

ACTION EUR-00

INFO LOG-00 AMAD-00 INL-00 PDI-00 UTED-00 VCI-00 H-00
 TEDE-00 INR-00 IO-00 LAB-01 VCIE-00 DCP-00 GIWI-00
 DOHS-00 IRM-00 NCTC-00 BBG-00 R-00 ECA-00 DRL-00
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P 140727Z JUN 06
 FM AMEMBASSY VIENNA
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3842
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RELEASED IN FULL

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DEPT FOR EUR/AGS, INR/EU, AND EUR/PPD FOR LISBETH KEEFE

OSD FOR COMMANDER CHAFFEE

WHITEHOUSE FOR NSC/WEUROPE

E.O. 12958: N/A
 TAGS: KPAO, AU, OPRC

SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: June 13, 2006

 EU Solves Crisis over Turkey at Last Moment

1. It was touch-and-go once again for Ankara regarding its EU membership ambitions, semi-official daily "Wiener Zeitung" writes like all Austrian media: Until Monday afternoon it was unclear whether the EU member states at a meeting of foreign ministers in Luxembourg yesterday would agree on opening formal accession talks. However, after tough negotiations and a number of compromise proposals from the Austrian EU Presidency, Cyprus - which had demanded official recognition from Ankara first and threatened to block negotiations -- abandoned its last-ditch objection to Turkish membership. In the end the EU succeeded in brokering a late deal, which allowed the foreign ministers to conclude talks on "science and research" -- the first chapter of membership talks with Ankara.

 Austria to Bring up Guantanamo Suicides during Bush Visit

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
 REVIEW AUTHORITY: JOHN L MILLS
 DATE/CASE ID: 25 APR 2011 200908726

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2. According to ORF radio early morning news "Morgenjournal," Austria as EU President has said it will make closure of the US prison camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, a key issue at talks with US President George W. Bush when he is in Vienna for the EU-US summit later this month. The radio quotes Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik as saying the camp is an "anomaly in US commitments to the rule of law."

Likewise, centrist daily "Die Presse" says the suicides at Guantanamo Bay prison have increased pressure on Austrian Chancellor and EU Council President Wolfgang Schuessel to bring up the issue of the camp during the visit to Austrian of US President George Bush next week. With Germany, Britain and Denmark calling for the prison to be closed down, Schuessel hardly has a choice but to call for a clear statement from the US President on the matter, the daily says.

Fortress Vienna

3. Like all Austrian media, ORF TV in its late night news "ZiBII" on June 12, reports on the upcoming "24-hour visit" of US President George Bush to Austria, where he will be meeting with top EU officials during the US-EU summit. Security measures for the US presidential visit are "massive, and tighter than ever before" and will turn Vienna into a veritable "fortress," ORF TV says. Secret service officials have been in the Austrian capital for weeks to make sure potential threats are kept at a minimum, according to the "ZiBII." For Austria's security forces, the visit is a tremendous challenge, too. Furthermore, the situation at the US Embassy in Vienna is tense, and even ordinary pictures being taken of the building bringing the Embassy security chief onto the scene in view of the imminent US presidential visit, ORF TV comments.

New Passports to Be Issued as of Friday

4. All Austrian media report that the Austrian authorities will begin issuing new passports containing digital photos beginning Friday, June 16. According to independent provincial daily "Salzburger Nachrichten," the photo will be scanned and printed in the passport. In addition, the documents will contain chips with the passport holders' data. These measures correspond with EU requirements and will make the documents less more secure with regard to

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forgery. Another, future step could be the inclusion of finger prints in the documents, the daily says, and adds that after applications have been filed, processing and delivering the new passports by mail will take up to five working days. The "Salzburger Nachrichten" believes a run on passport issuing facilities can be expected during the summer months.

 Bawag: State Liability Very Expensive for Taxpayers

5. Centrist daily "Die Presse" reports on the high costs - up to 300 euros - that each Austrian taxpayer will have to

fork out for the rescue of the Bawag. The OeBG' s situation is disastrous, experts agree, which is the reason why the union cannot bear the financial burden of the 900 million euros state liability all by itself. Therefore, the federal government - and thus the taxpayer - will have to pay the bill. Former boss of the PSK works council Volker Harwanegg said that Bawag as well as OeGB were "a shambles." He had already warned five years ago that the then-Bawag boss Elsner intended to dismantle the PSK "like a Christmas tree," whereupon Elsner had sued him. Meanwhile, OeGB Vice President Karl Klein demonstrated optimism, asserting that the OeGB could get its finances in shape using its own resources and adding, interestingly enough, that he and his colleagues had known about the OeGB debts of more than two billion euros for months, writes the daily.

 Awkward Proximity to Iran's Intelligence Services

6. Austrian media report on the charges leveled against Gert-Rene Polli, the boss of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and the Fight Against Terrorism (BVT). Greens parliamentarian Peter Pilz called Polli a "security risk" and demanded his dismissal, writes independent daily "Salzburger Nachrichten" Central to the charges is Polli's alleged proximity to Iranian intelligence services and his role in the sale of 800 Steyr-Mannlicher guns to Iran . Officially, the guns were intended for the fight against drug dealing - however, there was a danger from the beginning that "the guns could land in the hands of Iraqi terrorists," claimed Pilz. Polli traveled to Iran twice in 2005 and 2006 and met representatives of the Iranian Ministry for Security and afterwards demanded the data of all Iranian asylum seekers from the Federal Asylum

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Office without being able to explain why he needed the data. UNCLASSIFIED
It is suspected, although not proven, that the data was
subsequently given to the Iranian Embassy, reports the
daily.

Guantanamo Suicides Not PR Stunt

7. The US State Department has sought to distance itself from comments by a top official that the suicides of three Guantanamo Bay detainees last Saturday were a good public relations stunt. Meanwhile, UN special rapporteur on torture, Austrian human rights expert Manfred Nowak stressed on ORF radio's early morning news "Morgenjournal" he hopes that "the fact that those people died will be taken seriously enough by the US administration to take action and close down Guantanamo Bay detention facilities as quickly as possible."

According to semi-official daily "Wiener Zeitung," the European Union again emphasized its call to shut down Guantanamo Bay camp. The daily quotes EU Foreign Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner as stressing the inmates' death reinforced the EU's demand for the closure of the prison.

Washington correspondent for centrist daily "Die Presse" Norbert Rief argues that off the record, US officials say they believe the camp's closure is unavoidable. Rief suggests it is only a matter of time until the Americans vacate the highly controversial prison. It would be a symbolic move, similar to the closure of Au Ghraib, says Rief.

Media Commentary on Guantanamo Suiide

8. ORF Washington correspondent Raimund Loew comments on the issue on the radio's morning news, saying the Bush administration is trying to distance itself from yesterday's comments on Guantanamo, "that have caused such massive international outrage. We certainly do not see the suicides as a PR move, emphasized a State Department spokesperson. On the contrary, the United States is seriously concerned," Loew explains. He adds that "no one in Washington wants to defend the commander of Guantanamo Bay's labeling of the triple suicide as an act of warfare, either. A Republican Senator, powerful chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee Arlen Specter, urged for trials to finally be started. After all, many inmates are being detained simply because of the

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most dubious, hearsay allegations. In the face of the UNCLASSIFIED

increasingly harsh international reactions, a discussion of Guantanamo seems to be slowly getting off the ground in the US as well."

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