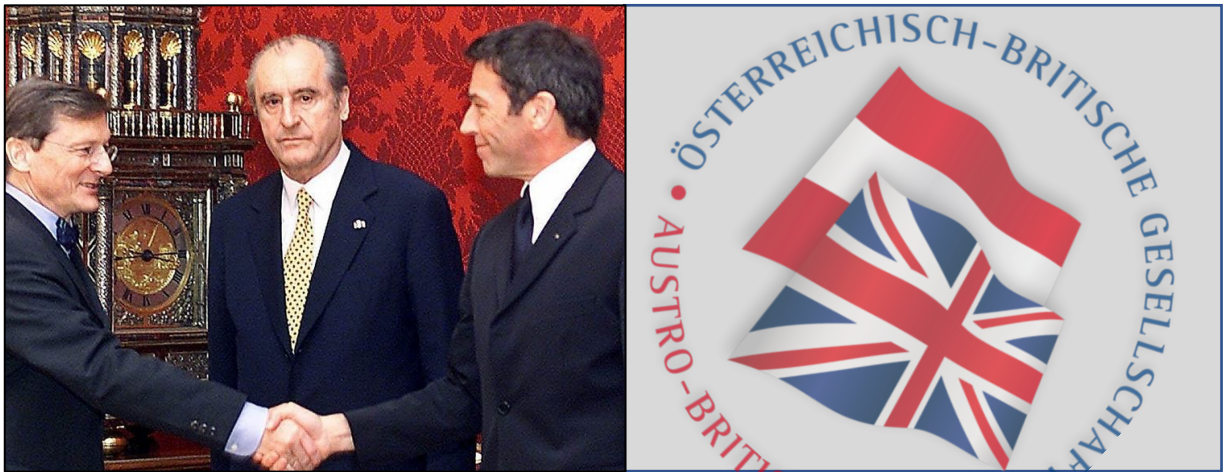


Ambassadorial Experiences | Part 1

Austria suddenly politically isolated

One of several remarkable personal experiences of the former Austrian Ambassador in the Netherlands



When on 4 February 2000 the Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel decided to form a government with the Haider-FPÖ, hell broke loose in Europe. A number of European member states imposed “sanctions” on Austria, thereby not only shunning contracts on the technical and political level with a member state, but in addition labelling our country as being close to right extremism and worse.

For an Austrian diplomat the situation in the Netherlands at that time was especially precarious. The Dutch – up to this very day – are not only rather self-righteous but much more extremely sensitive to everything which had to do with the Nazi occupation of their country. Two leading Austrian Nazis played a criminal and shameful role in Holland at that time and the Dutch have not forgotten this. Which meant that the official representative of Austria was from one day to the other no longer welcome, both to the Dutch government but also to the press and to the public at large.

It so happened that in every year, also in May 2000, the Queen had invited the Diplomatic Corps to her official dinner at her palace in Amsterdam. Two Chiefs of Mission were stricken from the list of invitees on instructions by the government – The Chargé d'affaires of Serbia and the Austrian Ambassador. The Queen herself was most unhappy with the decision on Austria by the social democratic Prime Minister. Interestingly, at that moment the press in its entirety sided with Austria and almost all newspapers brought critical commentary on their front pages.

A few days later, the bell rang at the door of our Residence in The Hague. I opened the door and saw a man with a plastic bag filled with some stuff. “Are you the Austrian Ambassador?” he asked. On my reply he said “I have followed the shameful treatment of your country and yourself having been disinvited from the Queen’s dinner. I apologize on behalf of the Dutch people and I thought – not having been able to participate at the dinner – you must be hungry and I have brought you some sausages and cheese to make up for it.” I took the bag and was literally speechless and somewhat bewildered and profusely thanked the man.

I shall never forget this rather bizarre episode during my Ambassadorship in the Netherlands. Thanks God, since then no member country of the European Union was ever sanctioned in that senseless way.

Let us have your thoughts and comments!
We are looking forward to receiving them!

About the author



Former Ambassador Dr Alexander Christiani is the Vice-President of the Austro-British Society and leads the ABS Expert Group which releases high-quality Policy Papers with first-hand background information on current political developments. Dr Christiani is a member of the board of the Austrian Society for Foreign Politics and the United Nations. His professional career led him to the hotspots of political developments all over the world (e.g. to the Middle East, South Africa, New York and many others) where he contributed reasonably to Austria’s excellent diplomatic reputation in the world.

The views expressed in this article are entirely his and reflect in no way the opinions of the ABS.