

# 2020/4/2 (EN): Rauchensteiner

## The ministers of defense of the Second Republic - a series

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*Georg Prader*

In this series, the life and work of the ÖVP-politician Georg Prader is examined, especially during his era as Austrian minister of defense (1964-1970). On 8<sup>th</sup> January 1969, ordered by Minister Prader, there was a meeting at the National Defense Academy, dealing with the progress report on the deployment of the Austrian Armed Forces during the so-called „Czech-Crisis“ the year before. Due to an order by the minister, this report had only been submitted to some officers, and only some parts which concerned and had to interest them. Prader had declared not to agree with a whole number of statements in this report. He called some passages, which, in his opinion, were aberrating, „theses“, and above all, he denied that the possibilities for a deployment of the army had strikingly suffered from the measures of streamlining and of curtailment of 1968.

He also said that it was a misjudgement if people thought that the lack of a mobilization on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1968, because „it had never been the case that the active army had been considered not sufficiently suitable for fulfilling the accruing tasks“. So obviously, everything was fine. On the other hand, nothing could be swept under the carpet permanently. What could be read in the report could be confidently understood as a balance sheet on the Armed Forces after 13 years of their existence and after four years of Georg Prader's ministership. After Ferdinand Graf and Karl Schleinzer, Prader was the third minister of defense of the Second Republic. Again, one could say, though due to different reasons than in 1961: The new minister had to take over a „construction site“. What made his start difficult were a by no means self-contained officers' corps, an organisation which would not really work despite the army reform of the year before, and, above all, a deficient budget, which was not compatible neither with the organisation nor with the demands on the army. It took a long time to digest the shock of 1968 - it was all over town that not everything had gone well during the „Czech-Crisis“. It also was not very useful when Minister Prader repeated time and again that the defense concept was absolutely proper, that weaknesses would be eliminated, that fortifications would be upgraded, and that the transport capacities of the heavy vehicles would be increased... this could not really appease. Much more attention was given to the fact that a so-called „defense billion“ was decided on, and that the federal chancellor himself entered the „battle“ for the budget. For the figures were clear. Although, in absolute figures, the budget was increased from 1958 to 1969 from 2 billions Schilling to 3,7 billion Schilling, this difference had to be expended for increased payroll costs mainly. During the same period, the allotment of the budget had sunk from 5,13% to 3,98%. That was relevant, and Prader knew it. He had known it already for long, and was confronted with the demand for 7% of the total budget, which he considered justified but did not want to be published. As both modernness and punch of the army in the course of the „Czech-Crisis“ had left so much to be desired, the army was supposed to become capable of transact the most urgent new acquisitions by means of special financing. The list of wishes was endless, and the demonstrations against it were unavoidable. Actually, only one third of the consented means reached the army. After the loss of the absolute majority, going into opposition became unavoidable for the ÖVP.

Prader's period as minister of defense ended on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1970. He became defense spokesperson of his party for some years, but thought that the ÖVP would be in opposition for only a short time. After the National Council elections of 1971 which left the SPÖ with the absolute majority, and finally in 1975, when he was not nominated defense spokesperson, he was definitely out. Although he remained associated with the Armed Forces, he also stuck with his previous alignment, and both confidently and vehemently criticized the army reform of the 1970ies as well as the development of the army. Thus, the dissociations unavoidably increased. He was a representative in the National Council until 1979 and represented his party in the Defense Council.

This also ended on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1979. One and a half years later, on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1980, Prader suffered from his first heart attack, and recuperated from it to some degree. On 16<sup>th</sup> March 1985, he had the second heart attack, and some minutes later, he died. He was buried in the main cemetery of St. Pölten. Meanwhile, Prader's work has become blurred and are limited to some photographs in various „ancestral portrait galleries“. One has to go to St. Pölten or Langenzersdorf to find streets with his name or a stela with the bronze head of Prader. There, however, one will not find the minister, but only „Schurl“.

