Austria

National Affairs

In the national elections of October 2006 the Social Democrats (SPÖ) eked out a slim victory over the ruling conservative People's Party (ÖVP), 35.3 percent to 33.5 percent. In January 2007, after protracted negotiations, the two large parties formed a grand coalition. There was no other choice, since the Socialists ruled out a coalition with the two small far-right parties, the Freedom Party (FPÖ) and the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ), and an alliance with the Greens would not have provided the necessary majority in Parliament. This teaming of the two major parties had previously occurred in the 1980s and 1990s.

Social Democrat Alfred Gusenbauer replaced Wolfgang Schüssel of the People's Party as chancellor. Schüssel resigned the chairmanship of his party and was not named to a ministerial post in the new government. Instead, Wilhelm Molterer, a trusted political friend of Schüssel, became vice chancellor. Political observers noted that the election had produced little change, since even though a Social Democrat was now chancellor, the allocation of ministerial posts seemed to continue the dominance of the ÖVP. Not only was Vice Chancellor Molterer named finance minister and Martin Bartenstein stayed on as minister of economic affairs, but also the key Interior, Foreign Affairs, and Health ministries went to politicians aligned with the ÖVP. Furthermore, even though the Ministry of Social Affairs was headed by a Social Democrat, its most important departments were relocated to the ÖVP-led Ministry of Economic Affairs. The Social Democratic ministers and state secretaries, all hand-picked by the new chancellor, belonged to the so-called "new leadership generation" whose political careers began while Gusenbauer had headed the Young Socialists.

The conservative bent of the new government was evident in the strict austerity measures it proposed. University fees introduced by the previous government, which Gusenbauer, during the election campaign, had promised to abolish, remained. The new ÖVP health minister, Andrea Kdolsky, announced cuts in government spending on health as well as increases in health-insurance premiums. Privatization of state-owned enterprises was to continue: in a press interview, Finance Minister Molterer
announced that the OMV oil company and Telekom Austria might be privatized. Despite SPÖ campaign promises to cancel the previous government's purchase of the Eurofighter combat aircraft, the new coalition said it would go through with the deal. The immigration and asylum policies of the previous government—largely shaped by FPÖ leader Jörg Haider and heavily criticized at the time by the Social Democrats—would remain in place. And the so-called "wealth tax" that the Social Democrats had pledged to enact was no longer mentioned.

Fierce opposition to the new government and its programs came from youth and student organizations, and some of the trade unions. In Salzburg, members of the Federation of Socialist Students barricaded the entrance to the SPÖ headquarters in protest against retention of the student fees. When the new government was sworn in, there were strong protests in Vienna's Heldenplatz, similar to those that greeted the swearing-in of the ÖVP-FPÖ government in 2000 (see AJYB 2001, p. 397). Only a massive police presence enabled Gusenbauer to avoid the embarrassment of entering the Hofburg Imperial Palace, the official residence of the Austrian president, by an underground passage, as his predecessor, Schüssel, had been forced to do seven years earlier.

Whereas the 2000 protests were directed against the entry of xenophobic extremists into the government, this time the target was the SPÖ's willingness to adopt the outgoing conservative government's policies as its own. Indeed, former chancellor Schüssel reported that Gusenbauer, his successor, had "not had to be persuaded of anything." Some argued that the formation of the new coalition would further accelerate the decline of the Austrian Social Democrats, whose numbers had already dropped from about 700,000 members in the mid-1970s to 300,000. Some regional party leaders expressed strong opposition to the coalition agreement, fearing that the policies about to be pursued at the federal level would have dire consequences in the forthcoming provincial elections.

Israel and the Middle East

Chancellor Gusenbauer paid a two-day official visit to Israel in August, where he met with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, President Shimon Peres, and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni. Their discussions focused on prospects for a settlement between Israel and the Palestinians. The chancellor said that Austria, which maintained good relations with Syria, was prepared to assist in promoting peace between Israel and Syria. Speaking at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya, Gusenbauer characterized Austrian-
Israeli relations as "excellent" and stressed the importance of combating racism and anti-Semitism. One area of friction between the two countries surfaced during the visit: Prime Minister Olmert expressed strong opposition to an agreement between Austria's state-owned oil company OMV and the Iranian government for the development of Iran's natural gas reserves. Under the terms of the deal, signed in April, OMV would develop Iran's giant Pars gas field, build a liquefied natural gas terminal (LNG), and export the fuel. The U.S. government also expressed strong opposition. Iranian media estimated the value of the project at 30 billion over 25 years.

An international conference entitled "Women Leaders—Networking for Peace and Security in the Middle East" met May 30–31 at Vienna's Hofburg Palace, organized by Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik. Some 80 women holding leading positions in politics, economics, the media, and nongovernmental organizations attended. In the course of the conference, Israeli foreign minister Livni spoke with a number of women from Arab and Muslim countries, including Samira Malik, Pakistan's minister for women's affairs, and held a private meeting with Hanan Ashrawi, a well-known moderate member of the Palestinian Parliament. Livni also served on a panel with Hiri Talabani, wife of the Iraqi president. In her public remarks, the Israeli foreign minister praised the "comprehensive" Saudi peace initiative, but warned that it could only achieve its objective if Arab countries normalized relations with Israel.

Barbara Prammer, president of the Austrian Parliament, made an official visit to Israel in July. After being received by President Peres, she met with Prime Minister Olmert and other members of the government. In a session with Holocaust survivors Prammer expressed regret that Austria had waited until 1991 to initiate restitution payments. She stated it was her "personal obligation" to see to it that Austrians were educated in a spirit of tolerance and democracy so as never to repeat the mistakes of the past. On a visit to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, Prammer wrote in the guestbook that Israel must remain the eternal homeland of the Jewish people.

Bilateral trade relations between Israel and Austria moved sharply higher in 2006 and well into 2007, according to the president of the Economic Chamber of Austria, Christoph Leitl. He made these remarks at a ceremony in honor of Uriel Linn, president of the Israeli Chambers of Commerce, who received the Grand Golden Badge of Honor for Meritorious Service to the Republic of Austria. The principal Austrian exports to Israel were industrial equipment, car components, pharmaceutical
products, chemicals, and food, while Israel exported primarily communication equipment, electrical appliances, measuring and control devices, and vegetables and fruits to Austria. Leitl foresaw increased opportunities for Austrian exports with the expansion of Israel's infrastructure, notably roads and railways, and the enlargement of its seaports and airports.

Israel and the province of Upper Austria agreed to engage in joint cultural and scientific projects. An agreement signed in Jerusalem in March committed the two parties to cooperate in research on alternative energies and nanotechnology. Major joint research projects were also planned by the Johannes Kepler University in Linz and the technical universities of Upper Austria with Israeli research centers, including the Weizmann Institute.

Anti-Semitism

The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France, ruled in favor of Austrian Jewish journalist Karl Pfeiffer, who had been accused of “causing the suicide” of a German professor, Dr. Werner Pfeifenberger. The case originated in 1995, when Pfeifenberger published an article about a so-called “Jewish connection” that had existed since the French Revolution of 1789. When Hitler came to power, according to the article, it was the Jews who declared war on Germany, not the other way around. Pfeiffer, who was then serving as editor of the monthly publication of the Vienna Jewish community, wrote a response asserting that Pfeifenberger was out to diminish the criminality of the Nazi regime. Pfeifenberger sued Pfeiffer for libel, but two Austrian courts, in 1997 and 1998, rejected his suit and held that Pfeiffer’s article was based on solid historical facts. Pfeifenberg committed suicide in 2000 after the Justice Ministry sought an indictment against him for violating the Austrian law outlawing support for Nazi activities.

In June of that year, Zur Zeit, an Austrian right-wing weekly that received subsidies amounting to hundreds of thousands of euros from the Austrian government, published an article holding Pfeiffer responsible for conducting “a manhunt” against Pfeifenberger that drove “the Catholic lecturer” to kill himself. The editor of the weekly, Andreas Moltzer, added that an “antifascist” group was conducting a scurrilous campaign against his newspaper. At the time, Moltzer was a member of the European Parliament and active in its neofascist faction.

Pfeiffer then sued Zur Zeit and its editor for slander and defamation of character, and a Viennese court ruled in his favor in 2002. But a higher
court, on appeal, found against Pfeiffer on the grounds that the latter was indeed “morally guilty” for Pfeifenberger’s suicide. Pfeiffer challenged that finding before the European Court of Human Rights. In its 2007 decision the latter held that the Austrian court had violated Pfeiffer’s freedom of expression and had failed to protect his good name and professional reputation, and ordered the Austrian government to pay Pfeiffer 5,000 euros for what he endured, plus 10,000 euros to cover his legal expenses.

In a newspaper interview after his exoneration Pfeiffer said it was important to refute the absurd claim that it was the Jews who declared war against Nazi Germany. As for the charge of responsibility for Pfeifenberger’s suicide, he asked, “How could I have ‘hunted’ a man to his death five years after a review I published in 1995? I am happy that I am not at the mercy of Austrian justice. The fact remains that the anti-Semitic rag Zur Zeit is subsidized by the Austrian government and the subsidy continues.”

In February, a court in Vienna imposed a 15-month sentence on a Croatian man for vandalizing a Jewish school in November 2006 and causing substantial material damage. The man had told reporters after his arrest, “There are too many Jews in this country.” Jewish groups criticized the sentence as too light, especially since the perpetrator did not apologize or express regret for the crime.

Holocaust-Related Matters

Compensation and Restitution

The Holocaust Victims’ Information and Support Center (HVISC), or Anlaufstelle, established by the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde (IKG) in July 1999, continued its work of promoting and protecting the interests of Austrian Jewish Holocaust victims and their heirs. Anlaufstelle personnel helped them find documentation necessary for filing compensation claims, apply to social security agencies for pensions, secure payments for nursing care, and regain lapsed Austrian citizenship.

The deadline for submitting applications for in rem restitution (restitution in kind) of publicly owned real estate was extended by one year to December 2007. Ariel Muzicant, head of the IKG, had been working with federal authorities to extend the deadline to the end of 2008. The Anlaufstelle approached a number of cities and communities through the Federation of Austrian Cities (Österreichischer Städtebund) and the Fed-
eration of Austrian Communities (Österreichischer Gemeindebund) to take action under terms of the law governing the restitution of public property. Only a few had yet heeded the call.

After two disappointing decisions in 2006 by the arbitration panel responsible for in rem restitution, the Anlaufstelle initiated discussions, both public and private, on interpreting the law governing restitution. Law professors expert in the field were asked to provide the Anlaufstelle their views both on the law and on procedures used by the panel in making decisions. This led to a major conference in April on the subject at the law faculty of the University of Vienna in which several of the country's leading legal scholars participated. Following the conference, one of the arbitration panel's controversial decisions was reversed and the other made subject to further review.

The Anlaufstelle also administered the joint project for the establishment of the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI), which united under one roof the files of the Wiesenthal Documentation Center and the records of Vienna Jewish community, and served as a research institute for visiting scholars and as a showcase for themed exhibitions. In this capacity the Anlaufstelle launched and hosted a VWI Website and assisted in the preparation and organization of events undertaken by the institute.

Among these was a series of Simon Wiesenthal Lectures, the first of which was delivered in March by the American scholar Omer Bartov, who spoke about "The Last Days of Buczacz." Bartov focused on the different ways in which Ukrainians, Poles, and Jews remembered the Holocaust in this formerly multiethnic town, now part of western Ukraine, where Simon Wiesenthal was born. In June the institute sponsored an international conference on "Labor and Extermination," and, in October, a presentation by French filmmaker Claude Lanzmann that included previously unreleased footage taken during the filming of Shoah, now available at www.vwi.ac.at. The federal government, in November, announced a decision to support the VWI, although it did not indicate the amount it would contribute.

The task of identifying looted artworks was carried out by the Commission for Provenance Research, on which the Anlaufstelle was represented. The findings were then passed on to an Art Restitution Council, whose new chairman, Clemens Jabloner, president of the Austrian Administrative Court, had chaired the Austrian Historical Commission that had created the original framework for the country's restitution efforts (see AJYB 1999, pp. 361–62). The council's recommendations would go
to the appropriate government ministry, which ruled on final disposition of the cases.

In order to make the council’s activities more transparent, the Anlaufstelle set up a Website for the dissemination of its recommendations. The Anlaufstelle also reviewed dossiers of possible restitution cases involving federal museums before their submission to the council, often in cooperation with the Dorotheum, Vienna’s leading auction house, using a digitalized form of about 18,000 index cards that had the names of persons who did business with public auction houses during the Nazi era and lists of the movable property they conveyed to those houses.

The art restitution law adopted by the Austrian Parliament in December 1998 covered only artworks in federal museums, not those under the jurisdiction of the individual provinces. Eight of the nine provinces (except Tyrol) had restitution laws, but only the museums in Styria (Landesmuseum Joanneum) and the City of Vienna (Wien Museum and Wien Bibliothek) had returned looted artworks in their possession to the legal heirs.

In May, Ingo Zechner, head of the Anlaufstelle, participated in a conference in Vienna on art restitution that was organized by Sotheby’s. Zechner’s presentation dealt with the due diligence required of auction houses when confronted with artworks of uncertain provenance. He also gave a presentation in July at the annual conference of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS), held in Salt Lake City, Utah, describing the archives of the Jewish community of Vienna.

The National Fund (Nationalfond), established in 1995 to handle payments to Austrian survivors of the National Socialist era, also played a major role in the restitution of artworks. In October it made available to the public its database of artworks held in Austrian museums and collections that, according to the most recent provenance research, may have been expropriated during the Nazi era. The English-language version was posted on the Internet on July 3. Speaking at the Sotheby’s restitution symposium, Hannah Lessing, secretary general of the National Fund, said that the database contained approximately 8,000 objects, about half from federal museums and the other half from holdings of the City of Vienna. Records of an additional 1,000 objects were being processed.

At a symposium on “Art Looting and Restitution” in January at Vienna’s Urania theater, several experts discussed the daunting hurdles facing the restitution of artworks located in Austria. Speakers noted that the provenance of 420 items now housed in Vienna’s Museum of Applied
Arts—20 percent of its acquisitions during the Nazi period—was being investigated; the status of 600 paintings and sculptures at the Österreichische Galerie was still unclear; and 40,000 objects in the possession of Vienna libraries, as well as 24,300 acquisitions by museums, had to be classified of "dubious" provenance simply on the basis of their dates of acquisition.

In February, historians Robert Streibel and Robert Holzbauer recommended the return to Dr. Richard Neumann's heirs of two paintings by Martin Johann (Kremser) Schmidt, a famous eighteenth-century Austrian painter. These had been seized by the Nazis in 1938, and when Neumann sought to reclaim them in 1952, Austrian authorities prevailed upon him to take others of lesser value in their stead. It remained unclear whether an out-of-court settlement might now be reached with the heirs so that the works could remain in Austria.

Georges Jorisch, a grandson of a Viennese woman murdered in the Holocaust, filed suit in Manhattan Federal District Court in October demanding the return of a Gustav Klimt painting from the private collection of Leonard A. Lauder, the New York cosmetics magnate. Jorisch claimed that the signed painting, *Blooming Meadow* (1906), now had a value of $10–$20 million. Lauder, who had purchased the painting in 1983 from a dealer, denied that it had ever belonged to Amalie Redlich, Jorisch's grandmother. Ironically, Lauder's younger brother, Ronald, now president of the World Jewish Congress, had played a leading role in advocating the return of stolen art.

The Vienna Chamber of Labor, together with the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute, organized an international conference, held June 27–29, on "Work and Extermination." Held under the auspices of Austrian president Heinz Fischer, the event was opened by Chancellor Gusenbauer. Also taking a hand in planning the conference were the University of Vienna's Institute for Contemporary History and the Jewish community of Vienna. The speakers focused on the connection between economic exploitation and racially motivated mass extermination. The conference took place in a building that had housed important elements of the Nazi bureaucracy that planned and implemented these policies.

The Austrian Reconciliation Fund, which completed its work at the end of 2005, had set up the Future Fund to support research on the Holocaust and on threats to peace posed by totalitarian regimes, promote international humanitarian cooperation and respect for human rights, and process restitution claims that had not yet been settled (see AJYB 2007, p. 475). Waltraud Klasnic, chairperson of its board, reported that in its
first year of operation the fund had processed 120 project applications, 80 of which had been approved, amounting to 2.5 million euros.

REMEMBRANCE AND COMMEMORATION

An exhibition of newly discovered archival records of the Vienna Jewish community, covering the period from the 1938 Anschluss through the Holocaust years, was officially opened at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington on June 7, followed by another exhibition, starting July 3, at the Vienna Jewish Museum. Workmen found this material by chance, stored in 800 dusty boxes stacked floor to ceiling in a vacant building that community leaders had decided to sell. The boxes were estimated to contain about half a million pages, including index cards produced by the communal emigration office with the names of 118,000 Jews who sought help in leaving the country in 1938 and 1939, and lists of Jews deported from Vienna in 1941 and 1942. The two exhibitions marked the culmination of seven years of work reordering, preserving, and microfilming the archives, a joint project of the Vienna Jewish community and the U.S. Holocaust Museum.

This archival trove, combined with previously known records now located in Israel, made up one of the largest Holocaust archives of any Jewish community—some two million pages. Not only could it be used by families to discover what happened to their relatives and to file restitution claims, but it also provided historians a clearer picture of the daily lives of Vienna’s Jews during the Nazi era.

At the start of a three-day visit to Vienna in September, Pope Benedict XVI paid tribute to the Austrian Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Accompanied by Austria’s chief rabbi, Paul Chaim Eisenberg, the pope stood in silence for several moments in the Judenplatz before the stone memorial to 65,000 Austrian Jews who perished in Nazi death camps or died in earlier actions. In a brief ceremony, he described the visit as a gesture of “sadness, repentance and friendship towards the Jewish people.” Jewish leaders viewed the use of the word “repentance,” connoting the acceptance of guilt and responsibility, as highly significant. Since the onset of his papacy, Benedict—who, as a young man, served briefly in Hitler’s army—had to confront the legacy of the Holocaust and the often problematic relations between the Catholic Church and the Jews.

The main purpose of the papal visit to Austria was to bolster the Church there, which had been hard hit by plummeting attendance, low birthrates, declining influence, and a series of sex scandals. One demog-
rapher predicted that if current trends continued, the Catholic share of the population, 74 percent in 2001, could drop to only 50 percent by 2051, with Muslims constituting 30 percent. Some 15,000 people assembled outside Vienna’s St. Stephen’s Cathedral for Sunday’s papal mass, a low turnout considering that 200,000 Viennese identified as Catholic.

The contemporary history project “A Letter to the Stars” entered its fifth year. The first activity of the group took place in 2003, when schoolchildren released 80,000 balloons at Vienna’s Heldenplatz to commemorate the victims of National Socialism. Since then 40,000 young people participated in remembrance programs. In May 2006, 80,000 white roses were placed at the doorsteps of former residences of Holocaust victims. Two groups, each consisting of 30 people, visited with Holocaust survivors abroad, in New York in April and in London in the fall. Also, about 15,000 students, calling themselves “ambassadors of remembrance,” contacted Holocaust survivors living abroad for documentation of their life stories, using a database of 2,500 “last witnesses.” Approximately 150 people participated in “Remembrance at Kreuzstadl,” a ceremony held annually in March to honor the memory of the victims of the South Eastern Defensive Wall construction project (Sudostwallbau). The wall, intended to halt or slow the advance of the Soviet army approaching Vienna, was built by Hungarian Jewish slave laborers under inhumane conditions, resulting in the death of many. Those still alive were murdered in the last months of World War II at Kreuzstadl, near the border with Hungary. In evoking the memory of this tragic event, Austrian writer Robert Menasse spoke of society’s responsibility to remain vigilant against threats to freedom.

Foreign Minister Plassnik lauded the resolution adopted in January by the UN General Assembly establishing International Holocaust Day and condemning the denial or belittling of the Holocaust. Plassnik used the occasion to condemn the Tehran conference in late 2006 that featured Holocaust denial as well as the statements along the same lines uttered by Iranian president Ahmadinejad. She noted the longstanding cooperation between Austria and the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem as well as Austria’s membership in the International Holocaust Task Force, which develops educational, commemorative, and research programs.

On May 5, Chancellor Gusenbauer and Vice Chancellor Molterer were among the numerous members of Parliament to attend the annual ceremony marking the liberation of the Mauthausen concentration camp, where almost half of the 200,000 inmates were killed or died of disease
and hunger. With the strains of klezmer music sounding in the background, Parliament president Barbara Prammer and others delivered speeches honoring the memory of resistance fighters and warning the country’s youth against “seducers” who idealized this dark period in Austrian history.

A commemorative plaque was unveiled at the Mauthausen site on November 27, the first such public recognition in the nearly 70 years since the liberation of the camp. Support to erect the commemorative plaque came from the local Mauthausen community and the Austrian Federal Railway Company, which also arranged for engraving, on the 51 stretches of railroad track connecting the station to the camp three kilometers away, the names of the victims.

The project Linz 2009 European Capital of Culture announced in November its plan for an international conference to commemorate the victims of Nazi euthanasia practices. Scheduled for 2009 in Castle Hartheim in Upper Austria, its preliminary title was “Eugenics and Human Genetics.”

An unusual program that, since 1992, had allowed 25 young Austrians annually to serve as volunteers at U.S. Holocaust-related institutions in lieu of army service came to a halt in 2007 when, for reasons probably related to security, the U.S. government did not grant visas to would-be participants. In previous years these young men and women performed such work as translating documents, leading tours, and meeting with Austrian and other Holocaust survivors.

CONFRONTING THE PAST

Minister of Justice Maria Berger announced that rewards of up to 50,000 euros would be given to private persons for information leading to the arrest of Nazi criminals still at large. She mentioned two men as particular targets: concentration camp doctor Aribert Heim, last seen in South America, and SS officer Alois Brunner. Bringing them to justice, she said—if they were still alive—was an important objective of her ministry. She also let it be known that her ministry would update relevant information concerning the arrest of Nazi war criminals and Holocaust deniers, in line with European Union standards.

Four Austrian soldiers faced criminal charges during the year for exchanging Hitler salutes in two videos that appeared on the Internet. Any display of Nazi symbols or propaganda was a crime in Austria. After an investigation, Defense Minister Norbert Darabos, a Social Democrat,
said that the four conscripts would be dismissed from the military and charged by state prosecutors, explaining, "There will be absolutely no tolerance for expressions of support for the National Socialist system. We can make no compromises here." Ironically, the matter came to light during Chancellor Gusenbauer's visit to Israel.

Kurt Waldheim, who, hiding his past service with the German army during World War II, served as UN secretary general from 1972 to 1982 and then as president of Austria, died in June at the age of 88. Although he was never convicted of war crimes, Waldheim was a lieutenant in army intelligence, attached to units of the Wehrmacht that executed thousands of Yugoslav partisans and civilians, and deported thousands of Greek Jews to death camps. Despite persistent rumors about his wartime misdeeds, Waldheim claimed that he had left the army after being wounded on the Russian front in 1942.

It was when he announced his candidacy for the Austrian presidency in 1986 that the truth finally came out, as investigative journalists, historians, and the World Jewish Congress uncovered incontrovertible evidence. These revelations, however, evoked a nationalist and anti-Semitic backlash in Austria that helped bring Waldheim victory. The People's Party, which supported his candidacy, apparently convinced a majority of voters that the accusations constituted an intolerable interference by foreigners in Austria's internal affairs. Many Austrians evidently viewed Waldheim's life as a parable of their own: they understood his denial of complicity with the Nazis and saw him simply as a fellow-citizen of a country occupied by Nazi invaders and forced to serve in their army. Waldheim stressed this point during the election campaign, insisting over and over that, like hundreds of thousands of other Austrians, he just did his duty.

A year after his election, the American Justice Department barred him from entering the U.S., having determined that he had assisted or participated in "the deportation, mistreatment and execution of civilians and Allied soldiers in World War II." At Waldheim's request, the Austrian government appointed a commission of historians from a number of countries, including Israel, to investigate the accusations. In February 1988 the panel reported that he had to have been aware of the atrocities, and, by doing nothing about them, had facilitated them. Specifically, the panel found it hard to believe that Waldheim had not known of the deportation of the Jews of the Greek city of Salonika between 1942 and 1944. Of the city's 60,000 Jews, only 10,000 survived.
Waldheim did not seek a second six-year term when his presidency ended in 1992, largely because no Western country would receive him, and thus he had become an embarrassment to Austria. He continued to insist on his innocence, and, in a 1996 autobiography, contended that his exclusion from the U.S. was engineered by American Jews who, he said, pressured the Reagan administration, which, in turn, felt it had to send a “useful signal” to Jewish voters in anticipation of the 1988 U.S. presidential election.

JEWISH COMMUNITY

Demography

The number of Jews registered with the IKG (as defined by Orthodox Jewish law) stood at the 7,012, a slight increase over the previous year’s 6,935. New registrants may have joined for personal reasons, for example to qualify for burial in a Jewish cemetery, or may have been brought in through the community’s outreach program, which encouraged unaffiliated Jews to become members. Knowledgeable observers estimated the actual number of Jews in Austria at 12,000–15,000. In a wide-ranging interview with the daily newspaper Die Presse shortly before the communal elections, IKG president Ariel Muzicant stated that the community had the potential to double its numbers over the next ten years by attracting Jews from other European Union countries. Apart from a tiny number of exceptions, immigration from non-EU countries remained frozen.

As had been true for generations, the overwhelming majority of the country’s Jewish population lived in Vienna. An estimated 40 percent of the Vienna Jewish community was now Sephardi, as was a majority of the population under age 25. The Sephardi Center, located in the city’s second district, housed two congregations, one of Bukharan Jews and the other of Jews from the former Soviet republic of Georgia.

Only some 300–400 made their homes outside Vienna, primarily in the large provincial cities of Graz, Salzburg, Innsbruck, and Linz. In some of the provinces, local governments had sought to redress the horrors of the past by creating Jewish centers or museums as reminders that Jewish life, culture, and religious institutions once thrived in these places. An example was the Jewish Museum of Hohenems, a regional museum that re-
called the town’s Jewish community and its contribution to the development of the province of Vorarlberg and the surrounding region. The museum also maintained a relationship with the descendants of Jewish families from Hohenems wherever they now lived.

Communal Affairs

In the same Die Presse interview mentioned above, Muzicant noted a significant improvement in the community’s financial situation. Two-thirds of its debts had been repaid, and the IKG had balanced its budget each year since 2003. Muzicant suggested that if the community continued along its present financial path it would soon be debt-free.

Construction continued apace on the IKG campus located in Vienna’s second district, which included the new Zvi Peretz Chayes School, the Hakoah Sports and Recreation Center, and the Maimonides Center, a new nursing facility whose foundation stone was laid in May. Placement of the three facilities in close proximity to one another was expected to promote intergenerational cohesiveness.

President Muzicant and his Atid (Future) list swept to victory in the communal elections held in November. Atid won 41.2 percent of the vote and ten seats on the new executive board that would take office on January 8, 2008, twice the number achieved by the Sephardi runner-up party, Sephardim-Bucharische Juden, which got 19.7 percent of the vote and five seats. Trailing far behind was the left-of-center Bund Sozialdemokratischer Juden—Avoda, which won only two seats. The remaining seven places were garnered by five other factions that contested the election. One of these was Gesher, a ticket backed by younger Jews that won two mandates. One of its platform planks was a call to judge Israeli policies more critically than the community had done in the past.

The Atid victory assured Muzicant of his third five-year term as IKG president. He immediately let it be known that he would meet with representatives of Sephardi party to discuss policy issues. Over the years he had worked closely with that faction and with others represented on the council.

The significance of the election was somewhat marred by a drop in voter turnout from 62.6 percent in the previous election of 2002 to 54.7 percent. But Muzicant downplayed its significance, noting that unlike 2002, when Jews were alarmed by the national coalition between the People’s Party and the far-right Freedom Party, there was, in 2007, no similar mobilizing issue to stimulate Jews to go to the communal polls.
Cultural Matters

A new institution, Future House, opened its doors in February for the Jewish community of Vienna. Located in the city's Leopoldstadt district, its five stories had facilities for cultural and recreational activities as well as a library and a café for seniors. Johannes Hahn, the Austrian minister of science, addressed the opening ceremony, as did former mayor Helmut Zilk. Other Austrian dignitaries attended as did President Muzicant of the IKG. Financial support for Future House came from the Republic of Austria, the City of Vienna, and industrial magnate Lev Leviev.

In March, the Department of Contemporary History of the Faculty of Historical and Cultural Studies at the University of Vienna organized a conference on the history of the Jews of Vienna in the early twentieth century. Scholars and artists as well as members of the general public attended the three-day event entitled “Vienna and the Jewish Experience from 1900 to 1938: Acculturation, Anti-Semitism, Zionism.” One speaker, Prof. Steven Beller, pointed out that the 200,000 Jews noted in the 1923 Vienna census were 11 percent of the population and constituted the second largest Jewish community in Europe, exceeded only by Warsaw. Prof. Frank Stern underscored the extent to which Viennese Jews were an integral part of the city's society before World War II, and suggested that the interwar period was actually more productive in terms of Jewish contributions to the arts and sciences than the better known fin-de-siècle (1890–1914).

Among the exhibitions mounted by the Vienna Jewish Museum during 2007 was one devoted to the work of architect Oskar Strnad, which ran from March 28 through June 4. Together with Joseph Frank, Strnad founded the Vienna School of Architecture. Strnad's main interest was in designing housing. He said his aim was to "shape without form" and to build "not prisons but open worlds." The exhibition displayed his designs for a villa for the writer Jakob Wasserman, a two-family house in the Vienna Werkbundsiedlung, as well as several communal tenement buildings. Apart from aquarelles and ceramics, the exhibition also featured furniture Strnad designed for Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and a series of Mousseline drinking glasses. Also on display were examples of Strnad's theatrical set designs.

Another exhibition presented at the museum's annex, Museum Judenplatz, from May 15 through August 26, was “Tribute to Paul Goldman, Press Photographer 1943–1965.” Goldman, born in 1900 in Budapest, emigrated to Palestine in 1940, and, together with his wife, was initially
interned as an illegal immigrant before joining the British Army. After his discharge Goldman earned a living as a press photographer, and though he died almost unnoticed in Israel in 1986, Goldman was one of the most important press photographers of his time. The pictures, most of them taken for international press agencies, focused on everyday life in Israel from the time of its establishment to the mid-1960s. Some of his pictures, notably the one showing Israeli prime minister David Ben-Gurion standing on his head on the Herzliya beach, enjoyed iconic status in Israel. Particularly touching were pictures of the arrival of Holocaust survivors in Palestine, the War of Independence, and operation “Magic Carpet” that brought the Jews of Yemen to Israel.

Queen Silvia of Sweden and Margit Fischer, wife of the Austrian president, joined with dignitaries from the government and the Jewish community for the opening of an exhibition at Museum Judenplatz titled “Joseph Frank: Architect and Outsider” that ran from November 22, 2007 to January 20, 2008. Frank (1885–1967) was one of the most important architects and designers of his time and his household items and textiles, classics of European design, were still popular. Born in Baden, Frank came to Vienna to study architecture, and came under the influence of the Modernist movement. Frank designed his first houses in 1913, and 12 years later founded the household furnishing company Haus und Garten, together with Oskar Wlach. In 1933, facing mounting anti-Semitism in Austria, Frank emigrated with his Swedish wife to Stockholm, and in 1940 came to the U.S. They returned to Sweden in 1946.

The exhibition “Best of All Women” opened at the Jewish Museum, focusing on the changing religious, economic, social, and cultural roles of Jewish women through the ages.

**Personalia**

Esther Fritsch, president of the Israëlite Kultusgemeinde of Tyrol and Vorarlberg, was awarded the highest medal of the province of Tyrol in February. The governors of Tyrol and South Tyrol presented the medal and lauded Dr. Fritsch for the exceptional contributions she made to the province during the 20 years she served as president of Tyrolean Jewry.

Raul Hilberg, the eminent Holocaust historian, died in August in Vermont at the age of 81 (see below, p. 715). The Vienna-born Hilberg and his family fled Austria shortly after the Nazi takeover in 1938. After finding temporary haven in Cuba, the family gained entry to the U.S. and settled in Brooklyn, New York. He enrolled in Brooklyn College, but shortly
afterward joined the U.S. Army and served in a combat unit in the European theater. After the war he finished his B.A. and earned a Ph.D. at Columbia University. His advisor, Prof. Franz Neumann, recommended Hilberg for a job at the Alexandria Documentation Center, where he reviewed captured Nazi documents. This gave him an unsurpassed knowledge of the German war documents, which he utilized for the monumental work that laid the foundation for all subsequent Holocaust research, The Destruction of European Jewry, first published in 1961, translated into many languages, and reissued in revised formats in 1985 and 2004. He taught at the University of Vermont for 35 years.

Hilberg had great difficulty returning to his native Austria. It was not until June 2006 that he set foot in Vienna again, for the purpose of aiding the establishment of the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies. Months later he was named honorary chairman of its International Scientific Advisory Board (see AJYB 2007, p. 477).

Robert Adler, a renowned physicist and inventor born in Vienna in 1913, died in February in Boise, Idaho, at age 93 (see below, p. 712). Adler received his doctorate in physics from the University of Vienna in 1937. He fled the country in 1939, arriving in the U.S. in 1941, where he was hired by Zenith Electronics. The holder of nearly 200 U.S. patents, Adler was best known as co-inventor of the television remote-control device. In 1958 he received the Outstanding Technical Achievement Award of the Institute of Radio Engineers.

Gerhard Bronner—cabaret artist, composer, and writer—died in January at age 84. Born in Vienna’s working-class district in 1922, he fled to Palestine in 1938 and returned to his home city in 1948, worked as an entertainer and pianist in Marietta Bar in Vienna, which he bought in 1955. Bronner recorded more than 60 LP records, wrote scores for more than 120 TV shows and 2,000 radio programs, and brought Broadway to the Viennese theater by translating hit musicals into German. The City of Vienna awarded him the Austrian Cross of Honor for Science and Art and the Nestroy Ring. Many people from the worlds of journalism and politics attended his funeral. President Heinz Fischer delivered a eulogy, and Chancellor Gusenbauer described him as the “artistic conscience of Austria.” He was buried in the City of Vienna’s tomb of honor.

Leon Zelman, head of the Jewish Welcome Service Vienna, died in July at the age of 79. A survivor of the Auschwitz and Mauthausen-Ebensee concentration camps, Zelman later studied journalism at the University of Vienna, where he was active in the Jewish student movement. The highly respected journal Das Judische Echo, which Zelman edited from
its beginning in 1951 until shortly before his death, had its beginning as
a university newsletter for Jewish students. In 1963 he was named head
of Reisebüro City of the Austrian Office of Tourism for the purpose of
developing tourism with Israel. As cofounder of the Jewish Welcome
Service Vienna, he made it possible for thousands of Jews who were
forced to flee Austria to renew their ties with their former homeland. In
1984 he initiated the Vienna exhibition “Der Versunkene Welt” (Sunken
World), which displayed the shtetl he remembered from childhood.

Kurt Schubert, who founded Austria’s first Jewish museum after World
War II, died in February at age 82. The museum first opened in Eisen-
stadt in 1972, relocated to Vienna in 1991, and is housed in Palais Eske-
les in the city’s first district. A noted scholar as well, Schubert founded
the Institute of Jewish Studies at the University of Vienna in 1966.

MURRAY GORDON SILBERMAN