

Letter from Pierre Safroy to Antoine Pinay (Luxembourg, 26 April 1955)

Caption: On 26 April 1955, Pierre Safroy, French Ambassador to Luxembourg, describes to Antoine Pinay, French Foreign Minister, the enthusiastic impressions of the Luxembourg Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Joseph Bech, following his official visit to Vienna.

Source: Ministère des Affaires étrangères; Commission de publication des DDF (sous la dir.). Documents diplomatiques français. Volume I: 1955, 1er janvier-30 juin. Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1987. 849 p. p. 515-516.

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Mr Bech appeared to be delighted with his official visit to Vienna and with the warm welcome that he received. He was particularly glad to meet up again with Mr Figl, whose trust and friendship he has enjoyed for many years.

His talks with Austrian statesmen clearly took place amidst that atmosphere of euphoria, one might even say joy, that has gripped the Austrian people since the announcement of Moscow's concessions.

Although the Chancellor and Mr Figl are careful not to display any kind of triumphalism, the people are still very happy now that the liberation of their country appears within their grasp. Such an outcome, which appeared unlikely even a few days ago, is, according to my contact, a result of the perseverance of the Austrian Government as well as of the strong will of the people, who have demonstrated that Austrian national feelings persist.

Nevertheless, the Government is not deluded into thinking that such a marked U-turn in Russian policy took place simply to 'please' Austria. However, a small country's responsibilities do not stretch beyond its frontiers, and Austria had neither the option nor the possibility to refuse the gift on offer, even if it was accompanied by certain reservations that would complicate the task of the friends and backers that the small Republic has in the Western camp.

There is, apparently, a realisation in Vienna that the agreement that will set Austria free has not yet been finalised and that it is still too early for joy being unconfined. Furthermore, a number of contentious issues remain unresolved, such as the sequestrations, compensation for the Jews, fees, etc.

When the time comes to define Austria's status once and for all, the Government will want to avoid a neutrality accompanied by foreign guarantees in order to avoid any pretext for Great Power involvement in Austrian affairs. A guarantee of territorial integrity would not have the same drawbacks.

At all events, Austrian statesmen would understand the need to maintain an army that, initially, would have to be small, but, over time, would have to be capable, just like the Swiss army, to ensure that the effective neutrality of Austria was respected.

A formal renunciation of the Anschluss would be in line with government policy and would therefore not cause any embarrassment. This would not be the case with the demand recently suggested to the Russians by Austrian Socialists that a clause be added to the agreement now being drawn up that would ban the restoration of the Hapsburgs. The Government would consider it sufficient that this ban already appears in the Austrian Constitution, without its having to be restated in an international agreement.

There still remains the possibility of a new U-turn by the Russians which might jeopardise everything at the last minute. However, Austrian Ministers do not seem to give this any weight and appear to have told Mr Bech that, despite all the rebuttals and failures that they have suffered at the hands of the Russians during ten years of occupation, the Russians had never gone back on a promise when they had happened to make some concession or other.

It seemed to Mr Bech that this moderate optimism was promising, but he feels that the people will regret the Americans' departure, and the Mayor of Salzburg told him that the American troop withdrawal would result in a loss of 500 million schillings a year, the equivalent of about 7 000 million francs.

P.S. — Mr Bech was questioned on his return about whether Moscow had asked Vienna to sign a secret agreement. The President answered that this seemed to him very unlikely because of the risks involved in a small country going down such a road with a superpower.

Mr Bech considered that the Foreign Affairs Committee's recently expressed wish went beyond the Austrian Government's intentions. While wishing to join the UN, it felt it was necessary to play for time. It is true that the Republic's admission to the UN would make it possible to separate the issue of Austria's future international status from that of Switzerland.