental history will show how, pushed by private initiative and often against the wishes of powerful lobbies and governments, Austria evolved into an environmental model country. Then, under various governments supporting environmentally destructive interests, progress stalled and Austria slipped down to a lower position in the league of environmental performers.*

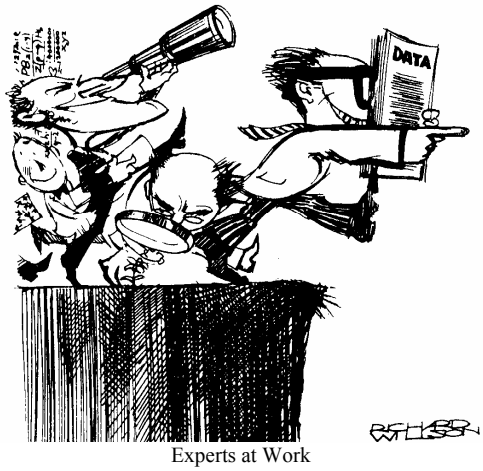
***Austria is still an environmental leader** in regard to:*
** nuclear power (the constitution prohibits nuclear power generation on Austrian soil) – but some electricity is now imported, with a certain share coming from nuclear sources;*
** genetic engineering (Austria's fields are still largely free of genetically engineered crops, and practically no genetically modified food is being sold);*
** organic agriculture (after Liechtenstein, Austria is the country with the highest percentage of organically worked agricultural area – 16%).*

***Austria has a dismal record** in regard to*

** its greenhouse gas emissions, and therefore ranks very low as to climate protection measures, and in*
** some other fields such as implementing NATURA 2000 (the EU's habitat protection project), and non-smoker protection. Finally,*
** Austrians' "ecological footprint" is currently larger than that of Germany (Germany: 4.3 hectare equivalents, Austria: 4.9, USA: 9.6; world average: 2.2; available: 1.8).*

Apart from Austrian "environmental history", four focus topics which are of special concern to Austrians will be discussed in more detail*: EU membership / nuclear power / genetic engineering / climate change.*

Table of Contents



Experts at Work

1. Early Controversies

Saving the Vienna Woods. In the 1860s, after a lost war, the Austrian government sold off large portions of publicly owned forest for clear-cutting to cover its war-debts. Finally, destruction was imminent for the Vienna Woods, a 1200 sq.km. area in Vienna and Lower Austria. But in a lone fight against greed and corruption, and in the face of threats on his life, Joseph Schöffel, the mayor of the forest town of Mödling, succeeded in putting the area under protection in **1873**. Thus, Vienna got one of the world's first "green belts".

Bridge over shallow waters. A century later, the Burgenland provincial government planned to build a giant highway bridge over Austria's second largest lake, *Neusiedlersee*. However, that lake is so shallow that an oil spill from a single tanker accident could have destroyed the unique species diversity in the area, and ruined a prime holiday resort for the Viennese. Austria's first "citizens' initiative" (grass roots movement) yielded 200,000 signatures against the project, which was dropped in **1971**. Instead, a national/international park was established in co-operation with Hungary.

Surface water quality. In the 1960s and 1970s, most Austrian lakes, rivers, and streams were cleaned up by heavy investments in sewers and treatment plants. This was probably the only major environmental improvement that was also pushed by business lobbies, because the tourist industry realised it had no future if lakes and rivers resembled stinking cesspools and canals.

Controversial hydropower projects. After World War II, water power development (e.g., the *Kaprun* alpine reservoir) made an important contribution to the reconstruction and electrification of Austria. However, as the utilities were trying to dam the last pristine Alpine valleys for ever more power generation, opposition arose. After long fights, projects such as the diversion of the *Krimml Falls* or the *Umbal Falls* had to be abandoned even though the utilities suggested turning the falls on for a few minutes each day for the sake of the tourist industry. Other projects such as the *Maltatal* alpine reservoir and the *Wachau* dam on the Danube went through in spite of all protests.

2. Nuclear Power

Possibly to help overcome the guilt felt by many Americans over the dropping by "God's own country" of two nuclear bombs in 1945, US President Eisenhower proposed to the world his "Atoms for Peace" program in 1953. Most Austrians believed in the promise of an energy source that would be **"safe, clean, and too cheap to meter"**. That the operation of nuclear plants releases radioactivity which destroys living tissue and, depending on its intensity, causes immediate death, cancer and other ailments and birth defects, and that the "peaceful" nuclear "fuel cycle" can contribute to the proliferation of weapons-grade nuclear material rather than to peace was overlooked or not talked about.

Atomic fission of nuclear fuels (uranium, etc.) produces heat which can be used to generate electricity in the same way as heat from fossil fuels. Of all the advantages claimed for nuclear power by its advocates, at least three cannot be denied even by its fiercest opponents:

* Nuclear fuel requires only a small fraction of the space taken by

comparable fossil fuels. Fuel supplies lasting several years could thus theoretically be stored on site.[1]

* Nuclear power plants need to be recharged only once a year. During several severe US winters, nuclear plants have proved more reliable than coal-fired plants, some of which were put out of action as barges and trains carrying coal supplies got stuck in ice and snow.

* As no fossil fuel is burnt, operation of the power plant itself does not generate CO_2, SO_X and NO_X, and thus does not contribute much to acid rain or the greenhouse effect.[2]

All other advantages claimed for nuclear power are seriously questioned by sceptics.

The first international conference under Eisenhower's program was held in 1955. One of the participants was American Nobel prize winner Hermann Joseph Muller. He registered a lecture on the genetic effects of radioactivity. However, the organisers simply did not let him speak. His text was subsequently included in the written summary of the conference, but that never made it to the enthusiastic headlines of the media reporting on the conference. This suppressive and misleading communications policy has been a hallmark of the nuclear lobby ever since and has been troubling observers and strengthening sceptics in their opposition to the "peaceful use of nuclear power." Other reasons why even then many suspected that nuclear power development was a deadly mistake were:

* the possibility of a catastrophic accident much worse[3] than what actually occurred at Chernobyl,[4]

* the constant release of low doses of radioactive substances during the routine operation of nuclear plants, higher releases in the so-called fuel cycle, and still higher ones during maintenance work and in "events",[5]

* the vulnerability of nuclear facilities to potential terrorist attacks 9/11 style and, even worse, the danger of nuclear material falling into the hands of "rogue states" or terrorists[6] (nuclear proliferation),

[1] For financial reasons, however, this is hardly ever done in practice.

[2] Radioactive emissions, however, may contribute to forest dieback in their own way. Also, fossil fuel combustion and thus CO2 production does occur in power plant construction, uranium mining, etc. In any case, in order to make a meaningful contribution to global CO2 reduction, a new nuclear plant would have to be opened every week. Lead time (designing and constructing a nuclear plant) is at least ten years. In contrast, setting up a wind turbine takes several weeks. Also, with many more nuclear plants, the industry would soon run out of easily accessible cheap uranium. Its price would spiral, and still there would not be enough of it, unless fast-breeder technology were revived. Even the late Edward Teller, pro-nuclear "father of the hydrogen bomb" (which he called "his baby"), warned against the extremely dangerous breeder option.

[3] For days after the Chernobyl accident, the operators feared a much worse disaster if the molten core hit a large groundwater body – which fortunately it did not.

[4] Although the worst did not happen at Chernobyl in 1986, the mere economic damage to the area and to the whole of Europe was enormous – several billion shillings in Austria alone: There, thousands of tons of contaminated agricultural produce had to be destroyed. Cranberries, mushrooms, and venison retained dangerously high levels of radioactivity for years. So did milk from certain "hot spots". It had to be thrown away. Later on it was mixed with uncontaminated milk so that the mixture sold to the Austrians was below the permissible levels – which in themselves were (and still are) arbitrary threshold values anyway, based on economic rather than medical considerations. By March 2008 it became clear that the incidence of thyroid cancer in Austria had doubled, esp. in the age brackets of 20-30 year olds: They had been small children at the time of the accident, and therefore especially susceptible.

[5] "Events" are irregularities in the operation of a nuclear facility that are not called "accidents" because no immediate damage can be observed. However, even the lowest additional exposure to radioactivity adds to a person's carcinogenic and/or teratogenic risks (= risks of damage causing him/her cancer and/or birth defects to his/her offspring).

[6] These scenarios, originally ridiculed by the experts of the nuclear lobby, have turned into a nightmare

* the mutually exclusive tasks of the UNO's watchdog authority which was established to monitor and at the same time to promote nuclear power,[7]

* the unsolved problem of nuclear waste[8] - if the ancient Egyptians had built nuclear plants instead of pyramids, we would still have to guard the dangerous waste which they generated for a few years of electricity supply,[9]

Nuclear waste from the research reactor at Seibersdorf in Lower Austria, 1960s. The waste problem is still as unresolved now as it was then.

* the doubtful economics: Its advocates claim that nuclear power is the only mature alternative to fossil fuels, and that the renewable energy sources need government subsidies to get started. They never mention the direct and indirect subsidies the nuclear industry has enjoyed from its early dawn half a century ago and is still enjoying, shielding it from the rough winds of the free market.[10]

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and into one of the reasons (or excuses?) for starting the "pre-emptive war" against Iraq in 2002. Iraq did not have any weapons of mass destruction, but more and more countries do. The first LDC to use entirely peaceful Canadian nuclear know-how to build a crude bomb was India as early as 1974. In 1998, it made a series of fully-fledged nuclear bomb tests, closely followed by its arch-enemy Pakistan which is now, to the delight of its impoverished masses, the first country with a "Muslim nuclear bomb." The political instability in the area further adds to observers' concerns because nuclear weapons seem to get into ever closer reach of fanatical splinter groups.

[7] The International Atomic Energy Authority IAEA (which ironically has its headquarters in Vienna) is supposed to monitor and control its member states' nuclear facilities to ensure that nuclear material is not diverted, and that safety regulations are adhered to. But as its second job is to promote nuclear power, there have been accusations that the IAEA may not always be strict enough. Its European equivalent, EURATOM, has the same conflict of interest: nuclear safety and security on the one hand, and promotion (e.g., by granting cheap loans) on the other. Critics demand a splitting of IAEA's and EURATOM's double tasks. In the United States, the two contradictory responsibilities have been vested in two separate agencies long ago: NRC – Nuclear Regulatory Commission (monitoring and regulating) and DOE - Department of Energy (promotion).

[8] Heinz Haber was scientific adviser to Walt Disney when the latter made his superb propaganda movie "Our Friend the Atom", which was shown to school children and adults all over the world between the 1950s and the 1980s. Later on, Haber admitted that at the time of shooting the film, even the best nuclear experts were completely unaware of the nuclear waste problem because there was still so little of it.

[9] The nuclear lobby claims that finding waste disposal sites is just a "political problem". For the USA, Yucca Mountain in Nevada had long been under consideration as the central federal nuclear waste repository, but scientists' concerns and fierce local opposition had prevented the project over decades. With the same determination that some people admired when he decided to invade Iraq, President G.W. Bush solved that political problem with a stroke of the pen, forcing the people of Nevada to give up their opposition, and presumably solving the geological and hydrological problems as well by presidential decree.

[10] One of the earliest market distortions in favour of nuclear power was the Price-Anderson Act of 1957: As US insurance companies refused to shoulder the risks alone, nuclear operators were required to insure only a tiny fraction of the potential damage a large-scale accident might cause. Another fraction was to be covered by the US government, but by far the largest financial risk was – and is – borne, unknowingly, by the potential victims, i.e., property owners and in fact everybody living in the contaminated area. – The British nuclear industry, one of the oldest and therefore most "mature" ones, has all the time been working at a net loss. Margaret Thatcher, Conservative prime minister and a great champion of the free market, tried to privatize it in the 1980s, but after inspecting its hitherto secret accounts, nobody wanted to buy it. She had to levy an extra tax on coal to support the alternative energy sources. 98% of the proceeds went to nuclear, and the remaining 2% to the whole of the renewable energy sector. Prime minister Tony Blair (1997-2007) again had to inject billions in subsidies in order to save the British nuclear industry from bankruptcy. - France generates 70% of its electricity from nuclear power, but has to highly subsidise the operating firm, which is one of the most heavily indebted companies in the world. - Wall Street gave up investing in nuclear power plants in the 1970s, not for ethical but for economic reasons. In the USA the last nuclear plant order that was not

The high cost is one of the reasons why most environmentalists think that, apart from its side effects, nuclear power is not a good option to combat climate change: Subsidies for nuclear power syphon off most of the funds otherwise available for investment into cheaper, safer alternatives, viz., energy efficiency measures and renewable energy generation technologies such as wind and solar.

In the 1960s, the Austrians knew little about all of this, and by 1971 construction of Austria's first nuclear plant was under way - at Zwentendorf in Lower Austria, right on an earthquake fault and at a location which the Federal Institute of Geology deemed "absolutely unsuitable."

By the mid-70s opposition was slowly emerging and to counter it, the Austrian utilities started their first horror scenario campaigns with posters depicting dark streets, little children with candles, and helpless doctors in front of cold incubators. For without nuclear power "the lights would go out." By 1978, construction of the plant was completed, but opposition had grown and become a burden on the ruling Social Democrat Party.

"No nuclear waste to the Waldviertel ..."

subsequently cancelled was placed in 1974. When George W. Bush announced a renaissance of nuclear power, potential US investors immediately demanded huge government subsidies. As yet, no new nuclear plant is under construction in the USA.

Red flags and Catholic banners and lots of otherwise apolitical citizens – a large cross-section of Austrian society were galvanized into activity against the nuclear power plant

Therefore, the then chancellor (prime minister) Bruno Kreisky decided to hold the first referendum in post-war Austria. (The second would be the 1995 referendum on joining the European Union). Kreisky was confident he would win because the Zwentendorf plant was already sitting there and just waiting to go on line and because the government, the Industrialists' Federation, and the Labour Unions had each spent 30 million schillings on pro-nuclear propaganda

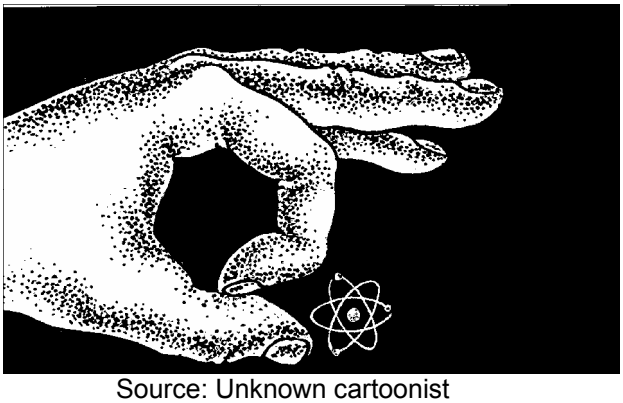
"No life without nuclear power ..."

On November 5, 1978, the first of two "Austrian miracles" occurred: To everybody's surprise, the vote turned

out NO – by a margin of 50.5% against 49.5 YES.

The plant was mothballed because the pro-nuclear lobby was hoping for a second referendum to reverse the first. It was only after the disaster at Chernobyl six years later that it finally gave up. Since then, the interior fittings and installations have been cannibalized and sold off to German nuclear plants. For the building itself, no use has yet been found.[11]

Among the personalities who convinced the Austrians to vote NO had been eminent scientists such as Nobel prize winner Konrad Lorenz. The most effective pro-nuclear lobbyist had been the immensely popular chancellor Kreisky. Even two years after the referendum, he signed an unsuccessful pro-nuclear initiative "as a private citizen". Shortly before his death, however, he said in an interview that being for nuclear power had been a mistake and that the "insight of his life" was that nuclear power must be opposed.



Source: Unknown cartoonist

[11] The ruins of a discontinued breeder project at Kalkar on the German-Dutch border were eventually converted into a "nuclear theme park". For the Zwentendorf ruin, it has been jokingly suggested to turn it into a museum for obsolete technologies. Local police have used its walls to train abseiling and other climbing techniques. German nuclear plant operators have sent staff to train emergency procedures under "gemütlich" Austrian conditions, i.e. without the deadly radiation they would normally encounter inside a reactor.

Some say that the outcome of the1978 referendum was NO because Kreisky had been for YES and had vaguely indicated that he might resign if the result was NO. Indeed some conservatives voted NO because they disliked Kreisky, not the atomic plant. However, an equal or larger number of Social Democrats voted YES because they wanted to support Kreisky, not nuclear power. In the general elections of 1979, with the nuclear debate off his back, Kreisky gained the largest majority ever reached in Austria.

Eventually, a ban on nuclear power generation was written into the Austrian constitution. As the Austrian politicians have been doing little to discourage energy waste and to promote energy efficiency and modern alternative energy sources, Austria is now importing electricity from abroad, some of which is nuclear.

Historical monument Zwentendorf: A nuclear ruin is the symbol of the classical era of Austrian environmentalism.

In 1979 a shocking nuclear accident occurred at Three Mile Island, Pennsylvania. No new nuclear power plants were built in the U.S.A. afterwards. In 1986, an even worse accident at Chernobyl, USSR, shocked the world. Nuclear plant construction came to a standstill in many countries. In the last few years, the nuclear industry has been able to convince part of the public that it can help combat climate change, although many feel that clean renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power would be a much safer option. In 2008, a number of embarrassing nuclear incidents in France, Belgium, Croatia, and in the IAEA research facility in Lower Austria helped to keep scepticism alive.

3. Another "Austrian Miracle"

Six years after "Zwentendorf", a hydropower project at Hainburg on the Danube sparked an environmental crisis that overshadowed all past ones and almost led to civil war.

The unique Danube/March wetlands, home to rare and endangered plant and animal species and the source of drinking water for a large area, and doubly protected by an international environmental treaty[12] and by Austrian laws[13], were nevertheless to be destroyed by a huge dam and reservoir. When word spread that the utility was illegally[14] beginning to cut down the trees, concerned environmentalists from Vienna and other parts of the republic flocked into the "Au"[15] (wetland) to protect it with their own bodies. Although the tree-huggers were forcefully and sometimes brutally removed by police, they came back over secret trails, led by locals who knew the geography. Instead of discouraging further nature lovers from getting involved, news of the authorities' actions mobilized thousands of hitherto indifferent citizens who would not normally have dreamt of exchanging their cosy homes for a tent on a cold December night.

The "Au" in its natural state

Would it soon look like this? ("Greifenstein" hydro plant Construction site)

Around Christmas of 1984, and after a last bloody attempt to expel the protesters from the Au, the government caved in and proclaimed a 1-year moratorium on construction work. This moratorium lasted for 12 years. In 1996, on the occasion of Austria's millenium celebrations, the Hainburg area was declared a national park and "given to the Austrian people as a present."[16]

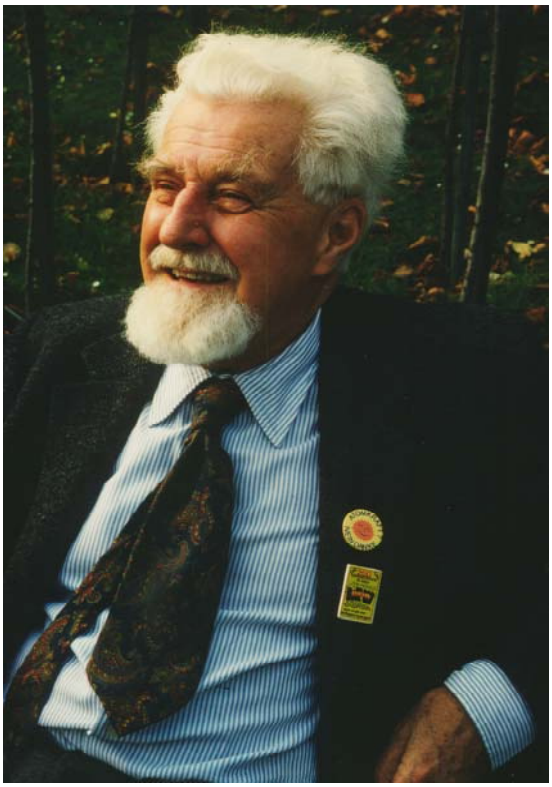
[12] The Ramsar Treaty for the Protection of Wetlands

[13] The Lower Austrian Landscape Protection Act

[14] Their application for a construction permit had been, in accordance with the laws, turned down by all three district governments responsible for the area. The utility (but not its opponents) now had the right to appeal to *naturschutzlandesrat* Ernest Brezovsky. This senior conservation officer knew that the federal government desperately wanted a decision in favour of the utility. He also knew that even if his verdict clearly broke the law it would be valid because no more legal appeal was possible. And he knew that the biology professors he had consulted were shut up by a gagging clause in their contracts. So in photocopying their expertises, he simply covered the passages that were critical of the project and handed the censored versions to the journalists. This made some of the professors so furious that they breached their contracts and spoke out rather than abet Brezovsky's tricks.

[15] Hitherto used in poetical or biological contexts only, the term "Au" suddenly became a household word and has remained so since. Etymologically related to Latin aqua, German Ache and Eiland, English meadow and place names such as Avon and Exeter, it is even there in the name of Scandinavia (originally "island of Skandin").

[16] The Hainburg events also acted as a catalyst to unite hitherto fragmented attempts at "green" political representation: it was the genesis of Austria's Green Party, which has been in Parliament ever since.



After playing a decisive role in the nuclear controversy, Nobel laureate Konrad Lorenz became the figurehead in the successful fight for the preservation of the Hainburg wetlands.

Early environmental controversies had been of a local or regional character. The *Zwentendorf* referendum had been on a national level, and the *Hainburg* crisis had reached international proportions: Journalists from all parts of the world came to report on the skirmishes, and Prince Philip came from Great Britain in his capacity as president of the WWF.

4. Another Referendum

In 1990, the Austrian government applied for membership to the European Union but found that a referendum was indispensable. Unlike in the *Zwentendorf* campaign, the government went into the 1994 referendum well prepared: An expensive advertising agency was hired, and most of the mass media wrote and broadcast solidly for YES. The widely read *Kronenzeitung* tabloid claimed that a NO outcome meant that Austrians would lose their 13th and 14th monthly salaries, and the state secretary responsible for EU propaganda promised that every Austrian would have an additional 1,000 schillings in their pay packets each month if they voted YES.

The result of this campaign was impressive – over 66% voted YES. When it was seen after accession that prices rose faster than incomes, and that the European commission interfered in Austrian affairs to an extent hitherto undreamt of, a hangover set in belatedly. Criticism is now spearheaded by the very *Kronenzeitung*, which has made a complete turnaround and wildly attacks the EU as if it had always been one of its fiercest opponents.

Whilst the economic pros and cons of accession are hard to weigh, Austria has probably been a net loser ecologically. The main reason for this is the EU's obsession with the free movement of goods, and with abolishing "non-tariff trade barriers"[17]. This means that in some respects an EU member has to give up more sovereignty to Brussels than any of the 50 US states has ever lost to Washington, D.C.

Case in point – the catalytic converter story: In 1983, Germany wanted to emulate the strict US automobile exhaust regulations in order to combat air pollution and forest dieback. New cars were to be allowed to be sold in Germany only if they had catalytic converters to reduce their toxic

[17] Non-tariff trade barriers are impediments to the international flow of goods other than customs duties, such as: national minimum environmental, health, hygiene, or safety standards, food and drug laws, labour and social standards, unilateral global environmental protection measures, etc.

emissions.[18] However, Italian and French auto manufacturers protested that that was a restriction of trade, a protectionist[19] non-tariff trade barrier because foreign manufacturers exporting cars to Germany would have to make costly technical modifications.[20] So Germany was not allowed to make catalysts mandatory even for its own citizens, and had to wait until the whole of the EU was ready to do so in the 1990s.[21]

In contrast Austria, not being in the EU in the 1980s, was able to prescribe catalytic converters long before the EU member countries could. By doing so, Austria (together with Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries) even influenced the EU from outside and prompted it to bring forward its own deadline.

In the USA, on the other hand, California had introduced mandatory catalytic converters as early as 1975, with the federal government in Washington following suit a year later. Had California been a member of the EU, it would not have been allowed to mandate an environment-friendly non-tariff trade barrier such as the catalytic converter but would have had to wait many more years.[22] The time lag between catalytic converters in the USA (1975) and the EU (1993) means that in the EU, an enormous amount of technically unnecessary air pollution continued for two more decades, and in Austria for one decade.

This does not mean that US environmental legislation always has the edge over the EU. At the time of writing, many Americans are looking wistfully at recent EU regulations, which limit or prohibit such additives as lead or phthalates in toys, electronic equipment and other household articles. Others, especially executives from the American chemical industry, despise the EU's "precautionary principle" to which European politicians are at least paying lip service now. The US (and WTO) philosophy tends not to interfere with industry but to wait until serious harm occurs. This laissez-faire attitude is increasingly leading to countries such as China applying two different export standards – a strict one for deliveries to Europe (and often for home consumption as well) and a more relaxed one for exports to the USA.

Similarly, in the USA concerns about genetically engineered food have not even translated into a labelling

[18] The catalytic converter neutralizes some toxic exhausts, but cannot reduce CO2 emissions.

[19] which it may also have been because German manufacturers were at the time more advanced than their Italian and French competitors.

[20] Under international trade agreements such as the EU, NAFTA, or the WTO, free trade is often used as a pretext to pursue an environmentally damaging agenda.

[21] By 2008, the tables had been turned: Germany was now the bad guy because owing to pressure from its large-car manufacturers it opposed stringent EU CO2 emission standards, while France and Italy would be happy to comply because they manufacture smaller, less polluting cars. In April 2008, Porsche even sued the City of London because it charged a higher toll on larger cars and that was "discriminatory" against the owners of Porsches.

[22] Porsches, BMWs and German SUVs would not be able to meet CO2 emission standards proposed by the EU commission (120mg/km), while the smaller French and Italian cars would. In Austria, environment minister Pröll speaks out for the new standards, economics minister Bartenstein against. At the same time in the USA, the Bush administration has at long last adopted new auto efficiency standards, the first in several decades. As they are pretty lax, California (together with 16 other states) again wants to act as a pioneer and introduce stricter ones, modelled on the European example. This time, however, the Bush administration is so fiercely against the Californian initiative that the President is trying to block his fellow-Republican Schwarzenegger's project, claiming that individual states must not have standards that are better than the federal ones – a reminder of the centralized EU philosophy. Schwarzenegger has vowed to fight the federal government in court. In the last few months, skyrocketing fuel prices have resulted in a re-discovery of public transport in Austria, in the EU and even in the United States. This should contribute to some reduction in CO2 emissions.

requirement.[23] The US FDA (Food and Drug Administration) determined as early as 1992 that comprehensive scientific reviews[24] of GM food were not necessary because it was substantially equivalent to natural food. In the EU food from GMOs (genetically modified organisms) must be labelled and therefore only finds a limited market because most Europeans simply do not want it. In Austria, the large supermarket chains[25] have voluntarily agreed not to sell labelled GMO food. In 1997, Austria also banned the import of certain GM seed varieties but was later forced by the EU commission to lift the ban.

The Bush administration, in its attempt to force-feed Europeans with American GMO products, has resorted to the WTO[26] to compel the EU to remove Austria's (and some other EU members') import restrictions. Under WTO rules, the U.S. and the other plaintiffs (Canada and Argentina) will now be able to slam high retaliatory tariffs on EU (and especially Austrian) exports[27] unless additional scientific studies convince the WTO that GMOs can cause harm. The existing studies and "red flags" simply do not count.

By mid-2008, an analogous situation is beginning to evolve in regard to meat from "cloned" animals.

5. Interference by the EU Commission

The EU Commission,[28] eager to toe the American line and to please its own European biotech lobby, has over the years been trying to help GMO products flood the market. However, it is facing strong resistance among the European population. At the time of writing, 240 European regions have declared themselves "GMO-free zones", among them the whole state of Upper Austria. But these are left in legal limbo because the Commission does not recognize them. Some Austrian states have now adopted measures short of outright bans but with similar effects, such as complex bureaucratic procedures and public registration of farmers who plant GM crops. As a result, there are at the time of writing practically no GMO fields in Austria. As far as GMO imports are concerned, the Commission has since

[23] although the vast majority of Americans would prefer labelling so that they can make an informed choice.

[24] Therefore, hardly any long-term studies exist.

[25] 90% of the grocery chains guarantee prompt removal of labelled GMO products from their shelves. A guarantee has only been refused by *Schlecker*, *Nah & Frisch* and, somewhat surprisingly, by *Meinl am Graben*, which is supposed to be a "gourmet temple".

[26] In a way, the World Trade Organisation is to the EU what the EU is to Austria. It sees to it that its 150 member nations strictly adhere to its rules upholding free trade. It strongly discourages trade barriers and tends to ignore underlying environmental or social concerns.

[27] EU-US GMO tensions mirror an earlier controversy about "hormone beef". After generous application of growth and sexual hormones in animal husbandry in Europe and the USA from the 1960s, and spectacular scandals (e.g., breast growth in Italian boys), the EU banned this method. The USA regards that as an arbitrary, protectionist measure, has sued the EU at the WTO, and has been entitled to $100,000,000 a year in punitive tariffs since 1999. Retaliatory tariffs or other restrictions on the most successful export industries of a country under WTO attack can easily weaken its resistance because those industries may desperately lobby at home for giving in. Exports of Austrian products such as KTM motor bikes or Red Bull drinks seem to be especially exposed. Also, cf. below the lobbying of the Austrian pharmaceutical industry for a lifting of rainforest protection legislation in 1993. And in 2008, the Czech government cancelled but then revived an order for Austrian tanks. Persistent rumour has it that a resumption of the order was made contingent on Austria stopping criticism of the Temelin nuclear power plant.

[28] The European Commission is the "government" of the European Union. It is not legitimized by any kind of democratic election process. Instead, each country's government delegates one "commissioner". Austria's is Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the EU's foreign relations commissioner. Before her, Austria had delegated Franz Fischler as agriculture commissioner. The commission is so powerful that it can – and often does – override the wishes of the majority of the European population.

2005 made three attempts to topple Austria's bans but failed twice because Austria's position was supported by a vast majority in the "Council of Ministers"[29] - even by ministers whose own countries allowed such imports. The third time (November 2007), under pressure because of looming retaliatory measures on the part of the USA, "only" 17[30] out of the 27 EU environment ministers voted for Austria, 4[31] against, and the rest abstained. Yet, the Commission is so powerful that in spite of the absolute majority of votes for Austria and only 4 against, it was now entitled to overrule Austria's import ban. In order for the ban to be upheld as in the first two instances, Austria would have needed 72% of the votes.

Even with the import ban lifted, GM maize will only find a small market in Austria. Under the voluntary agreement mentioned above, the large supermarket chains will not sell GM food products, and Austria is nearly self-sufficient in maize for animal feed.

Soy, for animal feed, is a different matter. A large amount, much of it genetically engineered, is imported each year and finds its way into human consumption via livestock. While the feed itself must be labelled, the meat, milk, eggs etc. from those animals are not required to be.[32] They would therefore be hard to identify even for extremely conscientious supermarket managers.

Most Austrian politicians are at least paying lip service to keeping non-meat, non-dairy food GMO-free. But some (e.g., vice chancellor Molterer and former EU commissioner Fischler[33]) seem to hope to use biofuels as a "Trojan horse" to open up Austrian agriculture to GM crops, after all. If they have their will, contamination of vegetables and cereals from genetically engineered biofuel crops will be a real possibility.[34]

Another Trojan horse long lobbied for by the biotech industry, and finally sanctioned, is a 2007 EU law allowing a 0.9% GM contamination in non-labelled products. Conventional[35] and

[29] The Council of Ministers meets from time to time to discuss special issues. Depending on the subject, it consists of 27 justice ministers, or 27 finance ministers, 27 environment ministers, etc. In order to overrule a decision coming from the Commission, no less than 72% of the votes is required in the council of ministers.

[30] Among them, Germany, France, Italy, and Poland.

[31] Great Britain, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Estonia.

[32] This means that the livestock breeder knows but will not tell his customers that he uses GM feed.

[33] As agriculture commissioner, Fischler not only ridiculed his compatriots' concerns about GM crops, he also aided and abetted most of the perversions of the EU´s CAP (common agricultural policy). For example, he accepted for years the "Herod calves" system, originally established to prevent surplus calves deflating prices. Inventive breeders soon turned this into a lucrative industry, rearing extra calves and cashing subsidies for having them carted from, say, Austria to Belgium. There they were slaughtered and destroyed because it was not permissible to process them into a usable commodity such as veal. Many felt that apart from the pain inflicted on the animals during their endless transit, the system was obscene because it wilfully reared and then destroyed livestock in a world rife with hunger. After many years, Fischler initiated a half-hearted CAP reform and abolished the "Herod calves" system.

[34] GM biofuel research might even lead to a mind-boggling doomsday scenario as mentioned in Wikipedia: Some scientists have expressed concern that if experimental genetic engineering continues to be used to develop artificial enzymes to break down wood much faster than in nature, such microscopic life forms may accidentally be released into nature, grow exponentially, be distributed by the wind, and eventually destroy the structure of all trees, ending all Earthly life that breathes oxygen released by photosynthesis in trees.

[35] The EU-sponsored Austrian Program for an Environment-friendly Agriculture (ÖPUL) subsidises up to 90 per cent of all Austrian farmers. To qualify, all they have to do is slightly reduce their input of pesticides etc. By simply making this aid contingent on non-use of GM seeds, the environment/agriculture minister could have banned GMOs from the bulk of Austria's agricultural area. He refused, in open defiance of the 1.3 million Austrians who signed a 1997 petition calling for "no food from the GM laboratory, no release of GMOs, no patents on life". Incidentally, former Vice Chancellor Gorbach vehemently supported the

especially organic farming (which by legal definition must be GM-free[36]) are in limbo as to their chances of survival, with a hostile legislative environment both at the EU and the national levels.[37] This may turn out destructive for organic farmers who have, against all odds, been able to raise Austria to a leading position[38] within the EU, with 16 per cent of its agricultural area under organic cultivation, much of it in the *Hohe Tauern* national park.

6. Biotech's promises and reasons for scepticism vis-à-vis GM food

Advocates hope that genetic engineering will bring about considerable advantages:

* Yields and farmers' profits will rise because crops will be engineered to be more suitable to unfavourable conditions such as drought, poor soils, etc.

* Genes producing valuable nutrients or even medicinal substances will be inserted.

* Use of poisons in agriculture will be reduced.[39]

* Crops will be engineered to last longer after being harvested.

Sceptics argue differently**:**

*** Basic assumptions.** Biotech advocates claim that creating new transgenic material by cutting a gene from the DNA[40] of one organism and pasting it into another is nothing unnatural: Breeders and nature itself have been doing it forever. Sceptics counter that it is naïve to think of the properties of a DNA as the sum of the properties of its genes, and to ignore the unpredictable synergisms in a new DNA combination. Also, neither nature nor breeders have ever cross-bred say butterflies with potatoes or fish with strawberries as the GM industry has.

*** Potential ecological and health effects.** There is no smoking gun such as thousands of consumers having

three demands in 1997 when his Freedom Party was in opposition. Once in power, he sided with the biotech lobby.

[36] Organic farmers must not use pesticides or commercial fertiliser, either.

[37] Here is a case in point: Organic farmers placed a commercial on the Austrian radio, advertising the fact that while GM food must be labelled, this does not apply to meat from animals raised on GM feed, and that only organic meat is guaranteed to be GM-free. The commercial had to be withdrawn under pressure from conventional farmers. The episode is alarmingly reminiscent of what happened in the US a decade earlier, when Monsanto forced the popular ice-cream chain *Ben and Jerry* to stop advertising that they did not use milk from cows treated with bST. This synthetic hormone increases milk production but leads to udder inflammation and other health problems in cows (and probably in people who drink their milk). bST is prohibited in the EU but – ironically – manufactured for Monsanto in Austria.

[38] Austrian consumers seem to be world champions in buying organic food. 86% of households buy organic at least occasionally, and the market share of organic eggs has risen to almost 20%. The most popular organic brand, *ja natürlich,* started in 1994 with 30 different products. It now offers 600 at its *Billa* and *Merkur* markets. *Spar* has *natur pur,* and even discounter *Hofer* now offers some organic products under the label of. *natur aktiv*. *Hofer***,** however, is cashing in on Austrians' enthusiasm for organic food by offering a cheaper second line, *Zurück zum Ursprung* (Back to the Roots) which is not completely organic although it is marketed in a way that makes consumers think it is.

[39] *Pest-resistant* crops are engineered to carry the pest-killing poison within them. This means that indeed less poison is applied (in conventional spraying, 99% of the poison does not reach the target pest but goes into the air, the soil, and the ground water). What the biotech lobby does not mention is that the majority of GM crops are of a different type. They are *herbicide-resistant*, i.e., engineered to withstand a poison (mainly Monsanto's *Roundup*) which kills everything else in the field. Farmers can therefore spray to their hearts' delight, and more often than not, herbicide use increases – and with it, the profits of Monsanto.

[40] Deoxyribonucleic acid (German: DNS), the carrier of the genetic information. It can be manipulated by genetic engineering.

fallen down dead. But the original concerns of eminent scientists[41] have over the years been corroborated by a number of studies and "red flags", for instance:

* A soybean genetically modified with a nut gene to change its protein content acquired the same potentially deadly allergenic properties as the nut itself. Marketing it had to be cancelled (1996).

* In order to prove its substantial equivalence with natural potatoes, leading British nutrition expert Dr. Arpad Pusztai engineered a GM potato by adding harmless components. To his dismay, when fed to rats the potato damaged their immune systems, thymus, spleens, brains, hearts, livers and testicles. When the media got word of this and wanted to learn details, Dr. Pusztai's office phones were disconnected, his computers blocked, and his research materials confiscated by the director of the Institute he worked for, which was partly funded by the Blair[42] government and by Monsanto. Dr. Pusztai received a gagging order and eventually was forced into retirement. In the following weeks his house and office were burgled, and pro-biotech lobbyists did all they could to smear his professional reputation. 20 international experts reviewed his work and found no fault. His Institute later on acknowledged his integrity.

* Cornell University (USA) reported that monarch butterflies died from contact with GM maize pollen. This broke the near boycott of the GMO issue by the American media.

* In Britain, one of the few longer-term studies showed that sowing GM crops changed the ecology and species diversity of the fields under investigation – in one case for the better, in two for the worse.

* Laboratory rats, fed with a genetically engineered maize produced by Monsanto, showed signs of toxicity in their kidneys and livers. This was the first time that a GE product already cleared for use as food showed toxic effects on internal organs (2007).

Potentially adverse health effects of GM food are denied or belittled by the biotech lobby. Yet, the industry has been fighting tooth and nail against labelling and liability legislation. In the USA it has been successful on both counts, in the EU only as to liability: In the EU, GM food must be labelled. But neither here nor in the USA will the industry be fully liable should a major accident[43] occur. In North America, neither conventional nor organic farmers get compensation if their crops have been contaminated by pollen drifting in from neighbouring GM fields. On the contrary, Monsanto has even sued them when specimens of Monsanto's patented crops grew in their fields against their will.[44]

*** Irreversibility, destruction of organic agriculture.** "Green Biotechnology" advocates claim that all they want is "peaceful co-existence"

[41] Among them, the late Columbia University professor Erwin Chargaff. His trail-blazing DNA research provided the groundwork for later biotechnology developments. He soon became deeply concerned about the all-too-fast marketing of a technology the basics of which are not yet properly understood. His plaque can be seen on the wall of the "Wasa-Gymnasium" college in Wasagasse in Vienna, which he attended as a student.

[42] In the preceding election, Blair had been supported financially by Monsanto.

[43] One conceivable disaster scenario is the transfer of desired properties such as pesticide resistance from genetically engineered useful plants to unwanted weeds, turning them into invincible "superweeds".

[44] Most recent jurisdiction in Canada, however, has weakened Monsanto's position.

between genetically engineered and natural crops. However, this is like peaceful co-existence between the cat and the mouse, because the release of GM species can contaminate natural ones and make them disappear,[45] as in the case of rapeseed in Canada.

Already in the 1990s research showed that GM qualities such as herbicide tolerance can be transferred to wild relatives and may turn them into persistent weeds, and that GM pollen can drift over much longer distances than expected. Meanwhile, the situation has become dramatic in some countries: In Canada, organic canola rape can practically not be grown any more because the country has been taken over by the GM varieties. In India, the cotton crops have been so massively contaminated that natural cotton can hardly be found any more. In Mexico, there has been large-scale contamination of cereal crops. The biotech industry belittles these effects, but, needless to say, is not unhappy with them. After all, replacement of natural crops by GM ones has been its expressed aim for many years.

In a number of GM seeds, Bt (bacillus thuringiensis) is used to protect the crops from insects and caterpillars. Sooner or later, this will inevitably lead to the development of Bt-resistant strains of pests. As Bt is a mild pesticide that organic agriculture is allowed to use in crisis situations, the emergence of Bt-resistant pests might put an end to organic farming – again an outcome not at all unwelcome to the biotech industry.

Monopoly on formerly "free goods" held by supranational companies. Monsanto. The history of the biotech industry is closely intertwined with the history of the US/multinational *Monsanto* corporation.

Monsanto became notorious when it became known that it had faked expertises to "prove" that dioxin was innocuous. These faked expertises led to thousands of American war veterans getting no compensation for the health damage suffered from Monsanto's defoliant *Agent Orange* as used in the Vietnam War.

More recently, Monsanto acquired a dominating stake in the biotech and seed industries. They commissioned Arthur Anderson Consulting Group to design a plan to replace, by flooding the seed market, 95% of the world's natural seeds with GM products within five years.

But progress was slower than anticipated: In 1998, Monsanto tried to get African politicians to sign a plea to Europeans to give up their resistance to GM food because it was needed to feed the hungry of the world. Instead, the Africans came out with their own resolution, appealing to the Europeans to "stand in solidarity with Africa in resisting these gene technologies …" A number of African countries have refused to accept US GM "food aid" because they feel it is a Trojan horse designed to flood Africa with GM seeds. In Europe, 240 regions have declared themselves GM-free zones, and Poland and Greece have imposed partial import bans without giving a hoot about EU or WTO free trade regulations. A cautious stance is also taken by France and Romania. In India, thousands of farmers have committed suicide because GM cotton seeds did not fulfil the promises Monsanto had made, and they found themselves unable to support their families and to pay their debts to Monsanto. In Australia, Monsanto had to give up attempts to market GM

[45] As early as 2004, EU environment commissioner Margot Wallström admitted that the problem of co-existence was totally unsolved.

wheat, and in many Asian countries GM produce is meeting with fierce resistance.

Monsanto has been luckier with US and Canadian farmers, many of whom have switched to GM crops. They had to sign contracts barring them from doing what farmers have been doing for thousands of years, viz., saving some of the harvest as seed for the coming year. These farmers are now bound to purchase their seeds (and the appropriate herbicides) from Monsanto.[46] The company hired special detectives to identify farmers who breached their contracts, and set up free phone lines for informers who wished to anonymously report their neighbours.[47] Monsanto then went on to prosecute hundreds of farmers in Canada and the US, some of whom have never even used Monsanto products at all but had their crops contaminated from neighbours' fields.[48]

Critics allege that Monsanto is planning to monopolise what economists used to call free goods: In the 1990s Monsanto tried to also take over the drinking water supply of countries like Mexico and India but had to give up these plans owing to a public outcry. The scenario is reminiscent of the Hollywood movie, *Total Recall*, where a corporation monopolises the breathing air supply on Mars and thereby wields almost unlimited power over the people who have to work there like slaves. They are finally rescued by – an Austrian! (Arnold S.)

In 2002, Monsanto lost a lawsuit resulting in US$700 million in damages being awarded to residents of the town of Anniston, (Alabama), which had been polluted for years by Monsanto's PCB waste. Although PCB production was outlawed in 1976, Monsanto dragged the lawsuit out for nearly three decades. Monsanto was found guilty of "negligence, wantonness, suppression of truth, nuisance, trespass, and outrage". Under Alabama law the rare claim of outrage requires "conduct so outrageous in character and extreme in degree as to go beyond all possible bounds of decency so as to be regarded as atrocious and intolerable in civilized society".

In 2008 for the first time in history, an EU commissioner (environment commissioner Stavros Dimas) spoke out in favour of banning a Monsanto GM maize strain.

7. More Interference on the Part of the EU – and of Distant Countries.

To many Austrians, the EU appears to be constantly issuing directives that range from the hostile to the ridiculous. For example, recent EU jurisdiction prohibits Austria (and Germany) from requiring foreign organic product testing institutions to operate a facility in Austria. This bureaucratic complication would contradict the EU

[46] Forcing farmers to buy the whole package - Monsanto seeds and Monsanto pesticides - doubles the company's profits

[47] In addition, Monsanto has been experimenting with self-destructing "Terminator" seed technology to replace the informer system.

[48] The Canadian farming couple, Percy and Loise Schmeiser, were sued by Monsanto when traces of genetically engineered Monsanto canola were found on their fields. They had never used Monsanto's products and were able to prove that pollen had been carried over by wind from neighbouring farms. In 2004, a strange verdict by the Supreme Court of Canada upheld Monsanto's right to its patents even if the Schmeisers' fields had been contaminated against their will and without their knowledge, but at the same time the Court did not compel them to pay the damages Monsanto had claimed, nor the legal costs. However, the long lawsuit had almost ruined them. In 2007, the Schmeisers received the "Alternative Nobel Prize" for their fight to preserve natural species diversity. In 2008, in a largely symbolic reversal of earlier verdicts, Monsanto was convicted for having contaminated the Schmeisers' fields and had to pay them $ 600.- (the cost of removing unwelcome Monsanto "volunteer crops").

principle of the freedom of services. On the other hand, the EU itself painstakingly tries to regulate things like the shape of tractor seats, the curvature of cucumbers, and even the décolletage of waitresses' dirndl blouses.[49]

In fairness it must be said that in the last few years, with Austria's environmental record on a slippery slope, EU interference has in a number of cases forced the Austrian government to improve environmental standards. For example, Austria was admonished for non-compliance with EIA[50] directives and for dragging its feet in the implementation of *Natura 2000*[51], and had to give up several golf course projects that would have encroached on protected areas. More recently, the Commission has been leaning heavily on Austria for non-compliance with EU non-smoker protection and climate policy. In 2008, the ECJ (European Court of Justice) also ruled that an individual can sue his/her country if particulate matter emissions exceed EU standards. This is the case at 28 Austrian monitoring points.

For climate protection and reduction of dependence on foreign energy suppliers, the EU devised in 2007 its 20/20/20/10 project - by the year 2020, 20% renewable energy, 20% less greenhouse gas emissions, 10% biofuels.[52] In Austria, owing to the large Danube dams, renewables already account for 23% of the energy mix. Thus, the Commission has set Austria a higher target of 34%. Instead of welcoming this as an incentive for modernization and as a chance to improve its disastrous climate record, the Austrian government is crying "unfair" and doing all it can to make the EU reduce this figure.[53]

Rainforests and the pharmaceutical industry. 1993 may have been the year in which Austria began to turn from an environmental champion into an environmental laggard. A year earlier, hoping to slow down the destruction of the world's rainforests, parliament had passed a law which made the labelling of tropical timber mandatory. However, Malaysia[54] and Indonesia did not like the idea and retaliated by striking back at Austria in a completely unrelated field: They threatened to boycott Austrian pharmaceutical firms, which had just established distribution networks in those states. The government now found itself blackmailed not only by two foreign countries but also by companies at home. So, it used its majority in parliament to withdraw the law as quietly as possible. The Greens

[49] This attempt, much ridiculed by the Austrian media though it was, has a serious background – sunburn and thus increased risk of skin cancer, especially at higher Alpine elevations.

[50] EIA = Environmental impact assessment (= *Umweltverträglichkeitsprüfung*). In February 2008, after a complaint from Schwechat residents, the EU instructed Austria to supply belatedly an environmental impact assessment for the Vienna airport extension, where large-scale construction activities had been going on without the required EIA. However, work in progress did not have to be stopped

[51] *Natura 2000* is a network of especially valuable sites to be protected by EU members under its birds directive and its habitats directive.

[52] For the reasons discussed in ch. 12, the EU now has second thoughts about the biofuel target and is reviewing its policy.

[53] This moaning is the more incomprehensible as the SPÖ/ÖVP coalition agreement still envisaged 45%.

[54] Exploitation for cattle ranching, timber production, and industrial activities (and, more recently, for palm oil monocultures for bio-fuels) is quickly and irreversibly destroying the world's rainforests and exterminating the animals that have their habitats there. This often goes hand in hand with human rights abuses and even genocide of aboriginal peoples. In Sarawak, Malaysia, the largest holder of logging concessions was for a long time the environment minister himself. Native tribes that have lived in the forests in harmony with nature for thousands of years have been severely decimated by a policy of persecution and relocation. Rainforest destruction has dire implications for both regional weather patterns and global climate and adds about 20% to human-induced CO2 in the atmosphere.

started a spectacular several-day filibuster but could not prevent the law from being abolished. Instead, parliamentary rules were changed so that filibustering would never again be possible.

8. Two Clouds with Silver Linings

*** Rainforests and a private initiative.** At about the same time, Vienna music professor Michael Schnitzler[55] visited Costa Rica, a model country which has survived for 50 years without an army of its own, and has designated a quarter of its area as nature reserves or national parks. When Schnitzler realized that some clear-cutting was still going on even in the protected areas because the government did not have the financial resources to actually buy all the land it had put under protection, he started a large-scale campaign in Austria, with the help of the *Kronenzeitung* tabloid. He collected enough money to buy a crucial corridor between two national parks, established a research station there, and finally got the Austrian government to finance construction of a rainforest hotel to provide jobs for some of the poachers who had lost their livelihood owing to the creation of the nature reserve.

*** Saving Antarctica.** In a very different part of the world, another Austrian made a significant contribution to the preservation of the world's last pristine continent: Bruno Klausbruckner, a well-known Austrian mountaineer, acted as the base leader of Greenpeace's "world park" monitoring station in Antarctica from 1988 to 1990. He and his international team of 4 were able to document environmental abuses[56] committed by several national research stations, and to lobby for extension of the 1961 Antarctic Treaty which prohibited exploitation of oil and mineral resources.[57]

9. Austria, the Lost Leader

By the mid-nineties, Austria had gained a reputation as an environmental model country. A 1995 OECD[58] report praised Austria for sulphur dioxide, nitrous oxide and particulate matter[59] reductions, and for improved energy efficiency. But by then Austria had begun sliding down a slippery slope which eventually led the country to a position in the lower league of environmental performers. By 2007, Austria occupied the last but one place (before Spain) in climate protection in the EU.

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[55] Schnitzler is the grandson of the famous Viennese author Arthur Schnitzler, one of whose stories served as a basis for the Hollywood movie, "Eyes Wide Shut".

[56] Run by the US military, the McMurdo research station turned out to be the worst offender. Over the fledgling internet, Klausbruckner succeeded in interesting an American senator, who eventually put enough pressure on the military for them to clean up their act. His name was Al Gore.

[57] Such a ban is sorely needed since oil spills and other pollution take infinitely longer to be absorbed there than in warmer climates. The Antarctic Treaty was renewed for another 50 years in 1991.

[58] OECD = Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (a think tank and monitoring agency committed to a market economy and a pluralistic democracy and acting as a forum for its 30 member countries and another 70 non-member countries to discuss, develop and refine economic and social policies).

[59] With road traffic increasing and Austrians buying more diesel passenger cars than anyone else, particulate matter (= fine dust particles) became a problem again in the 2000s. In Vienna, where exposure often exceeds EU limits, authorities have mandated measures such as particle filters for construction machines and similar off-road diesel vehicles. Vienna's Greens demand free public transport on days with high particulate pollution. According to a recent study, Styria's capital Graz exceeds limits on 100 days per year, increasing by 1.5% the mortality especially of children and senior citizens. The study was locked up, and as a solution some Graz politicians suggested raising the permissible levels.

While accurate overall ranking is difficult, one indicator is the lawsuits against Austria before the European Court of Justice: After accession to the EU, a number of Austria's standards were better than the EU's. Austria was able to defend most of them, but a German trucker successfully sued Austria for enforcing live animal transport legislation that was too humane – and thus a non-tariff barrier. Austria had to succumb to the lower, more brutal EU standards.

Similarly, Austria had to give in by reducing the toll on the Brenner Pass turnpike between Germany and Italy. It had been relatively high to encourage truckers to use the piggyback rail service and thus relieve some of the heavy air and noise pollution suffered by the desperate people of once beautiful Tyrolean valleys. Adding insult to injury, truckers were entitled to reclaim from the Austrian government the difference between the lower toll and what they had already paid. Piggyback is now much more expensive than road use, and piggyback trains are often half-empty while the Brenner *autobahn* is one line of slowly moving trucks.[60]

During the last few years the tide has turned: Austria's environmental practices are no longer "too good" for the EU. On the contrary, Austria is now in the cross-hairs of the EU for non-compliance with a number of minimum standards. Austrian environmentalists are occasionally even looking to the EU for support. In some cases, EU displeasure lies with incomplete implementation of the *Natura 2000* system. Other instances of Austrian non-compliance with EU directives are in the fields of nature conservation, local water quality, asbestos disposal, environmental impact assessments, non-smoker protection and greenhouse gases.

Federal politicians argue that much of this is due to Austria's nine states (or "provinces" – *bundesländer*) jealously guarding their legislative and administrative privileges and not giving them up to the federal government. There are still up to nine different sets of nature conservation regulations, hunting and shooting laws, water protection regulations, etc. However, all this was known before accession to the EU, and it is the inactive federal government that is responsible to the EU, and it is the taxpayer who will have to pay the fines – a scenario no longer unlikely since Greece was fined €20,000.- a day (€7.3 million per year) for not disposing of a hazardous waste hill.

10. Governmental and Citizens' Coalitions

Many think that the decline of Austria as an environmental leader came with the coalition government of the conservative People´s Party (ÖVP) with Jörg Haider's right-wing Freedom Party (FPÖ). In fact, the trend towards business-friendly legislation at the expense of social, health, and environmental standards accelerated under ÖVP/FPÖ, yet it had begun under a Social Democrat (SPÖ)/ÖVP coalition long before. But first of all, there were another two powerful expressions of popular disaffection with official politics.

Citizens get involved again – and not just in Austria: The Brent Spar saga. In 1995, an international row arose about *Shell* planning to scuttle in the British North Sea a contaminated

[60] To limit the worst damage, local authorities imposed sectoral restrictions on certain transports (e.g. hazardous ones). Most of them were struck off by the EU as being incompatible with EU membership.

oil distribution platform, the *Brent Spar*. The Conservative British government had gladly consented, but *Greenpeace* launched a last-minute campaign to prevent the project. They argued that deep sea dumping would set a dangerous precedent, hundreds of similar platforms would be dumped in the next few years if Shell had its way, and the Brent Spar should be dismantled on land.

Activists boarded the platform by helicopter to prevent its scuttling. Simultaneously, Greenpeace picketed Shell stations and started a Europe-wide information campaign which resulted in many motorists in Austria and other countries boycotting Shell products. After tangible drops in sales, the company caved in. The Brent Spar was towed to a Norwegian port and dismantled, with the metal parts decontaminated and used in harbour construction.

Shell entered into an ongoing dialogue with Greenpeace and other environmental players. Environmentalists hailed the episode as a turning point in the interaction between environmentalists and arrogant corporations. The episode is said to have given a boost to the concept of CSR (corporate social responsibility) in Europe. It also led to stricter international regulations concerning deep-sea dumping.

Citizens get involved again – in Austria: The GMO petition. In 1997, it was again the people rather than the politicians who stemmed the tide of what seemed to be an inevitable development. By that time, the fledgling biotech industry was trying to flood the market with genetically modified agricultural produce, as exemplified by Monsanto's attempts to undermine pending EU labelling legislation by mixing GM and conventional soybeans in shipments to Europe.[61]

A coalition of Austrian environmental groups initiated a petition with three basic demands, viz.: no genetically engineered food in Austria, no release of GMOs (genetically modified organisms) in field tests, and no patents on life. The petition did not demand a stop to medical and general genetic research.

A record number of over 1.2 million Austrians signed. This forced the Austrian government to put up at least some token resistance to the European Commission's plans to allow the biotech industry unlimited freedom of action. In the course of the controversy, it turned out that in most of the other EU countries a majority of the people were also unenthusiastic about GM food on the shelves of supermarkets, especially when it became clear that the industry was fighting tooth and nail to prevent labelling and liability regulations. Adopting the "precautionary principle", the EU authorities for some time slowed down the rapid advance of the biotech industry.

SPÖ/ÖVP (1987 - 2000). Coalition governments in Austria seem to be even more environmentally destructive than one-party ones, possibly because they need not deal with a strong opposition in parliament. The environmental track record of the "grand coalition" government (SPÖ/ÖVP) was nothing to write home about. Among other things, it dismantled the Academy of Sciences' famous *Institut für Umweltwissenschaften* (Institute of Environmental Sciences), which had become troublesome because its staff, above all popular environmental

[61] These attempts were thwarted by Greenpeace blockades at the European ports of destination.

scientists Bernd Lötsch and Peter Weish, would not succumb to political pressure but kept criticizing environmentally harmful projects.

Also in this era, the pristine alpine plateau of the *Wilde Krimml* in the Tyrol was lost to even more ski lifts and cable cars in defiance of environmental regulations. The case bore an uncanny resemblance to the Hainburg controversy. Like Lower Austrian SPÖ *naturschutzlandesrat*[62] Brezovsky in 1984, ÖVP Tyrol *naturschutzlandesrat* Fritz Astl ignored the findings of his own staff and signed an illegal construction permit which, however, he knew would be binding because it could not be appealed as he himself was the last instance of appeal.

This industry-friendly government also missed the chance to reduce household waste by encouraging reusable bottles and textile shopping bags. Therefore, the country is now swamped with non-returnable beverage containers and throwaway plastic bags. Only part of these are being recycled, with the rest ending up in waste dumps and incinerators.

ÖVP/FPÖ (2000 – 2007)**.** Their most visible achievement was the abolition of the Ministry of the Environment as a unit in its own right. Henceforth, the environmental agenda was to be dealt with by the Ministry of Agriculture – an unusual arrangement with a high potential for conflicts of interest.[63] After all, agribusiness belongs to the worst environmental polluters in any given country. Changing the name of the new agriculture-cum-environment ministry to *Lebensministerium* (life ministry) was little help. In the years to come, it did indeed turn out that whenever the agriculture minister was at odds with the environment minister, i.e., with himself, the agriculture minister usually won. Initially, 5,000 civil servants were working for the agriculture section of the ministry, vs. 270 for the environmental agenda.

As soon as they sat down to write their coalition agreement, the two government parties expressly excluded any future "gold plating". This meant that new Austrian legislation should never set environmental standards exceeding minimum EU requirements. That was in stark contrast with the promises made in the run-up to the 1994 EU accession referendum, when Austrians were assured that their country would continue to set ambitious environmental standards even more effectively once we were in the EU.

The coalition agreement also weakened the regulations concerning environmental impact assessments. Austria's policy of working for a phase-out of nuclear power in central Europe, expressly set out in every government programme since 1990, no longer appeared in the new programme.[64]

SPÖ/ÖVP again (2007 - 2008). This new coalition between the Social Democrats and the People's Party was for over a year unusually active in

[62] The *naturschutzlandesräte* (state conservation officers) are political appointees and some of them seem to regard environmental law as something to be circumvented rather than upheld.

[63] A similarly oxymoronic arrangement was made when the women's rights agenda was transferred to the minister of social affairs, who was a man, and from the right-wing party into the bargain. One of his first actions was to establish a department for men's rights.

[64] While in opposition, the Freedom Party had vociferously demanded the closure of hazardous nuclear power plants in eastern neighbouring countries and had also sided with other environmental causes. When faced with the realities of governing, they had to make several turnarounds. Thus they rejected, together with their coalition partner, a parliamentary motion for federal animal welfare legislation to replace nine different laws in the nine states. Before the elections they had vehemently demanded federal laws. Similar turnarounds occurred in regard to GMO products, waste incineration, and other environmental issues.

fighting each other so that little spectacular legislation against, and even less for, the environment was passed. But it can be said that the tradition of hostility[65] towards green electricity continued. Also, the government passively opposed the EU's ambitious 20/20/20 goals by not doing anything to curb the excessive increase in road traffic. Actively, the government protested against the EU's allocations of renewables to Austria, which it deemed too high. At the same time, the Austrian government supported Germany in its opposition to reducing CO2 emissions from automobiles, claiming that Austrian subcontractors such as Magna have a vital interest in Germany's automotive industry. In March 2008, the Austrian government was widely expected to veto the allocation of EU (and thus Austrian) funds to research into nuclear breeder[66] technology, but then it only abstained from voting.

On the upside, one thing the coalition parties have agreed on is a record investment programme in Austria's railway infrastructure (€ 10 billion for 2008 – 2013). However, environmentalists criticise that almost the same amount will go into road construction.

11. Austria's Energy Policy

Although the government still pays lip service to an anti-nuclear policy, and although parliament has unanimously demanded that such a policy should be more actively pursued, little is being done in this regard. Since its accession to the EU, Austria has been contributing € 40 million per year[67] to nuclear fission[68] and fusion[69] research and credit facilities under EURATOM.[70]

Austrians are quite concerned about several nuclear power plants in former East Bloc countries, close to Austria's borders. Some of them, of Soviet design like Chernobyl, have in the course of the years been upgraded with Western computer systems, and experts fear that the two different concepts are not really compatible.

[65] Only € 21 million is currently earmarked for new "green" power plants in Austria.

[66] "Fast breeders" have been experimented with since the 1950s. They could theoretically make better use of their nuclear fuel but are supposed to be so dangerous that even Edward Teller, the "father of the hydrogen bomb", advised against them. Most past projects (in the USA, France, Germany, the Netherlands, etc.) have been discontinued or never got beyond an experimental stage.

[67] Politicians often claim that the money is only used for safety enhancement, but in fact EURATOM credits have been and will be granted for new nuclear plants. Under EURATOM privileges, this can even apply to sites outside the EU. At the time of writing, EURATOM is planning with African nations a "dialogue on the peaceful use of nuclear power." More concretely, financing of a new Bulgarian nuclear plant is under consideration. The plant is on an earthquake fault, no European impact assessment has been conducted, and the Bulgarian authorities are notorious for their lack of safety culture.

[68] Nuclear fission is the splitting of atoms which generates heat which turns water into steam which drives turbines whose rotation is used to generate electricity. This principle underlies all present-day nuclear power plants.

[69] Nuclear fusion, the union of atomic nuclei to form a heavier nucleus, also releases heat which could theoretically be used like nuclear fission heat. However, half a century of expensive research has not yielded practical results (unless one regards the hydrogen bomb as practical), and the research community themselves admit that they will require another half century before they will see whether fusion electricity is a feasible proposition at all. But governments around the world are strangely fascinated by fusion research and put billions of taxpayers' money into it. Advocates propagate myths which are not upheld even by fusion scientists themselves, e.g. that the technology will be clean and that there will be no nuclear waste. The first Austrian science minister under ÖVP/FPÖ, a former needlework teacher without any scientific credentials, defended Austria's investment by claiming that nuclear fusion "has nothing to do with nuclear technology" and that "windmills are ugly".

[70] The excessive privileges that the EURATOM agreement gives to the nuclear industry effectively shield it from the cold winds of the free market. EURATOM was one of the three components that had to be accepted by Austria on accession to the EU. The other two were the Coal and Steel Community and the EEC (European Economic Community).

Concerns are especially strong over the *Temelin* plant near Budweis in the Czech Republic. Spectacular border blockades were staged by Austrian activists in 2000 and in 2007. The Austrian government has tolerated this kind of direct action, but is only half-heartedly negotiating with the Czech government – originally as to a phase-out[71] of their nuclear power program, and now as to enhanced safety systems. The option of vetoing Czech accession to the EU was never seriously considered.[72] Instead, in 2000 Austrian negotiators got the Czechs to promise in the *Melk Agreement* to commission an environmental impact assessment, to upgrade *Temelin's* inadequate safety systems, and to immediately inform[73] the Austrian authorities in the case of an incident. According to critics, the Czech Republic is not honouring these undertakings. Today, the *Temelin* nuclear plant is on line and seems to be more prone to incidents than any other known reactor.

"The story continues" – 30 years after the referendum

In 2008, environmentalists also protested furiously against the Austrian *Erste Bank* helping to finance the *Mohovce* nuclear station in Slovakia. The bank backed down, but the plant will still be built – without safety containment, and on the basis of building permits dating from the 1980s.

In Europe, like in the USA, nuclear power plant construction had been at a standstill for many years,[74] but not so in the communist countries of the East Bloc, not even after the velvet revolution. Austrian NGOs attempted to discourage nuclear plant construction in Eastern countries by demanding a ban on the import of nuclear electricity from hazardous nuclear plants at subsidised dumping prices.[75] But by now the share of imported electricity has risen to over 10% - some of it nuclear -, which further weakens the credibility of the Austrian government in its half-hearted negotiations.

[71] A phase-out would not be so absurd as it may appear since 5 EU countries (B, D, E, NL, S) are, or were for some time, considering a phase-out, as was non-EU CH. 10 have never built nuclear power plants and 2 (A, I) closed theirs down before or after they went on line. 8 remain firmly committed to nuclear power (CZ, GB, FIN, F, H, LT, SLO, SK).

[72] The FPÖ (Freedom Party) initiated a successful signature campaign for a veto, but ignored their own campaign in their capacity as the junior government partner. Opponents charged them with cheap xenophobic populism.

[73] When Austrian chancellor Gusenbauer visited Prague in March 2007 to discuss *Temelin*, neither he nor the Austrian authorities were informed by the Czechs that on the day before, the plant had suffered its 100th event, with 2,000 litres of radioactive water being spilt. The Austrian parliament has passed a resolution to sue the Czechs for non-compliance with the *Melk Agreement*. The Czechs say they cannot be sued because the *Melk Agreement* was not a real contract.

[74] This de-facto-moratorium was first broken by Finland, which is building a new nuclear power station. Some former communist countries also consider doing so, and in the wake of recent cuts in Russian oil deliveries, the nuclear lobby is raising its head again. Concerns about CO2 emissions from fossil fuel combustion are lending some additional credibility to the industry's desperate attempts to make a last-minute comeback. French president Sarkozy is negotiating nuclear plant sales with Gulf states, and President Bush with India.

[75] In the media, the words "nuclear power" and "cheap" habitually crop up side by side. In fact, nuclear power is "cheap" only because it is shielded from the competition of the free market by extraordinary privileges such as exemption from full liability and direct and indirect subsidies (Price-Anderson Act in the USA, EURATOM in the EU).

Finally, it should be mentioned that at the level of the EU parliament, several conservative ÖVP MEPs[76] have repeatedly voted with the pro-nuclear European conservative umbrella party rather than in accordance with the official Austrian nuclear phase-out policy.[77]

Competition in the Utilities Sector: Nuclear versus Green Electricity. Into the 1980s, it was taken for granted that both electricity generation and distribution had to be in the hands of one and the same business enterprise. Competition would have required several distribution systems and been impracticable. In return for the privilege of monopoly, "public utility services" were supposed to be closely supervised by governments. However, in many countries relations between politics and utilities became so cosy that the latter turned into extremely influential lobbies, flouting environmental regulations and yet keeping electricity rates high.

Modern technology makes it possible for different power generating companies to use one and the same distribution grid and charge their customers directly, with the grid owner only receiving a transmission fee. To promote competition and thus force power generators to cut their rates, the EU is opening the traditionally monopolistic utilities sector. It is now possible for large Austrian firms to purchase "cheap"[78] nuclear electricity directly from France and have it delivered through the Austrian grid. Private households can also make economies by changing their supplier.

But the new system also gives small consumers another option, viz., to voluntarily pay a little more rather than less, and buy "green" electricity: For a premium,[79] environmentally aware people can make sure that they purchase wind, solar, biomass[80], and small hydro electricity only.[81] In addition to this tiny target group of idealists, green power also has another access to the power grid: Like several US states, Austrian and EU regulations force the utilities to generate or purchase a small but supposedly increasing share of their power from eco-friendly sources. For a number of years, however, Austrian governments have been stemming this tide by cutting federal aid to green power projects and complicating bureaucratic hurdles, so that the share of green power is actually on the decrease.

12. Austria and Climate Change

Accumulation in the atmosphere of carbon dioxide (CO2) and other

[76] = members of the European Parliament

[77] On one occasion, 7 conservative Austrian MEPs voted against a motion to modify EURATOM's terms of reference to still include nuclear safety and decommissioning, but no longer nuclear power promotion. The bill was defeated in the European Parliament - by exactly 7 votes.

[78] i.e., subsidized by the French taxpayer.

[79] But in some cases, "green electricity" (e.g. from *"Alpen-Adria")* is even cheaper than that supplied by a "normal" utility, e.g.*"Wien-Energie".*

[80] Solar, wind and hydro power do not contribute CO2 to the atmosphere, nor does biomass combustion if whatever crop is burned is subsequently replaced by new plantings. For example, an energy system completely based on the burning of wood would be completely CO2-neutral, and could go on forever without disturbing the atmosphere's CO2 balance. Each tree burned initially adds CO2 to the atmosphere, but in the course of its life time the young tree planted in its place absorbs the same amount of CO2 from the atmosphere through photosynthesis.

[81] At the point of consumption, everybody obviously draws one and the same electricity "mix" from their plug sockets. However, by exclusively purchasing from "green" generators and paying to them only, the consumer increases the input of eco-friendly electricity into the system. If all consumers were to act this way, nuclear and fossil fuel electricity would gradually be replaced by eco-friendly electricity. Construction of wind converters, solar power plants, etc. would increase rapidly, creating thousands of new jobs.

"greenhouse gases"[82] is causing concerns about a potential scenario known under the buzzwords of "enhanced[83] greenhouse effect", "global warming", or "climate change". A few years ago this was a distant horror scenario with an increase in floods and droughts, melting glaciers and polar ice, rising sea levels and hundreds of millions of coast dwellers turning "environmental refugees" fleeing to other countries. Meanwhile, we may well be experiencing the initial stages of it. Average world temperatures are at an unprecedented high,[84] and even the Pentagon assesses the security hazards of global warming as worse than the threats from terrorism.[85]

In order to counteract this danger, a number of international conferences have been held, culminating in the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 and the Bali Conference of 2007. Under these agreements, participating countries undertake to reduce their CO2 emissions by a certain percentage.[86]

As CO2 is mainly produced by the combustion of coal, oil, and natural gas, the main CO2 sources are traffic, domestic heating, fossil-fuelled power plants, and industry. Clearcutting of forests adds another estimated 20%. Oil-producing countries such as OPEC and heavy users such as the USA[87] have traditionally played down the potential dangers of climate change. During much of the crucial first decade of the 21st century, they continued denying the experts' findings and fighting tooth and nail against mandatory reduction targets. The Bush administration employed special editors to water down the reports submitted by its own scientists,[88] the Australian government dragged its feet,[89] and some OPEC countries claimed compensation in case their oil revenues went down. In the 2007 Bali conference, which was to continue the work of the

[82] Carbon dioxide is the main culprit, but methane (CH4), chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), and nitrous oxide (N2O) also contribute.

[83] Thank God for CO2 in the atmosphere! By trapping some of the sun's heat that is reflected from the earth's surface back into space, it prevents the earth from being too cold for life as we know it ("greenhouse effect"). This warm and cosy state of affairs was down to the industrial revolution (which started in the late 18th century) based on an atmospheric CO2 concentration of 0.028% (280 ppm - parts per million). Today, concentration has reached 0.038% (380 ppm). This is bound to result (or is already resulting) in an "enhanced" (increased) greenhouse effect with far-reaching climate changes and the disastrous effects as described above. Ironically, our interference with the earth's natural "climate machine" might also lead to a drop in temperature in some parts of the world: a weakening of the Gulf Stream caused by chemical changes in the sea water in the wake of the greenhouse effect could produce an "ice age" of sorts in parts of the northern hemisphere.

[84] Average temperatures between 1800 and now have risen by 0.6 degrees centigrade globally, but by 1.8 degrees in Austria. The 11 hottest years on record occurred within the last 13 years. Glaciers in Austria and in many parts of the world are shrinking dramatically. The Arctic and Antarctic ice caps are thinner than they used to be a few decades ago. Permafrost in Siberia and Alaska is thawing, with disastrous consequences for houses built on the frozen ground.

[85] A March 2008 EU report corroborates what environmentalists have been claiming for years, viz., that environmental problems (here, climate change) are the security problem of the future. Millions of desperate environmental refugees trying to survive when their land is flooded by rising sea levels will flee to other parts of the world causing severe social turmoil and military conflicts.

[86] But to return to a "natural" state of affairs, a reduction of at least 70% in global CO2 emissions would be required.

[87] The United States, with 5% of the world's population, consumes 25% of the world's resources and contributes 30% to the world's greenhouse gases.

[88] The Austrian environment minister never denied the climate change scenarios. But he did not do much about them, either. The one thing that is remembered is that he appealed to Austrians to fly less frequently – after which he took off on an air journey with his family. When it was found out that owing to his poor performance in CO2 abatement Austria would soon have to buy abroad CO2 certificates to the tune of 1.5 billion Euros, he followed the example of the Bush administration and simply attacked the scientists who had made the calculations.

[89] Like his role model in Washington, the Australian prime minister never let his country join the Kyoto Protocol. This was one of the reasons why he lost the November 2007 election. His Labour Party successor vowed to join.

Kyoto Protocol, the US delegation was only at the very last moment shamed into some kind of co-operation by the other delegates and by the journalists. Even in the absence of concrete reduction targets, George W. Bush immediately announced his "displeasure" with the results. The EU, on the other hand, has consistently tried to prod the US into participating and has indeed somewhat reduced its own CO2 emissions. Austria has always been one of the loudest advocates of CO2 reduction, but her own recent record is dismal.[90] Under the terms of the Protocol, Austria should by 2010 reduce her CO2 emissions by 13 per cent as compared with the 1990 base year. Instead, they have increased by 23%.[91] It is hard to imagine how a 36% reduction can be achieved within the remaining two years. Austrian industry interests have suggested solving the problem by withdrawing from the Kyoto Protocol like the USA, but the same effect will probably be reached "the Austrian way", i.e. by simply ignoring our obligations.

Recent Austrian governments have obstructed green electricity[92] and been unwilling to promote energy conservation through sensible tax and transport[93] policies. A long-overdue "green" tax reform resulting in a revenue-neutral tax system that slowly shifts the tax burden from human labour to energy and other scarce resources seems to be all but unthinkable under the present political constellation.[94] Also, promotion of road construction at the expense of the railroad system seems to be the rule.

Both the tax on car ownership and the charge for an *autobahnvignette* (i.e. a sticker entitling the owner to use the superhighway system) have been considerably hiked, rather than introducing a general[95] toll system (road pricing) and/or increasing the tax on gasoline.[96] With overhead costs high and variable costs low, car-owners are induced to drive as much as possible so that their initial investment "pays off."

With over 30% increase in CO2 emissions since 1990, Salzburg and the Tyrol are the worst offenders.[97] The

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[90] At the time of writing, Austria has slid to last-but-one place in the EU as to Kyoto Protocol implementation.

[91] In 2005, Austria's chancellor Schüssel was the only head of state who opposed climate protection targets at an EU summit meeting, claiming that more research was necessary. "More research" is exactly the line G.W. Bush had been taking for years.

[92] Detractors say that a country could only cover a tiny fraction of its energy requirements from renewable sources. However, a determined alternative energy policy can yield impressive results: Within a few years, the contribution of wind electricity in Germany' has risen from zero to 7.3%, and in the Austrian state of Burgenland from zero to over 50% (100% on one memorable windy day in 2004). Denmark covers 17%, and on certain days up to 40% of its electricity consumption by wind power.

[93] Between the Kyoto Protocol base year (1990) and 2005, greenhouse gas emissions from the Austrian transport sector rose by 94%, with emissions from trucks having tripled. In 2006, in order to win some speeders' votes, transport minister Hubert Gorbach raised *autobahn* speed limits from 130 kilometers per hour to 160 on selected parts of the highway system. As even 130 is more than most other EU countries allow, Gorbach faced considerable opposition. After the 2006 elections, Gorbach had to go and so did the 160 speed limit.

[94] To lay the blame solely at the door of the government would be unfair. Polls show that 66% of Austrians think taxes are high enough and therefore reject a carbon tax – possibly because they do not understand or trust the idea of "revenue-neutral".

[95] After many years of delay, a controversial toll system for trucks was at last introduced. It covers *autobahnen* (superhighways) only. Many truckers evade it by shifting to country roads, adding to rather than reducing pollution.

[96] It is true that car owners and the media keep complaining about the "high tax burden" on petrol. But a long-term comparison with the cost-of-living index shows that petrol has become ever cheaper if adjusted for inflation. Only the recent hike in crude oil prices has raised petrol prices sufficiently to slightly influence driving habits and to encourage people to use public transport. The government was quick to subsidise drivers by raising *kilometergeld* and *pendlerpauschale* (i.e. tax allowance for business travel and commuting by car).

[97] In contrast, in 2007 for the first time in decades, the overall number of journeys in Vienna was higher

government hastens to explain that this is largely due to what is called tanking tourism, i.e., foreigners driving into Austria to buy cheap petrol. But as the government refuses to raise petrol taxes to neighbouring countries' levels, Austria acts like a large discount petrol station. The additional traffic is therefore home-made and correctly debited to Austria's CO2 balance.[98]

Another memorable failure of Austrian government policy was its inability to curb transnational movements of heavy and polluting trucks[99] from the EU. In Austria's EU accession treaty, a system of eco-points, to be debited to all EU trucks except low pollution ones, was to reduce transit of the worst stinkers. In the end EU truckers had used up all their points and yet continued their journeys, with the EU claiming that Austria's accounting system was at fault. Also, fraud[100] was rife, with truckers putting "low pollution" stickers on trucks that did not qualify.[101]

To attain Austria's 2010 Kyoto target will be entirely impossible. Ironically, the 2007 coalition agreement still envisioned compliance. In the document, the fastest-growing CO2 polluter, traffic, was not even mentioned under "environmental protection", but under "infrastructure to strengthen Austria as a location of industry and commerce." In other words, traffic was to be promoted rather than curbed. Critics saw a continuation of previous governments' laid-back attitude towards Austria's obligations, aggravated by a hostile attitude vis-à-vis "green electricity".

Austria will probably have to attain her Kyoto target by last-minute investments in "flexible mechanisms". These provisions allow rich countries to obtain credit points by paying for clean energy projects in poorer countries, or to purchase emission rights abroad, without actually reducing emissions at home. Critics point out that this will syphon off money that could be invested in energy efficiency and renewable energy projects in Austria, thereby creating thousands of new jobs at home.

The only project to be boosted on a large scale is the eventual addition of 5-10% of biofuel to commercial petrol and diesel. Biofuel (agro-fuel), like all biomass (fuelwood, straw, etc), is theoretically CO2-neutral: the carbon dioxide released in burning one year's biofuel is offset by the CO2 bound into the next year's agrofuel crop (maize, rape, sugar cane, palm oil, etc.) in the process of its growth.[102] Fossil fuels (coal, petroleum, natural gas) cannot be replaced by new plantings. The CO2 released in their combustion therefore adds to the CO2 in the atmosphere.

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on public transport than in automobiles, viz., 35% vs. 34%, with 27% pedestrian and 4% bicycle traffic.

[98] Transport minister Faymann saw an upside: He believed that the tax revenues from "tanking tourism" were higher than the extra fines Austria would have to pay under the Kyoto Protocol.

[99] Austrian and foreign trucks caused the country costs amounting to 6.3 billion Euros in 2007, while they paid only 2.7 billion in taxes and other charges.

[100] Fraudulent claiming of subsidies in the billions is a booming industry in the EU.

[101] Another type of half-legal fraud lies at the root of many trans-border journeys: In order to claim transit subsidies, international division of labour is driven to extremes that no longer make sense. For instance, there have been cases where potatoes were harvested in Germany, driven through once beautiful Tyrolean valleys into Italy to be washed, and then returned to Germany to be processed.

[102] Of the chemical formulae for photosynthesis and burning of plant proteins and carbohydrates in plants, the ones for glucose are the simplest. Note the production of CO2 in burning and its absorption in photosynthesis. *Photosynthesis: 6H2O + 6CO2 + solar energy (sunlight) → C6H12O6 (glucose) + 6O2. ←→ Combustion (burning): C6H12O6 + 6O2 → 6H2O + 6CO2 + heat energy.* The solar energy used in the process of photosynthesis is stored in the form of chemical energy in glucose, and later on released as heat energy in combustion. **Memorizing these formulae and their interpretation may earn you extra credit points in your exam!**

The agrofuel project will satisfy the Austrian environment/agriculture minister's rural clientele, because they can sell large amounts of energy crops. It will not change patterns of traffic and wasteful behaviour. Also, it will encourage intensive cultivation and the application of energy-consuming commercial fertiliser and pesticides. Genetically engineered crops may also become more accepted.[103] In addition, biomass may have to be imported from far-away countries, which will mean extra fuel burning for transportation. Rainforest destruction for oil palm monocultures is also progressing at unprecedented speed, releasing even more CO2.

What many think to be the most obscene aspect is that food crops are being processed[104] to fuel the automobiles of the rich, while every day tens of thousands of children and adults die of hunger. On a world-wide scale agro-fuel is now competing for land with food production.[105]

[103] Former EU agriculture commissioner Fischler and vice-chancellor Molterer are openly lobbying for infiltrating Austria with GM technology via energy crops.

[104] In March 2008, retiring UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Jean Ziegler, demanded a five-year moratorium on the production of agro-fuels.

[105] In 2005, President Bush announced that biofuel made from maize and sugarcane would increasingly be added to US gasoline. Shortly afterwards there were "tortilla riots" in Mexico because the price of maize rose so steeply that poorer families could no longer afford their staple food. Similar riots followed in countries such as Haiti, Honduras, Bangladesh, etc. The governor of "Austria's tenth federal province" (California), although sometimes hailed as an environmental guru, shows little insight when for the media he pours bio-ethanol into his – Hummer of all things. Not only was it he who made that most obscene of automobiles popular for civilian use, he is also unaware that the production of one single tankful of 100 litres requires 400 kg of maize, **which could feed a person for two years.** "Arnie" has also come under attack from environmentalists for having himself flown daily to and from his home in southern California to his office in Sacramento, over 500 kms north, at a cost of $ 10,000 per hour, because "his children need him". He also fired his own brother-in-law, Bobby Shriver-Kennedy, and Hollywood celebrity Clint Eastwood, from their respective (unpaid) positions as chairman and vice-chairman of the State Park Commission. The Terminator terminated their contracts because they opposed his plans to accommodate the construction lobby by having a six-lane superhighway built through protected areas.

13. National Parks

Things look somewhat grim for the *Donau-Auen* national park**.** After the 1984 *Hainburg* crisis and the establishment of a national park instead of a power plant, the wetlands seemed to have been saved for good. However, work is under way to cut an *autobahn* tunnel through the *Lobau* part of the park. Attempts to obstruct the project by occupying the site failed owing to a lack of public support.

At the same time the Danube itself, the very lifeline of the park, is under attack: Within the framework of the TENs[106], its fairway is planned to be deepened to make it navigable for ever larger ships (esp. for the *Europa-kahn,* a standardised European barge). If that is allowed to happen, environmentally damaging interests will once more have been able to encroach – this time on an area which is explicitly defined as a national park. As usual, advocates offer half-truths and outright lies, e.g. that more traffic on the Danube would relieve the stress on the road system. But for the bulk goods conveyed on water, roads have never been an option – the railroad has. This means that any additional river business would be at the expense not of road but of rail transport. Moreover, even the current carrying capacity of the river is only utilized to a degree of ten per cent. Also, in downstream and upstream countries like Hungary and Germany, the fairway is shallow. An obligation to deepen their fairways would arise for those countries only if Austria set a fait accompli. If, on the other hand, they were to decide not to

[106] The TENs are *trans-European networks* of road, rail and shipping systems which the EU wants to promote and standardise across national borders.

deepen after all, the Austrian investment would have been in a white elephant. Finally, in the words of the late Austrian Nobel prize winner Konrad Lorenz, why should a river have to adapt to a boat – why not adapt the boat to the river?

The remaining five Austrian national parks seem to be safe from environmental degradation, at least for the time being. National Parks are relatively recent in Austria. The first one (*Neusiedlersee – Seewinkel*) was established in 1993, over 120 years after the first American one (Yellowstone, 1872). The latest (*Gesäuse*) was established in 2002 but is still under attack from local shooting, fishing and timber interests.

Many feel that outside the national parks more than enough has been destroyed by the construction of ski lift circuses, i.e., large interconnected ski lift systems that afford skiers maximum variety. However, local greed and ambition frequently result in further enlargement or even new projects. This trend is supported by new federal legislation easing restrictions. Also, the Tyrolean state government is supporting renewed attempts by the utilities to construct up to four new alpine hydropower plants. With the population overwhelmingly against the projects, politicians have delegated the "education" of the public to P.R. agencies and concentrate their own efforts on intimidating local radio and TV stations into under-reporting the issue.

For some time, conservationists have once a year lit “Alpine fires” simultaneously on many European mountain tops to draw attention to the destruction that is taking place in the Alps. This custom is picking up an ancient tradition of lighting mountain fires when under attack from enemies.

14. Transnational Problems

Apart from being a victim of neighbouring nuclear plants, Austria is also a perpetrator of trans-border environmental offences:

* Factories in Styria and Burgenland are heavily polluting the Raab river, which downstream in Hungary results in large amounts of chemical foam floating on the water’s surface. Hungarians are furious and threatening a tourism boycott. Greenpeace Austria and Greenpeace Hungary have run some spectacular campaigns, such as blockading with foam the access to a leather factory in Styria.

* Austrian banks and the Austrian government have colluded to finance construction of the Ilisiu Dam on the Turkish part of the Tigris river. The project is environmentally damaging and will flood the historic city of Hasankeyf. Turkey refuses to sign an agreement which would safeguard minimal environmental standards. For that reason, Swiss banks have withdrawn from the project. Not so the Austrian government. It has granted export guarantees to the Austrian banks in question. – As to the involvement of *Erste Bank* in the Slovak nuclear industry, cf. above, sub “Austria’s Energy Policy”.

15. Bright Spots – and another Dark Spot

Although various Austrian governments have been doing little to further the cause of the environment and have even turned the clock back in numerous instances, local governments at the level of towns, cities and states are - like in the USA - taking steps where the federal government fails. For instance, 660

Austrian towns and cities and all 9 states have joined the *Climate Alliance,* an international project to curb CO2 emissions and cooperate with indigenous peoples. And the City of Vienna is implementing an *ökokauf* (ecological purchasing) policy which excludes environmentally harmful goods and services, and a *klip (klimaschutzprogramm* - climate protection plan*)* to reduce CO2 emissions.

Other recent environmental victories have prevented some detrimental projects. One example is a project planned by Frank Stronach**.**

* The Austrian Franz Strohsack emigrated to Canada in 1954, where he changed his name and founded *Magna International Inc*., now one of the world's largest automotive components suppliers. He returned to Austria in the 1980s to set up his headquarters here. He built up strong political links and a "revolving door strategy", with former *Magna* executives going into politics and former politicians working for *Magna*. Stronach became controversial when he pursued a large amusement park project south of Vienna. It would have encroached on protected areas and generated an enormous amount of additional traffic and thus air pollution in a sensitive area already heavily burdened. Local and national opposition put a stop to part of the project.[107]

* A similar case concerned a €700-million "motor sports academy" project in Styria. Dieter Mateschitz, proprietor of the *Red Bull*[108] energy drink, wanted to invest some of his surplus funds, using the site of a former Formula 1 racetrack. He was welcomed by regional politicians, who hoped for a cornucopia of jobs in what had become a deprived area after the demise of Formula 1. They poured millions of public money into preparing the site for Mateschitz and apparently promised that administrative and environmental regulations could be bypassed.[109] When the independent federal "Environmental Senate" struck the project down, they acted completely surprised although they had been warned that the submitted blueprints had severe shortcomings and violated a number of laws. Local politicians and pro-project residents reacted by blaming the Environmental Senate and terrorizing those residents who had originally appealed to it. Federal legislation was promptly changed to weaken the Senate and to make similar applications easier in future. At the time of writing, a scaled-down version of the project is under consideration. For this, Styria will subsidize Mateschitz to the tune of € 1.5 million until 2067.

Environmentalists deplore the fact that politicians still take it for granted that they are above the law and that self-appointed rich "benefactors" prefer to think in terms of harmful investments rather than less spectacular but more

[107] In 2007, Stronach came up with another project, viz., a soccer stadium, 9,000 parking lots, and Austria's second largest shopping centre (only two miles from Austria's largest) on agricultural land on the southern outskirts of Vienna. Opposition was strong because public transport is non-existent there, purchasing power would be drained off the 10th district, and Vienna's green belt would be disrupted. Vienna mayor and soccer fan Michael Häupl had supported Stronach to his best ability. However, the project is likely to be cancelled. Possibly to "punish" the local population for their obstinacy, extension plans for the southern underground line have been cancelled, too.

[108] *Red Bull* is a hugely successful Austrian export hit sold even in American supermarkets. As it contains taurine, a controversial amino acid, it was banned in France until May 2008, and now has to carry a health warning there.

[109] Like in the cases of *Hainburg* and the *Wilde Krimml*, a *naturschutzlandesrat* tried to be helpful: Styrian *Naturschutzlandesrat* Johann Seitinger was at first strictly against the idea but then miraculously changed sides. If it had not been for the newly established federal Environmental Senate, the project might have been pushed through.

sustainable alternatives such as solar cell manufacturing or the like.

* The Vienna Woods have recently been designated as a UNESCO *Biosphärenpark. Such a* biosphere reserve falls short of a national park, but will afford improved protection to this world-famous[110] area adjacent to, and including part of, western and southern Vienna. At the same time, Vienna's "green belt", which is not contiguous in its non-*Wienerwald* portions, is being completed by re-foresting areas east and north of the city.

* Another bright spot was a federal animal welfare act, which took observers by surprise. For decades, all parties had promised they would work for federal legislation to replace the diverging standards of the nine different state laws.[111] After each election, the conservative ÖVP had invariably succeeded in blocking such efforts in order not to annoy their rural electorate. But in 2005 ÖVP took determined steps towards improvements.[112] However, this success may have contributed to a stunning blow which animal protection activism received in 2008.

16. Would-be Rambos in Action

Girl with Rabbit. Cartoon: Franz Gratzer

In an unprecedented Rambo-style police raid which many observers thought was shockingly disproportionate, anti-terror police units stormed several dozen flats and offices of animal rights activists and humane societies in May 2008. Although telephone lines had been tapped for months and the police therefore knew that they had to expect zero resistance, they kicked in doors, forced people at gunpoint and in full view of small children to stand half-naked for hours, handcuffed them, ransacked offices, and took away computers and office property.[113]

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[110] For example, the Vienna Woods is the only region in Europe that is home to all 10 European woodpecker varieties.

[111] Clashes with regional customs seem to be inevitable. At the time of writing, Upper Austrian interests are desperately trying to retain some exemption from federal and EU regulations prohibiting the trapping and exhibition of songbirds. The environment minister first granted an exemption, then withdrew it under pressure from humane organisations. Bird trappers have announced they will continue their local traditions illegally. Other countries that have regional customs probably incompatible with civilised standards are Italy with songbird trapping even worse than in Upper Austria, and Spain with its bullfights and its custom of suspending old "galgos" (greyhounds) with loops around their necks, their hind legs supporting them until they grow too weak, after which they slowly choke to death.

[112] For example, dogs must not be chained, spiked collars and electric shocks are prohibited. Dogs and cats must not be sold in pet shops, which may only act as mediators between buyers and breeders. (This restriction was lifted again in 2007). To the chagrin of many farmers, farm animals are not allowed to be tied up all the time, and chicken batteries will have to be phased out. However, castration and dehorning are still legal without anaesthesia.

[113] Although the authorities kept reassuring the media that they were only looking for evidence against individual persons and in no way trying to paralyse animal protection work, they even took away the keys to the official car of one of the societies By the time of writing (i.e. three months after the event) they have not returned them. Neither have they returned the donor data base, nor the documents pertaining to acts of cruelty to animals which the society was in the process of reporting to the police. Animal tormenters of all descriptions can look forward to their activities enjoying a heyday in Austria.

Under an obscure law created in the wake of 9/11, which requires a minimum of ten suspects to prove the existence of a "criminal organisation", exactly 10 people were arrested. Some of them did not even know each other. The prisoners were not released for several months, and all unsolved animal rights-related unlawful acts that had been committed during the last decade[114] were simply put on them.

Protest against the law that can be abused to suppress NGOs

It is not impossible that one or the other of them had actually "liberated" some chicken or another from a battery farm, thus committing a property offence. One or the other of them could even have thrown a bottle of smelly butyric acid into a shop selling fur products. In most cases, however, the authorities were unable to ascribe specific acts to specific persons. In others, the evidence was rather ambiguous.[115] In any case, the measures taken by the authorities appear to have been completely out of proportion.

These events caused considerable concern at an international level. Demonstrations were held in front of thirty Austrian embassies on three continents, Amnesty International protested, and foreign newspapers reported.[116] However, the authorities, having spent oodles of taxpayers' money on their shadowing, wiretapping, and raiding activities, probably felt they had to justify that expense and so they kept the ten suspects imprisoned as long as they could. After 106 days without sufficient evidence for a charge, they finally had to set them free again.


DDr. Martin Balluch, favourite hate object of Austrian animal tormenters. During the first few days of his imprisonment, his double doctorate proved to be of grave disadvantage as less educated prison guards made extra efforts to humiliate and ridicule him. Photo: VgT

Many observers felt that the excessive clampdown on the animal rights movement was also intended to discredit and intimidate all types of environmental or humanitarian activists. The damage done to the humane societies by devastating their offices and taking away their data bases effectively paralysed their work, much to the glee of their influential

[114] There have indeed been acts of vandalism related to animal rights issues in Austria, although fewer than in other countries.

[115] E.g., a fire in a hunting cabin caused by an overheated stove turned into "arson" committed by an activist who happened to be in the area several days after the event. A witness's statement that was given in English got "lost in translation": *"I used to sab mink hunts with him"* (an act of civil disobedience) turned into *"Wir sabotierten oft Nerzfarmen gemeinsam"* (which would have been damage to property, a criminal act).

[116] For an article in a renowned British daily, see Victor Schonfeld in *The Guardian,* June 5, 2008. There was probably more outrage abroad than in Austria itself, where large portions of the population were unaware of the events because their eyes were riveted on the European soccer championship. And immediately after that, gasoline prices became the main topic of discussion.

enemies among intensive livestock farmers, amateur shooters, and fashion outlets that still sell fur products.

Protest for law and order and against state terror

In past years, animal rights activists had been very successful in raising public awareness by lecturing at schools, showing gruesome animal abuse footage in public places, and getting the media interested. This resulted in modern legislation aimed at reducing suffering in circuses and in poultry, fur, and rabbit farms. By 2008, activists were beginning to concentrate on cruel practices in pig farming, one of the largest and most influential sectors of animal husbandry in Austria. At the same time, a parliamentary bill was being discussed to make animal rights part of the constitution. All this may have alarmed the influential shooting, animal husbandry, and fur lobbies, who in turn may have used their connections to encourage some authorities to act in a manner hitherto unknown in Austria.

No matter how much damage has been done by the authorities to the cause of animal protection, the new regulations successfully fought for in the past decade are here to stay and cannot easily be withdrawn. Some of them even exceed EU minimum requirements. After they became law, several Austrian politicians enthusiastically predicted that other countries would again take Austria as a role model– a status which it had lost a long time ago.

The priorities of future governments will determine whether Austria can regain some of its former reputation.

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One last cartoon

The ultimate pesticide: "And this one'll eradicate ecologists"

17. Appendix

In German, but probably of interest to English teachers and others who have fond memories of Vienna's British Council:

Ökolinguistik, Atomkraft und das British Council

Sprachwissenschaftler sollten sich nicht in Dinge einmischen, die sie nicht studiert haben. Gentechnik beispielsweise oder Atomenergie sollten sie den jeweiligen Experten überlassen und hübsch bei ihrem linguistischen Leisten bleiben.

So sähen es die Kollegen aus den entsprechenden Fachgebieten und Wirtschaftszweigen gerne. Allerdings werden deren Projekte oft aus den Steuern des kleinen Mannes und somit auch des kleinen Sprachwissenschaftlers mitfinanziert und laufen auch auf dessen Risiko ab – ob es sich nun um die Verstrahlung durch Tschernobyl oder um die Verseuchung des kanadischen Bodens durch gentechnisch manipulierte Saaten handelt, die dort den biologischen Anbau von Raps und Soja nicht mehr möglich machen.

Die Propaganda für lebensfeindliche Technologien, die keineswegs wirklich „für die Wirtschaft" gut sind, sondern nur für die Technologie-Verkäufer, wird mittels Lügen und – noch infamer – mittels Halbwahrheiten betrieben. Diese zu durchschauen hat der Sprachwissenschaftler möglicherweise ein besseres Sensorium als so manche andere Mirbürger/innen.

Seit den Neunzigerjahren hat sich eine linguistische Subdisziplin „Ökolinguistik" entwickelt, getragen von ökologisch motivierten Sprachwissenschaftlern, in Österreich vor allem von Alwin Fill von der Grazer Anglistik und Richard Alexander von der Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien.

Der Verfasser hat 2002 die Forderung an die Ökolinguistik formuliert,

> *If (…) we feel that the survival of humankind is at stake, and that we need to contribute something to its salvation, perhaps we ought to muster the courage to go beyond our limits.*[117]

Gemeint ist, dass wir uns im Zusammenhang mit dem Sprachunterricht oder überhaupt mit Textanalyse nicht scheuen sollten, auch andere als die sprachwissenschaftlichen Instrumentarien anzuwenden, wenn es um die Widerlegung von Unwahrheiten geht. Dies erfordert allerdings manchmal eingehende Beschäftigung nicht nur mit sprachlichen Aspekten, sondern auch mit der jeweiligen Materie selbst.

In dem oben zitierten Aufsatz berichtet der Verfasser über zwei Episoden aus seiner eigenen „ökolinguistischen Vergangenheit" - über ungeheuerliche Verdrehungen bei der Übersetzung eines amerikanischen Atomkraftwerks-Sicherheitsberichtes in einer Propagandabroschüre des Verbandes der Elektrizitätswerke Österreichs und über glatte Lügen[118] eines offiziellen NASA-Sprechers bei einem Interview mit dem BBC World Service über den plutoniumgespeisten thermoelektrischen Kleingenerator für die Stromversorgung einer zum Saturn geschossenen Raumsonde.

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[117] Neuwirth, Gernot: Eco-Linguistics – Going Beyond the Text, in: Colourful Green Ideas, ed. by Alwin Fill, Hermine Penz & Wilhelm Trampe, Berlin 2002, pp. 361-373

[118] oder doch nur Unwissenheit? Es wäre auch nicht sehr beruhigend, wenn der offizielle Repräsentant der NASA Millionen BBC-Hörern etwas ganz Unwahres über ein so sensibles Thema erzählte, weil er keine Ahnung von der Materie hatte.

In beiden Fällen gelang eine Publikation der entdeckten Unwahrheiten, im Falle der Raumsonde ging die BBC sogar auf die Beschwerde ein und brachte einen fünf Minuten langen Widerruf– ein seltenes Ereignis, auf das der Verfasser nicht wenig stolz ist. Die Kassette spielt er noch heute gerne seinen Studenten vor.

Dass er in seinen alten Tagen sogar beim vermeintlich abgehakten Thema Atomkraft wiederum etwas betreiben muss, was mangels eines besseren Wortes vielleicht „Aufdeckungslinguistik“ (“investigative linguistics“?) genannt werden sollte, das hat er sich nicht gewünscht. Aber in ihrem verzweifelten Aufbäumen gegen das Absinken in die Bedeutungslosigkeit hat die Atomlobby die Chancen zur Gehirnwäsche, die ihr Klimawandel und Ölverknappung bieten, voll erkannt, sucht nochmals alle Schichten der Gesellschaft nach Verbündeten ab und findet manchmal welche. Unter anderem die bisherige Hausbank[119] des Verfassers und – das British Council.

Das British Council ist wohl noch vielen – nicht nur Sprachwissenschaftlern – in wohliger Erinnerung: Kuschelige Leseräume, Buch-, Musik- und Filmbibliothek, gepflegtes Englisch bei den Mitarbeitern und bei den Veranstaltungen. In den letzten Jahren sind diese Annehmlichkeiten weitgehend verschwunden. Das British Council organisiert aber noch Sprachprüfungen und Veranstaltungen. Und lädt unlängst in einen riesigen, düster beleuchteten Hörsaal der TU Wien ein (soll das an die dunklen Zeiten ohne Atomkraft erinnern?). Thema: „Nuclear Power or Renewables“ – Atomkraft oder Erneuerbare. Noch dazu in deutscher Sprache. Was „zu meiner Zeit“ nie der Fall war.

Rührend naive Suggestivfragen schon in der Einladung zu dieser seltsamen Veranstaltung lassen nichts Gutes ahnen. Etwa: „Könnte es wieder ein Tschernobyl geben und wenn nicht, warum nicht?“ Da fällt einem ein, dass die britische Regierung ein Dutzend Atomkraftwerke bauen will und das British Council eine staatliche Einrichtung ist.

Die Moderation führt der Wissenschaftsredakteur des STANDARD, Klaus Taschwer - wenngleich er die Publikumsfragen, die tagelang vorher schriftlich eingereicht werden mussten, nicht behandelt. Das Podium ist „ausgewogen“ mit eineinhalb Atomkritikern und zweieinhalb Atomlobbyisten besetzt: DI Silva Hermann (von Global 2000), TU-Professor Günther Brauner (sieht in Österreich keine Notwendigkeit für Atomkraft, im Rest der Welt schon), TU-Professor Helmuth Böck (Leiter des TU-Forschungsreaktors) und Dr. Paul Howarth (Leiter des Nuklearinstituts der Universität von Manchester).

[119] Dass die „Erste“ das Wort „Österreichisch“ aus ihrem Namen gestrichen hat, erscheint im Nachhinein durchaus konsequent, richtet sich doch die Kofinanzierung der zusätzlichern Blöcke des slowakischen AKWs Mohovce direkt gegen Österreich und seine offizielle Politik und gegen die österreichische Bevölkerung und deren atomkritische Einstellung.. Abgesehen von der offenkundigen Ahnungslosigkeit der Entscheidungsträger, die weder vom systemimmanenten Fehlen eines Containments (Schutzmantels) noch von den Baubewilligungen aus den Achtzigerjahren noch auch vom Fehlen einer Umweltverträglichkeitsprüfung gehört hatten, würden die Gespräche der Umweltschützer mit den Bankleuten eine eigene ökolinguistische Betrachtung rechtfertigen, z.B.: Das Geld (wohl mit dem Mascherl „Erste“?) gehe nicht in den Bau selbst, sondern in Sicherheitseinrichtungen, und das sei die Bank den Österreichern ja sogar schuldig! Auf die Frage, was das denn wohl für Sicherheitseinrichtungen seien: Na z.B. bessere Straßen für den Fall eines Unfalles.

Der ältere Zuhörer fühlt sich dreißig Jahre jünger, weil die atomaren Urgesteine Böck und (aus dem Publikum) Binner haargenau wie damals reden und mit denselben Behauptungen kommen, die die Österreicher schon damals nicht beeindruckt haben. Nur der Klimawandel ist neu im Repertoire. Aber genau wie damals sind die neuen Atomkraftwerksprojekte nunmehr „inhärent sicher“ und das Müllproblem ist wie vor dreißig Jahren nur ein „rein politisches“. Stimmt natürlich irgendwie. Denn in den USA wurde es kürzlich tatsächlich rein politisch gelöst.

Yucca Mountain in Nevada ist seit Jahrzehnten als nationales Atommüll-Endlager vorgesehen, aber böse Wissenschaftler finden immer wieder mögliche Wassereinbrüche und sonstige geologische Fakten, die den Berg als ungeeignet ausweisen, bisher die Inbetriebnahme verhindert haben und der Bevölkerung und den Politikern Nevadas Gründe für ihre erbitterte Gegnerschaft liefern. Es musste erst ein entschlossener Präsident her (der, dessen Weisheit wir alle schon bei seinem Einmarsch in den Irak bewundert haben), und der hat Yucca Mountain einfach durch einen Federstrich endgültig zum atomaren Entsorgungspark und damit geeignet gemacht. So leicht ist es in Wirklichkeit mit dem Atommüll. Wenn nur der gute Wille da ist, gepaart mit einer großen Politikerpersönlichkeit – diese Mischung überwindet sogar Naturgesetze. Tut-ench-Amun hätte nicht anders gehandelt, und hätten die alten Ägypter Kernkraftwerke statt Pyramiden errichtet, dann müssten wir ihren Atommüll noch heute und in ferner Zukunft bewachen.[120]

Der Engländer am Podium wird übersetzt, er spricht wenigstens ein gepflegtes Englisch und so sieht man ihm seine Un- und Halbwahrheiten bereitwilliger nach. Zum Beispiel „Auch Fotovoltaik hinterlässt toxischen Müll – das hochgiftige Cadmium!“ Natürlich sagt er nicht dazu, dass bei weitem der Großteil aller Solarzellen aus Silizium gefertigt wird, dessen Harmlosigkeit der seines Rohstoffes entspricht: Sand. Andere un- oder halbwahre Behauptungen zu widerlegen würde stunden- oder tagelange Recherchen erfordern, die während der Veranstaltung ohnehin nicht vorgenommen werden können. Irgendwie fühlt man sich wie die Polizei, die ja auch dem Erfindungsreichtum der Unterwelt technisch und informationsmäßig stets hinterherhinkt.

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[120] Diese Bewachung wäre nicht nur kosten- und energieintensiv, es bestünde auch die Gefahr, dass wir die ägyptischen Warntafeln gar nicht verstünden (die Hieroglyphen wurden sukzessive erst nach Auffindung des Steins von Rosetta 1798 entziffert). Bei Recherchen im Internet (Wikipedia) stoße ich auf etwas, das ich trotz langjähriger Beschäftigung mit der Materie bisher nicht gewusst habe: Solche Überlegungen stellen keineswegs nur Spinner an, sondern verantwortungsbewusste Kernphysiker, von denen manche eine „Atompriesterschaft“ fordern, die das Wissen um die Endlager weitergibt, die die Informationen alle paar hundert Jahre neu übersetzt, und die Rituale und Mythen schafft, welche unsere Nachkommen vor unbeabsichtigtem Eindringen in Todeszonen bewahren sollen. Speziell für Yucca Mountain arbeitet im Auftrag der Regierung seit 1982 eine Gruppe von Kernphysikern und Sprachwissenschaftlern an einem System zur Warnung künftiger Generationen (Atomsemiotik). Dabei ist der willkürliche Zeithorizont für Yucca Mountain nur 10.000 Jahre. In Deutschland haben sich Wissenschaftler, Atomkraftbefürworter und Atomkraftgegner festgelegt, dass Atommüll für einen Zeitraum von einer Million Jahre sicher von der Biosphäre abgeschlossen werden muss. Das wären tausend mal tausend Jahre, bzw. 50.000 (Menschen-) Generationen. Die frühesten uns überlieferten Schriften sind wenige tausend Jahre alt, davon sind manche bis heute nicht entziffert. Und Sprachen ändern sich so, dass sie in weniger als tausend Jahren unverständlich sind. Also: Atommüll – nur ein politisches Problem? Verantwortungs-bewusstsein oder Verantwortungslosigkeit?
Mir fällt zu dem Ganzen ein, was Marx auf die Frage geantwortet hat, ob er etwas für künftige Generationen tue. „Warum sollte ich“, sagte Marx. „Denn bitte schön, was haben denn künftige Generationen für mich getan?“ (Groucho Marx von der beliebten Komikergruppe „The Marx Brothers“).

Als Howarth verkündet, sogar der britische Öko-Guru und Vorsitzende der staatlichen Nachhaltigkeitskommission, Jonathon Porritt, bescheinige den dortigen Atomkraftwerken hohe Sicherheitsstandards und einen Beitrag zur CO2-Reduktion, überlegt man kleinlaut: Ist Jonathon, den man aus früheren Zeiten in guter Erinnerung hat, auch schon übergelaufen? Erst am nächsten Tag erbringt eine Internet-Recherche die gesamte Wahrheit: Ja, er und seine "Sustainable Development Commission" haben das tatsächlich gesagt. Mehr noch, sie befürworten weitere Nuklearforschung und schließen eine Neubewertung der Situation in Zukunft nicht aus. Die Pointe allerdings hat uns Howarth vorenthalten: "On balance, the (commission) finds that the problems outweigh the advantages of nuclear". Per Saldo sind also die Probleme der Nuklearenergie schwerwiegender als die Vorteile.

Ein Zuhörer meint, Atomkraft sei völlig unwirtschaftlich und die öffentlichen Mittel, die hineingepulvert werden, gingen den erneuerbaren Energien ab. Sogar Premierministerin Margaret Thatcher, selbsternannte Pionierin des freien Marktes, habe die britische Nuklearindustrie durch Riesensubventionen vor dem freien Markt beschützen müssen, und noch Tony Blair habe ein Schweinegeld hineingepumpt, um sie vor dem Konkurs zu bewahren.

Howarth bleibt ruhig. Blairs Subvention (5 Milliarden Pfund, das sind fast 7 Milliarden Euro oder fast 100 Milliarden Schilling) sei notwendig geworden, weil der Strompreis damals extrem niedrig war. Das habe die gesamte Strombranche betroffen – mit der Atomenergie habe es jedoch nichts zu tun.

Recherche im Internet: Die Subvention hat British Energy bekommen, die Firma, die die 8 modernsten und daher privatisierten Atomkraftwerke betreibt. Aber in der Tat nicht nur Atomkraftwerke, sondern auch sage und schreibe - 1 (ein) Kohlekraftwerk. So also sieht Howarths „gesamte Branche" aus. Keine Halbwahrheit mehr, sondern nicht einmal eine Zehntelwahrheit.

Für alle Fälle noch eine Rückfrage bei Greenpeace in England – vielleicht hat nicht NUR British Energy die Subvention bekommen, sondern doch auch andere Energieversorgungsunternehmen?
Hier Auszüge aus der Antwort von Greenpeace-Atomcampaigner Nathan Argent:

I've now had a chance to speak to our Senior Consultant who has confirmed that these subsidies were specific to British Energy and not part of a wider 'propping up' of the electricity market. The Government stepped in to underwrite 65% of BE's liabilities … In a nutshell, whatever the British Council stated was not true.
Cheers
Nathan

Stundenlange Recherchierarbeit, um eine zehn-Sekunden-Unwahrheit zu entlarven.„Lüge" nennt man es lieber nicht. Der britische Atomwerber könnte behaupten, er habe wirklich geglaubt, was er sagte – und das kann einen vor Gericht bringen.

Blair musste sich übrigens damals wegen dieses schweren Eingriffs in den freien Markt sogar vor der EU-Wettbewerbsbehörde verantworten. Aber die hat ihm schließlich verziehen – räumt doch der EURATOM-Vertrag der Nuklearwirtschaft ganz besondere

marktverzerrende Privilegien ein. Das erinnert den Verfasser an die Besichtigung eines britischen Atomkraftwerks vor ein paar Jahren, wo der Führer erzählte, das Ziel der britischen Atomindustrie sei, in Zukunft einmal den Beweis zu erbringen, dass sie kostendeckend arbeiten kann. Denn seit einem halben Jahrhundert gibt es diese Sparte in Großbritannien, einem der ersten Atom-Länder, und seit damals fährt sie Verluste ein.

Aber das wird jetzt anders: Die hoffnungsvollen Investoren erklären, sie werden die neuen AKWs diesmal ohne staatliche Subventionen bauen. Alles, worum sie ersuchen, ist – eine Preisgarantie für den produzierten Strom. Also genau dieselbe Marktverzerrung, die sie den erneuerbaren Energien vorwerfen.

Das Internet spuckt aber auch Informationen über eine brandneue Studie des britischen Rechnungshofes aus. Der stellte im Jänner 2008 fest, dass die bald fälligen Abbruchskosten für die alten britischen AKWs in kurzer Zeit von unvorstellbaren 56 Milliarden Pfund Sterling auf unvorstellbare 73 gestiegen sind – in alten Schillingen von 1.000 Milliarden auf fast 1.400 Milliarden, zu bezahlen zumindest zum Großteil vom Steuerzahler. Und ein Weißbuch der Regierung schreibt im Kleingedruckten, dass auch bei Neubauten bei Kostenüberschreitung (also sicher) der Staat zu Hilfe eilen wird.

Aber – vielleicht sind nur die Briten so untüchtig? Sehen wir uns doch die cleveren Amerikaner an, die ebenfalls seit einem halben Jahrhundert AKWs betreiben – im eigentlichen Mutterland der Kernkraft. Präsident und Atomfreund Ronald Reagan stand zur gleichen Zeit, als seine geistige Ziehschwester Margaret Thatcher ihre Atombranche auf Kosten des Steuerzahlers vor den rauen Winden der Marktwirtschaft abschirmte, vor einem Dilemma: Auch er hatte sich immer wieder für den freien Markt, die gesunde Konkurrenz und die Privatwirtschaft ausgesprochen, und gegen jegliches „bail-out“, also gegen die Rettung maroder Sektoren durch staatliche Finanzspritzen.

Die amerikanischen Freunde des Verfassers versicherten ihm damals, dies sei das Ende des Ausbaus der US-Atomwirtschaft, denn einige Elektrizitätsgesellschaften stünden durch AKW-Bauten knapp vor dem Konkurs und von Reagan hätten sie ja keine Hilfe zu erwarten. Der Verfasser forderte sie mit überlegenem Lächeln auf, doch nicht so naiv zu sein, weil es ihm sonnenklar war, dass Reagan so wie Thatcher im Falle der Kernkraft blitzschnell von seinen hehren Ansprüchen abgehen und die große Ausnahme machen werde. Wer hatte wohl Recht?

Nein – falsch. Die Freunde hatten Recht. Anders als Thatcher wirklich konsequent, ließ Reagan die Atomheinis im Regen stehen. Die mussten den Konkurs durch Entwertung der Aktien ihrer Kleinanleger abfangen. Eine Katastrophe für viele Senioren, die ihre Pensionsabfindungen in den vermeintlich sicheren E-Werksaktien angelegt hatten und nun in hohem Alter wieder arbeiten gehen mussten. Und seither stehen in den USA eine Reihe fast fertiger AKWs herum, deren Bau nie mehr vollendet wurde und die langsam verrotten Sie stammen alle aus den Achtzigerjahren, als den Österreichern immer wieder eingeredet wurde, sie seien das einzige Volk mit einem „AKW-Modell im Maßstab 1:1“ und die ganze Welt lache über sie.

Vor ein paar Jahren ist der Verfasser mit seiner damaligen amerikanischen

Freundin Jessie, die seinerzeit als ehrenamtliche junge Juristin am Niedergang der US-Atomwirtschaft mitgearbeitet hatte, an der Westküste zufällig bei einer dieser Ruinen vorbeigekommen. Erregt steuerte sie sofort darauf zu, bald aber erschien auch eine uniformierte Security-Beamtin, der die beiden Gestalten mit dem Hund, der an der Grundmauer des Kühlturmes seine Notdurft verrichtete, verdächtig vorkamen. Jessie fragte höflich, was nach den vielen Jahren mit den Ruinen geschehen würde. Die Wächterin antwortete höflich, soviel sie wisse, plane man die Kühltürme mit Erde auszufüllen. Sie und der Verfasser und der Hund waren überrascht, als Jessie einen Lachkrampf bekam.

Es stellte sich heraus, dass die Atomleute damals in ihrer zunehmenden Verzweiflung ihre Gegner vorwurfsvoll gefragt hatten, was sie denn mit den Gebäuden machen sollten, wenn der Bau wirklich eingestellt würde. „Macht doch aus den Kühltürmen riesige Blumentöpfe“, höhnten die. (Den Zwentendorf-Gegnern wurde die gleiche Frage gestellt. „Macht doch daraus ein Museum für veraltete Technologien“, schlug der Biologe Peter Weish damals vor).

Jedenfalls kann die Geschichte der amerikanischen Zwentendörfer als Lehrstück dienen, wie „wirtschaftlich“ die Atomindustrie funktioniert, wenn ihr die Milliardensubventionen gestrichen werden. Seit 1974 ist in den USA kein neues AKW mehr bestellt worden, das nicht später storniert wurde. Und da hat Wall Street nicht aus Sorge um den Atommüll, aus Verantwortung gegenüber künftigen und gegenwärtigen Generationen gehandelt, sondern aus simplen betriebwirtschaftlichen Gründen. Denn auch ohne jegliche ethische Überlegungen rechnete es sich einfach nicht, ein AKW zu bauen, wenn es keine staatlichen Subventionen gab.

George Bush jedoch kündigte 2005 eine Renaissance der Kernkraft an. Das erste, was man von den potentiellen Investoren hörte, war ein lauter Ruf nach – Subventionen.

All das geht dem Verfasser im düsteren TU-Saal durch den Kopf, kann aber natürlich nicht mehr vorgebracht werden. Vor und nach der Veranstaltung wird „abgestimmt“. Unter den Anwesenden, offenbar Schüler und Technikstudenten, ist schon zu Anfang ein größerer Anteil an Atombefürwortern als bei der Durchschnittsbevölkerung.
Möglicherweise sogar die Hälfte, soweit aus der letzten Bank zu sehen ist. Bei der zweiten Abstimmung würde man einen noch größeren Überhang erwarten. Überraschenderweise verkündet die Zählerin eine marginale Verschiebung in Richtung Atomskepsis.

Ein kleiner Trost. Aber: Was um Himmelswillen hat ausgerechnet das British Council mit einer solchen Veranstaltung zu tun? Soll es in Österreich Akzeptanz für die neuen (britischen) Atompläne schaffen? Nach dem Krieg hatte das British Council unter anderem die löbliche Aufgabe, das Land ideologisch entnazifizieren zu helfen. Soll es Österreich – das in den letzten Jahren seine ökologische Vorreiterrolle ohnehin weitgehend eingebüßt hat - jetzt ent-ökologisieren?

Nachsatz, nur indirekt zum Thema gehörend: Man belehrt uns ja oft genug, dass die erneuerbaren Energien nur einen winzigen Bruchteil des Energieverbrauchs decken könnten. Außerdem könne man ja nicht die ganze Erde mit

Windkraftwerken zubauen. Nun hat das Burgenland einen großen Windpark auf der Parndorfer Platte und mehrere kleinere, deren Anblick – je nach Einstellung - manche Menschen stört, andere aber erfreut. Wissen Sie, welcher Prozentsatz des burgenländischen Stromverbrauchs durch burgenländische Windkraft gedeckt wird?

Die weithin unbekannte Antwort lautet:

Über 50 (fünfzig) Prozent. Und das ist kein Burgenländerwitz, sondern kann bei der Bewag nachgefragt werden. An einem denkwürdigen windigen Tag im Jahre 2004 sogar 100%.