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TEXT

TAGS: PGOV, PREL, AU, US
SUBJECT: RENEWED CONCERN OVER WALDHEIM ISSUE

REF: VIENNA 16083

1. SUMMARY: RENEWED CONCERN IN SALZBURG OVER THE THORN THAT THE ELECTION LAST SPRING OF **KURT WALDHEIM** AS AUSTRIAN PRESIDENT PLACED IN THE SIDE OF AUSTRIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS MANIFESTED ITSELF RECENTLY IN THE FORM OF A SERIES OF DISCUSSIONS CARRIED OUT HERE BY AUSTRIAN AMBASSADOR TO THE U.S. KLESTIL AND A FORUM RELATING TO AMERICAN MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE ELECTI , PONSORED BY THE LOCAL STUDIO OF AUSTRIAN RADIO AND TELEVISION. THE ISSUE CONTINUES TO TROUBLE THE OTHERWISE SOLID BEDROCK OF FRIENDSHIP TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES WHICH HAS PREVAILED IN WESTERN AUSTRIA SINCE POST-WORLD WAR II OCCUPATION DAYS. END SUMMARY.

2. AFTER SEVERAL MONTHS OF RELATIVE SILENCE ON THE SUBJECT, THERE HAS BEEN A RENEWED FLARE-UP OF CONCERN IN SALZBURG AND THROUGHOUT AUSTRIA OVER U.S. MEDIA COVERAGE OF, AND POSSIBLE U.S. GOVERNMENT ACTION RELATING TO, THE WARTIME ACTIVITIES OF PRESIDENT **KURT WALDHEIM**. PROVOKED IN PART BY AUSTRIAS CONTINUED FRICTION WITH ISRAEL OVER THE SUBJECT, AS WELL AS BY THE RECENT REVELATIONS IN THE

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WASHINGTON POST AND BY LOCAL PRESS REPORTS, CLAIMING THAT SECRETARY SHULTZ HAD REFUSED TO MEET WITH WALDHEIM IN CONNECTION WITH HIS VISIT TO VIENNA FOR THE OPENING OF THE CSCE, THE CONTROVERSY IS CLEARLY TROUBLING MANY SALZBURGERS, WHO THOUGHT THAT THE ISSUE HAD BEEN PUT TO REST AFTER THE PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATION LAST JULY. 3." THE ISSUE WAS THE FOCUS OF ATTENTION DURING A SERIES OF PUBLIC APPEARANCES IN SALZBURG ON NOVEMBER 3 BY AUSTRIAN AMBASSADOR AND THE UNITED STATES THOMAS KLESTIL, KLESTIL, WHO IS NOMINALLY RUNNING FOR A NATIONAL COUNCIL SEAT ON THE OEPV TICKET DURING THE CURRENT ELECTION CAMPAIGN, WAS PRESSED BY HIS AUDIENCE TO EXPLAIN WHY

AUSTRIA'S IMAGE CONTINUES TO SUFFER, NOTWITHSTANDING AUSTRIA'S LONGSTANDING FRIENDLY ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES. ALTHOUGH THE AMBASSADOR DID HIS BEST TO PUT THE PROBLEM IN A BROADER AND MORE OBJECTIVE LIGHT BY NOTING THAT FRIENDLY RELATIONS HAD SURVIVED PAST DIFFERENCES OVER AUSTRIA'S MIDDLE EASTERN POLICY, ARMS DELIVERIES TO LIBYA, TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER ISSUES, THE 1985 WINE SCANDAL, AND IMPLICATIONS OF BAD MANAGEMENT IN CONNECTION WITH THE CURRENT ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES OF AUSTRIAN INDUSTRIES, MOST IN THE AUDIENCE BRUSHED THESE FACTORS ASIDE AND FOCUSED EXCLUSIVELY ON WALDHEIM AS THE CAUSE FOR PRESENT TROUBLE.

4. KLESTIL LISTED SEVERAL RECOMMENDED MEASURES DESIGNED TO RESTORE AUSTRIA'S IMAGE. FOR STARTERS, HE URGED THAT AUSTRIANS THEMSELVES DEMONSTRATE GREATER NATIONAL UNITY IN DEALING WITH THE ISSUE AND POINTED OUT THAT AUSTRIAN MEDIA COMMENTARY HAD FREQUENTLY BEEN COUNTERPRODUCTIVE. IN HIS VIEW, AUSTRIA MUST WORK HARDER THAN EVER TO DEMONSTRATE ITS STATUS AS A MILITARILY NEUTRAL, BUT CLEARLY WESTERN-ORIENTED DEMOCRACY. KLESTIL ALSO RECOMMENDED GREATER EMPHASIS ON AUSTRIA'S ROLE IN FACILITATING EMIGRATION OF JEWISH PERSONS FROM THE SOVIET UNION, DISSEMINATION OF FILMS ON AUSTRIA VIA AMERICAN TV, AND MORE IMAGINATIVE APPROACHES FOR PROMOTING AUSTRIAN TRADE AND TOURISM.

5. THE MAJOR FOCUS OF AUDIENCE CONCERN WAS ON WHETHER THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE WOULD PLACE WALDHEIM ON A BLACK LIST AND BAN HIM FROM ENTRY INTO THE U.S. KLESTIL'S VIEW WAS THAT SUCH AN ACTION WAS POLITICALLY INCONCEIVABLE. HE POINTED OUT THAT THE LAW IN QUESTION DATED FROM THE MCCARTHY ERA IN THE EARLY 1950S, AND THAT THE REASONING WHICH HAD PROMPTED IT IN THOSE TIMES WAS MEANWHILE LARGELY DISCREDITED. HE NOTED FURTHER THAT A JUSTICE DEPARTMENT DECISION ON THE QUESTION HAD BEEN POSTPONED BRINGING AN AUSTRIAN GOVERNMENT REQUEST IN ORDER NOT TO INFLUENCE THE OUTCOME OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. KLESTIL RATHER SUSPECTED THAT THE DECISION WOULD AGAIN BE DELAYED UNTIL AFTER THE AUSTRIAN NATIONAL ELECTION ON NOVEMBER 23 FOR SIMILAR REASONS, AND THAT EVEN THEREAFTER, SOME RATIONALIZATION WOULD BE FOUND TO ALLOW THE ISSUE TO REMAIN IN THE FILES.

UNCLAS SECTION 02 OF 02 SALZBURG 0122

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6. SUMMING UP, THE AMBASSADOR CAUTIONED HIS AUDIENCE TO REMEMBER THAT THE U.S. WAS ITSELF ENGAGED IN AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN WITH ALL THE EXAGGERATED RHETORIC THAT ENTAILED. HE REMINDED THAT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT WAS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT APPEARED IN AMERICAN MEDIA, AND THAT WITHIN THAT RELATIVELY SMALL PROPH TION OF THE U.S. POPULATION FOR WHOM AUSTRIA CALLED UP MORE THAN VAGUE GEOGRAPHICAL AND SCAL ASSOCIATIONS, THE RESERVOIR OF FRIENDSHIP REMAINED STRONG. AT THE SAME TIME, HE CAUTIONED, THE DANGER EXISTED THAT IF ONLY AUSTRIAS FRIENDS CONTINUED TO BELABOR THE ENTIRE NATION, THEREBY CASTING INTO QUESTION THE AVOWEDLY DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES UPON WHICH THE COUNTRY RESTED, LONGTERM NEGATIVE EFFECTS COULD WELL RESULT. (IN AN IRONIC COINCIDENCE, AUSTRIAN NEWSPAPERS QUOTED THE SAME DAY A REMARK BY SOVIET FOREIGN MINISTER SHEVARDNADZE UPON HIS ARRIVAL IN VIENNA, PRAISING AUSTRIAS ROLE AS A NEUTRAL COUNTRY AND WISHING THAT THE CLIMATE OF SOVIET RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. WERE AS GOOD AS THAT EXISTING BETWEEN MOSCOW AND VIENNA.)

7. ON NOVEMBER 7, THE SALZBURG STUDIO OF AUSTRIAN RADIO AND TELEVISION HELD A SEVEN HOUR PUBLIC DISCUSSION, ENTITLED "US TELEVISION, CLOSE UP". THE DISCUSSION WAS CONDUCTED BY EUGEN FREUND, A SENIOR EDITOR OF AUSTRIAN TELEVISION IN VIENNA, WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY SERVED WITH THE AUSTRIAN INFORMATION SERVICE IN NEW YORK. ALTHOUGH FREUND COVERED VARIOUS ASPECTS OF AMERICAN TV BROADCASTING, HE DEVOTED TWO SOLID HOURS TO SHOWING A COMPOSITE SERIES OF NEWS CLIPS FROM VARIOUS NETWORKS TO DEMONSTRATE HOW THE AUSTRIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, AND PARTICULARLY THE ACCUSATIONS AGAINST WALDHEIM, WERE PORTRAYED TO THE AMERICAN PUBLIC.

8. A MIS9ILQ DISCUSSION ENSUED, FOCUSED LARGELY ON WHAT THE AUDIENCE PERCEIVED AS THE SHALLOWNESS AND ONESIDEDNESS OF THE REPORTAGE. FREUND WAS CAREFUL TO POINT OUT THAT THE CONCERN OF MANY AMERICANS WAS LESS WITH THE POSSIBILITY THAT WALDHEIM WAS A WAR CRIMINAL. THAT, HE SAID, FEW IF ANY BELIEVED. RATHER, WITH THE WATERGATE EXPERIENCE STILL FRESH IN THEIR MINDS, THEY CONDEMNED WALDHEIM FOR WHAT THEY CONSIDERED AN ATTEMPT TO COVER UP OR DISTORT THE TRUTH. THIS THEY WERE NOT PREPARED TO ACCEPT IN A HEAD OF STATE, NOR COULD THEY UNDERSTAND WHY THE AUSTRIAN PEOPLE COULD DO SO, IF THE COUNTRY WERE AS DEMOCRATIC AS THEY HAD ALWAYS BEEN LED TO BELIEVE. WHILE THE AUDIENCE WAS NOT AS SOPHISTICATED AS THOSE WHO HEARD AMBASSADOR KLESTIL, IT WAS SIGNIFICANT THAT THE OFFICIAL AUSTRIAN BROADCASTING SYSTEM CHOSE TO PERPETUATE THE CONTROVERSY IN THIS FASHION.

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