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TEXT

TAGS: PREL, PGOV, AU, GR, YO
SUBJECT: KIRCHSCHLAEGER STATEMENT ON WALDHEIM: PRESS PLAY

1. SUMMARY: AUSTRIAN PRESIDENT RUDOLF KIRCHSCHLAEGER'S SPEECH ON NATIONAL TV REGARDING THE CONTROVERSY OVER PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE **KURT WALDHEIM** WAS THE LEAD STORY IN THE AUSTRIAN PRESS APRIL 23. THE MAJORITY OF ARTICLES AND COMMENTARIES STATE THAT KIRCHSCHLAEGER HAS CLEARLY ACQUITTED WALDHEIM OF WAR CRIME CHARGES WITHOUT PASSING ANY ACTUAL VERDICT. SOME ARTICLES COMMENT THAT THE PRESIDENT DID NOT FOCUS ON THE REAL ISSUE IN THE RECENT CONTROVERSY. THESE EDITORIALS NOTED THAT KIRCHSCHLAEGER HAD AVOIDED ANY COMMENT ON WALDHEIM'S CREDIBILITY IN CONNECTION WITH CHARGES THAT WALDHEIM TRIED TO COVER UP HIS WARTIME ACTIVITIES. END SUMMARY.

2. PRESTIGIOUS AUSTRIAN INDEPENDENT "DIE PRESSE" HEADLINES: "KIRCHSCHLAEGER AS ARBITER": 'I WOULD NOT DARE TO PROSECUTE'." ACCORDING TO "DIE PRESSE" THE KEY

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SENTENCE OF THE ADDRESS WAS THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT, "DO NOT EXPECT ANY VERDICT FROM ME...". THE FRONT PAGE ARTICLE EQUALLY FOCUSES ON KIRCHSCHLAEGER'S REASONING:

"IF I WERE A PUBLIC PROSECUTOR, I WOULD NOT DATE TO RAISE CHARGES AGAINST MR. WALDHEIM." AN EDITORIAL CALLS THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENTS "BALANCED", STRESSING THE ADMONISHING CHARACTER OF THE SPEECH. KIRCHSCHLAEGER HAS SETTLED THE CONFLICT AND CALLED ON THE AUSTRIAN VOTER TO DECIDE, THE ARTICLE CONCLUDES.

3. INDEPENDENT "KURIER" HEADLINES: "IF I WERE A PUBLIC PROSECUTOR, I WOULD NOT HAVE SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE TO PROSECUTE". THE PAGE 2 HEADLINE ASSERTS "KIRCHSCHLAEGER'S EXAMINATION OF FILES FAVORS WALDHEIM". THIS OPINION IS REITERATED IN THE FRONT-PAGE EDITORIAL. HOWEVER, THE ARTICLE NOTES THAT THE PRESIDENT DID NOT COMMENT ON CHARGES THAT WALDHEIM'S BIOGRAPHY COVERED UP ASPECTS OF HIS WARTIME PAST.

4. AUSTRIA'S MASS-CIRCULATION DAILY "KRONENZEITUNG" HEADLINES: "KIRCHSCHLAEGER DID NOT FIND ANYTHING WHICH MIGHT INCRIMINATE WALDHEIM". AN IMPROMPTU TELEPHONE POLL COMMISSIONED BY THE NEWSPAPER SHOWS ALMOST 60 PERCENT SATISFIED WITH THE PRESIDENT'S SPEECH. ASKED WHETHER KIRCHSCHLAEGER'S ADDRESS WOULD INFLUENCE THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTION, 35 PERCENT ANSWERED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE, WHILE 44 PERCENT SAID NO. KIRCHSCHLAEGER'S STATEMENT THEREFORE CLEARLY SHOWS THAT THE INCRIMINATING CONCLUSIONS OF THE WORLD JEWISH COUNCIL ARE WRONG, THE PAPER ASSERTS.

5. SOCIALIST "ARBEITERZEITUNG" SUMS UP ONE OF KIRCHSCHLAEGER'S STATEMENTS IN THE HEADLINE: "NEITHER VERDICT NOR ACQUITTAL", BUT NOTES ONE OF THE PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS THAT WALDHEIM MUST HAVE KNOWN ABOUT "RETALIATORY ACTIONS" IN THE BALKANS. THE PAGE 2 EDITORIAL DRAWS ATTENTION TO THE LEGALISTIC APPROACH OF KIRCHSCHLAEGER'S SPEECH. PARALLELING ABOVE-CITED ARTICLES, THE EDITORIAL POINTS OUT THAT THE QUESTION OF WALDHEIM'S GUILT OR INNOCENCE REGARDING HIS WARTIME ACTIVITIES HAS NEVER BEEN THE REAL ISSUE OF THE CONTROVERSY. THE FORMER UN SECRETARY GENERAL WAS ACCUSED OF OMITTING WHOLE DECADES OF HIS LIFE IN HIS BIOGRAPHY, WHICH MAKES NEGATIVE WORLD REACTION UNDERSTANDABLE, THE ARTICLE CONCLUDES.

6. THE SEMI-OFFICIAL "WIENER ZEITUNG" REPORTS MATTER-OF-FACT ON THE KIRCHSCHLAEGER TV ADDRESS. ITS ESSENTIAL ORIENTATION IS TO PROMOTE THE NEGATIVE IMPLICATIONS IN PRESIDENT KIRCHSCHLAEGER'S STATEMENT. IN A CRITICAL HEADLINE THE PAPER NOTES: "(WALDHEIM) MUST HAVE CERTAINLY BEEN INFORMED ABOUT ALL WAR ACTIVITIES", A CONCLUSION WHICH ACTUALLY REPRESENTS ONLY ONE OF KIRCHSCHLAEGER'S SEVERAL FINDINGS.

7. COMMUNIST "VOLKSSTIMME" HAS A VERY SHORT ARTICLE NOTING THAT THE SPEECH HAD BEEN SENSATIONALIZED

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PREVIOUSLY BY THE MEDIA. THE ARTICLE BRIEFLY RECOUNTS KIRCHSCHLAEGER'S COMMENTS ON THE TWO DOCUMENTS, GIVING SLIGHTLY MORE SCOPE TO THE PRESIDENT'S CONCLUSION THAT WALDHEIM MUST HAVE BEEN AWARE OF WAR ACTIVITIES IN THE BALKANS AT THAT TIME.

8. OVP-AFFILIATED PROVINCIAL PAPERS CLEARLY POINT OUT THAT KIRCHSCHLAEGER'S EXAMINATION HAS PROVED THAT "THERE IS NOTHING TO CRITICIZE ABOUT WALDHEIM" ("NEUES VOLKSBLATT", LINZ) AND THAT HIS STATEMENTS REPRESENT "A LEGAL ACQUITTAL" OF THE FORMER UN SECRETARY GENERAL. THE PRESIDENT'S FINDINGS SHOULD BE ACCEPTED ACCORDINGLY BY THE AUSTRIAN VOTER ("OBEROESTERREICHISCHE NACHRICHTEN").
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Page 3