

Jörg Haider - Death of a politician

"The governor of Carinthia, Jörg Haider is dead"

This somewhat bizarre headline has definitely secured its place in Austrian news history.

Besides the tragedy at a human level, knowing that politicians don't carry a license protecting them from demise it leaves you desperately trying to pin-point the weirdness of this news. And the strange sensation garrison these words.

One explanation might be that this happened just two weeks after the elections - in the midst of the coalition talks with concerns ranking high of Haider and his right-wing department landing yet another coalition-coup as seen in 2000. Both of the countries right-wing parties together, Haider's former FPÖ and his newly formed BZÖ, have managed to generate voters favours accounting for 27 per cent of the total voting outcome. Just one percent less than the Christian Democrat Party with a winning majority of 29 per cent. If this does not spill the beans on a country's „mental“ state.

What Haider has managed once more is leaving the country in conflict. This time round on whether to feel mourning, relief or indifference. A dichotomy that seems to have hit on the media the most for its obligation to deal with the moral question of the his obituary in this particular case. No doubt he might have been an earnest, hard working man had only his motif and cause would have proved of human integrity.

What are the ethical implications to call a dead man a good man knowing of his strictly selected love and respect towards his own kind of which he made no secret of.

It is almost painful to follow the media coverage; how the ORF (Austrian Broadcasting) is dutifully broadcasting special reports, permitting their national branch covering Haider's hometurff province Carinthia changing its entire programme for the day; liberal paper Der Standard (web edition) apologising for the missing blog-spot complementing the article since due to a mass of impiously responses to this news they saw themselves forced not to; editor's hairsplitting discussions over the term neo-fascism with regards to his policies; reports about mourners in Carinthia putting on candles for a man who was one of them; columnists airing their disgust over the legend he has already been made overnight; voices from the press across the globe.

Austrian news agency APA putting together a medley of the most outrageous quotes he delivered in his career that have given Austria a face to its name. A name that still has precisely this right-wing connotation clung to its sound.

What exactly is the catch-22 for the media: Duty before ethics? Or ethics before death?

How to pay tribute to a man who perhaps did not deserve one without saying it out loud.

What has been elegantly left out is Haider's one and only positive function he occupied – although subconsciously – in his position. He epitomized the opportunity for debate and reflection on the true identity of this country and its intended future image. He posed a challenge for the country to grapple with its own history and trauma that is being passed on from generation to generation since the end of WWII. But this never happened. Looking at the country's post-election situation at this very moment where politicians are swamped with forming a hopefully righteous government - one finds it hard to believe that they are able to grapple with the current political challenges to start with.

A similar inertness hovers in the air; that same old game of complacency rather than rolling up the sleeves and rethink the voting system – for example.

Living in this country feels quite insular in fact. All the more when a paper like the center-right Die Presse prints headlines such as „The cliché has returned: Austria as Nazi-country“. Would the word cliché not strike the perfect chord to finally demand for clarification; for mature discussions without being ashamed or having the finger pointed at - in order to enable this country to get over its „victim“ trauma and a chance for a new beginning. Finally.

The current discourse reduced to the literature section in a couple of national daily quality papers is not enough: so far it's only authors desperately solving their conflict of loving their grandfather, the Nazi.

If politicians – elected by a nation in the hope of bringing about change are not able to do so, then what happened to the so-called fourth estate of the press? It should start to exercise its duty to the public rather than acting dutiful. How else to get rid of the so-called cliché?