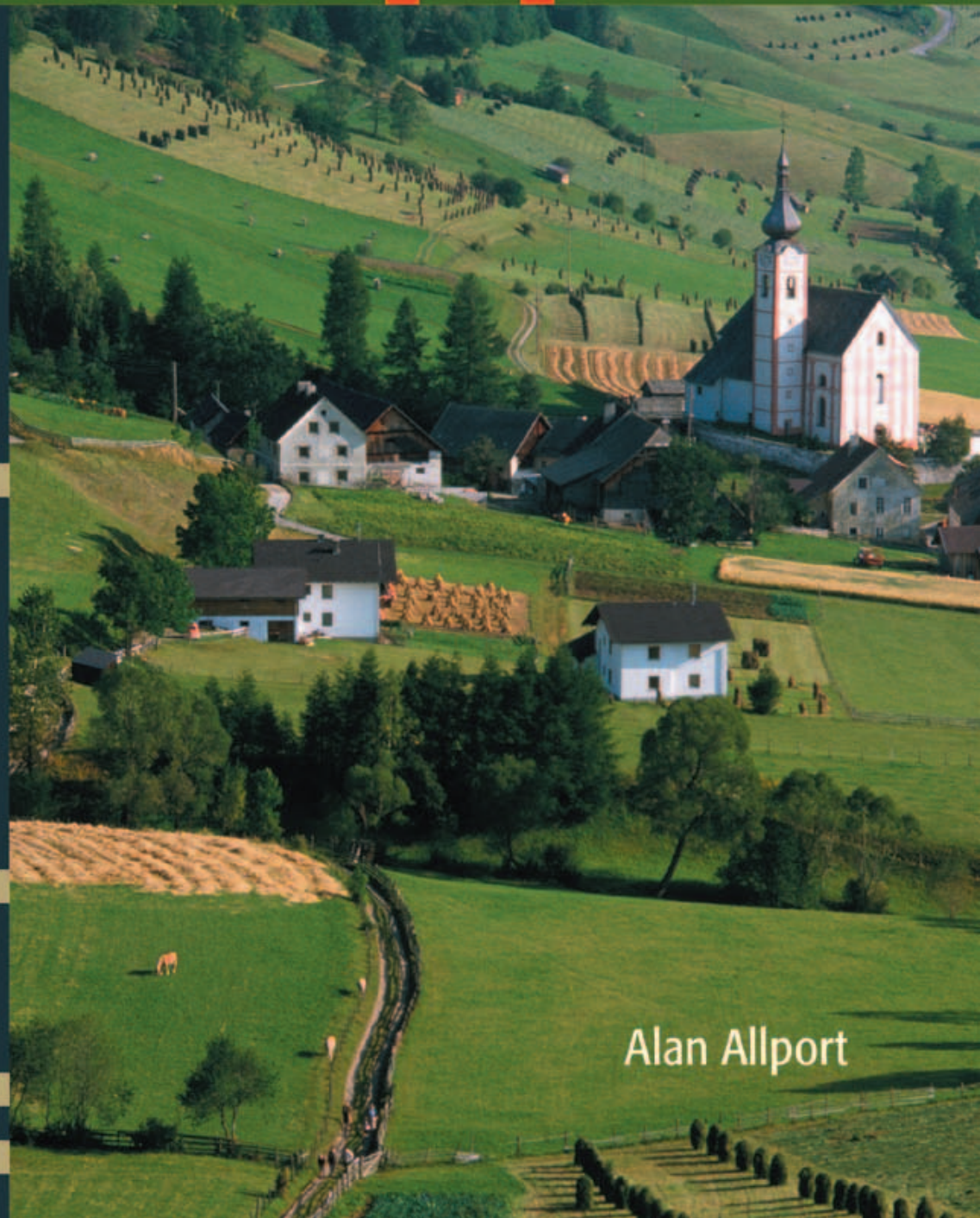




# AUSTRIA



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# 3

## The Early History of Austria

**H**istorically, what is Austria? This is not a straightforward question. Nowadays Austria is defined as the landlocked, partly mountainous, heavily forested country in south-central Europe that we described in Chapter 2. But before 1918, when this modern republic was created, “Austria” was a gigantic multinational, multilingual empire stretching from southern Galicia in modern Poland to the Adriatic shore and from the Carpathian Mountains in Romania to the borders of Switzerland. These were the lands of the Habsburgs, probably the most extraordinary family in European history. The Austria we know today was just another corner of a much larger political unit—and in many respects not even a very important corner.

Modern Austrians speak of their history in two separate ways to reflect this dual identity: There is the history of Austria as it is

defined nowadays, and then there is the *Kaiserzeit*, the history of all the lands of the Habsburgs. By necessity, this chapter will jump between the two—sometimes discussing events within the borders of the modern Republic and sometimes events that took place in what are now Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and so on.

### **Austria Before the Habsburgs**

Evidence of humans settling in Austria goes back at least 7,000 years, although little is known about these first inhabitants, and the first Austrians may have appeared even earlier. The story becomes a little clearer by the Early Iron Age, around 1000–400 B.C., when the so-called Hallstatt civilization, named after the archeological site where it was first discovered, was active. The Hallstatt people were the first to exploit the region's salt deposits and develop a primitive mining industry as well as leave behind a material legacy in the form of pottery, brooches, weaponry, and a formalized artistic style based on bird motifs.

From about 400 B.C. onward, Celtic tribes occupied the area and founded the kingdom of Noricum, Austria's first recognizable political unit. But the strategic value of the Danube as well as the region's iron resources were not lost on another ambitious people, the Romans. After a couple of centuries of tentative probing, the legions marched north, overwhelmed Noricum, and established an imperial presence along the line of the river, briefly integrating Austria into the culture of the ancient Mediterranean and Near East. Vienna—called Vindobona by the Romans—became a significant military and administrative center at this time, and Christianity trickled into Austria along with colonists from the south.

Roman suzerainty over Austria was fairly short-lived, however, as by 166–180 A.D. Germanic tribes were already plundering the newly established provinces, and despite

initially repelling these invaders, the Roman emperors found it increasingly difficult—and unprofitable—to maintain control of their distant and not very prosperous Danubian frontier. By the 5th century A.D. the Romans had essentially given up, and for several hundred years afterward the region was contested by successive waves of barbarian tribes, culminating in a showdown between the Slavic Avars and the Germanic Bavarians.

The latter had a powerful patron in the form of the Frankish ruler Charlemagne (reigning 771–814), whose empire stretched across much of northwestern Europe. This tipped the scales in favor of the Bavarians, who turned Austria into a fortified border “march,” or frontier, of the Frankish empire, known as the Eastern March. The distinctive character of the Austrian Germanic dialect is an inheritance from these Bavarian settlers.

The seesaw battle was not over yet, however, as in 880 A.D. the Eastern March was conquered by new interlopers, this time Magyars from what is today Hungary. It was not until 955 that a descendent of Charlemagne, King Otto I (reigning 936–976), smashed the nomadic Magyars at the battle of the Lechfeld and returned Austria to the Frankish-German fold, this time for good.

In 976 A.D. the German emperor installed Leopold I of the House of Babenberg (reigning 976–994) as ruler of Austria. The Babenbergs were to hold this position for the next 300 years, and their reign saw the consolidation of many of Austria’s most characteristic features. The word “Austria” itself—*Österreich* in German, literally translating as “eastern realm”—was used to describe the region for the first time. (In 1996 modern Austrians celebrated the thousandth anniversary of this naming). Austria received the status of a duchy and began to exhibit more practical independence from the German crown. By the late 1100s the ducal capital had moved to Vienna, henceforth the



This shows medieval Vienna as it appeared in a woodcut print illustration from an historical volume of the time.

political center of the country. A canon of local common law emerged. The red-white-red color scheme that today makes up the Austrian flag was invented. The Babenbergs fostered a rich cultural life at their courts; “Nibelunglied”

(“Song of the Nibelung”) one of the German language’s most influential poems, was written under their auspices. Monasteries, towns, and roads were built. All of this cost money, and one Babenberg, Leopold V (reigning 1177–1194), dreamed up an enterprising means of funding his development plans when he kidnapped King Richard “the Lionheart,” who was returning to England from the Crusades in the Holy Land via Austria, and held him to ransom.

Like most of the princes of Germany at the time the Babenbergs found themselves embroiled in various political conflicts, including the continuous squabbling between the nobility and the church, which had considerable secular as well as spiritual authority in the Middle Ages. The resulting wars and alliances caused a bewildering series of divisions and absorptions of Austrian territory, particularly as the Babenbergs practiced the traditional partition of land between the inheriting sons of the ruler. But the long-term trend was for the duchy’s borders to expand, from the region immediately adjoining the River Danube southward toward what is now the province of Styria. Although there was much territorial jockeying to come, the distinctive outline of an Austrian nation was starting to emerge.

However, the Babenbergs would not survive to see the fruition of their work. After Duke Frederick II (reigning 1230–1246) died leaving no male heir, the claim to the duchy was contested. This allowed Otakar II, prince of nearby Bohemia (reigning 1253–1278), to finagle his way into the Viennese inheritance. Otakar proved a bit too successful for his own good because his expansion frightened the other German nobles so much that they leagued together to expel him from Austria; in 1278 at the battle of the Marchfeld, Otakar was defeated and killed by an army led by Count Rudolf I of Habsburg (1218–1291), the head of the family that would dominate Austrian history for the next 700 years.

## Enter The Habsburgs

The reason that Count Rudolf led the coalition against Otakar was that five years earlier he had been elected emperor of the Holy Roman Empire by his fellow German princes. The Holy Roman Empire was the legacy of Charlemagne, the Frankish emperor who had sponsored the creation of the first Austrian frontier. Charlemagne's original empire had extended across modern France, the Low Countries, Germany, and northern Italy, but by Rudolf's time it had become for most practical purposes an all-German affair. At first the Habsburg rulers were only elected as Holy Roman Emperor every now and again. But after 1440 they monopolized the office, and it became in effect a hereditary Austrian title until the empire's dissolution in 1806. For centuries ruling over Austria came bundled with the extra opportunities and headaches of also being Holy Roman Emperor.

The early Habsburgs introduced new Austrian institutions. They founded the University of Vienna in 1365 and built a magnificent gothic cathedral, St. Stephen's, in the city center. This triumph of medieval architecture dominates the Viennese skyline even today, and within its catacombs are the preserved entrails of the Habsburg rulers, housed in individual bronze caskets. (Other Habsburg body parts can be found elsewhere in the city—their hearts are in the nearby Augustinian church, and the rest of their mortal remains are encased in monumental sarcophagi in the Capuchin Crypt.)

One of the most colorful of the early Habsburg monarchs was Frederick III (reigning 1440–1493). Amongst Frederick's contributions to the family inheritance was an ingenious forgery, the "Privilegium Maius," which claimed all sorts of extravagant and spurious rights for Austria within the Holy Roman Empire. Frederick had a mysterious motto, a.e.i.o.u., which he was fond of having doodled in the



Early Habsburg ruler Frederick III, who reigned from 1440-1493, did much to extend Austria's land holdings and influence. This sixteenth-century fresco shows the marriage of Frederick to Eleonora of Portugal.

archways and portals of his castles and public buildings. This cryptic message has inspired speculation throughout history; it is probably an acronym in Latin and old German for "Austria's destiny is to rule over the whole world."

Frederick may have had his whimsical diversions, but when it came to the business of expanding the Habsburg lands, he was deadly serious. His master plan for this



involved not conquest but a far more potent weapon in the medieval era: the wedding ring. Carefully selected marriages could allow an ambitious family to make major territorial gains through inheritance, and the Habsburgs were acknowledged masters of the craft—as the saying went: “Let others wage war; you, happy Austria, marry!” A series of fortuitous births and deaths meant that by the early 1500s, a single Habsburg prince, Charles V (1500–1558), ruled Austria, Burgundy (in eastern France), the Netherlands, Spain—at the time the richest and most powerful country in Europe—southern Italy, and the new lands of the Americas, discovered by Europeans just two decades earlier courtesy of Christopher Columbus. This was more than just a valuable inheritance; it was the creation of a world empire.

In practice, however, the Habsburg lands were less cohesive than they seemed. It quickly became clear that the government infrastructure of the day was too primitive to allow one man to control such a huge and scattered empire. Charles therefore deputized his younger brother Ferdinand (1503–1564) to rule Austria in his place while he concentrated his attentions on Spain. This arrangement was soon codified into law, and it was also agreed that Ferdinand would become Holy Roman Emperor after Charles. The Habsburg dynasty split into two branches, with Charles’s descendents forming the so-called Spanish Habsburgs and Ferdinand’s children continuing the Austrian Habsburgs. Although the branches would remain closely associated until 1700, when the Spanish Habsburg line died out, they conducted their future business independently of one another.

Europe was at the same time being shaken by the religious movement known as the Protestant Reformation, which had started in 1517 when Martin Luther, a German priest in the town of Wittenberg, presented his congregation with a series of complaints against ecclesiastical practices. Something about the passionate intensity of Luther’s protest and the defiance

with which he faced Papal demands to repent ignited a latent powderkeg of rebellion within Europe—and particularly within the Holy Roman Empire. By the 1520s the continent was abuzz with heretical ideas, and Luther’s supporters—who became known as “Protestants”—had attracted the patronage of some of the German princes. Austria was quickly affected by this turmoil. News about the Protestant challenge to Rome began to reach Austria from the northern German universities, spread in part by the new technology of printing, and converts accumulated at an astonishing rate. It has been estimated that by the time of Luther’s death in 1546, around 90 percent of the Austrian population had turned Protestant.

As staunch defenders of the Catholic faith, both Charles V and Ferdinand strove to suppress the Protestant heresy throughout Europe, and they embarked on a vigorous war against rebellious princes as well as suppressing the Protestant doctrine within their own lands. This went on for decades, interspersed with a few uneasy truces, and culminated in 1618–1648 with the Thirty Years’ War, which proved a disaster for the Germans as a people. Bloodshed, rapine, and destruction haunted the land for decades, and atrocities took place that presaged the horrors of the 20th century. In 1631, to take just one example, two-thirds of the 20,000-strong population of Magdeburg were slaughtered after a successful months-long siege. The biggest losers of the Thirty Years’ War were the religious minorities everywhere. Austrian Protestants either reconverted or fled, leaving the country once more largely Catholic.

The next challenge came in July 1683 from the Ottoman Empire, an Islamic power with a large and efficient army that controlled most of southeastern Europe. Some 150,000 Turkish troops massed along the Danube to assault Vienna. The Habsburgs appealed for aid, and the King John Sobieski of Poland agreed to send a relief army accompanied by troops from Saxony, Bavaria, and other parts of Germany.

On September 12, Sobieski's army attacked the Turkish lines and after a 15-hour contest broke the Ottoman army completely. Thousands were slaughtered in the ensuing rout, and the Turks were forced to abandon vast hordes of supplies and booty—including, according to legend, several sacks of coffee beans that were used to establish the first of Vienna's famous coffeehouses. The pursuit of the Turks continued beyond Vienna. Soon Sobieski's forces had pushed the Ottomans out of Hungary completely, and Emperor Leopold was able to make good on an old Habsburg claim to the kingdom of Hungary.

### **The Habsburg Zenith**

In the century that followed the Thirty Years' War, Austria confirmed its place as one of Europe's so-called Great Powers in a series of coalition wars involving France, England, Russia, and a new upstart German kingdom, Prussia. The long years of war began in 1700 when the last king of the Spanish Habsburg line died without leaving an heir. The Austrian Habsburgs had a good legal claim to the inheritance, and it looked for a while as if the great continental empire of Charles V might be resurrected; but Louis XIV, king of France, intervened to place a candidate from his own family on the throne. The War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714) began with a brilliant victory for the Austrians and their English allies at the Battle of Blenheim in 1704, but the fighting dragged on for years, and eventually the two sides reached a compromise peace that awarded the Spanish title to Louis XIV's claimant.

Far from enjoying European supremacy, the Habsburgs were very soon contemplating the breakup of their entire dynastic estate. The problems began when it became clear that Emperor Charles VI (1685–1740) would leave no male heir, and the Austrian inheritance would fall to his daughter Maria Theresa (1717–1780). Under the international law of the time



Maria Theresa (1717-1780), became Empress of Austria after the death of Emperor Charles VI left no male heir. She rose to the occasion by fiercely defending Austrian lands against Prussian advances and is credited with instituting significant legal and structural reforms to the archduchy.

it was unclear whether or not a woman could succeed to the Austrian archduchy, and Maria Theresa's father went to considerable trouble to get the formal approval of the other Great Powers in a series of agreements known collectively as the Pragmatic Sanction. Unfortunately, as soon as Charles died in 1740 the young and ambitious king of Prussia, Frederick II (known as Frederick the Great) launched a military offensive against Austria, seeking to take advantage of the confusion to steal the rich province of Silesia from the Habsburgs. This crisis in the midst of personal tragedy might have defeated other monarchs, but Maria Theresa, though hardly brilliant or groomed for power, was a tough customer determined to fight for what she believed was rightfully hers. Austria and Prussia waged two extended wars over control of Silesia, from 1740 to 1748 and again from 1756 to 1763, and although she never successfully regained Silesia, Maria Theresa did decisively confirm her own authority among the leaders of Europe.

As the devoted *Landesmutter*, or mother of the land (and motherhood was a role she took quite seriously—she had 16 children), Maria Theresa also spent her long reign trying to introduce structural and legal reforms within Austria to bring the archduchy into the modern age. These were continued by her successor, Josef II (1741–1790), who was influenced by the prevailing ideas of the “Age of Enlightenment” coming from France. The ideal Enlightenment model of government was that of the so-called enlightened despot, a king who would use his absolute authority in the interests of his subjects, and Josef aspired to play the part in Austria. Carrying this to completion was another matter, as it turned out. Josef's centralization of the government's powers angered the local nobility, who felt that their ancient rights were being trampled upon; his desire to make German the language of the state alienated the Hungarians; and his attempts to reform education on secular lines and increase religious toleration aroused the fury of the Catholic church. Many of

these schemes, as well as his plan to abolish serfdom, did not long survive his death.

By then war was brewing once more in Europe. Josef's sister Marie Antoinette, who had become queen of France, was arrested and executed along with her husband, Louis XVI, by Parisian revolutionaries who had taken the ideas of the Enlightenment to another stage. The wars of the French Revolution (1792–1815) brought turmoil and destruction to Europe and saw a brilliant French general-turned-emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte, conquer much of the continent. In 1805 Napoleon smashed the combined Austrian and Russian armies at the Battle of Austerlitz, and the following year he dissolved the ancient Holy Roman Empire, creating in its place a German confederacy loyal to him. Henceforth the Habsburgs had to be satisfied with their Austrian titles alone.

Adopting the old family policy of diplomacy by marriage, Francis I (1792–1835) arranged a wedding between his daughter Maria Louisa and Napoleon. This bought the Habsburgs some time while Emperor Bonaparte overextended himself in Russia, and in the war of liberation of 1813 to 1814, the Napoleonic conquests were freed from French rule. After dispatching the dethroned Bonaparte into exile, the diplomats of Europe met at a congress in Vienna to draw up new maps of Europe and try to establish a permanent peace for the continent.

### **The Decline and Fall of the Habsburgs**

By 1815 the Habsburgs ruled a vast and powerful empire. In addition to the old Austrian archduchy, they also controlled Hungary, the lands that make up the modern Czech Republic and Slovakia, Galicia (now in Poland), northern Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia. For the next 100 years, although they would be involved in some sharp little wars, the Habsburg emperors did not have to face a serious

external threat to their territory as they had done from Frederick the Great or Napoleon. But as the 19th century continued on, a much more dangerous problem developed inside their borders. New social forces such as liberalism and nationalism were coming to the fore. The first, which demanded greater political authority for ordinary subjects, was bad enough. But the second was even more ominous because the empire was packed with different nationalities—German, Hungarian, Czech, Slovak, Italian, Polish, Romanian, Serb, and Croat to name just the major ones—and if all these groups insisted on national self-rule, then Austria would simply fall to pieces.

The initial reaction to this was to suppress all attempts at reform, or even the discussion of reform. Metternich (1773–1859), chancellor under Francis I, turned Austria into a virtual police state for nearly 30 years, using his powers to arrest or expel anyone suspected of harboring treacherous liberal or nationalist ideas. The response to this suppression, when it came, was explosive. In 1848—a year of revolutionary turmoil throughout Europe—crowds rioted in Vienna, Prague, and Budapest and forced Metternich himself into exile. The Hungarians declared independence, and it took a Russian army to bring the insurgents back into line. In the midst of this chaos, the incompetent emperor of the moment was quietly removed, and a young Habsburg prince, Franz Josef (1830–1916), was installed on the throne. This proved to be a wise decision. Under Franz Josef's calm tutelage, order and authority were restored in Vienna and throughout the empire, although it was now clear that simple repression alone would not be enough to counter the liberal and national challenges. The Habsburgs would have to accommodate themselves to the new realities of European politics as best they could.

Austria's continued weakness was highlighted in 1866 when Prussia launched a lightning-quick war to determine

the mastery of Germany once and for all. Although the Holy Roman Empire was long gone, the German princes had continued to look to Vienna as the natural focus of authority; now the Habsburgs had to concede to their Prussian counterparts, the Hohenzollerns, the right to decide matters in Germany. Austria had already been stripped of its Italian territories in an earlier war with France and Piedmont, and now the Hungarians were demanding greater autonomy, as well. The year after his loss in the Austro-Prussian war, Franz Josef enacted what was called the Compromise of 1867; henceforth Hungary would be an equal partner with Austria within the empire, with its own parliament and political rights. This new Austro-Hungarian Empire, as it was called, solved one problem but opened up many others. The Czechs, Croats, and Serbs now demanded their share of national privileges, too. The long-term survival of such a ramshackle institution was beginning to look grim.

The latter years of Franz Josef's long reign were marked by personal tragedy. His beautiful, haunted wife, Elisabeth ("Sissi," as she was known), grew distant and rarely visited the imperial capital. In 1889 their son and heir, Archduke Rudolf, a mentally unstable alcoholic and drug addict, killed himself and his aristocratic mistress at the remote hunting lodge of Mayerling. Nine years later Sissi herself was murdered by an anarchist assassin. Franz Josef and the new heir, his nephew Franz Ferdinand, were never personally close, and the younger man angered his uncle by marrying an obscure noblewoman instead of a princess of the royal rank. As the 20th century opened and Austria's political problems worsened, it seemed as if only the ever-more frail figure of the old emperor—who was genuinely loved and revered by the vast majority of his subjects—was holding the Austro-Hungarian Empire together.

On June 28, 1914, Franz Ferdinand and his wife went to Sarajevo (now in Bosnia) for a routine ceremonial visit.



Shortly after they arrived, a teenage Serbian schoolboy, Gavrilo Princip, marched up to their car and shot the couple dead. Determined to punish Serbia for what it considered a deliberate act of terrorism, Austria declared war and in so doing sparked off World War I (1914–1918) between the “Central Powers” of Germany, Turkey, Bulgaria, and Austria herself and the “Entente Powers” of France, Great Britain, Russia, and eventually the United States.

Millions of men fought and died across Europe in the most dreadful conditions, straining each combatant nation to its limits of endurance. For Austria-Hungary, the strain proved fatal. In November 1916 Emperor Franz Josef died peacefully, and with him died the last ties of loyalty within the Habsburg realm. By the autumn of 1918, rebellious national movements were appearing publicly across the empire, demanding the right to independent statehood. On November 11, the day that the Armistice ending the war was signed, the last emperor, Charles (1887–1922), formally abdicated the imperial throne and left Vienna for the final time. Over 600 years of Habsburg rule in Austria were over.

As the Habsburgs retreated into history, the victorious Entente Powers met near Paris to decide upon the fate of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire. On September 10, 1919, Austrian representatives signed the Treaty of St. Germain (named for the palace it was presented in), which carved up the Habsburg territories into nation-states: Czechoslovakia was formed from Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia; Galicia became part of the new Republic of Poland; Croatia and Bosnia joined Serbia in the Yugoslav union; Hungary, itself shorn of much territory, became an independent nation. “What’s left,” said the French prime minister Georges Clemenceau, “is Austria”. The predominantly German-speaking peoples in the western end of the old Habsburg estate were left to their own devices, to establish for the first time in their history their own federal republic. Aside from

the brief period of union with Germany immediately before and during World War II, Austria has remained an independent state ever since the Treaty of St. Germain. But it has not been an easy journey from empire to modern democratic nationhood.



The grand dome of St. Peter's Church in Vienna reflects the power and influence of the Catholic Church in Austria. About three-quarters of Austria's population are Roman Catholic.

growth of right-wing organizations like the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ, discussed in more detail in Chapter 5), feeding on resentment of immigrants and foreigners, has played a major role in Austrian parliamentary politics for over a decade now. Defenders of the immigrants argue that Austria's aging and shrinking indigenous population can only afford to maintain its expensive welfare-state system with the contribution of outside labor, and therefore Austria has a responsibility to maintain its tradition of tolerance for those fleeing persecution and economic woe. But surveys suggest that many people, especially older Austrians in the more socially conservative west, are hardening their attitudes toward immigration.

### Who are the Austrians?

The early 20th-century historian and philosopher Oswald Spengler once wrote: "The Austrians feel foreign inside themselves to all other Germans." He was writing this at a time when, as we have seen, "Austria" meant something rather different to what it does now. In those days Austria was at the center of a much larger multinational empire of which the nine provinces of modern Austria were just a minor subsection, although Vienna was the imperial capital. So when someone before World War I referred to "Austrians," they could mean several different things, depending on the context: They might be talking about the provinces of Lower and Upper Austria or the empire's German-speaking peoples or everyone living in the half of the empire directly administered from Vienna—many of whom were not ethnically German—or they could mean something else entirely. The rulers of imperial Austria, who had nothing to gain and everything to lose from nationalism, did their best to subdue any ideas about a distinct Austrian self-consciousness.

So was Spengler right? The creation of an independent Austrian nation-state set off a crisis of identity that to some



# 5

## The Austrian Republic

As we saw at the end of Chapter 3, modern Austria was forged from the German-speaking remnants of the old Habsburg Empire at the close of World War I. Since the Treaty of St. Germain in 1919, Austria has been a federal republic, governed by a president and parliament in Vienna but with important powers also delegated to its nine self-governing *Länder*, or provinces: Burgenland, Carinthia, Lower Austria, Upper Austria, Salzburg, Styria, Tyrol, Vienna, and Vorarlberg. To be more accurate, there have been two federal republics—the first lasting until 1938, when the country was absorbed into Nazi Germany, and the second beginning in 1955 and continuing to the present day. Despite this break in its political continuity, the Austria of today is still largely governed by the principles laid down in its 1920 constitution, with the most important amendments being made in 1929. To better understand

the often-turbulent story of the two republics, it would be useful to analyze the structure of the Austrian government more closely.

### **Austria's Political System**

The Austrian head of state is the federal president, elected by popular vote every six years. This president nominally appoints the government and is commander in chief of the national armed forces. In practice, it is the president's chancellor—usually the leader of the largest political party at the time—who governs the country on a day-to-day basis, appoints a cabinet of ministers, and introduces new legislation in parliament. Parliament is composed of two houses, the lower chamber, or National Council (*Nationalrat*) and the upper chamber, or Federal Council (*Bundesrat*). The Nationalrat, which has 183 members and is elected by popular vote on a four-year basis, is the more important of the two, and although a new law must be approved by both houses before it becomes official, the Nationalrat can override the vote of the Bundesrat if it so chooses. Nationalrat elections are organized on the principle of “proportional representation,” or PR, meaning that the number of members each party obtains is roughly equal to its share in the popular vote. (Congressional elections in the United States are not conducted using PR, which means that there can sometimes be a discrepancy between the number of votes a party receives and the seats that it wins).

The Bundesrat's 64 members are appointed by regional assemblies, or *Landtags*, and its role is to safeguard the rights of Austria's provinces. Membership in the Bundesrat is apportioned according to the population in each province. Each province has a governor in its own right, appointed by the local Landtag, except for Vienna, where the city's mayor also acts as the governor. The Landtags are in turn elected by popular ballot. Each province has its own constitution and can raise taxes as well as organize the local police force, administer primary

education, run the region's health and housing services, and implement environmental-protection laws. The provinces fiercely guard their constitutional privileges, and throughout Austria's recent history there has sometimes been tension between the wishes of the federal government in Vienna and the local governors and Landtags.

Austria is a fully functioning modern democracy in which the powers of the government are monitored and, if necessary, restricted by an independent judicial system. The Constitutional Court, whose 13 members are directly appointed by the federal president, is the supreme legal authority in the country and, if need be, can overturn a parliamentary law if it is deemed to be contrary to the national constitution. A whole series of lower courts handle ordinary civil and criminal matters, although in situations involving fundamental liberties, an ordinary citizen may be able to appeal his case all the way to the Constitutional Court. Austria has a professional civil service, which is independent of party political allegiance and helps to administer the country efficiently.

The two most powerful political parties in the Republic are the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) and the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP). Both can trace their origins to the Habsburg period, and they reflect the key ideological and geographical divisions within Austrian society. The SPÖ, a left-wing party espousing broadly socialist principles, has traditionally derived most of its electoral support from the working-class population of Vienna and other large cities. By contrast, the ÖVP is more politically conservative and is strongest in the small-town middle class and the mountainous western provinces. During their earlier history, these two parties were bitter parliamentary foes, even taking their conflicts onto the street with violent results, but nowadays their differences are more of degree than of kind. For example, modern Social Democrats tend to support Austria's heavily nationalized and state-controlled industrial system, while the People's Party is more skeptical about the

benefits of government intervention in the economy. Both parties have gone through name and image changes because of embarrassing associations with Austria's political past. During most of the postwar period, the SPÖ was officially called the Socialist Party, but it returned to its older Social Democratic title after the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe because it did not want to be too closely identified with the failed Soviet system. Similarly, the ÖVP started life as the Christian Social Party but abandoned this name after World War II because it had been tarnished by involvement with the Nazis.

The political mood of 21st-century Austria stands in marked contrast to the bitterness and rancor that characterized the First Republic. Both the Social Democrats and the People's Party have wanted above all to avoid the political instability that undid their country in 1938, and because the proportional representation system makes it difficult for one party alone to control the Nationalrat, they have often governed together in so-called Grand Coalitions. A policy of *Proporz* (proportionality) is used in such cases, whereby positions in government are tacitly allotted to each side in rough proportion to their electoral support. This discourages political infighting and has aided the country's peaceful postwar development, but critics have charged that it weakens the authority of parliament and has brought corruption into government. The rise of the right-wing Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) can partly be traced to dislike of the influence of *Proporz* in Austrian politics.

Another feature of Austria's political system is the so-called social partnership between the government, management, and labor, expressed in institutions like the Wage-Price Commission. This commission meets to negotiate changes in wages and prices between representatives of the state, employers, and trade-union leaders and is intended to keep the Austrian economy healthy through compromise and mutual agreement rather than competition. The social partnership reflects the determination of Austria's mainstream politicians to avoid



the destructive power struggles within their society that characterized the ill-fated First Republic. However, some Austrians have complained that the partnership is similar to the Proporz system, rewarding establishment favorites at the expense of the general public.

### **The First Republic (Up to 1938)**

After 1919 the new Austrian nation was beset with problems. Food shortages and unemployment were rampant, and the local currency suffered massive inflation. The creation of a short-lived Bolshevik regime in neighboring Hungary brought fears of a Communist *putsch*, or revolt. Perhaps most serious of all, many Austrians lacked any unifying sense of allegiance to their new republic. In imperial times the Habsburg emperors had represented the symbolic center of patriotism; now, with no binding sentiment to keep the country together, what alternative focus of loyalty was there? Indeed, many people in Austria believed that the best course their country could take would be *Anschluss*, or unification, with their fellow German speakers to the north (in the postwar Weimar Republic). But the Entente Powers had specifically forbidden *Anschluss* between Austria and Germany in the terms of the Treaty of St. Germain, and in the immediate aftermath of World War I, neither country was in any position to defy that ban.

Politically there was little room for compromise between the Social Democrats and their Christian Social opponents. The Christian Social Party led a conservative coalition that ran the federal government from 1920 up to the end of democratic politics in the first Republic 14 years later, but it was never able to establish firm control over the parliamentary life of the country. Vienna, which had important state powers of its own, remained the stronghold of the Social Democrats, who implemented a series of ambitious social reforms during the 1920s. “Red Vienna,” as it became known, saw the construction of

large and elaborate housing projects for city workers that influenced urban planners across the world.

Conflict between left and right was expressed not only through political means but also by violence. Conservative radicals created the *Heimwehr*, a paramilitary force intended to suppress left-wing agitators that eventually became a fascist political party, while the socialists countered with a militia of their own, the *Schutzbund*. Both of these groups engaged in bloody street clashes with one another, and their existence served to undermine the already fragile democratic tradition in Austria. Ignaz Seipel (1876–1932), a former Jesuit priest and college professor who served as Austria’s chancellor throughout most of the 1920s, increasingly relied upon the Heimwehr to maintain political control. In July 1927, on a day later known as Black Friday, a demonstration by Viennese workers was brutally broken up by the authorities, and in the ensuing chaos nearly 100 people were killed and the Ministry of Justice Building burned down. Another troubling development on the political stage was the emergence of an Austrian National Socialist (“Nazi”) movement, mimicking the German organization under the leadership of Adolf Hitler.

In 1932 a new Christian Social politician, Engelbert Dollfuss (1892–1934), became federal chancellor. Dollfuss came to power shortly after the collapse of the Austrian banking system had ushered in a new economic slump. He believed that democratic politics had failed in Austria and that only an authoritarian regime could recreate stability in the country. In March 1933, taking advantage of a procedural problem in the Austrian government, Dollfuss suspended parliament and later that year announced the creation of the “Fatherland Front,” a coalition of conservative parties intended to keep the socialists from any chance of power. Although Dollfuss was now effectively a right-wing dictator—the period of his rule is sometimes called Austro-Fascism—he distrusted the Austrian Nazis and was as keen to suppress them as the communists. Dollfuss also feared

that Hitler, who had now become German chancellor, would try to seize Austria by force, and so he sought alliance with the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini. Although Mussolini would later ally with the Germans during the World War II, in 1933 he was eager to restrain Hitler's ambitious plans, and so he agreed to support Dollfuss on condition that the Fatherland Front crack down on the Viennese Social Democrats.

Tensions came to a head the following year when first the Social Democrats and then the Austrian Nazis revolted. The left-wing uprising in February 1934 was poorly organized, and the government was able to quickly regain control, although hundreds of working-class militiamen were killed and wounded in the fighting. In July the Nazis seized control of the chancellor's office in an attempt to overthrow the regime; Dollfuss was shot and died soon after, and it was left to a new leader, Kurt Schuschnigg (1897–1977), to reassert authority. Using the Heimwehr, Schuschnigg ordered the arrest and execution of leading Nazis; the putsch had failed. The outcome of the 1934 crisis was the forced dissolution of all political parties except the Fatherland Front. In 1935 Great Britain, France, and Italy came together in what was known as the Stresa Front in a demonstration of support for Austrian independence. It looked for a moment as if Austria might achieve some kind of diplomatic security.

Unfortunately for Schuschnigg, the unity of the Stresa Front was short-lived because Italy alienated Great Britain and France by invading Ethiopia in 1936. At home, by trying to fight the Social Democrats and the Nazis at the same time, Schuschnigg's government isolated and weakened itself. By early 1938 Hitler felt strong enough to renew German designs on Austria. Under pressure from Hitler, Schuschnigg agreed to bring some Austrian Nazis into the government, but clearly agitation for Anschluss was growing within the country and outside. On March 9 Schuschnigg attempted to forestall unification by announcing a referendum on the continued existence



Federal Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg, shown in 1935. Schuschnigg's efforts to prevent German annexation of Austria were successful until he lost the support of Italian leader Benito Mussolini. Schuschnigg became a Nazi prisoner until 1945. After the war, he settled in the United States and taught at St. Louis University until his death in 1977.

of Austria. Hitler immediately demanded that he abandon this plan, and, defeated, Schuschnigg agreed. Two days later German troops invaded Austria in a bloodless occupation, and on March 15 Hitler appeared in Vienna to ecstatic crowds to announce the Anschluss. Austria's brief experiment with independence had ended—for the time being.

Reaction to the Anschluss was mixed. Many thousands of Austrians chose to leave their country rather than accept Nazi government, and Austria lost the talents of some of its most famous and gifted sons and daughters, including Sigmund Freud. Others disliked the arrangement, though they tolerated it. But for many people the desire for Anschluss had lingered ever since the creation of the Republic at the end of World War I; they were also attracted to the economic prosperity and stability that Germany seemed to promise. Although after 1945 Austrians sometimes pretended otherwise, at the time millions of them greeted absorption into Hitler's Third Reich with enthusiasm.

The group with the most to fear from the Anschluss was, of course, Austria's Jewish population, which was concentrated in the capital. Its local heritage was deeply rooted; there is evidence that Jews had been living in Vienna since Roman times, and in 1938 the city's Jewish community was around 170,000 strong. Austrian Jews had long experienced forms of official and unofficial anti-Semitism—some mild and some not so mild—but their community had also played a major role in Vienna's artistic, business, and professional life, and many of the city's wealthiest and most respected citizens were Jewish. The effects of the Anschluss were devastating. Tens of thousands hurriedly emigrated in the wake of Nazi rioting that was even more vicious than in Germany itself, and most of the 33,000 Jewish businesses in Vienna were broken up or forcibly taken over. Some 65,000 Viennese Jews would die in the ensuing Holocaust.

### **The Second Republic (1945 and After)**

A little more than a year after the Anschluss, Hitler's Reich was at war with Great Britain and France. Soon the Soviet Union and, later, the United States joined the fight against Nazism. By 1945 Germany had been defeated, and—echoing 1918—the Allies once again had to decide what to do with Austria. The immediate decision was to partition the country

into four areas of occupation—American, British, French, and Russian—with Vienna additionally being divided into four areas and a central “international zone.” A provisional government was installed, led by Karl Renner (1870–1950), who had also been the first chancellor of Austria in 1918. Renner included former members of the Social Democrat and Christian Socialist parties, the latter now reorganizing itself as the Austrian People’s Party. But real authority remained in the hands of the occupying powers. The atmosphere of the immediate postwar period is captured in *The Third Man*, a well-known 1949 movie set in Vienna starring Orson Welles.

The onset of the Cold War between the western powers and the Soviet Union made progress on the Austrian question more complicated. Austrians feared that the division of their country into zones might become permanent, as had happened in Germany. The key to ensuring a continued unified Austria was to offer a guarantee of neutrality in the competition between East and West. In May 1955, the Austrian State Treaty was signed by the occupying powers, creating the Second Austrian Republic and returning the country to the status of an independent and sovereign nation. Austria had to agree not to attempt any further Anschluss with Germany, forego any political alliances with either side of the so-called Iron Curtain, and make hefty payments to the Soviet Union for the return of goods and property confiscated at the end of the Second World War.

During the 1950s and 1960s Grand Coalitions generally governed the country. In 1970, however, the socialists under Bruno Kreisky (1911–1990) won their own majority and proceeded to run Austria alone for the next 13 years. “King Bruno,” as he was known to many Austrians, dominated the political life of the country throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. His tenure as chancellor saw the extension of Austria’s generous social-welfare state and the democratization of important Austrian institutions like the university system. A political moderate, Kreisky worked to broaden the electoral

appeal of his party and also went to great pains to distance his socialist beliefs from those practiced in communist Eastern Europe. A series of financial scandals in 1983 dethroned the king, and he resigned under something of a black cloud.

### **The Freedom Party and the Legacy of Anschluss**

By far the most contentious aspect of Austria's political life today has been the rise of a third party to challenge the Social Democrats and the People's Party, namely the Freedom Party of Austria, or FPÖ.

The FPÖ was formed in 1956 and attracted a motley crew of old-fashioned conservatives, extreme nationalists, and even former Nazis—who in some cases did not disguise their continued sympathies for National Socialism. Although at first a minor force, the FPÖ successfully tapped into popular resentment both of the corruption scandals that were plaguing Austrian politics in the 1970s and 1980s and of the increasing numbers of foreign-born immigrants to the country. Their first taste of power came in 1983, when Bruno Kreisky stood down. The socialists, who had suffered losses in recent elections, needed a coalition partner to retain control of the government and, in a surprise move, offered a place to the FPÖ. In 1986 the Freedom Party also gained an effective new leader, Jörg Haider (1950–). However, that year the socialists abandoned the alliance, and in 1987 they recreated the old Grand Coalition with the People's Party.

The reason for this sudden switch in tactics was the election to the Austrian presidency in 1986 of Kurt Waldheim (1918–), the Austrian Republic's most internationally well-known politician. Waldheim, the secretary-general of the United Nations from 1971 to 1981, was suddenly accused during his presidential campaign of covering up his involvement in Nazi atrocities during his wartime service in Yugoslavia. Waldheim's evasive responses to questioning deepened suspicion among many that he was being less than candid about his past.



Former U.N. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim was inaugurated as Austria's President in 1986. Controversy surrounded Waldheim regarding the extent of his involvement with the Nazis while serving in the German army during World War II.

Waldheim's election set off a storm of protest across the international community, and the United States declared that the Austrian president was an "undesirable" who would not be allowed to enter the country—a major diplomatic snub. For the five years of Waldheim's term, Austria found itself effectively isolated.

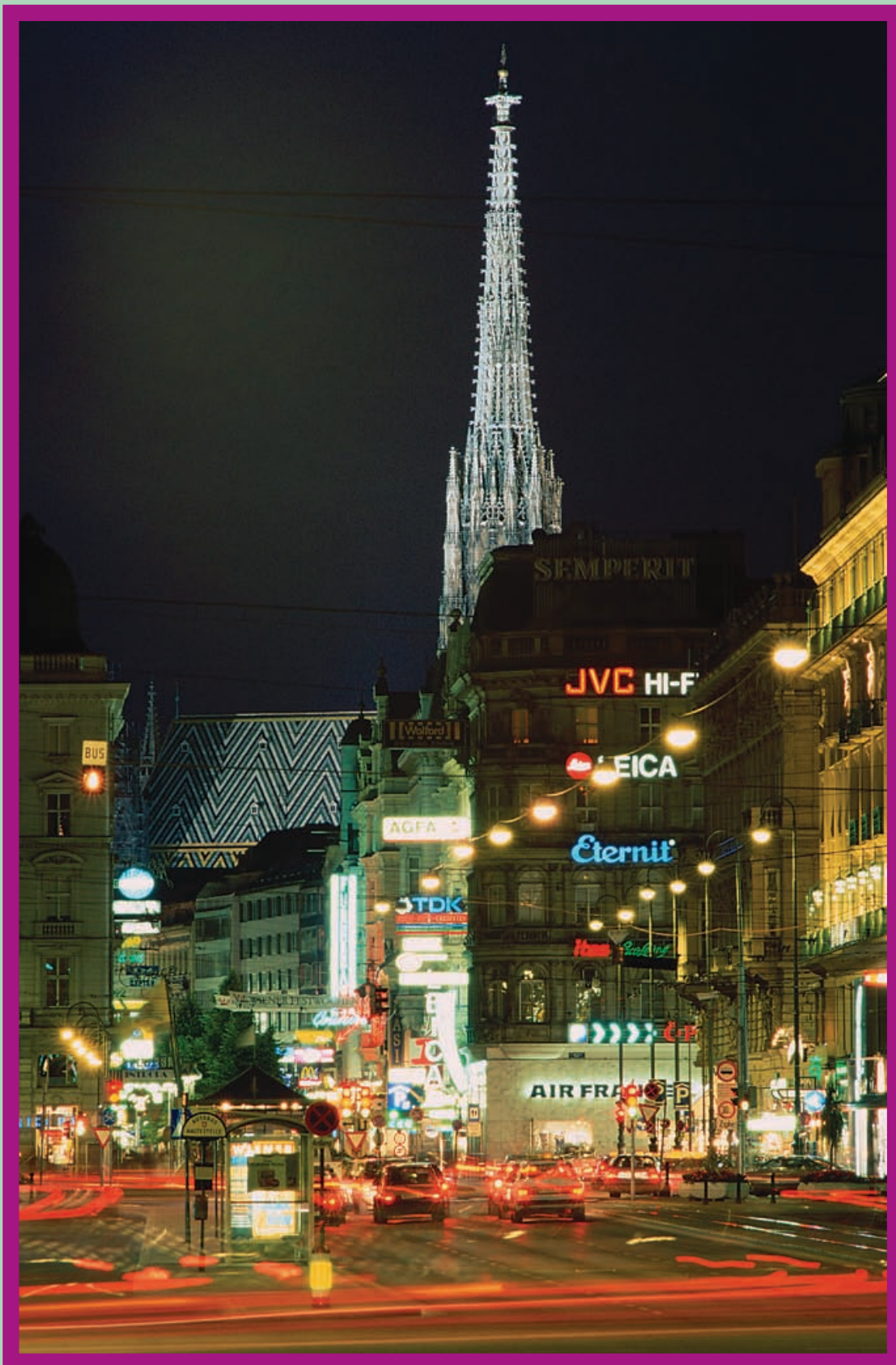
Waldheim's election and the increasing success of the FPÖ touched a raw nerve within Austrian society. Was the president's hedging about his past representative of the Austrian attitude to the Third Reich—that the country had chosen to forget its



former enthusiasm for Hitler's regime by portraying itself as a victim of German policies rather than their executor? And did nostalgia for National Socialism continue to linger in Austria?

In recent years many Austrians have gone to considerable lengths to dispel this belief. In October 2000 the government finalized an agreement to pay compensation to 150,000 former slave laborers who were pressed into service during World War II, at a cost of over \$400 million. Plus in January 2001 Austria agreed to create a compensation program for the property stolen from its Jewish populace in the Nazi era. And as we saw in Chapter 4, postwar Austria has accepted huge numbers of refugees fleeing war or tyranny in their own countries—an act of generosity that ironically has served to embitter some native Austrians and foster the support of the Freedom Party.

The controversy made world news once again in October 1999 when the Grand Coalition of the socialists and the People's Party broke down, and after much parliamentary wrangling the People's Party offered Haider's FPÖ (which had won 27 percent of the popular vote in recent elections) a new role in government. This quickly became known as the "black-blue coalition"—black and blue being the respective colors of the ÖVP and the FPÖ—and it provoked hostility both inside the country and abroad. Massive demonstrations by protestors took place throughout Austria, and the European Union (EU), which Austria joined in 1995, implemented diplomatic sanctions against the new government in Vienna. The black-blue coalition denounced the sanctions as interference in Austria's internal affairs, but its leaders also agreed to sign a statement rejecting racial discrimination and allowed observers from the European Commission on Human Rights to report on the democratic state of Austrian politics. This report, as well as Haider's resignation as head of the FPÖ in February 2000, eased concerns somewhat, and the EU lifted its sanctions. But the continuing presence of the FPÖ in Austrian government remains a sore point in the country's relationship with the outside world.



Modern nightlife and ancient culture exist side-by-side on Vienna's Kärntnerstrasse.