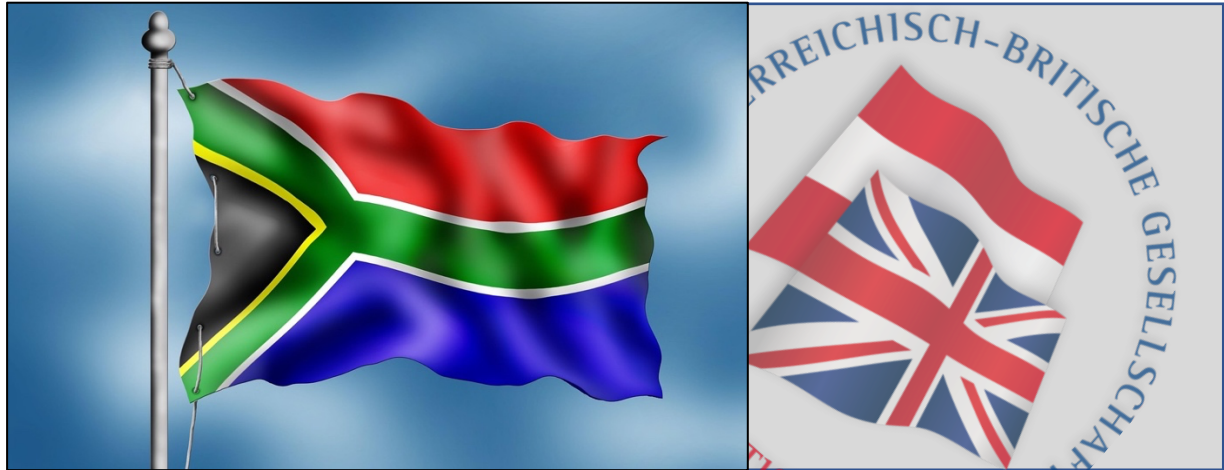


Ambassadorial Experiences | Part 3

South Africa at its best



During my time in South Africa, I once visited a doctor's office in Capetown. There, the registration necessitated to fill out a rather comprehensive form. A few days later a lady from the doctor's office called and the following conversation ensued:

- *Are you Mr. Christiani?*
 - *Yes...*
- *You visited our rooms the other day and when you filled out our form you forgot to indicate for **which company** you are working?*
 - *I am not working for any company, I am the Austrian Ambassador...*
- *Oh, I understand, so you are the Ambassador of **Australia**?*
 - *No, of **Austria**... you know, ours are the lipizzans and not the kangaroos!*
- *I see, its AUSTRIA then - can can you spell that please!*
 - *Yes, its -A- U -S -T -R- I -A- ...*
- *Oh, I am sorry, Sir, I understand: you are the Ambassador auf AUSTRIA?*
 - *Yes, that's what I said....*

The lady paused a few seconds and exclaimed

- *"I get it now: so, you are not working at all...?"*

Our office in Pretoria was in an ugly ten stories high building with a flat roof. The Austrian Embassy occupied the tenth floor and Israel the ninth and the eight floors. On the roof two antennas – one a towering twenty feet high and another one very small, more like a whip. For an outsider, the impression must have been very clear: "Of course, the big one must belong to Israel and the tiny one to Austria..." I was actually the other way round.

At that time Austria, in potential crises areas like South Africa, installed a special wireless system with the need for big technical devices, like huge antennas. In the year 1989, when I was the dean (speaker) of the Diplomatic corps, I bade farewell to the departing Israeli Ambassador, which was customary for the dean. At that occasion, I mentioned the two antennas on our building's roof and that everyone must have been of the impression that – taking into account the importance of our two countries – the big one must have been **his** and the small one **ours**.

The Israeli Ambassador replied "*Dear colleague, since as I am retiring now, I can let you share a little secret: **Of course, yours was the big one and ours the small one – but ours have been hooked to yours all the time!***"

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.