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The impact of the war in Ukraine on changing Russia-Austria relations

Original article

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Abstract

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Objectives: The article considers the changes that occurred in bilateral relations between Russia and Austria in the period before and after the start of the military invasion of Ukraine in February 2014. Austria, as the subject of the study, was chosen because of its peculiarities as a perpetually neutral country and state - member of the European Union. The country to shape its bilateral relations with Russia in a particular way, which has changed since the beginning of military operations in Ukraine.

Methods: The analysis and synthesis of knowledge, the case study method, the hard and soft power theory of Joseph Nye, a method of observing current political and military events.

Results: 1. Until the conflict with Ukraine, which took the form of war in February 2022, relations between Russia and Austria were friendly, based on mutual benefits. 2. The Austrian government to take an unambiguous stance towards the conflict and to stand in solidarity with other EU countries. 3. The bilateral relations to rapidly weaken and deteriorate, which can be seen in the public statements of Russian politicians.

Conclusions: Austria played a special role in bilateral and multilateral contacts in the international environment. Russia sought to influence Austria through diplomatic, informational and economic means. By publicly condemning the armed invasion in Ukraine and accepting the sanctions imposed on Russia by EU countries, Austria received a harsh reaction from Russia in the diplomatic forum. In the long run, this may dramatically change the arrangement of mutual relations between the two countries.

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Introduction

The Russian Federation, pursuing its national interests in the international arena, employs a variety of means of influence, including military (a tangible example of which is the military conflict with Ukraine), economic (control over the supply of energy resources), and diplomatic, cultural and informational (for propaganda in the international community and to enhance its image in the world). Thus, the Federation uses hard and soft means of influence, which in its foreign policy are inseparable instruments, used interchangeably and complement each other, and their systematization is vague and ambiguous (Skrabacz, 2020: 103-104).

The purpose of this article is to present the changes that occurred in Russia-Austria bilateral relations in the period before and after the start of the armed invasion of Ukraine in February 2014. Austria, as a subject of the research, was chosen because of its peculiarities as a perpetually neutral country, the consequence of which is the lack of NATO membership, on the other hand as a state - member of the European Union. Such political and military conditions caused the country to shape its bilateral relations with Russia in a particular, specific way, which has changed since the beginning of military operations in Ukraine. The main research problem is formulated as follows: How did Russia's armed invasion of Ukraine affect the international relations of the Russian Federation and Austria? The following specific problems were helpful in solving this problem: How were Russian-Austrian contacts shaped before 2014? What position did Austria take towards the sanctions applied by the EU countries against Russia? In the post-war reality, can it be assumed that bilateral relations between these countries will return to the pre-war state?

The hypothesis that has been put forward for consideration is that until relatively recently relations between Russia and Austria were friendly and based on mutual benefits, especially political and economic ones. This was the result of the use of mainly soft instruments of influence by the Russians. This situation was changed by the events in Ukraine, during which Austria, militarily neutral, but as a member of the European Union, unequivocally joined the EU policy condemning Russian aggression. Consequently, this may lead to significant changes in bilateral relations between the two countries, and the post-war reality may be far different from what it was before the war.

Using theoretical methods, including analysis and synthesis of knowledge available in compact and continuous (traditional and electronic) sources, the spectrum of means of influence used by the Federation in foreign policy is discussed. Using the comparative

method, the differences in Russia's relations with individual European Union states, including Austria, are indicated, while using exemplification specific examples of the use of soft and hard instruments in the realization of the political goals of the Russian Federation in relation to Austria are given. The author used primarily the results of qualitative research conducted by Polish and foreign scholars, avoiding the issue of the power and strength of the state in the international arena, which is usually measured by quantitative methods.

The study was divided into two parts. In the first part, Russia's understanding and use of soft and hard instruments of influence, both in relation to the European Union and in its relations with Austria, is discussed. Part Two provides a multifaceted analysis of the Russian Federation's political, economic, social, and military relations with Austria. The time censorship is the beginning of the year 2022, which represents a kind of demarcation in the formation of mutual relations, influenced by Ukrainian events. The conclusion returns to the main issue contained in the title, characterizing the basic factors implying Russia-Austria relations.

1. Russia's foreign policy in international relations

The foreign policy of the Russian Federation has changed dramatically since Vladimir Putin came to power. Its initial period was between 1997 and 2000, when, as prime minister, he approved a new concept of foreign policy, the expression of which was a pragmatic, functional and flexible line, oriented primarily on the defense of clearly defined national interests and the ability to adapt to changing conditions and opportunities. On the other hand, after becoming president, Vladimir Putin began to pursue a flexible policy of rapprochement with the Western world, making it an offer of deepened cooperation on terms appropriate to Russia (Potulski, 2008: 342).

The transition period occurred in 2001, or rather after September 11 and the series of attacks in the USA. At that time, acting in the framework of the fight against international terrorism there was a clear understanding with America and other Western European countries, as Russia proved to be very necessary to control the situation in the Middle East. The conduct of military operations in Afghanistan by the United States and its European allies would have been impossible without the consent and support of Russia, which retained its influence in the Central Asian region. Russia was determined to take advantage of the opportunity provided by the events of 2001, and its primary goal was to establish relations with the West that would allow it to co-decide on matters of international security and to

regulate emerging crises. Joining the anti-terrorist coalition created such a possibility for Russia (Potulski, 2008: 343).

However, contacts between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic states deteriorated at the turn of 2003-2004, during the war in Iraq, and in later years the situation escalated significantly in connection with the aggression against Georgia and Ukraine (Moose, 2017: 566).

After Dmitry Medvedev became president in July 2008, the concept of foreign policy of the Russian Federation was approved, which recognized that most important is to ensure security and strengthen sovereignty and territorial integrity. It has also been pointed out that one of the most significant threats to Russia is the expansion of NATO to include Ukraine and Georgia (Moose, 2017: 566).

Approved by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on February 12, 2013. The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation states that in line with the highest priority of national security - ensuring the protection of the individual, society and the state - in general, the main efforts in foreign policy should focus on achieving the following goals:

- a) ensuring the security of the country, maintaining and strengthening its sovereignty and territorial integrity and a strong and authoritative position in the international community,
- b) to create favorable external conditions for stable and dynamic growth of the Russian economy,
- c) to actively support the course directed towards the comprehensive strengthening of international peace, general security and stability with a view to establishing a just and democratic international system,
- d) to establish good neighborly relations with neighboring countries,
- e) to develop bilateral and multilateral relations of mutually beneficial and equal partnership with foreign countries,
- f) to strengthen Russia's commercial and economic position,
- g) comprehensive protection of the legal rights and interests of Russian citizens and compatriots living abroad,
- h) dissemination and strengthening of the position of the Russian language in the world, popularization of cultural achievements, consolidation of the Russian diaspora abroad,
- i) supporting the development of constructive dialogue and partnership between civilizations (Concept, 2013).

Realizing the adopted goals of international policy, Russia, in addition to military potential (i.e. hard power), also uses soft power, by which he means power, might, or flexible

force (Moose, 2017: 565). It is an integral part of modern international policy, using a comprehensive instrumentarium for solving foreign policy tasks based on the capabilities of civil society, information and communication, humanitarian and other methods and technologies that are an alternative to classical diplomacy (Concept, 2013).

The essence of Russian soft power is three pillars: cooperation, security, sovereignty. Cooperation is based on equal conditions, without imposing ideology, governance, or geopolitical or civilizational orientation. Sovereignty, on the other hand, is the ability to provide, mainly to the former post-Soviet republics, true sovereignty and indisputable geopolitical independence. Security means the emergence of the former Soviet Union countries without war and the use of force (Pacak, 2012: 197). It is also worth adding that Russia takes very seriously such a soft power instrument as human resources, i.e. millions of Russians spread around the world.

At the same time, Russia points out that the strengthening of global competition and the accumulation of crisis potential lead to the risk of sometimes destructive and illegal use of soft power and the concept of legal protection for the purposes of exerting political influence on independent states, interference in their internal affairs, destabilization of the prevailing situation, manipulation of public opinion and awareness, including in the framework of financing humanitarian and human rights projects abroad (Concept, 2013).

Generalizing, it can be said that Russia's foreign policy successfully uses a wide range of instruments at the disposal of this state, characteristic of both soft and hard influence on other countries (Goldthau, Sitter, 2015). On the one hand, the Federation effectively uses economic and military tools, which shows its hard face in accordance with the nature of these methods. The energy resources in its possession are an excellent bargaining chip for achieving political goals, and controlling their availability makes them take on a tough character (Moose, 2017: 567). In the aspect of the use of armed forces, Russia reaches for them frequently, even when it is possible to use other tools of influence.

This state, with its considerable military power, can inspire respect and fear, of which the armed invasion of Ukraine is a clear example, but it is unable to gain recognition from the international community. The outrage and condemnation of the international community for the escalation of military action in Ukraine has assumed an unprecedented scale and solidarity in the application of political, economic and diplomatic sanctions against the aggressor.

On the other hand, Russia seeks to raise its standing in the world by activating public and digital diplomacy, science and culture. Particular attention is paid to the need to develop means by which to influence public opinion abroad. All this is to contribute to the objective

perception of Russia in the world in order to gain understanding and support for its foreign policy (Nye, 2013). Thus, the basic tools of soft influence can include culture, art, education, language, media, the Orthodox Church and NGOs (Kosachev, 2012).

Promotion of culture, art, and especially literature and language is one of the most important challenges in Russian foreign policy. Russian culture is widely known and respected around the world and, most importantly, associated with high culture (Vodkovska-Bagan, 2013:43). Who in the world does not know such writers as Leo Tolstoy or Anton Chekhov, poets: Alexander Pushkin, Anna Akhmatova, composers: Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Sergei Rachmaninoff, or bards: Vladimir Vysotsky and Bulat Okudzhava (Stanchik, 2020:123).

Creating cultural centers in Russian embassies, maintaining the graves of Russian soldiers killed abroad, or teaching programs and grants and scholarships for foreign students and specialists who want to study in Russia are only selected methods of soft impact activities. Mass labor migration favors these policies, especially from countries such as Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which ask Moscow to sponsor new Russian-language schools on their territories (Laruelle, 2015: 16).

Education and science are a very important element of soft power because they support the formation of future foreign economic, political, and military elites sympathetic to the state that helped educate them (Pleskhanova, 2018). Universities form part of a network of transnational influence and may share the same values. Hence, according to UNESCO data from 2014, there were more than 170,000 foreign students studying in Russia, 30% of whom were students from former USSR republics (Moose, 2017: 572).

In turn, the media, including television and radio stations, newspapers, and Internet portals, are completely dependent on and controlled by the authorities, hence their messages are characterized by political elements, propaganda, ambiguity, and half-truths. The Russian information network is formed by the large media company Russia Today (RT), the radio station Voice of Russia, the All-Russian State Television and Radio Company, the National Media Group, and Gazprom Media Holding. The media platform is formed by Sputnik. RIA Novosti Agency covers 45 countries and broadcasts in 14 languages. RT broadcasts information and commentary about what is happening in the world around the clock, which are available on cable, satellite, and online. It broadcasts in Russian, English, Arabic, and Spanish. In the CIS area the programs are broadcast in Russian. Since 2007, the daily *Rosiyskaya Gazeta* has additionally published a monthly magazine with a circulation of over 3 million copies. Most daily newspapers are also published in electronic, English language

version (Moose, 2017: 573). However, there are still stations, such as the reactivated Radio Sputnik, whose main task is disinformation and manipulation - pillars of hard power (Wielopolska-Szymura, 2017: 182).

The Orthodox Church, which is an important element of national identity and an excellent tool for the exercise of power, is in fact its moral and spiritual legitimization. The idea of Moscow's existence as the Third Rome and heir to the imperial, cultural and spiritual mission of the ancient Romans and Byzantium is still alive in Russia, hence the authorities often resort to religious arguments and support themselves on the Orthodox Church in the implementation of their actions (Moose, 2017: 570).

In order to effectively use soft tools, since 2004 Russia has been developing the activities of NGOs, especially those with links to foreign networks. One of the pro-government foundations is the Anna S. B. Lozinski Foundation for Public Diplomacy, which was established in 2010. One of the pro-government foundations is the A. A. Foundation for Public Diplomacy.

A. Gorchakov and the Russian Council for International Association, and in 2012. Historical Memory Foundation, all of which are manifestations of the significant effort the Russian government is making to use soft power resources (Moose, 2017: 571; Wlodkowska, 2010: 65).

How do soft tools affect Russian society? Generally speaking, it can be said that it is extremely resistant to external soft power. Western cultural patterns, led by same-sex marriages or consent to the adoption of children by mono-gender couples, are difficult to adopt in Russia. The Russian president, in an interview with the Financial Times in June 2019, stated that Russia "does not have a problem with LGBT people," indeed anyone can be happy, but this "cannot obscure the culture, traditions and traditional family values of millions of people who are the heart of the population," - he argued. The nurturing of family values stems directly from the strong traditional pattern of women's upbringing, which is alien to gender ideology, and this holds back moral change in Russia by at least a generation .

Generalizing, the foreign policy of the Russian Federation is based on the principle of stick and carrot (Newnham, 2011). In this simple scheme, the stick is hard means of influence, such as military and economic aspects. The carrot, on the other hand, is diplomacy, culture, mass media (both traditional and digital), language and the church, which are soft tools of influence, but which are an excellent complement to the former, and in fact are nowadays decisive for the degree to which a country's foreign policy goals are achieved (Skrabacz, 2020: 103).

2. The change in bilateral relations caused by the armed invasion of Ukraine

Evaluating the mutual relations between Russia and Austria, it is worth starting with a broader statement concerning the relations of the Federation with the European Union and with its individual states, as these contacts should be definitely distinguished.

Characterizing relations between Russia and the European Union, they could be described as an ambivalence of attitudes. On the one hand, both the EU and Russia regarded each other as important partners, especially in trade, while on the other hand they treated each other with a great deal of distrust (Leonard, Popescu, 2007). In Europe, the Federation was and is perceived as an unstable, unpredictable state, not conforming to European democratic standards, and currently violating all the rules of international and legal order (Olszewski, 2011: 58). In Russia, on the other hand, the EU is perceived as a rival entering the sphere of Russian interests and trying to push it out of its traditional areas of influence. The greatest threat and the most difficult opponent to neutralize in the West is traditionally NATO, which is treated in Moscow as a tool of American policy (Kuczynski, 2009: 157). Hence, for years Russia has been pursuing a conscious policy of neglecting and weakening the image of the Pact, which was manifested, according to Grzegorz Kuczyński, by the appointment of the anti-Western, controversial populist Dimitri Rogozin as Russia's representative to NATO in January 2008 (Kuczyński, 2009: 160). This was a demonstration of the low importance Moscow attaches to the existing structures of cooperation with the North Atlantic Alliance. A few years later, Russia suggested that after Ambassador Alexander Grushko completed his mission, it would downgrade its representation to NATO and would not send a high-ranking diplomat to Brussels because under current conditions the work of Russia's representative to the Alliance could not be as effective as before (Kommiersant, 2018). Attitude towards NATO The Russian demands to Ukraine to demilitarise the country and to remain neutral are a perfect illustration of this.

Turning to the formation of relations with individual European states, including Austria, it is worth noting that in bilateral contacts Moscow enjoyed a much stronger position than in relation to the community of countries appearing together in the form of the EU (Kuczynski, 2009: 159). Hence, in international politics Russia has always tried to take advantage of the division of views between partners. Instead of multilateral cooperation, the Federation was mainly interested in building bilateral relations in which it could dictate terms to weaker partners, as exemplified by its bilateral relations with Germany or France (Oldeberg, 2010). It is obvious that the Russian military incursion into Ukraine has dramatically changed this

situation, although it should also be noted that EU states do not agree on the scope and size of sanctions imposed on the Russian side (Żukrowska, 2020: 155).

When analyzing bilateral relations between Russia and Austria, it is worth conventionally dividing them into two time periods: the first - until the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and the second - during its duration. Starting with the characteristics of relations between these countries in the first period, it is worth signaling that the country was included in the group of pragmatists friendly to Russia, along with such countries as Belgium, France, and Portugal. This meant that they wanted to maintain at least correct relations with Russia, wanting to reap economic gains over political and social objections (Skrabacz, 2020: 106).

Austria itself was keen to maintain good relations with Russia for a number of reasons. One of them is the status of a perpetually neutral state, proclaimed by an internal constitutional act in October 1955.

International law speaks of two forms of neutrality: martial, or temporary, and perpetual, or permanent. A perpetually neutral state undertakes never to use armed force against other states or to make any international commitments that could draw it into armed conflict.

To what extent Austria's choice of the neutral option was a sovereign decision and to what extent it was the result of Soviet influence is still unclear.

The consequences of Austria's choice of perpetual neutrality include remaining outside alliances and military organizations, a prohibition on making its territory available for foreign military bases, and an obligation to defend its neutrality. In Austria, this policy is referred to as the "peace and neutrality policy". It determines certain aspects of domestic policy and defense policy. Austria's neutrality was thus one of the resultants of the arrangement of relations between East and West (Konieczka, 1998: 8-9).

This balancing between East and West is a characteristic of Austria's foreign policy. On the one hand, it tries to be close to NATO, a tangible example of which was its participation in the Partnership for Peace programme and in the NATO peacekeeping mission in Bosnia within the framework of IFOR, while on the other hand, the Austrian authorities tried at all costs to avoid irritations with Russia. Russia, in turn, was not so much interested in maintaining Austrian neutrality as in prohibiting the stationing of foreign troops on neutral territory, as is the case, for example, in Poland or the Baltic states.

Maintaining neutrality status was also a condition for Austria's accession to the European Union in 1995, in which Austria often takes on the role of championing Russian

interests. An example of this is the use of an informal meeting of EU defense ministers in September 2007 to criticize Poland and the Czech Republic for adopting the U.S. missile shield, which conflicted with Russian interests (Konieczka, 1998: 37). While pursuing such a pragmatic policy towards Russia, Austria is focused on developing business interests consisting primarily of domestic bank activity and aspirations to be a regional hub for Russian gas, as the country has a Central European Gas Hub that receives about 57 bcm of gas annually, of which as much as 47 bcm is from Russia. This is roughly a third of Russian blue fuel exports to Europe. The involvement of the Austrian company OMV in the Nord Stream 2 project and the partnership with Gazprom should not be overlooked either. It is also worth mentioning that many Austrian politicians are associated with Russian companies, such as even Karin Kneissl, foreign minister from 2017-2019, who was nominated to the board of directors of the Russian company Rosneft. Her affection for Russia is evidenced by the fact that she invited Vladimir Putin to her wedding in 2018 while she was still in the government, which was widely reported in the political world, especially in the face of the annexation of Crimea and sanctions against Russia applied by EU countries, as well as commenting on political events on RT television (formerly Russia Today), financed and managed by the Russian government, which, according to critics, deals mainly with global disinformation on current world events (Euractiv, 2021).

Coming back to the mainstream of considerations, not only political relations have been successful with Russia, but also business relations, as the Federation is an interesting destination for many foreign investments. Some of Austria's largest companies such as OMV (oil and gas), Strabag (construction), Doppelmayr / Garaventa (world market leader in cable car systems) or Raiffeisen (finance) have been deeply involved in Russia for years. In November 2016, Russia's ambassador to Austria emphasized in an interview "excellent contacts with Austrian companies" and noted that none of the approximately 1,200 Austrian companies operating in Russia wanted to sever ties with his country, and a number of them actually intensified their activities and cooperation with Russian partners (Weidinger, Schmid and Krekó, 2017: 12).

When describing these bilateral trade contacts, the politician had in mind the situation after Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014. And although Austria officially condemned this action as illegal under international law and supported the sanctions imposed by the EU on Russia, in reality it was the first to try to undermine their regime. Key mainstream political figures have visited Russia numerous times over the past few years, and many Russian politicians have been hosted in Vienna. In its summary of 2015, the Russian

embassy noted the "high intensity of Russian-Austrian political, economic and cultural contacts", mentioning 28 "major" Russian delegations from various political fields visiting Vienna during the year. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov visited Vienna six times in 2015 to attend multilateral negotiations on Iran and Syria, also taking the opportunity to hold bilateral talks with his Austrian counterpart Sebastian Kurz and President Heinz Fischer. The Russian Embassy in Vienna noted that relations between Russia and Austria are "evolving positively" and are characterized by "stability and predictability" (Weidinger, Schmid and Krekó, 2017: 16), which meant that Russia has a decisive influence on the Austrian political and business world, influencing these circles primarily with soft instruments. Another axis of Russian interest was the NGOs and think tanks appearing in the Austrian public space. Examples include the Suvorov Institute in Vienna and the Center for Continental Cooperation, which receive funding from Russian governmental entities (Weidinger, Schmid and Krekó, 2017: 15).

International observers assessing Russia-Austria relations predicted that if the national-conservative Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), which is strongly Eurosceptic, wins the next parliamentary elections, Russia's influence in Austria will grow even more. In elections dated October 15, 2017, the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) won and formed a coalition government precisely with the FPÖ. However, in May 2019, "Süddeutsche Zeitung" and "Der Spiegel" published recordings dating back to July 2017 of a meeting between the FPÖ leader and a woman claiming to be a relative of a Russian oligarch, who allegedly offered to help her obtain state contracts in exchange for his party's support of an Austrian tabloid in which the woman was to invest. The existence of an association set up to accept donations to the FPÖ in circumvention of existing laws was also discussed. In the ensuing situation, Chancellor Sebastian Kurz ruled out the possibility of further cooperation with the FPÖ leader serving as vice chancellor in his government and led to his resignation (Reuters, 2019). This example indicates how strong Russian influence was in various areas of social and political life in Austria, especially among members of far-right parties with anti-American and Eurosceptic views, while with a strong pro-Russian tinge.

One more detail is worth noting. Many EU countries have noted the intense threat of Russian information warfare, which intensified especially during the conflict with Ukraine in its first period. Meanwhile, Austria was silent on the subject. Although officially Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz supported the EU sanctions imposed on Russia after the annexation of Crimea, at the same time he hoped for progress, including a reduction in

Russian support for separatists in Donbass, that would allow the restrictions to be gradually reduced.

Another is the decades-long treatment of Austria as a "center for Russian spies," and Vienna in particular, as the capital of a neutral country at the confluence of East and West, home to several international organizations, including the UN, OPEC, and the OSCE. The city is therefore a traditional site for spy exchanges and a hotspot for intelligence activities. A tangible example of this was the 2011 revelation of a pair of Russian spies with Austrian identity documents who had been recruiting informants and obtaining secret EU and NATO documents for over 20 years (Kublik, 2012). Another spy scandal erupted in November 2018. This time the spy turned out to be a 70-year-old Austrian army colonel who had been working for the Kremlin for two decades. The news was released to the media by Chancellor Sebastian Kurz himself, stating that "Russian espionage in Europe is unacceptable and will be exterminated" (Wiech, 2018) and on this practically the matter was closed, which did not weigh on mutual relations for long.

Thus, summarizing the mutual relations between the two states, it can be assumed that in the period after the annexation of Crimea and before the armed invasion of Ukraine, they were primarily political in nature. This is due to Austria's historical role even during the Cold War as an East-West link and its status as a neutral state. Despite the disintegration of the bipolar world, Austria was still willing to act as an intermediary in order to maintain an appropriate balance between Russia and the EU member states without losing sight of its own interests. These interests were particularly evident in the economic sphere, due to the fact that Austria is home to Europe's largest gas hub, which brings benefits to oil companies, banks and many other businesses that depend on positive relations with its powerful neighbour.

The personnel changes on the Austrian political scene in December 2021, resulting from the corruption scandal and the departure from politics of Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and several other leading politicians, coincided with the increasing tension between Russia and Ukraine. The new Austrian Chancellor, the former Minister of the Interior Karl Nehammer, immediately after taking office, expressed his support for the launch of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, among other things, noting that this decision cannot be conditioned by Russian-Ukrainian relations. He motivated his opinion by concerns for the energy security of not only Austria, but the entire European Union (Rzeczpospolita, 2021). Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg added that a pipeline that is built and not launched will be "like a car without an engine" that will go nowhere.

A change in the position of Austrian politicians occurred a few days before the armed invasion, which was expressed by Chancellor Nehammer, who stated that the package of sanctions prepared by the EU in the event of a Russian attack on Ukraine would also include measures against the pipeline and its certification, and stressed the need for European solidarity in sanctions against the Russian aggressor (Gazeta Prawna, 2022).

In addition, the Austrian Chancellor commented on the fact of the armed invasion of Ukraine by saying that the Kremlin is unilaterally responsible for starting the war and for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Russian troops on Ukrainian population and territory. This statement did not escape the attention of the authorities in Moscow, who quickly reacted to both the head of government and the foreign minister's statement about the demolition of the European security architecture. The Russian government reproached the Austrians for the fact that the Red Army "paid a high price for the 'liberation of Austrian territory,' resulting in the deaths of more than 26,000 Soviet soldiers," which it linked to the Communists' imposition of Austria's neutrality in postwar European history (News, 2022). The Russians also do not like the fact that the Austrians do not remain impartial to the current political and military situation (for example, the National Security Council of Austria recommended that the government exclude Russia from the SWIFT system), which they stated: "raises serious doubts about the quality of Austrian neutrality, which has been clearly declining and losing ground in recent times" and will be remembered to them for the future. In retort to these accusations, the Austrian Foreign Ministry stated that "Austria remains neutral, but cannot remain so when the freedom, sovereignty and territorial integrity of another country is threatened" (News, 2022).

Thus, when assessing the mutual relations between Russia and Austria, one can see the significant turn Austria has taken in recent weeks, especially since the beginning of 2022. The events in Ukraine, especially the armed aggression that has been taking place there for several weeks, have caused Austria to unite with the countries of the European Union in sanctions against Russia. Will relations between the two countries return to the earlier scenario in the "post-war" perspective? This question cannot be answered logically and reasonably at the moment.

Conclusions

1. Russia's foreign policy is based primarily on military and economic potential, which are hard instruments of influence in international relations. The juggling of energy

supply contracts and control of pipelines, as well as the display of military power, are the primary hard tools used to advance national interests.

2. The Russian political leadership pursues a very flexible and pragmatic foreign policy, using its political, military and economic resources ad hoc and opportunities as they arise. In its international policy Russia emphasizes building good bilateral (rather than multilateral) relations, taking advantage of economically and militarily weaker neighbors, as in the case of the CIS states, or prestigious partners, such as France, Germany, or Austria.
3. Austria is an ideal partner for Russia to pursue its national interests on many levels. On the one hand, Austria, as a member of the EU, is a window to the European world, being at the same time a guardian of Russian interests in this environment. On the other hand, as a neutral country that is not a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, it does not irritate Russia with its military involvement.
4. In its bilateral contacts with Austria, the Federation relies primarily on political and economic partnership, caring for a positive image of its political elites and sympathizing with and supporting anti-American and Eurosceptic movements. Economic leverage allows the Russians to influence the Austrian economy by creating financial and social ties.
5. The location of representative offices of many prestigious international institutions in Vienna makes Russian intelligence activity particularly intense. This was exemplified by the spy scandals that were publicized from time to time, but which the Austrian government reacted to with stoic calm, downplaying the events and not giving any opportunity for the deterioration of mutual relations.
6. the armed aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 was viewed negatively by the Austrian government, which stood in solidarity with other EU countries in imposing sanctions on Russia.
7. Austria's firm stance against the war in Ukraine was clearly perceived by Russia as undermining its neutrality. In return, the Kremlin makes clear suggestions that this will have far-reaching consequences in the mutual relations between these states.

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