

# A Return to Vienna – and a Return to School

Note:

This was an email I sent out over my mailing list on my return to Austria from exile in eastern Europe and Turkey, updating everyone at the time that I wasn't dead and trying to finally get my residence permit in Austria. I wasn't able to pick it up until I had insurance, and I couldn't get student insurance (the only one I could afford) until I had all my paperwork from the school. I arrived on a Sunday and had until Friday (my last day of being legal in Schengen without the residence permit) to figure everything out. I wrote this up on the Wednesday of the week of my arrival after I got all my paperwork together and before I went out and got the insurance and the permit. This is followed by a quick addendum that was sent on Friday.

2/29/2012

Grüß Gott Alle!

I successfully landed in Vienna from Istanbul last Sunday to return to my quest on becoming legal within Schengen. I had the unfortunate disposition of thinking I could just walk up and get my permit, which immediately led to me tripping over red tape. After untangling it from my feet, I got back up, dusted myself off, and resumed my march forward against the wind, having until Friday to still be legal. Here is an overview of the events that have come to pass since I came back. I never sent out an email about my bureaucratic experience of applying for the permit because, frankly, I was so upset about the whole procedure that I had blocked it out of my mind. Maybe this will give you a small taste of what I've been going through.

I arrived last Sunday (Feb. 25th) because I had to take a German placement test on Monday, so the German Institute I'm attending will know which class to stick me in. I also knew that before I could pick up my permit I would have to get insurance, which now that I was a university student I'm qualified for cheap student insurance. I figured I could take the test Monday morning, figure out the insurance thing Monday night, get the insurance on Tuesday, then pick up the permit at my earliest convenience.

I arrived around 8:20 at the German Institute, walking up the stairs to the second floor to find the hallway empty. I had expected it to be full of students from all over the globe waiting to take the test as well, and I stood there scratching my head for few moments before groaning and slapping my forehead. "GERMAN second floor\*! Doh!" I went up the next set up steps to find the expected congregation of foreign students and let out a sigh of relief.

\*The first floor is the "ground floor" in German, and they start counting at 1 once you go up the first flight of stairs.

The test proctors arrived after a few minutes and we all filed into our respective rooms. They gave us some basic instructions for the test in German and let us loose. The first part was writing, where we were giving a picture and we just had to write something about it in German. It was a pretty

boring picture of a family packing the car for a vacation, and taking damn near the whole house with them. I wrote a bunch of sarcastic comments and turned it in for the second test, which was multiple choice "fill-in-the-blank-for-each-sentence" sort of thing. It started off easy and got tricky enough that I was guessing by the end. After handing that one in I was told to wait outside and come back at about 11:15 for the oral part of the test.

I went out into the hallway, plopped myself down at a table, and grabbed my trusty emergency book and the time flew right by. Eventually my name was called, and I went back into the room and sat down in front of the two women who were looking at me with a mix of excitement and confusion.

"Wo haben Sie Deutsch studiert?" The first one asked me.  
("Where have you studied German?")

"Ich... uh... habe nicht." I replied back.  
("I... uh... haven't.")

This was followed by looks of understanding. "That explains it!" (Or the German equivalent) one of them said. They then explained to me that they were very confused about my German, because I was very understandable but my grammar was all over the place. We discussed further about what to do about which class I should take, because apparently I was too advanced for class 1 but not advanced enough for class 2. During this discussion, whenever I made a grammatical mistake (which was basically the whole time), one of the women looked like she had just gotten slapped in the face, and whenever I corrected myself she would give a sigh of relief like someone just disarmed a bomb in the building. We discussed a little more and I was told to come back Wednesday for more information. I thanked them and left, heading back to the apartment I'm staying at to get my insurance crap in order.

I successfully navigated through the German website to print off the form I needed. After a bit of help I had the thing filled out. My plan for the next day was twofold: my friend who has been helping me with all this crap recently had a bloodtest and wanted me to pick the test results up for her, as she would be at work and was unable to do so. She said I should be able to get the insurance at this place, therefore accomplishing both our needs at once. Sounded great to me and I slept sound on it.

Tuesday rolled around and I got the "permission slip" from my friend and managed to find the health insurance place after getting lost (of course the street I was looking for was actually two streets, one of which was cut in half, and the place I was looking for was on the far end of the third piece of street I managed to find. Oof). I was able to get my friend's results no problem, but after asking two people there about insurance I was unequivocally told that they do NOT do insurance there and I was going to have to go to the main building on the other side of Vienna. I was handed a leaflet with information on it, and I noticed the place closes at 2:30. I also noticed the current time was 2:15. There was no way in hell I was getting there on time, which meant I was going to have to try again tomorrow.

Which would have happened anyway, because upon coming home I noticed a warning boxes in bold letters on the insurance form:

*"ACHTUNG! Ohne Vorlage Ihrer Studienbestätigung und einer Kopie Ihres aktuellen Studienblattes kann Ihr Antrag nicht bearbeitet werden."*

Rough translation: "WARNING! Without your Studienbestätigung and a copy of your Studienblatt, you cannot apply for this insurance!"

I had the same thoughts you're having right now: what the fuck is a Studienbestätigung and a Studienblatt? Asking the Austrian inhabitants I'm staying with yielded no useful results, and digging through my mountain of attained-paperwork-to-date the same. Did the documents I already had fit the requirements for these, or did I need papers that clearly said STUDIENBESTÄTIGUNG and STUDIENBLATT on the top of them? I had no idea and I went to bed that night not quite as soundly.

9:30 Wednesday morning came and I showed up to the "more information" thing at the German Institute and had all the information I needed by 9:35 (the girl there just handed each one of us a piece of paper with our relevant information for showing up the next day). After everyone was handed their slips of paper, I asked the girl about my two mystery documents, and she told me I should already have gotten them in the mail. I wasn't impressed with this answer and to clarify I whipped out my Folder'O'Documents and started going through each possibly-relevant paper.

"Is this a Studienbestätigung or a Studienblatt?"

"No. That's your acceptance letter."

"Okay, then what about this?"

"No, that's information about your online account."

"What about... this?"

So on and so forth.

She eventually got the idea I was going to hound her until I got some useful information and she told me to come up with her to her office. I did just that and she promptly found my Studienbestätigung in a pile of documents on top of some filing cabinets next to the wall. It looked all official with a stamp and a signature on it, so even though I still didn't know what a Studienbestätigung was, it was written clearly across that top and that was good enough for me.

This of course left me with the problem of the Studienblatt. Wondering if I was started to get on her nerves, I asked her about it again and she told me she didn't know about it. I started whipping out papers again (persistence is key!) and asked her to help me read them to see if there was any useful information on them, and lo and behold she found out that I needed to print it off my student account! Of course, my account wasn't activated yet. I was still flirting with the idea of making it to the insurance company on time so I asked her if there were any nearby computers I could use to save me the trouble of having to go back to the apartment and waste valuable time (the insurance company closes at 2:30, remember!).

I was pretty surprised that not only did she say yes, she said I could use her computer behind the desk. So I walked around, sat down, and became a pseudo-employee for a few minutes while I tried to navigate the university website\* in German. Eventually I called her over to see if she could help me and it took her about a minute to get lost in the website herself. It was at this point that I finally felt like I had eaten up enough of her time and space (she needed the computer to work afterall). I got up, thanked her, made a mental note to consider asking her out in the future, and headed out the door back to the apartment where I would have internet access, my attempt at saving time lost.

\*If you have ever tried to navigate a university website, you will know it's damn near impossible even in your

native language.

Back home with time ticking, I started back into the university website and finally found the page I was looking for. I was practically jumping for joy as I filled in first name, middle initial, last name, student number, password, and... PIN? Huh? I didn't remember ever getting a PIN. The website said my PIN should be found on the receipt that I used to pay my tuition. A quick look informed me either they were wrong or I was looking at the wrong sheet and didn't have the right one. I searched my email history and that didn't give me anything either. My blood pressure was starting to tick with the time as I reached for the phone to call the university. I was quickly patched to the right guy and I explained to him my situation. He told me my only two options were to fax him or to come in person. I wasn't interested in waiting for however long it took them to deal with faxes, so I donned my shepherd's hat and headed out the door to the university, somewhat in the opposite direction of the insurance building.

I found the room rather quickly upon arriving and met the same guy I was talking to over the phone. He asked for my student ID then had my account activated in about two minutes. I knew I wasn't out of the fire yet, so I held my elation. I wasn't about to go home again to figure out that I had to jump through some other hoop to get access to the Studienblatt. So I asked him about it and he showed me how I could access it. It was almost 1 o'clock at this time and I was a good deal away from the insurance building, so I asked him where I could print it. I got some complicated answer about a room in another building across the street or paying with a bank card in the present building. I found this answer to also be unimpressive and I just stared back at him and asked:

"Couldn't you just print it here?"

"Well... yea. I guess I could."

Ya fucker, you could have just said that in the first place.

I was rewarded with a piece of paper clearly labeled STUDIENBLATT (which turned out to be a current class schedule). My blood pressure started going down as I realized I theoretically had enough paperwork to get the insurance now. However, I started doing the math in my head; the time it would take me to get to the insurance company, the time I would have to wait after getting a number, plus the time it would take me to talk to the person behind the counter... there was no way in hell I was going to make it. I headed back home and that leaves me where I am now, leaving me with tomorrow and Friday to figure out my insurance and PRAY that I have everything in order to pick up my permit.

Hope everyone is doing well in their respective areas!

**3/2/2012**

**BOOYA!**

On the last possible day I could have been legal, I was able to attain my residence permit in Austria! YAO!!

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