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Anschluss

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The **Anschluss** [ˈʔanʃlʊs[ⓘ] listen[ⓘ]] (spelled **Anschluß** at the time of the event, and until the **German orthography reform of 1996**; German for "connection" or union, political annexation^[1]), also known as the **Anschluss Österreichs** (pronunciation[ⓘ] help[ⓘ]), was the occupation and **annexation** of **Austria** into **Nazi Germany** in 1938.^[2] This was in contrast with the *Anschluss movement* (Austria and Germany united as one country)^[a], which had been attempted since as early as 1918 when the **Republic of German-Austria** attempted union with Germany which was forbidden by the **Treaty of Saint Germain** and **Treaty of Versailles** peace treaties.



German and Austrian border police dismantle a border post.

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The Anschluss [edit]

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Austria was annexed into the German **Third Reich** on 12 March 1938. There had been several years of pressure by supporters in both Austria and Germany (by both Nazis and non-Nazis) for the *"Heim ins Reich"* movement.^[4] Earlier, Nazi Germany had provided support for the **Austrian National Socialist Party** (Austrian Nazi Party) in its bid to seize power from Austria's **Austrofascist** leadership.

Under considerable pressure from both Austrian and German Nazis, Austria's Chancellor **Kurt Schuschnigg** tried to hold a **referendum** for a vote on the issue. Although Schuschnigg expected Austria to vote in favour of maintaining autonomy, a well-planned *coup d'état* by the **Austrian Nazi Party** of Austria's state institutions in **Vienna** took place on 11 March 1938, prior to the referendum, which they canceled.

They transferred power to **Germany**, and *Wehrmacht* troops entered Austria to enforce the *Anschluss*. The Nazis held a **plebiscite** within the following month, asking the people to ratify the *fait accompli*. They claimed to have received 99.7% of the vote in favor.^{[5][6]}

Although the **Allies** were committed to upholding the terms of the **Treaty of Versailles** and **St. Germain**, which specifically prohibited the union of Austria and the German Empire, their reaction was only verbal and moderate. No military confrontation took place and even the strongest voices against the annexation, particularly **Fascist Italy**, **France** and Britain (the *"Stresa Front"*) remained at peace.

The *Anschluss* was among the first major steps of **Adolf Hitler**'s creation of a **Greater German Reich** which was to include all **ethnic German** and all the **lands and territories** which the **German Empire** had lost after **World War I**. Although Austria had never been a part of 20th-century Germany (the **unification of Germany** of the mid to late 1800s created a **Prussian** dominated nation state in 1871, leaving Austria as a part of *"Lesser Germany"*), it was seen^[*by whom?*] as a German state. Prior to the 1938 annexation, the Third Reich had remilitarized the **Rhineland**, and the **Saar** region was returned to Germany after 15 years of occupation through a plebiscite. After the *Anschluss*, Hitler targeted Czechoslovakia, provoking an international crisis which led to the **Munich Agreement** in September 1938, giving the Third *Reich* control of the industrial **Sudetenland**, which had a predominantly ethnic German population. In March 1939, Hitler then ended Czechoslovakia by recognizing the independence of **Slovakia** and making the rest of the nation a **protectorate**. That same year, **Memelland** was returned from Lithuania.

With the Anschluss, the **German-speaking** Republic of Austria ceased to exist as a fully independent state. At the end of World War II, a Provisional Austrian Government was set up on 27 April 1945, and was legally recognized by the **Allies** in the following months. It was not until 1955 that Austria regained full sovereignty.

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Timeline after World War I [edit]

Main articles: Holy Roman Empire of the German nation, German Confederation, German question, and German Empire

The idea of grouping all **Germans** into a nation-state country had been the subject of debate in the 19th century from the ending of the **Holy Roman Empire of the German nation** until the ending of the **German Confederation**. By 1871, the decision was to form a "*kleindeutsch*" **German Empire** based on Prussia and excluding Austria.^[7] Austria had its own empire at the time, comprising Hungarians, Slavs and other ethnic groups ruled by a German minority.^[8] Austria had wanted a *Großdeutsche Lösung* (greater Germany solution), whereby the German states would be united under the leadership of the Austrian Germans (Habsburgs). This solution would include all the German states (including the non-German regions of Austria), but Prussia would have to take second place. This controversy, called **dualism**, dominated Prusso-Austrian diplomacy and the politics of the German states, for the next 20 years.^[9]

1918–1933 [edit]

Elite and popular opinion in Austria after 1918 largely favoured some sort of union with Germany, but it was explicitly forbidden by the peace treaties.^[10] The Austro-Hungarian Empire broke up in 1918, and on 12 November that year **German Austria** was officially declared a republic. The provisional national assembly drafted a provisional constitution that stated that "German Austria is a democratic republic" (Article 1) and "German Austria is a component of the German Republic" (Article 2). Later plebiscites in the German border provinces of **Tyrol** and **Salzburg** yielded majorities of 98% and 99% in favor of a unification with the German Republic.

The **Treaty of Versailles** and the **Treaty of Saint-Germain** (both signed in 1919) explicitly prohibited the inclusion of Austria to politically join the German state. This measure was criticized by **Hugo Preuss**, the drafter of the German **Weimar Constitution**, who saw the prohibition as a contradiction of the **Wilsonian** principle of **self-determination** of peoples, intended to help bring peace to Europe.^[11] Following the destruction of **World War I**, however, France and Britain feared the power of a larger Germany and had begun to dis-empower the current one. Austrian particularism, especially among the nobility, also played a role in the decisions; Austria was Roman Catholic, while Germany was dominated by Protestants, especially in government (the Prussian nobility, for example, was **Lutheran**). The constitutions of the **Weimar Republic** and the **First Austrian Republic** included the political goal of unification, which was widely supported by democratic parties. In the early 1930s, popular support in Austria for union with German Empire remained overwhelming, and the Austrian government looked to a possible **customs union** with German Republic in 1931.

Nazi Germany [edit]

The rise of the **Nazis** led by **Adolf Hitler** to power in the Weimar Republic initially caused the Austrian government to withdraw from such economic ties. Hitler, an **Austrian German** by birth,^{[12][b]} picked up his patriotic **German nationalist** ideas whilst serving in the German army during WWI. In accordance to this, one of the **Nazi's** ideologies was to **re-unite all Germans** either born or living outside of the *Reich* in order to create an "all-German *Reich*". From the early beginning of his leadership in the Nazi Party, Hitler had publicly stated in his 1924 autobiography (*Mein Kampf*) that he would create a union between his birth country and Germany, by any means possible ("German-Austria must be restored to the great German Motherland." "People of the same blood should be in the same Reich."^[14]

Austria shared the economic turbulence of the **Great Depression**, with a high unemployment rate and unstable commerce and industry. During the 1920s it was a target for German investment capital. By 1937, rapid German rearmament increased Berlin's interest in annexation, because Austria was rich in raw materials and labor. It supplied Germany with magnesium and the products of the iron, textile and machine industries. It had gold and foreign currency reserves, many unemployed skilled workers and hundreds of idle factories, and large potential hydroelectric resources.^[15]

The First Republic, dominated from the late 1920s by the anti-*Anschluss*^[16] Catholic nationalist **Christian Social Party** (CS), gradually disintegrated from 1933 (dissolution of parliament and ban of the Austrian National Socialists) to 1934 (**Austrian Civil War** in February and ban of all remaining parties except the CS). The government evolved into a pseudo-**fascist**, **corporatist** model of one-party government, which combined the CS and the paramilitary *Heimwehr* with absolute state domination of **labour relations** and no **freedom of the press** (see *Austrofascism* and *Patriotic Front*).

Power was centralized in the office of the **chancellor**, who was empowered to **rule by decree**. The predominance of the Christian Social Party (whose economic policies were based on the papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum*) was an Austrian phenomenon. Austria's national identity had strong Catholic elements that were incorporated into the movement, by way of clerical authoritarian tendencies not found in Nazism. Both **Engelbert Dollfuss** and his successor, **Kurt Schuschnigg**, turned to Austria's other fascist neighbour, Italy, for inspiration and support. The statist corporatism often referred to as Austrofascism bore much more resemblance to **Italian Fascism** than German National Socialism. For his part, **Benito Mussolini** supported the independence of Austria, largely due to concern that Hitler would eventually press for the return of Italian territories once ruled by Austria. However, Mussolini needed German support in Ethiopia (see *Second Italo-Abyssinian War*). After receiving a **personal assurance from Hitler** that Germany would not seek territorial concessions from Italy, Mussolini began a client relationship with Berlin that began with the 1937 **Berlin–Rome Axis**.

On 25 July 1934, Chancellor Dollfuss was assassinated by **Austrian Nazis** in a failed coup. The second **civil war** followed, lasting until August 1934. Afterward, leading Austrian Nazis fled to Germany but they continued to push for unification from there. The remaining Austrian Nazis started to make use of terrorist attacks against Austrian governmental institutions, causing a death toll of more than 800 between 1934 and 1938.

Following Dollfuss' assassination, his successor was **Kurt Schuschnigg**, who followed a similar political course. In 1935 Schuschnigg used the police to suppress the Nazi supporters in Austria. Police actions under Schuschnigg included gathering Nazis (and Social Democrats) and holding them in **internment camps**. The **Austrofascism** of Austria between 1934–1938 focused on the history of Austria and opposed the absorption of Austria into the Third Reich (according to the philosophy Austrians were "better Germans"). Schuschnigg called Austria the "better German state" but struggled to keep Austria independent. Eventually Schuschnigg gave up his anti-Nazi program and in July 1936 he signed the Austro-German Agreement, which, among other concessions, allowed the release of Nazis imprisoned in Austria and the inclusion of National Socialists in his Cabinet. This did not satisfy Hitler and the pro-Germany Austrian Nazis grew in strength.



Following increasing violence and demands from Hitler that Austria agree to a union, Schuschnigg met with Hitler on 12 February at [Berchtesgaden](#) in an attempt to avoid the take-over of Austria. Hitler presented Schuschnigg with a set of demands which included appointing known Austrian Nazi sympathizers to positions of great power in the Austrian government. The key appointment was that of [Seyss-Inquart](#) who would take over as Minister of Public Security, with full and unlimited control of the police forces in Austria. In return Hitler would publicly reaffirm the treaty of 11 July 1936 and reaffirm his support for Austria's national sovereignty. Schuschnigg accepted Hitler's "deal", returned to Vienna and made the changes to his government.^[17]

Seyss-Inquart was a long-time Nazi who sought the union of all Germans in one state. Leopold argues he was a moderate who favoured an evolutionary approach to union. He opposed the violent tactics of the Austrian Nazis, collaborated with Catholic groups, and wanted to preserve a measure of Austrian identity within the Third Reich.^[18]

One week later, Hitler made a speech in which he stated, "The German Reich is no longer willing to tolerate the suppression of ten million Germans across its borders." This was clearly directed at Austria and [Czechoslovakia](#).

Schuschnigg announces a referendum [edit]

On 9 March 1938, in an effort to preserve Austria's independence, Schuschnigg scheduled a [plebiscite](#) on the issue of unification for 13 March. To secure a large majority in the referendum, Schuschnigg set the minimum voting age at 24, as he believed younger voters were now supporters of the German Nazi ideology. This was a risk, and the next day it became apparent that Hitler would not simply stand by while Austria declared its independence by public vote. Hitler declared that the referendum would be subject to major fraud and that Germany would not accept it. In addition, the German ministry of propaganda issued press reports that riots had broken out in Austria and that large parts of the Austrian population were calling for German troops to restore order. Schuschnigg immediately responded publicly that reports of riots were false.^[19]

Hitler sent an ultimatum to Schuschnigg on 11 March, demanding that he hand over all power to the [Austrian National Socialists](#) or face an invasion. The ultimatum was set to expire at noon, but was extended by two hours. Without waiting for an answer, Hitler had already signed the order to send troops into Austria at one o'clock.^[20]

Schuschnigg desperately sought support for Austrian independence in the hours following the ultimatum. Realizing that neither France nor Britain was willing to take steps, he resigned as chancellor that evening. In the radio broadcast in which he announced his resignation, he argued that he accepted the changes and allowed the Nazis to take over the government 'to avoid the shedding of fraternal blood [*Bruderblut*]'.^[21]

It is said that after listening to Bruckner's Seventh Symphony, Hitler cried: "*How can anyone say that Austria is not German! Is there anything more German than our old pure Austrianness?*"^[22]

German troops march into Austria [edit]

On the morning of 12 March, the 8th Army of the German *Wehrmacht* crossed the border to Austria. The troops were greeted by cheering German-Austrians with Nazi salutes, Nazi flags and flowers. Because of this, the Nazi annexing is also called the *Blumenkrieg* (war of flowers), but its official name was *Unternehmen Otto*.^[23] For the *Wehrmacht*, the invasion was the first big test of its machinery. Although the invading forces were badly organized and coordination among the units was poor, it mattered little because no fighting took place.^[24]

Hitler's car crossed the border in the afternoon at [Braunau](#), his birthplace. In the evening, he arrived at [Linz](#) and was given an enthusiastic welcome in the city hall.



Hitler announces the *Anschluss* on the [Heldenplatz](#), Vienna, 15 March 1938. [img]

Hitler's travel through Austria became a triumphal tour that climaxed in [Vienna](#), on 15 March 1938, when around 200,000 German-Austrians gathered around the [Heldenplatz](#) (Square of Heroes) to hear Hitler say in front of tens of thousands of cheering people that "*The oldest eastern province of the German people shall be, from this point on, the newest bastion of the German Reich*"^[25] followed by his "greatest accomplishment" (completing the annexing of Austria to form a Greater German Reich) by saying "*Als Führer und Kanzler der deutschen Nation und des Reiches melde ich vor der deutschen Geschichte nunmehr den Eintritt meiner Heimat in das Deutsche Reich.*"^[26] Translation: "As leader and chancellor of the German nation and Reich I announce to German history now the entry of my homeland into the German Reich."^[26] Hitler later commented: "Certain foreign newspapers have said that we fell on Austria with brutal methods. I can only say: even in death they cannot stop lying. I

have in the course of my political struggle won much love from my people, but when I crossed the former frontier (into Austria) there met me such a stream of love as I have never experienced. Not as tyrants have we come, but as liberators."^[27]

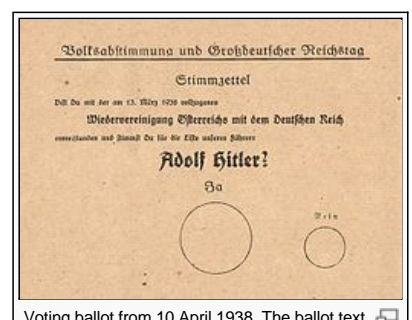
The *Anschluss* was given immediate effect by legislative act on 13 March, subject to ratification by a plebiscite. Austria became the province of [Ostmark](#), and Seyss-Inquart was appointed governor. The [plebiscite](#) was held on 10 April and officially recorded a support of 99.7% of the voters.^[28]

Hitler's forces worked to suppress any opposition. Before the first German soldier crossed the border, [Heinrich Himmler](#) and a few *SS* officers landed in Vienna to arrest prominent representatives of the First Republic, such as [Richard Schmitz](#), [Leopold Figl](#), [Friedrich Hillegeist](#) and [Franz Olah](#). During the few weeks between the *Anschluss* and the plebiscite, authorities rounded up Social Democrats, Communists and other potential political dissenters, as well as Jews, and imprisoned them or sent them to [concentration camps](#). Within only a few days of 12 March, 70,000 people had been arrested. The plebiscite was subject to large-scale propaganda and to the abrogation of the voting rights of around 400,000 people (nearly 10% of the eligible voting population), mainly former members of left-wing parties and Jews.^[28]

While historians concur that the result was not manipulated, the voting process was neither free nor secret. Officials were present directly beside the voting booths and received the voting ballot



Cheering crowds greet the Nazis in Vienna. [img]



Voting ballot from 10 April 1938. The ballot text [img]

by hand (in contrast to a secret vote where the voting ballot is inserted into a closed box). In some remote areas of Austria, people voted to preserve the independence of Austria on 13 March (in Schuschnigg's planned but officially cancelled plebiscite) despite the *Wehrmacht*'s presence. For instance, in the village of [Innevillgraten](#), a majority of 95% voted for Austria's independence.^[29] However, in the plebiscite on 10 April, 73.3% of votes in Innervillgraten were in favor of the Anschluss, which was still the lowest number of all Austrian municipalities.^[30]

reads "Do you agree with the reunification of Austria with the German *Reich* that was enacted on 13 March 1938, and do you vote for the party of our leader Adolf Hitler?" The large circle is labelled "Yes", the smaller "No".

A largely unhindered voting process occurred in the Italian harbour city of [Gaeta](#), where an extraterritorial vote of German and Austrian clerics, studying at the German college of [Santa Maria dell'Anima](#), took place. The vote was concluded on board the German cruiser *Admiral Scheer*, which was anchored in the harbour. Contrary to the overall result, these clerical votes rejected the Anschluss by over 90%, an incident which became known at the time as the "[Shame of Gaeta](#)" (*Vergogna di Gaeta*, *Schande von Gaeta*).

Austria remained part of the [Third Reich](#) until the end of World War II, when a preliminary Austrian government declared the *Anschluss null und nichtig* (null and void) on 27 April 1945. After the war, then Allied-occupied Austria was recognized and treated as a separate country. It was not restored to [sovereignty](#) until the [Austrian State Treaty](#) and Austrian [Declaration of Neutrality](#), both of 1955, largely due to the rapid development of the [Cold War](#) and disputes between the Soviet Union and its former allies over foreign policy.

Reactions and consequences of the *Anschluss* [edit]



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Austria in the first days of the *Third Reich* had many contradictions: at one and the same time, Hitler's terror regime began to tighten its grip in every area of society, beginning with mass arrests as thousands of Austrians tried to escape; yet other Austrians cheered and welcomed the German troops entering their territory. Many Austrian political figures announced their support of the *Anschluss* and relief that it happened without violence.

Cardinal [Theodor Innitzer](#) (a political figure of the CS) declared as early as 12 March: "The Viennese Catholics should thank the Lord for the bloodless way this great political change has occurred, and they should pray for a great future for Austria. Needless to say, everyone should obey the orders of the new institutions." The other Austrian bishops followed suit some days later. [Vatican Radio](#), however, broadcast a strong denunciation of the German action, and [Cardinal Pacelli](#), the [Vatican Secretary of State](#), ordered Innitzer to report to Rome. Before meeting the Pope, Innitzer met Pacelli, who had been outraged by Innitzer's statement. He told Innitzer that he needed to retract his statement; he was made to sign a new statement, issued on behalf of all the Austrian bishops, which provided: "The solemn declaration of the Austrian bishops ... was clearly not intended to be an approval of something that was not and is not compatible with God's law".^[citation needed] The Vatican newspaper reported that the German bishops' earlier statement had been issued without approval from Rome.

Robert Kauer, president of the minority [Lutheran Church](#) in Austria, greeted Hitler on 13 March as "saviour of the 350,000 German Protestants in Austria and liberator from a five-year hardship".^[citation needed] [Karl Renner](#), the most famous Social Democrat of the First Republic, announced his support for the Anschluss and appealed to all Austrians to vote in favour of it on 10 April.^[29]

The international response to the Anschluss was publicly moderate. *The Times* commented that 300 years before, Scotland had joined England as well, and that this event would not really differ much. On 14 March, the British Prime Minister, [Neville Chamberlain](#), noted in the [House of Commons](#):

His Majesty's Government have throughout been in the closest touch with the situation. The Foreign Secretary saw the German Foreign Minister on the 10th of March and addressed to him a grave warning on the Austrian situation and upon what appeared to be the policy of the German Government in regard to it.... Late on the 11th of March our Ambassador in Berlin registered a protest in strong terms with the German Government against such use of coercion, backed by force, against an independent State in order to create a situation incompatible with its national independence.

However, the speech concluded:

I imagine that according to the temperament of the individual the events which are in our minds to-day will be the cause of regret, of sorrow, perhaps of indignation. They cannot be regarded by His Majesty's Government with indifference or equanimity. They are bound to have effects which cannot yet be measured. The immediate result must be to intensify the sense of uncertainty and insecurity in Europe. Unfortunately, while the policy of appeasement would lead to a relaxation of the economic pressure under which many countries are suffering to-day, what has just occurred must inevitably retard economic recovery and, indeed, increased care will be required to ensure that marked deterioration does not set in. This is not a moment for hasty decisions or for careless words. We must consider the new situation quickly, but with cool judgement... As regards our defence programmes, we have always made it clear that they were flexible and that they would have to be reviewed from time to time in the light of any development in the international situation. It would be idle to pretend that recent events do not constitute a change of the kind that we had in mind. Accordingly we have decided to make a fresh review, and in due course we shall announce what further steps we may think it necessary to take.^[31]

Within this speech Chamberlain also said, "The hard fact is that nothing could have arrested what has actually happened [in Austria] unless this country and other countries had been prepared to use force."^[32]

The subdued reaction to the *Anschluss* (the U.S. issued a similar statement) led to Hitler's conclusion that he could use more aggressive tactics in his "roadmap" to expand the *Third Reich*, as he would later in annexing the [Sudetenland](#).

Legacy [edit]



Seyss-Inquart and Hitler in Vienna, March 1938

Anschluss: annexation or union? [edit]

The word *Anschluss* outside the context of March 1938 is properly translated as "joinder," "connection," "unification," or "political union." In contrast, the German word *Annektierung* that would mean military **annexation** unambiguously was and is not commonly used in this context. The usage of the term *Anschluss* has been widespread before and in 1938 describing an incorporation of Austria into Germany. Calling the incorporation of Austria into Nazi Germany an "Anschluss," that is a unification or joinder, was also part of the propaganda used in 1938 by Hitler and the Nazis to create the impression the events of March 1938 were not backed and enforced by military pressure. Hitler described the incorporation of Austria as its return to its original home (*Heimkehr*). The word *Anschluss* has endured during and following World War II, despite being a euphemism for what took place.

Some historical sources, like the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, describe the *Anschluss* as an "annexation"^[33] rather than a union. Neither word captures the differences between the *Anschluss* and other Nazi annexations backed by force: that much of the Austrian population either supported or were indifferent to the incorporation of Austria into the Third Reich.^[citation needed]

Second Republic [edit]

Moscow Declaration [edit]

The **Moscow Declaration** of 1943, signed by the U.S., the Soviet Union and the UK, included a "Declaration on Austria", which stated the following:

The governments of the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and the United States of America are agreed that Austria, the first free country to fall a victim to Hitlerite aggression, shall be liberated from German domination. They regard the annexation imposed on Austria by Germany on 15 March 1938, as null and void. They consider themselves as in no way bound by any changes effected in Austria since that date. They declare that they wish to see re-established a free and independent Austria and thereby to open the way for the Austrian people themselves, as well as those neighbouring States which will be faced with similar problems, to find that political and economic security which is the only basis for lasting peace. Austria is reminded, however, that she has a responsibility, which she cannot evade, for participation in the war at the side of Hitlerite Germany, and that in the final settlement account will inevitably be taken of her own contribution to her liberation.^{[34][35]}

The declaration was mostly intended to serve as **propaganda** aimed at stirring Austrian resistance. Although some Austrians aided Jews and are counted as **Righteous among the Nations**, there never was an effective Austrian armed resistance of the sort found in other countries under German occupation. The declaration is said to have a somewhat complex drafting history.^[36] At Nuremberg, **Arthur Seyss-Inquart**^[37] and **Franz von Papen**,^[38] in particular, were both indicted under count one (conspiracy to commit crimes against peace) specifically for their activities in support of the Austrian Nazi Party and the *Anschluss*, but neither was convicted of this count. In acquitting von Papen, the court noted that his actions were in its view political immoralities but not crimes under its charter. Seyss-Inquart was convicted of other serious war crimes, most of which took place in Poland and the Netherlands, was sentenced to death and executed.

Austrian identity and the "victim theory" [edit]

After World War II, many Austrians sought comfort in the idea of Austria as "the Nazis' first victim." Although the Nazi party was promptly banned, Austria did not have the same thorough process of de-Nazification at the top of government which was imposed on Germany for a time. Lacking outside pressure for political reform, factions of Austrian society tried for a long time to advance the view that the Anschluss was only an annexation at the point of a bayonet.^[39]

This view of the events of 1938 has deep roots in the 10 years of Allied occupation and the struggle to regain Austrian sovereignty: the "victim theory" played an essential role in the negotiations on the **Austrian State Treaty** with the Soviets, and by pointing to the Moscow Declaration, Austrian politicians heavily relied on it to achieve a solution for Austria different from the division of Germany into separate Eastern and Western states. The state treaty, alongside the subsequent Austrian declaration of permanent **neutrality**, marked important milestones for the solidification of Austria's independent national identity during the course of the following decades.^[40]

As Austrian politicians of the left and right attempted to reconcile their differences in order to avoid the violent conflict that had dominated the First Republic, discussions of both Austrian **Nazism** and Austria's role during the Nazi-era were largely avoided. Still, the **Austrian People's Party** (ÖVP) had advanced, and still advances, the argument that the establishment of the Dollfuss dictatorship was necessary in order to maintain Austrian independence. On the other hand, the **Austrian Social Democratic Party** (SPÖ) argues that the Dollfuss dictatorship stripped the country of the democratic resources necessary to repel Hitler; yet it ignores the fact that Hitler himself was a native to Austria.^[41]

In contrast with the first victim theory, it has also helped the Austrians develop their own **national identity** as before. After **World War II** and the fall of the **Third Reich** the political ideology **Pan-Germanism** massively declined and is now seen by the vast majority of German-speaking people as taboo^[citation needed]. Unlike earlier in the 20th century era when there was no Austrian identity separate from a German one, in 1987 only 6 percent of the Austrians identified themselves as "Germans." Today over 90 percent of the Austrians see themselves as an independent nation. The logic of the existence of an independent Austrian state is no longer questioned as it was in the inter-war period^[citation needed].

Political events [edit]

For decades, the victim theory remained largely undisputed. The Austrian public was rarely forced to confront the legacy of the Third Reich; most notably it had to face issues during the events of 1965, when **Taras Borodajkewycz**, a professor of economic history, made anti-Semitic remarks following the death of **Ernst Kirchweger**, a concentration camp survivor killed by a right-wing protester during riots. It was not until the 1980s that Austrians confronted their mixed past. The catalyst for the **Vergangenheitsbewältigung** was the Waldheim affair. When **Kurt Waldheim**, the successful candidate of a presidential election and former **UN Secretary-General**, was accused of having been a member of the Nazi party and of the infamous **SA** (he was later absolved of direct involvement in **war crimes**), Austrians said that scrutiny was an unwelcome intervention in the country's internal affairs. Despite the politicians' reactions to international criticism, the Waldheim affair started the first serious discussions about Austria's past and the *Anschluss*.

Another factor was the rise of **Jörg Haider** and the **Freedom Party of Austria** (FPÖ) in the 1980s. The party had combined elements of the **pan-German** right with free-market liberalism since its foundation in 1955, but after Haider ascended to the party chairmanship in 1986, the liberal elements became increasingly marginalized. Haider began to openly use nationalist and anti-immigrant rhetoric. He was criticised for using the *völkisch* (ethnic) definition of national interest ("Austria for Austrians") and his apologetics for Austria's past, notably calling members of the **Waffen-SS** "men of honour". Following a dramatic rise in electoral support in the 1990s that peaked in the **1999 elections**, the FPÖ entered a coalition with the **Austrian People's Party** (ÖVP), led by **Wolfgang Schüssel**. This was condemned in 2000. The coalition prompted the regular

Donnerstagsdemonstrationen (Thursday demonstrations) in protest against the government, which took place on the [Heldenplatz](#) where Hitler had greeted the masses during the *Anschluss*. Haider's tactics and rhetoric, often criticised as sympathetic to Nazism, forced Austrians to reconsider their relationship to the past. Haider's coalition partner, former Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel, in a 2000 interview with the *Jerusalem Post*, stated that Austria was the first victim of Hitler's Germany, repeating the victim story.^[42]

Literature [\[edit\]](#)

The political discussions and soul-searching were reflected in other aspects of culture. [Thomas Bernhard](#)'s last play, *Heldenplatz* (1988), generated controversy even before it was produced, fifty years after Hitler's entrance to the city. Bernhard made the historic elimination of references to Hitler's reception in Vienna emblematic of Austrian attempts to claim its history and culture under questionable criteria. Many politicians called Bernhard a *Nestbeschmutzer* (damaging the reputation of his country) and openly demanded that the play should not be staged in Vienna's [Burgtheater](#). Waldheim, still president, called the play "a crude insult to the Austrian people".^[43]

Historical Commission and outstanding legal issues [\[edit\]](#)

In the context of the postwar [Federal Republic of Germany](#), one encounters a *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* ("struggle to come to terms with the past") that has been partially institutionalised, variably in literary, cultural, political, and educational contexts (its development and difficulties have not been trivial; see, for example, the [Historikerstreit](#)). Austria formed a *Historikerkommission*^[44] ("Historian's Commission" or "Historical Commission") in 1998 with a mandate to review Austria's role in the Nazi expropriation of Jewish property from a scholarly rather than legal perspective, partly in response to continuing criticism of its handling of property claims. Its membership was based on recommendations from various quarters, including [Simon Wiesenthal](#) and [Yad Vashem](#). The Commission delivered its report in 2003.^[45] Noted Holocaust historian [Raul Hilberg](#) refused to participate in the Commission and in an interview stated his strenuous objections in terms both personal and in reference to larger questions about Austrian culpability and liability, comparing what he thought to be relative inattention to the settlement governing the Swiss bank holdings of those who died or were displaced by the Holocaust:

I personally would like to know why the [WJC](#) has hardly put any pressure on Austria, even as leading Nazis and SS leaders were Austrians, Hitler included... Immediately after the war, the US wanted to make the Russians withdraw from Austria, and the Russians wanted to keep Austria neutral, therefore there was a common interest to grant Austria victim status. And later Austria could cry poor – though its per capita income is as high as Germany's. And, most importantly, the Austrian PR machinery works better. Austria has the opera ball, the imperial castle, Mozartkugeln [a chocolate]. Americans like that. And Austrians invest and export relatively little to the US, therefore they are less vulnerable to blackmail. In the meantime, they set up a commission in Austria to clarify what happened to Jewish property. Victor Klima, the former chancellor, has asked me to join. My father fought for Austria in the First World War and in 1939 he was kicked out of Austria. After the war they offered him ten dollars per month as compensation. For this reason I told Klima, no thank you, this makes me sick.^[46]



The SS raid a Jewish community center, Vienna, March 1938.

The [Simon Wiesenthal Center](#) continues to criticise Austria (as recently as June 2005) for its alleged historical and ongoing unwillingness aggressively to pursue investigations and trials against Nazis for war crimes and crimes against humanity from the 1970s onwards. Its 2001 report offered the following characterization:

Given the extensive participation of numerous Austrians, including at the highest levels, in the implementation of the Final Solution and other Nazi crimes, Austria should have been a leader in the prosecution of Holocaust perpetrators over the course of the past four decades, as has been the case in Germany. Unfortunately relatively little has been achieved by the Austrian authorities in this regard and in fact, with the exception of the case of [Dr. Heinrich Gross](#) which was suspended this year under highly suspicious circumstances (he claimed to be medically unfit, but outside the court proved to be healthy) not a single Nazi war crimes prosecution has been conducted in Austria since the mid-1970s.^[47]

In 2003, the Center launched a worldwide effort named "Operation: Last Chance" in order to collect further information about those Nazis still alive that are potentially subject to prosecution. Although reports issued shortly thereafter credited Austria for initiating large-scale investigations, there has been one case where criticism of Austrian authorities arose recently: The Center has put 92-year-old Croatian [Milivoj Asner](#) on its 2005 top ten list. Asner fled to Austria in 2004 after Croatia announced it would start investigations in the case of war crimes he may have been involved in. In response to objections about Asner's continued freedom, Austria's federal government has deferred to either extradition requests from Croatia or prosecutorial actions from [Klagenfurt](#), neither of which appears forthcoming (as of June 2005).^[48] Extradition is not an option since Asner also holds [Austrian citizenship](#), having lived in the country from 1946 to 1991.^[49]

Austrian political and military leaders in Nazi Germany [\[edit\]](#)

- [Adolf Hitler](#)
- [Ernst Kaltenbrunner](#)
- [Arthur Seyss-Inquart](#)
- [Odilo Globocnik](#)
- [Amon Göth](#)
- [Lothar Rendulic](#)
- [Alfred Ritter von Hubicki](#)
- [Alexander Löhr](#)
- [Franz Böhme](#)
- [Otto Skorzeny](#)
- [Julius Ringel](#)
- [Adolf Eichmann](#)
- [Erhard Raus](#)

- Hans Fischböck

See also [edit]

- *The Sound of Music* (a dramatization based on the memoir of [Maria von Trapp](#))
- *The Great Dictator* (a fictitious account of the invasion of "Osterlich" by "Tomania", modeled on the *Anschluss*)
- *King Ottokar's Sceptre* (a fictitious account of the failed Bordurian coup d'état and invasion of their democratic neighbour Syldavia, modeled on the *Anschluss*)

Notes [edit]

- ↑ After the Prussian-dominated German nation-state was created in 1871 without Austria the German question was still very much active in most parts of Austria in the Austria-Hungary empire, the Austrian pan-Germans were in favour of a Pan-Germanism vision of Austria joining Germany to create a "Greater Germany".^[3]
- ↑ Hitler was an [ethnic German](#), but was not a [German citizen](#) by birth since he had been born in the Austro-Hungarian empire. He later gave up his Austrian citizenship in 1925 and remained stateless for seven years before he eventually became a German citizen in 1932.^[13]

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 Silesian Uprisings (1918–1919)
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[Saar Treaty \(1956\)](#)
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[Treaty of The Hague \(1960\)](#)
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