

Austria Calls Iran "Axis of Peace"  
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*Austrian President Thomas Klestil said, "(We) recognize the fact that the Islamic Republic of Iran is the axis of peacemaking and friendship in the world and the region."*

TEHRAN, Jan. 27—Austrian President Thomas Klestil met with Iranian leaders President Khatami, the Grand Ayatollah Khamenei, Majlis Speaker Mehdi Karroubi, Head of the Expediency Council Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani as well as Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi in a visit between the two nations in a visit to Iran Jan. 25-27 that the Austrian President called, "his trip to Iran is one of the most fruitful visits he has ever had."

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei hoped for broader, more deep-rooted ties between Iran and Austria, IRNA reported.

In a meeting with visiting Austrian President Thomas Klestil here Monday, Ayatollah Khamenei praised Austria's independent stands in dealing with international developments as well as that country's appropriate attitude towards Muslims living in Austria.

Referring to the numerous free and fair elections held in Iran following the victory of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khamenei

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emphasized, "Before the Islamic Revolution, the despotic regime ruling in Iran, which was backed by the United States and the United Kingdom, never permitted the Iranian nation to have a real election.

But we have staged 23 free and fair elections in the revolution's 25-year life." The leader reiterated that the American and British governments, which claim to be the standard-bearers of democracy today, used to be the staunch supporters of the previous despotic regime in Iran, "therefore the Iranian people are right in not believing such claims by London and Washington".

Referring to the negative propaganda of the Americans and the Zionists, as well as their influential mass media against the Iranian realities, he added, "The main reason why they are so serious in their negative propaganda against us is because the Iranian nation and the Islamic Republic of Iran will never yield to US hegemony once again."

The leader noted that the existence of genuine democracy in Iran is an undeniable fact and one needs to have a comprehensive outlook in analyzing the current situation in Iran.

"Aggrandizing the shortcomings observed in the countries opposed to US hegemony in the Zionist mass media is a well known phenomenon, but in Iran the developments are all based on the laws," he said.

Ayatollah Khamenei further emphasized, "The Iranian nation has been faced with real problems throughout the past 25 years such as war, but none of them has been able to force our nation and politicians to retreat from confronting the enemies."

Referring to the United States as the perpetrator of "evil deeds, aggression and hatred in the whole world", Ayatollah Khamenei reiterated, "Due to its illogical moves in Afghanistan and particularly in Iraq, the US administration is now facing numerous crises and these crises will not leave the Americans alone."

During the meeting, which was also attended by President Mohammad Khatami, the Austrian president referred to his great enthusiasm for visiting the leader of the Islamic Revolution, adding that his trip to Iran is one of the most fruitful visits he has ever had.

Klestil added that the largest economic delegation that has ever accompanied an Austrian president is now in Tehran, proving the importance Vienna attaches to ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

"As against the US government's stands, we not only do not consider Iran as a part of the axis of evil, but recognize the fact that the Islamic Republic of Iran is the axis of peacemaking and friendship in the world and the region," he emphasized.

Austrian President Thomas Klestil, on the first day of his visit to the Islamic Republic, hailed 'historical, friendly and deep-rooted' ties between the two



Austrian President Thomas Klestil, 27 Jan. 04

countries, saying his trip was aimed at accelerating their expansion.

On Monday, a joint economic forum was held with the participation of President Klestil and Khatami as well as heads of commerce and economic chambers of the two countries.

Klestil also hailed the progress of reforms in Iran, and said the European public opinion is closely watching the developments of reforms in Iran.

On Tuesday, Klestil was officially seen off by his Iranian counterpart President Mohammad Khatami and a number of high-ranking officials of the two countries.

During the ceremony, the national anthems of Iran and Austria were played and the two Presidents reviewed the guard of honor.

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