



Preface

More than fifteen years have passed since the first edition of this book. During this period the national trends of the year 2005 have changed substantially. And the international economic situation has taken an extreme turn for the worse. The bursting of the real estate bubble in the U.S. in 2007 developed into a huge global banking and financial crisis which, in turn, led (also in Austria) to massive state interventions in 2008 and 2009 in order to bail out banks and rescue the financial sector. In 2010, the financial crisis became acute in Europe starting with the financial disaster in Greece and affecting a number of other, highly indebted EU-member states. In Austria, too, all kinds of special rescue packages for banks and stimulus programs were implemented by the new coalition government, led by Chancellor Werner Faymann and Vice-Chancellor Josef Pröll, and continued by Pröll's successor, Michael Spindelegger. He served as Austrian vice chancellor, Foreign Minister and chairman of the ÖVP. He was succeeded by Reinhold Mitterlehner, Minister of Science, Research and Economy. After the CEO of the Austrian Railways Christian Kern had organized an internal party coup against the Social Democratic Chancellor Faymann he took over the Chancellery in 2016, but had to resign in December 2017 when the new People's Party chairman and former Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz won the elections and formed a government with the right wing Freedom's Party of Heinz Christian Strache.

This government exploded over a scandal video of Strache and after a period with a government of experts led by the first female Chancellor Brigitte Bierlein, Kurz again won the elections and formed a coalition with the middle to the left Green Party under chairman Werner Kogler. And already two months after the new government took over the executive power the deadly corona virus crisis hit Austria in February/March 2020 and forced the new People's Party-Green government to completely reverse their strategy of zero-base-budget or start ecological tax incentives in 2022: public and economic life was shut down for more than a month and the government set up a EUR 38 billion aid and assistance package to contain the biggest economic crisis since the end of the Second World War.

Nationally, as well as internationally, it was the memory of the global economic crisis of the 1930s that was the force behind the concepts motivating comprehensive state intervention in failing free markets. In the shadows of this crisis, the

FPÖ (Austrian Freedom Party) made a fresh start after its split and capitalized on the public debates about migration and security dominating the municipal elections of October 2010. This right-wing populist party gained 25.77 per cent of the electoral vote; the SPÖ (Austrian Socialist Party) got only 44.34 per cent and thus lost its absolute majority, which led to a Red–Green coalition government, a brand new experiment for the city of Vienna.

The BZÖ (Alliance for the Future of Austria), in turn, was not to survive the split-up in any of the provinces after Jörg Haider's fatal car accident. Only in Carinthia did Haider's political legacy survive for a bit while still benefiting from his regional myth, but the reconciliation with Strache's FPÖ happened quite swiftly. In the aftermath of the crisis, the FPÖ made a fresh start after the split in Knittelfeld, achieving 25.77 per cent of the vote in Vienna's October 2010 municipal council elections, which were dominated once again by vehement right-wing populist debate about migration and security. The most recent austerity measures will continue to shape the social and political conditions for years to come without, however, offering distinct control measures and strategies of intervention that would regulate turbo-capitalism and neo-liberalism. In 2019 the FPÖ only received 16.2 per cent of the vote after the video scandal of the former party chairman H.C. Strache and the Greens which have been voted out of parliament in 2017 made a successful comeback with 13.9 per cent of the votership. The Kurz-Kogler government tried to hinder the complete economic and social disaster after the shutdown of public and economic life to contain the virus with immediate extensive budget spendings like never before in Austrian history.

Compared to all of this – and in hindsight – the 50th anniversary of the Austrian State Treaty in 2005 was a calm year for the Republic of Austria, a year marked by an almost perpetually festive spirit. The year 2005 was an exciting one for the Republic of Austria. There were no fewer than three jubilees to celebrate: 1945 (war's end, liberation and start of the Second Republic), 1955 (signature of the State Treaty and Neutrality Act) and 1995 (EU entry). Exhibitions in Schloss Belvedere, in the Schallaburg and in hundreds of local museums sought to draw in the masses. And again Vienna's Staatsoper, which commemorated its reopening on 5 November 1955 with a state ceremony and star conductors from all over the world, presented itself, as it had fifty years earlier, as *the* place in Austria for remembrance. The war's end in 1945 and the proclamation of Renner's provisional government on 27 April 1945 were highlighted in the media and by politicians, as were the liberation of the Mauthausen concentration camp in early May 1945 and the forty-eight subsidiary concentration camps throughout Austria. Towns, villages, factories, institutions, organizations and political parties all positioned themselves historically and endeavoured to reinterpret their past. Additionally, the year of remembrance offered the last chance for eyewitnesses to establish their accounts in the collective memory.

‘History sells’: but how much critical historical awareness did the various historical performances, whose motto might be ‘Turn off the future, turn up the past’ (Jesse Sykes), really bring about?

This book will seek to portray ten important developments and structural elements of the Second Republic, combining the findings and debates of recent decades with an academic analysis. It is intended to offer an intensive, sometimes subjective, but always clear insight into the collective memory of Austrians, men and women, and especially to stimulate reflection about identity and democratic consciousness. It is not the by now almost obligatory negative account of the State that is to be the focus, but a critical discussion of the foundation and reconstruction myths of the Second Republic, again meant to arouse contradiction and reflection. It will not deal in parlour patriotism, but rather offer an open-minded, open-ended assessment of the Second Republic’s achievements, and its mistakes. The Austrian identity is part of this, as is the specific development of democracy and the Austrian economic miracle. The international context will always be at the centre of the interpretation. Austria, which as a nation felt itself for far too long to be a sort of island, is not one any longer; indeed, in many respects it is a kind of Atlantis, whose traces and artefacts will be highlighted in this volume.

A picture will also be sketched of the most important political actors, against the background of the political party landscape. This will no doubt upset quite a few wishful notions and historical traditions, but at the same time it will bring various new facets into view. The importance of women, not even covered in most histories, in the predominantly women’s elections of 1945 that decided the political shape of the Second Republic will be appropriately reflected in all ten sections.

Democracy and politics without art, culture and the media are inconceivable; especially in a small country like Austria, these are seismographs for the extent of open democratic debate. Throughout the text the focus will repeatedly fall on the attitudes of Austrian men and women towards democratic politics. Since the *demos* determines the present, and the future, of our republican polity, the question of democratic consciousness and corresponding attitudes receives much attention. In 2004 a survey on Austria’s authoritarian potential was specially commissioned for this book; its findings are juxtaposed here with actual historical developments since 1945.

The historical origins of Austrian neutrality and current attitudes to it form one of the ten viewpoints, as do European identity and Europe policy. One often-neglected but important feature of the history of the Second Republic is social policy, the Austrian welfare-state model. It helped greatly towards building an identity quickly and creating acceptance for the mini-State. But in addition the picture also brings in the importance of political pasts for current politics (from the monarchy via the dictatorial regimes of Dollfuß and Schuschnigg to National

Socialism, reconstruction and the Kreisky era). In conclusion, future trends will be summarized, and an assessment of various earlier futurologies given.

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