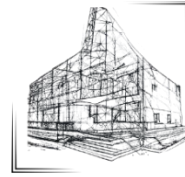


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(IN)VISIBLE TRACES.  
ARTISTIC MEMORIES OF  
THE COLD WAR

(In)Visible Traces. Artistic memories of the Cold War

# Brief historical introduction to the Cold War in Austria

(In)Visible Traces. Artistic memories of the Cold War

BLOCKFREI

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The Cold War, a geopolitical and ideological struggle between the United States and its Western allies on one side and the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc on the other, had a significant impact on countries worldwide. Austria, located in the heart of Europe, found itself caught in the crossfire of this tense international rivalry.

The Cold War's inception notably included Austria among its focal points. While there were undoubtedly more prominent crises that marked the unraveling of the "unnatural" alliance between the West and Stalin, forged by Hitler's war policies, Austria's situation was pivotal. Alongside tensions stemming from Kremlin-installed governments in Eastern Europe, the conflict over Austria emerged as one of the earliest disputes among former Allies regarding Europe's post-war order.

Post-war Austria was portrayed primarily as a **victim** rather than an active participant or perpetrator during World War II. This narrative gained prominence during the early years of the Cold War and was instrumental in shaping Austria's identity and diplomatic trajectory. Dissociation from Nazi Past - The Victim Narrative downplayed Austria's active role in the Nazi regime and its annexation (Anschluss) by Germany in 1938. Instead, it emphasized the notion that Austria was the "first victim" of Nazi aggression. This narrative often omitted acknowledgment of Austrians' participation in Nazi crimes, portraying the country as more of a bystander than a willing collaborator.

Following World War II, Austria was divided into four zones of occupation, each administered by one of the Allied powers: the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and France. Vienna, the capital, was similarly divided into four sectors.

In the **Moscow Declaration** of 1943, Great Britain, the USSR, and the USA had agreed to restore Austria as an independent and democratic state, aligning with the shared interest of curbing German influence post-war through territorial divisions. However, Stalin's subsequent establishment of a Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe, achieved through communist takeovers, raised concerns that Austria might also fall behind the Iron Curtain.

It became evident that Austria, due to its strategic geographical location between emerging power blocs, was too significant to be disregarded by either side. Consequently, both sides adopted positions, albeit primarily political ones. By early 1946, a Soviet report described Austria as a "laboratory where one can observe the process of the struggle between two systems: the Soviet and the capitalist."

However, the Austrian government was able to re-establish its sovereignty in **1955** through the **Austrian State Treaty (Staatsvertrag)**, signed by the occupying powers. One key aspect of the **Austrian State Treaty** was the declaration of Austria's **perpetual neutrality**. This neutrality was not only a reflection of Austria's desire to avoid becoming a battleground for the superpowers but also a strategic decision by the Soviet Union to withdraw its troops in exchange for Austria's commitment to remain neutral. **The Austrian State Treaty** effectively ended the direct military occupation of Austria and solidified Austria's neutrality and established it as an independent and sovereign state.

Vienna, as the capital of Austria, played a crucial role during the Cold War as Austria maintained a policy of neutrality. The city became a hub for international diplomacy, hosting various summits and negotiations between the East and West such as the **Vienna Summit (1961)** when Vienna gained global attention when it hosted a summit between U.S. President John F. Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. The summit was a Cold War milestone, marked by tense discussions on issues like Berlin and nuclear weapons testing.

Situated close to the Iron Curtain, Vienna symbolized the ideological and physical divide between the Eastern and Western blocs during the Cold War. The city's proximity to the border made it a crucial location for intelligence and espionage activities. Once a hotspot for Cold War espionage and diplomatic intrigue, became a symbol of the geopolitical tensions as the city where East and West confronted each other.

**The construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 heightened the sense of division in the city, but Austria's commitment to neutrality kept it out of direct involvement in the major conflicts of the Cold War.**

Throughout the Cold War, Austria maintained its neutral stance, avoiding alignment with either NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) or the Warsaw Pact. This neutrality allowed Austria to develop economically and politically without the direct influence of the superpowers. The end of the Cold War in the late 1980s and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 had a profound impact on global geopolitics, and Austria continued to navigate its course in the evolving European landscape.

References:

Bischof, Günter, and Anton Pelinka. Austrian Historical Memory and National Identity. Transaction Publishers, 1997.

Granville, Johanna. The First Domino: International Decision Making during the Hungarian Crisis of 1956. Texas A&M University Press, 2004.

## **The legal status of (Cold War) heritage in Austria**

Austria was obligated to maintain certain Soviet monuments. This obligation was part of the agreements made during the negotiations for Austria's independence and neutrality. The presence of Soviet monuments in Austria served as a reminder of the Soviet Union's role in the defeat of Nazi Germany and the liberation of Austria from Nazi rule. While Austria agreed to maintain these monuments as a gesture of goodwill towards the Soviet Union, it was not explicitly stated as a requirement within the treaty itself. However, the maintenance of Soviet monuments was generally understood as part of Austria's diplomatic relations and obligations towards the Soviet Union at the time.

Cultural heritage and monument protection in Austria are governed by several laws and regulations aimed at preserving and safeguarding the nation's cultural assets. Here are some key aspects of cultural heritage and monument protection laws in Austria:

**Monuments Protection Act (Denkmalschutzgesetz - DMSG)** - This act is the primary legal framework for the protection of monuments and cultural heritage in Austria.

It outlines the criteria for designating a structure or site as a monument and establishes procedures for their preservation.

The act also defines the responsibilities of the monument protection authorities at different levels.

**Federal Monuments Office (Bundesdenkmalamt - BDA)** - The Federal Monuments Office is a key institution responsible for implementing and enforcing monument protection laws.

It assesses and approves conservation and restoration projects and issues permits for interventions on protected monuments. It plays a crucial role in implementing monument protection laws and managing the cultural heritage inventory.

**Building Act (Bauordnung)** - The Building Act often includes provisions related to the protection of cultural heritage within the context of urban planning and construction projects.

**Regional and Local Legislation** - Austria's federal structure allows individual states (Bundesländer) to have their own monument protection laws that complement federal regulations.

Local municipalities may also have specific regulations regarding cultural heritage protection.

International Conventions and Agreements:

The legal status of Cold War heritage in Austria is subject to the country's broader cultural heritage and monument protection laws. Austria has legal frameworks in place to protect and preserve sites and artifacts of historical significance, and the specific legal provisions for Cold War heritage may be embedded within these broader laws.

**Listing on National Heritage Register:** Cold War-era sites with historical importance may be eligible for listing on Austria's national heritage register, providing them with legal protection.

Austria is a party to various international agreements and conventions concerning cultural heritage protection, such as the UNESCO World Heritage Convention.

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#### Example: **Zwentendorf Nuclear Power Plant**

One notable example of Cold War heritage in Austria is the Zwentendorf Nuclear Power Plant. Although the plant was never operational, it represents a significant part of Austria's Cold War history. It has been preserved as a cultural monument, and there are legal provisions in place to protect and maintain its historical integrity.

References and Sources:

\*Monuments Protection Act - The official text of the Monuments Protection Act can be referenced for detailed legal provisions.

\*Federal Monuments Office (BDA) - The official website of the Federal Monuments Office provides information on their activities and guidelines.

\*Legal Databases - Austrian legal databases and repositories contain the most up-to-date legislative texts and amendments.

## Examples:



### **The Nuclear Power Plant Zwentendorf**

**Austrian contemporary history and a lesson in Austrian politics. Zwentendorf is the world's only nuclear power plant to have been completed but never put into operation due to the outcome of a national referendum.**

#### **Importance:**

The Zwentendorf Nuclear Power Plant, located near Vienna, represents Austria's response to the global nuclear energy debate during the Cold War. Construction began in the 1970s, and it was intended to be Austria's first nuclear power facility. However, public opposition and a national referendum in 1978 led to the plant's suspension.

The Zwentendorf Nuclear Power Plant is a unique Cold War heritage site, emphasizing Austria's determination to remain nuclear-free. It offers insights into the socio-political dynamics of the Cold War era and the influence of public opinion on major policy decisions.

**Citizen Awareness and Memorialization:** The location is well-known among Austrians due to the national referendum and the significant role it played in shaping the country's

energy policies. While it may not be a traditional memorial, its preserved state serves as a tangible reminder of Austria's commitment to nuclear-free energy.

**Status Today:** The Zwentendorf Nuclear Power Plant stands as a symbol of Austria's anti-nuclear stance. While the plant itself was never operational, it remains physically intact. The decision to halt its activation and the subsequent anti-nuclear sentiment highlight the intersection of Cold War concerns and environmental activism.

Following the 1978 referendum, no commercial nuclear power plant (built for the purpose of producing electricity) ever went into operation in Austria. In 1978, Austria enacted a law prohibiting the construction and operation of fission reactors for electrical power generation, hence the plant nowadays is used for research purposes. Three small nuclear reactors for scientific purposes were built in the 1960s, and only one of these plants is still being operated.

Today, the plant's premises along the Danube are home to numerous plant and animal species. Inside, engineers have transformed the plant and turbine halls into a training centre. Moreover, the power plant has also begun generating electricity – 100 % eco-friendly solar power.

The power plant has been offering free guided tours through the nuclear power plant every Friday since 2010: while the morning is always reserved for schools and universities, the popular afternoon tours are open to everyone. Moreover, interested visitors or groups may also arrange additional tours. Thousands of visitors have been inside the power plant in the last few years.

The power plant has not only hosted fashion shows and music videos but was also the shooting location for feature films: both the German TV film "Restrisiko" and the French-Austrian motion picture "RZ2 – Grand Central" were produced at the nuclear power plant along the Danube.











Guided tour: <https://www.zwentendorf.com/en/virtual-tour/index.html>

Image Source: Obtained from the official Facebook account of "AKW Zwentendorf."

## Heroes' Monument of the Red Army (Heldendenkmal der Roten Armee)



**Importance** - The Heroes' Monument of the Red Army, located in Vienna's Schwarzenbergplatz, was erected by the Soviet Union in 1945 to commemorate Soviet soldiers who died during the liberation of Vienna from Nazi occupation. The monument was built in the aftermath of World War II, marking the Soviet contribution to the defeat of the Nazis and the liberation of Vienna. It served as a symbol of gratitude and remembrance for the sacrifices made by the Red Army when 17000 of its soldiers have been killed.

**Status today** - The status of the Heroes' Monument of the Red Army has undergone changes over the years. In the post-Cold War period, discussions arose about the appropriateness of Soviet monuments in various European cities. In 2013, it was decided to keep the monument in place, but with modifications to its inscription to reflect a more neutral and historical perspective. The modifications aimed to emphasize the importance of reconciliation and understanding between Austria and Russia.

**Citizen Awareness and Memorialization** - The Heroes' Monument of the Red Army is well-known among the citizens of Vienna. Its prominent location in Schwarzenbergplatz makes it a visible and recognizable landmark. While the monument itself is not a traditional memorial in the sense of honoring specific individuals, it serves as a historical reminder of the complex relationship between Austria and the Soviet Union during the post-war period. The modifications made in recent years reflect efforts to approach the monument from a more historical and reconciliatory perspective, acknowledging the evolving political landscape and the desire for peaceful relations.

The monument has been increasingly subjected to acts of politically inspired vandalism in the 21st Century. In April 2012 red paint was thrown over a part of the memorial.

In May 2014 it was daubed with the colours of the Ukrainian flag during the onset of the Russo-Ukrainian War.

In February 2015 black paint was poured over an order on the monument from Joseph Stalin congratulating Soviet Forces on their victory in the Vienna Offensive in 1945.

As learned from personal interviews conducted with the police force stationed in the close vicinity of the monument, there have been reported attempts to vandalize it following the outbreak of the full-scale Russian war on Ukraine. In response to these incidents, the Austrian government has implemented a precautionary measure by stationing a 24-hour police watch to safeguard the monument.





(Image Source: "Heroes' Monument of the Red Army" obtained by BLOCKFREI)