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OCCUPATION AND INDEPENDENCE: THE AUSTRIAN SECOND REPUBLIC, 1945-1963



The experience of the Anschluss and Nazi rule deepened the commitment of Austrians to parliamentary democracy and Austrian statehood. The electorate remained divided into three political camps—socialist/Marxist, Catholic, and nationalist/liberal—but cooperation replaced extreme political polarization. Through Allied occupation, slow economic growth, dependency on Marshall Plan, the Second Republic became a stable democracy. The major political parties strove towards ending Allied occupation and restoring a fully independent Austria. Upon the termination of Allied occupation, Austria was proclaimed a neutral country, and "everlasting" neutrality was incorporated into the Constitution on October 26, 1955.

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Detailed Description:

As the Soviet troops advanced on Vienna, they occupied the town where Socialist leader Karl Renner lived in retirement. Despite his anti-Soviet reputation, Renner was chosen by the Soviet leaders to form and head a provisional government, apparently believing the aging politician would be an easily manipulated figurehead. Renner, however, established authority based on his leadership role in the last freely elected parliament, not on the backing of the Soviet Union.

On April 27, 1945, the provisional government issued a decree nullifying the Anschluss and reestablishing an independent, democratic Republic of Austria under the 1920 constitution as amended in 1929. The country was occupied by the Allies on May 9, 1945 and under the Allied Commission for Austria established by an agreement on July 4, 1945, it was divided into Zones occupied respectively by American, British, French and Soviet Army personnel, with Vienna being also divided similarly into four sectors.

Though under occupation, this Austrian government was officially permitted to conduct foreign relations with the approval of the Four Occupying Powers under the agreement of

June 28, 1946. As part of this trend, Austria was one of the founding members of the Danube Commission formed on August 18, 1948. Austria would benefit from the Marshall Plan but economic recovery was very slow as a result of the its 10-year political overseeing by the Allied Powers.

Unlike the First Republic, which had been characterized by sometimes violent conflict between the different political groups, the Second Republic became a stable democracy. The two largest leading parties, the Christian-conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) remained in a coalition led by the ÖVP until the mid-1960s. The Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ), who had hardly any support in the Austrian electorate, remained in the coalition until 1950 and in parliament until 1959. For much of the Second Republic, the only opposition party was the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), which included pan-German and liberal political currents. It was founded in 1955 as a successor organization to the short-lived Federation of Independents (VdU).

The two major parties strove towards ending allied occupation and restoring a fully independent Austria. The Austrian State Treaty was signed on May 15, 1955. Upon the termination of allied occupation, Austria was proclaimed a neutral country, and "everlasting" neutrality was incorporated into the Constitution on October 26, 1955.

The political system of the Second Republic came to be characterized by the system of *Proporz*, meaning that posts of some political importance were split evenly between members of the SPÖ and ÖVP. Interest group representations with mandatory membership (e.g. for workers, businesspeople, farmers etc.) grew to considerable importance and were usually consulted in the legislative process, so that hardly any legislation was passed that did not reflect widespread consensus.

When Austria adopted a policy of neutrality in 1955, its leaders made it clear that political neutrality did not mean moral neutrality. Austrian sympathies clearly lay with the Western democracies, an attitude that was reinforced by its opposition to the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. Nonetheless, Austria attempted to cultivate good relations with the Soviet bloc countries, which accounted for about one-sixth of Austrian exports by the early-1960s.

This Archives Unbound collection of U.S. State Department Central Classified Files relating to internal the internal affairs of post-World War II Austria, contain a wide range of materials from U.S. diplomats, including:

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Publisher's Note: This collection comprises, in their entirety, the Scholarly Resources microfilm collections entitled *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs, Austria, 1945-1949*; *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs, Austria, 1950-1954*; *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs, Austria,*

1955-1959; and, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs, Austria, 1960-1963.*