

Republic and Dictatorship

Austria from 1918 to 1945

After World War I Austria-Hungary's various nationalities decided against one common empire. Thus also the German-speaking representatives of the monarchy proclaimed a state of their own. The conditions, however, were dictated by the victorious powers. The last emperor, Charles I, was sent into exile together with his family. Demands of the Austrian political parties to unite with Germany were turned down by the allies. The struggle for securing the country's new borders was carried out with diplomatic means as well as with weapons. The southern border of the province of Carinthia and the Burgenland were heavily disputed. The creation of a solid economic basis was extremely difficult.

The political atmosphere in Austria was becoming ever more hostile. Political violence was the order of the day. Due to this fact paramilitary formations were formed; among which the „Heimwehren“, who sympathized with the Cristian Socialist Party, the „Frontkämpfervereinigungen“ and later on also the „Ostmärkische Sturmsharen“ as well as the Republican „Schutzbund“ were the most important. The National Socialists also had their formations. All together they outnumbered by far the regular Austrian federal army built - according to the conditions of the peace treaty of St. Germain - by professional soldiers. From 1927 onwards Austria lived in an atmosphere of impending civil war. The Christian-Socialist government of chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss was heading towards an authoritarian system, used the patt situation in Parliament to eliminate it in 1933 and replaced the democratic constitution by a corporate one. In February 1934 civil war broke out, the member of the then already forbidden „Schutzbund“ revolted not only in Vienna, but also in other provinces of Austria. In July 1934 the assassination of Dollfuss by members of an illegal „SS-Standarte“ again led to extensive fighting. The rapprochement to fascist Italy, which offered protection, lead to the complete isolation of Austria when Mussolini arranged with Hitler. In Berchtesgaden Hitler put chancellor Schuschnigg under heavy pressure; Schuschnigg saw his only chance by organizing a public opinion poll on the independence of Austria on March 13, 1938. Intimidated by Hitler's threat of a military invasion the chancellor resigned on March 11, president Miklas' resignation followed soon afterwards. On March 12 the German army („Wehrmacht“) entered Austria and was given a hearty welcome by some parts of the population. On the following day the new National Socialist government, already formed on March 11, „legalized“ Austria's „Anschluss“ to the German Reich. Austria did no longer exist as an independent state.

National Socialist dictatorship did not only lead to a change of elites, forcible emigration and persecution, but also made the country ready for war within a short period of time. Austrian soldiers were deployed on all fronts; many of them fought in the battle at Stalingrad. However, Austrian soldiers also entered Allied armies. From 1943 onwards the country, now divided into „Alpen- und Donaureichsgaue“, suffered from airraids and partisan warfare led by Yugoslavia in its Southern regions. In the meantime the persecution of Jews and enemies of the NS-regime reached its climax. Despite the gradually rising resistance and the participation of Austrians in the attempt to assassinate Hitler on July 20, 1944, the country was deeply involved in the political and military structures of the German Reich, experienced war, the liberation by the Allies and the capitulation of the „Wehrmacht“ on its own territory from March until May 1945. In mid-April Karl Renner succeeded in forming a new Austrian government, proclaiming the independence of the country and making a new start.

Showcases and other objects

Wall showcase left of the entrance: exhibits reminding of the birth of the Republic, the democratic constitution and Parliament („Volkswehr“, federal army) as well as the struggle for the country's borders. In the middle of the room: advertising column with political pamphlets.

Showcase right of the entrance and objects near the window: exhibits reminding of emperor Charles I, the extremely difficult economic situation and the great importance of railways for the population's supply as well as the maintenance of contacts from abroad.

3 showcases near the window: exhibits reminding of the paramilitary formations, the increasing violence in politics and the civil wars. Behind and in the centre of the room: roadblock; 8 cm field gun model 18 of the federal army; oil painting by M. Florian: „The Revolution“. On the back wall of the 1st video chamber: portraits of Austrian federal presidents and chancellors.

2 showcases near the window, behind the gun: uniforms, weapons and equipment of the members of the federal army, the „Freiwilligen Schützenkorps“ and the „Frontmiliz“.

Wall showcase on the left, behind the 1st video chamber: objects of the federal chancellors Seipel, Dollfuss and Schuschnigg; exhibits reminding of the futile attempts to maintain Austria's independence, the „Anschluss“ plebiscite of April 10, 1938, as well as the beginning of the „Gleichschaltung“, the integration of Austrian soldiers into the „Wehrmacht“ and suppression and annexation of some parts of Czechoslovakia. In the middle of the room, behind the video chamber: commemorative plaque on the introduction of the Corporate Constitution; advertising column with appeals and advertising pamphlets of the „Vaterländische Front“ and the National Socialists; at the left wall, behind the advertising column: F. Liebermann: bust of Adolf Hitler.

Wall showcase on the left, behind the Hitler bust: „Führer“ cult, weapons, uniforms and equipment of the „Wehrmacht“, the „Reichsarbeitsdienst“ and the „Hitlerjugend“, helmets and headgear of army members of the defeated countries.

Showcase in the middle of the room: figure of a German parachutist; his weapons and equipment; above: light monoplane of the type Fi 156 C-trop („Fieseler Storch“); beside the window: German „Kübelwagen“ VW type 82; German anti-tank gun model 40; German NSU-tracked vehicle.

Showcase in the middle of the room, behind the „parachutist showcase“: figure of a Soviet artillery officer; Soviet weapons and equipment; „war rubbish“ from Stalingrad.

3 showcases near the window: assemblages by C. Stenvert: „Stalingrad or the Proceeds of Murderous Tyranny“. At the back wall of the 2nd video chamber and beside the window: paintings and photos of different aspects of war; near the window: German 8,8 cm anti-aircraft gun model 36 and German 60 cm anti-aircraft searchlight.

Showcase behind the gun: figure of an American bomber pilot. Behind, hanging from the wall: 2 American aircraft bombs; below: machine gun emplacement of a US bomber.

Wall showcase on the left, behind the 2nd video chamber: anti-aircraft protection; facsimile of the „Moscow Declaration“; German explosive tank „Goliath“; exhibits reminding of resistance, partisan warfare, Austrians in allied armies, concentration camps, forced labour and armaments industry; in the middle of the room: advertising column with rallying calls of the NS regime; behind, in the middle of the room: painting by H. Fronius: „The execution“.

Last showcase on the left: exhibits of military spiritual warfare and medical treatment as well as objects showing the war on Austrian territory, the capitulation of the German armies, prisoners of war, reestablishment of the Austrian republic and allied military administration.

Showcase in the middle of the room: uniform parts, weapons, equipment and pamphlets of the Red Army. Behind, near the window: German tracking vehicle model „Ost“; tank barrier; Soviet 7,62 cm anti-tank gun model 42; spherical bunker; American MB Willy's Jeep; on the wall beside the window: painting by M. Florian: „St. Stephen's Cathedral on Fire“; at the right back wall: oil painting by H. Wulz: „Retum“; left: G. Ambrosi: bust of president Renner; above the entrance to the room „Naval Power Austria“: R. Hammerstiel: triptychon „Evening, Night and Morning“.