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AUSTRIA

Kurt WALDHEIM

Ambassador to the United Nations

Dr. jur. Kurt Waldheim succeeded Franz Matsch as Austrian Ambassador to the United Nations in June 1964. One of Austria's top professional diplomats, Waldheim had previously served as Director of the Political Section in the Foreign Office. He has had considerable experience in UN affairs and is highly regarded by US Embassy officials in Vienna.



(1963)

The son of a civil servant, Waldheim was born on 21 December 1918 in St. Andrae-Woerden, Lower Austria. Graduating from the Consular Academy of Vienna in 1939, he then attended the University of Vienna. He concurrently worked as a court official and in 1944 was promoted to assistant judge. He received his doctorate in law that same year. Waldheim entered the Foreign Service in 1945 and was assigned as secretary to the Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs. His first foreign assignment took him to Paris in 1948 as First Secretary of the Austrian Legation. Returning to Vienna in 1951, he was appointed head of the Personnel Division within the Foreign Affairs Section of the Federal Chancellery. In 1955 Waldheim came to the United States as the Austrian Permanent Observer (with the rank of Minister) to the United Nations. He was appointed Minister to Canada in 1956 and became Ambassador after the Austrian mission was raised to an embassy in 1958. Remaining in this capacity until 1960, he then returned to the Foreign Office as Deputy Director of the Political Section and chief of the Section's Department for Western and International Affairs. He was appointed Director of the Political Section in 1962.

Waldheim's association with international issues dates back to 1945-1948, when he participated in Austrian Peace Treaty negotiations in Paris, London, and Moscow. He was a delegate to UNESCO in 1949 and was elected Vice President of the UN International Conference for Technical Assistance in 1955. A delegate to the UN General Assembly since 1956, Waldheim has served on the Political and Security Committee and the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee. While at the United Nations, he has often acted as Austria's spokesman on matters of disarmament and outer space. Before the Political Committee in 1958, he urged that member nations agree to cease nuclear tests and abide by international control, and he suggested that aid for underdeveloped countries be derived from reductions in the military budgets of the great powers; he also

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Kurt WALDHEIM (Cont'd)

advocated agreement on the use of outer space for peaceful purposes. Before the same committee in 1959, he called for step by step disarmament and maintenance under effective control of the balance of power between East and West during the disarmament process.

Since 1960 Waldheim has been actively involved in the controversy with Italy over the South Tirol, in particular the issue of autonomy for the province of Bolzano. During the UN debate on the South Tirol in 1960, he was described by one observer as "by far the most astute member of the Austrian delegation" and a probable factor in averting a clear-cut UN defeat for Austria. He is said to personally deplore the South Tirol situation and has generally demonstrated a positive and constructive approach to the problem. On other matters, Waldheim has recently spoken out in favor of West Germany's membership on the Danube Commission, the seven-nation commission designed to develop and improve navigational conditions and services of the Danube River. According to Waldheim, the position of Austria, the only non-Communist member of this commission, is that of supporting the idea of West German membership on the grounds that Austria suffers a handicap by being the only Western-oriented state in an otherwise Communist conclave. Waldheim has also evinced a profound interest in the activities of the Intergovernmental Committee on European Migration (ICEM) and early last year greatly impressed the ICEM Austria Mission Chief, who described Waldheim as showing a more keen and positive approach toward refugee and migration matters than that displayed by any other Austrian official of comparable rank.

Invariably regarded in a favorable light, Waldheim has been described by US officials in Vienna as unusually frank and open in manner, thoughtful, dignified, informal, and a pleasure to work with. His experiences in Canada and the United States have reportedly given him an understanding of American thinking, with the result that he has been cooperative and helpful in promoting US interests, more so, according to one source, than anyone else in the Foreign Office. Other diplomatic representatives in Vienna have commented that he has proved accessible and cooperative without regard to the rank, relative importance or nationality of the caller. Waldheim is also said to have an unusual degree of objectivity but on occasion is capable of becoming quite excited and emotional. Although identified with the conservative Austrian People's Party, he is respected throughout the Foreign Office for his professional abilities. Several reports indicate that he would like to be the Austrian Ambassador in Washington at some future date. ~~He was reported in 1962 to be suffering from a heart ailment. Married since 1944 to the former Elisabeth Ritschel, a charming and attractive brunette, Waldheim has one son and two daughters. Both he and his wife speak excellent English.~~

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