

Austria – Out of the Shadow of the Past (Anton Pelinka) Simple English Study Notes

Chapter 1: Austria's Identity

- Austria is a small Central European country with about 8 million people.
- After World War II, Austria was neutral and acted as a bridge between East and West.
- Most people speak German and Austria was traditionally Catholic.
- After 1945, Austria described itself as a victim of Nazi Germany, even though many Austrians supported Nazism.
- Over time, Austrians developed a strong national identity separate from Germany.
- The Waldheim affair in the 1980s forced Austria to face its Nazi past.

Chapter 2: Political Culture

- After 1945, Austria used a power-sharing system between the two main parties (SPÖ and ÖVP).
- This system avoided conflict and helped rebuild democracy.
- Political parties controlled much of public life and worked closely with interest groups.
- This created stability but reduced open political competition.
- From the 1980s onward, voters became less loyal and new parties gained support.

Chapter 3: Constitutional System

- Austria is a federal parliamentary republic based on the 1920 constitution.
- The President is directly elected but mostly has a ceremonial role.
- The National Council is the most powerful political body.
- States exist but have limited power compared to the federal government.
- The Constitutional Court protects democracy and the rule of law.

Chapter 4: Parties and Elections

- For decades, SPÖ and ÖVP dominated Austrian politics.
- The FPÖ became a strong right-wing populist party under Jörg Haider.
- The Greens introduced environmental and social issues into politics.
- Voters became more flexible and turnout slowly declined.
- Austria moved from a two-party system to a multi-party system.

Chapter 5: End of Subcultures

- Catholicism and socialism once strongly shaped political identity.
- Over time, people stopped voting strictly based on religion or class.

- The Church became less politically powerful.
- The SPÖ lost its strong worker-based identity.
- Politics became more individual and issue-based.

Chapter 6: Economy

- Austria experienced strong economic growth after World War II.
- State-owned industries and social partnership supported stability.
- Austria became one of the richest countries in Europe.
- In the 1980s, state industries faced crises and were privatized.
- EU membership increased economic dependence but also opportunities.

Chapter 7: Corporatism

- Corporatism means cooperation between workers, businesses, and the state.
- It helped prevent strikes and economic instability.
- Decisions were often made behind closed doors.
- New social groups were excluded from this system.
- Corporatism weakened but did not disappear.

Chapter 8: Neutrality

- Austria became permanently neutral in 1955.
- Neutrality helped Austria regain independence.
- Austria stayed militarily neutral but politically Western.
- After the Cold War, neutrality became less important.
- EU membership changed Austria's foreign policy role.

Chapter 9: Darker Side

- Austria avoided responsibility for Nazi crimes for decades.
- Many Austrians actively supported Nazism.
- The Waldheim affair exposed denial and anti-Semitism.
- Far-right populism gained support in the 1990s.
- Austria began openly confronting its past.

Chapter 10: Austria's Future

- Austria is becoming a normal Western democracy.
- Old political divisions are disappearing.
- New divisions are based on education, generation, and globalization.
- EU integration is central to Austria's future.

- Austria must manage diversity and democratic challenges.