

## Austria country profile

19 April 2018



**Austria was a major power in Central Europe for centuries in various state guises, until the fall of its Habsburg dynasty after the First World War.**

But its position at the geographical heart of Europe, and its neutral status during the Cold War between NATO and the Soviet bloc, maintained the much-reduced country's strategic significance.

Austria is now a member of the European Union, but an enduring legacy of its decades of post-war neutrality can be seen in the large

These include the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and Opec, the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

The political consensus, which has seen the Social Democrats and the conservative People's Party share power for much of the post-war period, has come under strain in recent years with the rise of the nationalist Freedom Party.

## FACTS

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### Republic of Austria

Capital: Vienna

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**Population** 8.7 million

**Area** 83,871 sq km (32,383 sq miles)

**Major language** German

**Major religion** Christianity

**Life expectancy** 80 years (men), 84 years (women)

**Currency** euro

UN, World Bank

## LEADERS

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### **President: Alexander van der Bellen**

Alexander van der Bellen was elected in the December 2016 re-run of a highly polarised election earlier that year, defeating Norbert Hofer of the far-right Freedom Party. Mr Van der Bellen - a Green Party politician running as an independent - had won an extremely narrow victory in the initial run-off vote against Mr Hofer in May, but the result was annulled because of vote-counting irregularities.

The possibility of Mr Hofer becoming the first far-right European head of state in recent history attracted major international media interest in the contest for the largely ceremonial post.

### **Chancellor: Sebastian Kurz**

Sebastian Kurz became the world's youngest head of government when he was sworn in as federal chancellor in December 2017 at the age of 31.

After his Austrian People's Party (OeVP) won 32% of the vote in the October parliamentary election he formed a coalition government with the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ), making Austria the only country in western Europe with a far-right presence in government.

He became OeVP chairman in May 2017 and immediately ended the decade-long coalition government with the Social Democrats (SPÖ) and called for an early election.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein, said he was worried about the inclusion of the Freedom Party in the new cabinet. Some 6,000 people protested outside the December 2017 swearing-in ceremony in the Hofburg palace in Vienna, denouncing the Freedom Party as Nazis.

## **MEDIA**

Austria's public broadcaster, Oesterreichischer Rundfunk (ORF), has long-dominated the airwaves. It faces competition from private TV and radio broadcasters.

Cable or satellite TV is available in most Austrian homes and is often used to watch German stations, some of which tailor their output for local viewers.

A daily newspaper is a must for many Austrians. National and regional titles contest fiercely for readers.

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