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„The Radicalization of Anti-Semitism in Austria, 1914-1923“

Greeting and introduction

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah, dear fellows. First of all, I would like to thank the foundation for the fellowship, with which I was able to finance my doctorate from September 2016 to August 2017, and secondly for this invitation to be here in Paris and the opportunity to present my project to you today.

I will begin my presentation with an overview of the topic of my dissertation project as well as my approach, and then give an insight into the ongoing research.

Introduction and Relevance

The First World War with its social, political, economic, and cultural turmoil impacted in fundamental ways on Europe's social development. The phase of transition from dynastically structured multiethnic empires to 'nation' states in Central Europe was marked by economic crises, social tensions and traumas as a consequence of the harrowing experiences of war. Questions of belonging and/or otherness were at the heart of intense social and political controversy and contention – with the Jewish population at its very center.

Above all, there was a massive rise and radicalization of anti-Semitism in all its familiar forms, taking new shapes and contours.

Proceeding from and also embedded in the European development, this thesis centers on an analysis of the radicalization of Anti-Semitism in the mainly German-speaking areas of the Habsburg monarchy and the Republic of German-Austria/Austria. It focuses on traditional manifestations of Anti-Semitism as well as on its new forms springing from political developments at the time.

A range of questions are explored: who propagated anti-Semitism in the political, social and cultural debates? In what contexts did it become virulent? What aims were pursued and what images and stereotypes were employed? Another question of importance is: what role did anti-Semitism play on one hand to the development of the identity of the anti-Semites and, on the other hand, of the Republic German Austria/Austria itself, which was struggling to find its own national identity?

Research - Basis source stenographic protocols

The stenographic protocols of the Austrian Parliament serve as a primary source and the basis for further research. The goal of the chronological review of all the debates is to systematically record all the anti-Semitic discourses in parliament. Parliament was a central place for the articulation, transformation and continuity of anti-Semitic politics over all those years.¹ I have perused and written out several hundred pages of anti-Semitic speeches, remarks and debates in the stenographic protocols which I have worked through; here is a brief overview of some of the sources analysed thus far.

Already shortly after the re-convening of the Imperial Assembly,² an on-going debate about the Jewish population took place in the summer of 1917, which was caused by anti-Semitic accusations. For example, the Jews' loyalty during the war was discussed. In the passionate defence pleas of the Jewish delegates, the impending end of the Habsburg Monarchy, and the consequences associated with it, become clear. In their contributions, the elected representatives of the Jewish community emphasized the loyalty and the achievements of the Jewish population in the war, expressed themselves regarding unproved anti-Semitic accusations, and discussed the rights of the Jewish minority in a future national state. Benno Straucher, a Jewish delegate from Bukovina, boiled the concerns of the Jewish population, about the striking radicalization of anti-Semitism, down to an essence:

“The ever growing anti-Semitism is striking and painful, as well as the hidden and obvious onset of an intense anti-Jewish direction. Namely, regrettably and significantly, by unbiased, influential factors and circles, who previously had an impartial, objective, fair and factual opinion of both Jews and anything concerning Jews. However, over time, individuals, who have been influenced by spitefulness, do not only tolerate anti-Semitism, but unquestionably and evidently encourage it.”³

During the last months of the war in 1918, the tone was tightened and the anti-Semitic repertoire ranged from "conspiracy" theories to smear campaigns against the Social Democratic Party,

¹ See Matthias Falter/Saskia Stachowitsch, *Das jüdische Wien im Parlament – Jüdische Identitätspolitik, regionale Interessenspolitik und antisemitische Widerstände von 1861 bis 1922*, in: transversal. Zeitschrift für Jüdische Studien. No. 1 (2012), 83.

² With the re-convention of the Imperial Assembly by Emperor Karl on the 30th of May 1917, the parliamentary work in Austria was resumed after more than three years - and thus the first time since the beginning of the war. For further information, see Manfred Rauchensteiner, *Der Erste Weltkrieg und das Ende der Habsburgermonarchie 1914–1918*, Vienna-Cologne-Weimar 2013, 734–738.

³ Stenographic protocols about the meetings of the delegates of the Austrian Imperial Assembly in 1917. 8th meeting, 16th of June 1917. The protocols and accompanying annexes from the Imperial Assembly are available here: <http://alex.onb.ac.at/spa.htm> “ALEX – Historische Rechts- und Gesetzestexte Online” (accessed 23 January 2017).

which was described by its political opponents as "Jewish". The radicalization of anti-Semitism manifested itself in parliament, both in the increasingly undermined and direct attacks on the Jewish population, and in the frequency of such anti-Jewish agitation.

The main reason for the anti-Semitic incitement were deputies from the German national and Christian socialist camps. Their parties had anti-Semitism, and claims as a result thereof, partially fixed in their programmes.⁴ The Israeli historian, Shulamit Volkov, called anti-Semitism a "cultural code", which is used as an identity-establishing element in certain socio-political camps.⁵ In this context, this is also true for the situation in Austria. The anti-Semitic consensus between Christian Socialists and German Nationalists was celebrated in public at events like the "anti-Semite days", the "German Volkstag", or at rallies at universities, and there were also alliances in parliament in this regard.⁶

An example of an individual who repeatedly used clear anti-Semitic rhetoric and has become conspicuous for it, is the Christian socialist Anton Jerzabek. He founded the Anti-Semitic Association in 1919. At rallies and demonstrations of this association, the expulsion of "East Jews", an expression often used for war refugees from Galicia and Bukovina, and the introduction of a numerus clausus at the university were requested. It often came to violent attacks against the Jewish population during these events.⁷ This association, too, served as a bipartisan melting pot of anti-Semitic politicians. An excerpt from a speech which Jerzabek held in the National Assembly in March of 1921:

"If we look at the decay of morals, we can only trace it back to this immigration, to what these gentlemen from the East, from the Orient, have brought with them. These are also the people who, in certain circles, undermined the respect for the state, which originally prevailed in the republic, so that the Republic of Judaism was justifiably coined."⁸

⁴ For a general overview see Bruce F. Pauley, *Eine Geschichte des österreichischen Antisemitismus. Von der Ausgrenzung zur Auslösung, Teil III: Die Spielarten des österreichischen Antisemitismus*, Vienna 1993, 182-253 - Original title: *From Prejudice to Persecution: A History of Austrian Anti-Semitism*, Chapel Hill-London 1992 - and Leopold Spira, *Feindbild „Jud“: 100 Jahre politischer Antisemitismus in Österreich*, Vienna 1981.

⁵ See Shulamit Volkov, *Antisemitismus als kultureller Code. Zehn Essays*. Munich 2000, 13-36 – Original title: Shulamit Volkov, *Antisemitism as a Cultural Code: Reflections on the History and Historiography of Antisemitism in Imperial Germany*, in: *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, no. 23 (1978), 25-46.

⁶ See David Rechter, *The Jews of Vienna and and First World War*, London 2001, 95.

⁷ On the Antisemitenbund see Pauley, *Eine Geschichte des österreichischen Antisemitismus*, 233-235 and Rütgen, *Antisemitismus in allen Lagern: Publizistische Dokumente zur Ersten Republik Österreich 1918-1938*, Graz 1989, 358-366 and 580-582.

⁸ Stenographic protocols on the meetings of the National Assembly of the Republic of Austria. 20th Meeting. 4th of March 1921. The protocols and accompanying annexes from the Provisional and Constituent National Assemblies, as well as from the National Assembly, can be found here: <http://alex.onb.ac.at/spe.htm> "ALEX - Historische Rechts- und Gesetzstexte Online" (accessed 23 January 2017).

In the new state of German-Austria, after the war had ended, the "blame" of the course of war was discussed with anti-Semitic undertones, but it was mainly about the status of the Jewish minority. This was debated about in the Provisional National Assembly. However, the focus of anti-Semites was primarily directed at the Jewish war refugees, who they wanted to deny citizenship to for the new republic, and this ultimately happened with the Citizenship Act of the 5th of December 1918.⁹

Anti-Semitic speeches and remarks remained an integral part of parliamentary discourse in the Constituent Assembly, which was elected in February of 1919, and also after the first National Council elections in October 1920. At a debate, delegate Josef Ursin of the Greater German People's Party, spoke about the anti-Semitic riots at the university, which he tried to justify with the following words:

"The events which we have observed today and which have passed before our eyes are a symptom of the deep commotion, of which 90 per cent of the German population are affected.

It is a fact, and cannot be denied that the majority of the German-Austrian people, without being persuaded, but rather spontaneously, have been inspired by the unheard-of conditions in this field, that they are, of course, anti-Semitic today, and that they want to be their own master in their own country, on their native soil."¹⁰

In addition to apparently anti-Semitic hatred, anti-Semitic arguments were also used in debates on different topics, which at a first glance were not necessarily associated with Jews. Thus, politicians of the Christian Social Party denounced the attempts initiated by Social Democrat Otto Glöckel to reform schools, particularly because attending religious education should be voluntary, which caused violent controversies in parliament about the "Jewish school reform". Although the Christian socialists consciously made anti-Semitism part of their programme in the years of turmoil, it is controversial whether the openly anti-Jewish campaigns really had such a great positive effect. Especially John Boyer doubts this fact in his comprehensive work on the Christian Social Party, pointing to, among other things, the extremely modest results in the municipal elections in Vienna.¹¹

⁹ See Margarete Grandner, Staatsbürger und Ausländer. Zum Umgang Österreichs mit den jüdischen Flüchtlingen nach 1918, in: Gernot Heiss/Oliver Rathkolb (Eds.) *Asylland wider Willen: Flüchtlinge in Österreich im europäischen Kontext seit 1914*, Vienna 1995, 79.

¹⁰ Stenographic protocols on meetings of the Constituent National Assembly of the Republic of Austria. 78th meeting. 29th of April 1920.

¹¹ See for example, John Boyer, *Culture and political crisis in Vienna. Christian Socialism in Power, 1897-1918*, Chicago 1995, 445-446.

In the course of my dissertation project, the results of the research are source-critically analysed, as well as with the method of historical discourse analysis.¹² It is, therefore, important to consider and take note of the specific context of parliament - the meetings were extensively reported on in the press, giving them a broad reception in public - and the different intentions of anti-Semitic speeches and statements. Between the abstract world conspiracy theories and the concrete political demands, such as the non-allocation of citizenship to the Jewish refugees, there was a wide range of anti-Semitic motives.

In summary, it can be said that the years of turmoil during the war and in the post-war period were characterized by upheaval in the Jewish population. The intensity of anti-Semitic agitation intensified and some new or already existing and once again activated anti-Semitic stereotypes became part of political disputes. Parties or individual actors created or consolidated power through anti-Semitic positions.

A reaction to the experiences of the First World War in the formation of the successor states of the multi-ethnic empires, was the discourse about who belonged to the national identity and who did not.¹³ In this phase of the extremely difficult formation of a national identity in Austria - the "rump state", which had been left over from the former Habsburg Empire, no one was really happy with - anti-Semitic theses also came into play. With anti-Semitic argumentations, a clear and majority-appealing position on various political issues could be considered in the transitional phase from a multinational Austria-Hungary to an almost homogenous nation-state (German-) Austria.

Interim remarks on the questions raised in the dissertation project can be noted: Anti-Semitism remained an integral part of the political discourse in Austria throughout the years of the war. However, through the break of the First World War, it underwent a radicalization ascertainable at different levels and thus, also with regard to further events of the 20th century, a significant change.

¹² On the historical discourse analyses see e.g. Philip Sarasin, *Geschichtswissenschaft und Diskursanalyse*. Frankfurt/Main 2003 and Achim Landwehr, *Historische Diskursanalyse*, Frankfurt/Main 2008.

¹³ See Petra Ernst/Sabine A. Haring/Werner Suppanz, *Der Erste Weltkrieg – Zeitenbruch und Kontinuität*. Einleitende Bemerkungen, in: Petra Ernst/Sabine A. Haring/Werner Suppanz (Eds.), *Aggression und Katharsis. Der Erste Weltkrieg im Diskurs der Moderne (=Studien zur Moderne 20)*, Vienna 2004, 21-22.