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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN REACTION TO GERMAN TV PROGRAM'S ATTACKS
ON SIMON WIESENTHAL

1. (U) SUMMARY: A GERMAN TV PROGRAM HEAVILY CRITICAL OF
THE AUSTRIAN NAZI-HUNTER SIMON WIESENTHAL HAS BEEN
REJECTED AS SENSATIONALIST JOURNALISM BY MOST AUSTRIAN
MEDIA COMMENTATORS AND SEVERAL PUBLIC FIGURES. QUOTING
DOJ/OSI'S ELI ROSENBAUM, THE TV PROGRAM STRESSED
WIESENTHAL'S "ACQUITTAL" OF FORMER AUSTRIAN PRESIDENT
WALDHEIM. WALDHEIM REJECTED ALLEGATIONS OF HIS COMPLICITY
IN WAR CRIMES RAISED IN THE PROGRAM AND INDICATED HE IS
CONSIDERING SUING THE TV STATION. END SUMMARY.

TV PROGRAM

2. (U) THE GERMAN TV NEWS PROGRAM "PANORAMA" (ON THE

DECLASSIFIED AND RELEASED BY
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
SOURCES METHODS EXEMPTION 3B2B
NAZI WAR CRIMES DISCLOSURE ACT
DATE 2001 2007

NAZI WAR CRIMES DISCLOSURE ACT
2000

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PUBLIC TELEVISION ARD CHANNEL) AIRED A REPORT ON FEBRUARY 8 ATTACKING AUSTRIAN NAZI-HUNTER AND FORMER CONCENTRATION CAMP INMATE SIMON WIESENTHAL'S RECORD IN DISCLOSING NAZI WAR CRIMES AND TRACKING WAR CRIMINALS. THE PROGRAM, PRODUCED BY GERMAN JOURNALIST VOLKER STEINHOFF AND AMERICAN JOURNALIST JOHN GOETZ, QUOTED -- AMONG OTHERS -- U.S. OFFICE OF SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS' ELI ROSENBAUM AND FORMER MOSSAD (ISRAELI SECURITY SERVICE) CHIEF ISSER HAREL. THEY REPORTEDLY ACCUSED WIESENTHAL OF HAVING FOUND FEWER THAN TEN WAR CRIMINALS, AS OPPOSED TO WIESENTHAL'S CLAIM TO HAVE TRACKED DOWN 1,200. MOREOVER, ROSENBAUM

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REITERATED HIS ATTACK AGAINST WIESENTHAL, ALREADY MADE PUBLIC IN ROSENBAUM'S 1993 BOOK "BETRAYAL," FOR SUPPRESSING DOCUMENTS WHICH HE SAID SHOWED THAT FORMER AUSTRIAN PRESIDENT **KURT WALDHEIM** HAD PARTICIPATED IN THE MURDER OF A BRITISH SOLDIER AND HAD BEEN A MEMBER OF THE SPECIAL NAZI MILITARY UNIT, THE "SA."

AUSTRIAN REACTION

3. (U) THE ATTACKS ON WIESENTHAL WERE VEHEMENTLY REJECTED BY AUSTRIAN MEDIA COMMENTATORS AND PUBLIC FIGURES. IN SEVERAL COMMENTARIES, EDITORIALISTS FROM LEADING NEWSPAPERS (E.G., "DIE PRESSE" AND "DER STANDARD") REJECTED THE ATTACKS ON WIESENTHAL AS SENSATIONALIST JOURNALISM AIMED AT DISCREDITING AN HONORABLE MAN WITH A REMARKABLE RECORD IN INVESTIGATING WAR CRIMINALS. COMMENTARIES ALSO STRESSED THAT THE TV PROGRAM WAS BASED ON ROSENBAUM'S BOOK "BETRAYAL." THE ALLEGATIONS WERE GENERALLY ATTRIBUTED TO RESENTMENT FROM AMERICAN AND ISRAELI JEWISH GROUPS OF WIESENTHAL BECAUSE OF HIS RESTRAINT IN THE WALDHEIM AFFAIR IN THE MID-80'S, WHEN WIESENTHAL DECLARED THAT WALDHEIM WAS A LIAR, BUT NOT A WAR CRIMINAL.

4. (U) THE HEAD OF THE VIENNA JEWISH COMMUNITY, PAUL GROSZ, CHARACTERIZED THE ATTACKS AGAINST WIESENTHAL AS "OLD HATS." ROSENBAUM'S ALLEGATIONS HAVE BEEN "KNOWN FOR SOME TIME, BUT DO NOT CORRESPOND WITH THE GENERAL OPINION" OF WIESENTHAL. THE PRESIDENT OF THE AUSTRO-ISRAELI SOCIETY, CONSERVATIVE MP WALTER SCHWIMMER, SAID THE ALLEGATIONS "ARE NOT WORTH DEALING WITH." FORMER VIENNA MAYOR HELMUT ZILK CHARACTERIZED THE ATTACKS AGAINST WIESENTHAL AS "OLD HAM WHICH ALREADY STINKS." THE HEAD OF THE GERMAN NAZI INVESTIGATING OFFICE IN LUDWIGSBURG, CHIEF PROSECUTOR STREIM, REPORTEDLY ALSO BACKED WIESENTHAL, STRESSING THAT WIESENTHAL HAD GIVEN SEVERAL HUNDRED SUCCESSFUL TIPS IN CONNECTION WITH NAZI CRIMES.

5. (SBU) THE ISRAELI DCM GROSSMAN LIKewise TOLD US THAT THERE WAS NOTHING NEW IN THE ARD BROADCAST, BUT ADDED THAT

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WIESENTHAL HAD INDICATED TWO MONTHS AGO THAT SUCH ATTACKS WOULD BE MADE. GROSSMAN WAS AT A LOSS TO EXPLAIN WHY THE ALLEGATIONS SURFACED NOW, BUT NOTED THAT WIESENTHAL HAD

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"ENEMIES" IN VIENNA AND ALLUDED TO CRITICISM OVER WIESENTHAL'S PROPOSAL FOR A MEMORIAL ON JEWISH SQUARE IN VIENNA.

6. (U) COMMENTING ON THE TV PROGRAM ON WIESENTHAL, FORMER PRESIDENT **KURT WALDHEIM** REFERRED TO THE FINDINGS OF A BRITISH COMMISSION WHICH HAD INVESTIGATED THE WAR CRIME ALLEGATIONS AGAINST HIM. WALDHEIM STRESSED THAT ACCUSATIONS HE HAD BEEN INVOLVED IN THE EXECUTION OF A BRITISH SOLDIER WERE A LIE. WALDHEIM ALSO REITERATED THAT HE HAD NEVER BEEN A MEMBER OF THE SPECIAL NATIONAL SOCIALIST MILITARY UNIT "SA," AND SAID HE WAS CONTEMPLATING SUING ARD TV. WALDHEIM EMPHASIZED WIESENTHAL WAS "A MAN OF ABSOLUTE INTEGRITY" WHO HAD MADE ALL EFFORTS TO INVESTIGATE WAR CRIMES AND TRACE WAR CRIMINALS.

WIESENTHAL

7. (U) THE 88-YEAR-OLD WIESENTHAL, WHO HAS BEEN HOSPITALIZED SINCE LAST WEEK DUE TO CIRCULATORY PROBLEMS, REPORTEDLY REJECTED SIMILAR ALLEGATIONS IN THE GERMAN NEWS MAGAZINE "SPIEGEL." WIESENTHAL STRESSED THAT THE WORK OF HIS LIFE COULD NOT BE DESTROYED BY PEOPLE "WHO THEMSELVES HARDLY EVER DID ANYTHING," WORKING WITH SENSATIONALIST JOURNALISTS. WIESENTHAL ALSO MAINTAINED THAT NEO-NAZIS WOULD BE THE ONLY BENEFICIARIES OF ALL THE NEGATIVE REPORTING ON HIM.

COMMENT

8. (SBU) WHILE WIESENTHAL HAD ALREADY BEEN CRITICIZED IN THE U.S. WHEN ROSENBAUM'S BOOK "BETRAYAL" WAS PUBLISHED IN 1993, THE CHARGES RAISED IN THE "PANORAMA" PROGRAM ARE THE FIRST MAJOR PUBLIC ASSAULT AGAINST WIESENTHAL IN AUSTRIA (AND WE BELIEVE GERMANY) SINCE THE MID-1970'S, WHEN THEN AUSTRIAN CHANCELLOR BRUNO KREISKY ACCUSED WIESENTHAL OF WORKING WITH THE GERMANS IN WWII. WIESENTHAL'S RESTRAINT VIS-A-VIS FORMER PRESIDENT WALDHEIM IN THE MID-EIGHTIES SEEMS TO BE THE FUNDAMENTAL CAUSE OF THE ATTACKS BROADCAST IN THE ARD PROGRAM, ALTHOUGH THE CHARGES COULD ALSO BE

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USED BY THOSE WHO MAY NOT WISH TO SEE WIESENTHAL'S PLANS
FOR A CONFERENCE ON TOLERANCE (WHICH HE ANNOUNCED LAST
FALL AT THE UN) TO SUCCEED. FOR AUSTRIA, THE CONTROVERSY
HAS RESURRECTED UNWELCOME MEMORIES OF THE WALDHEIM AFFAIR.
HUNT

ADMIN
END OF MESSAGE

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