

## "Austria is celebrating itself" The House of Austrian History A Press Report

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- The opening of the Haus der Geschichte Österreich (HGÖ - House of Austrian History) is the culmination of a discussion which has taken nearly one hundred years.
- The discussion is the result of a struggle between political parties over the right to seek a definite interpretation of the Austrian interwar period.
- The didactical-conceptual orientation of the announced project has the potential to both discuss and question politically influenced interpretations of the Austrian interwar period.

**Purpose:** On the occasion of its one hundredth birthday, the Republic of Austria has opened a history museum in November 2018 called the House of Austrian History. The considerations towards this are almost as old as the republic itself. This article shall analyze why political parties could not agree on a specific project for so long and illustrate the decision-making process and its implementation before ultimately categorizing the didactical-museographical concept of the exhibition from a historical-didactical perspective.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The basis for the analysis is provided by Austrian daily newspaper coverage of the House of Austrian History. The body of sources limits itself to the period between January 2008 and January 2019 and has been evaluated based on the analysis of its content.

**Findings:** In the course of the discussion, which preceded the opening of the House of Austrian History, the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) debated bitterly for decades about how to best interpret Austrian contemporary history and were unable to find common ground. Eventually, both the SPÖ and the ÖVP were able to agree on a concept whereby the museum would focus upon the controversial, politically influenced metanarratives of the Austrian interwar period themselves. With the SPÖ having departed from the government, however, the museum's future remains uncertain.

**Keywords:**

House of Austrian History, Austria, historical culture, history policy

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## 1 Introduction

2018 is a year of remembrance and memory for the Republic of Austria. Remembrance of the annexation of Austria into Hitler's Germany in 1938 and the foundation of the republic one hundred years ago find themselves at the forefront. In November 2018—just in time for the occasion of Austria's one hundredth birthday—a museum called *Haus der Geschichte Österreich* (HdGÖ; in the following as: House of Austrian History)<sup>1</sup> will open in the Hofburg in Vienna, occupying itself with the country's contemporary history. In order to ensure the museum's opening in the anniversary year of 2018, the original plans were drastically scaled down. The museum's funds were slashed and the exhibition space was reduced to one third of what was originally envisioned; at the opening, only a temporary special exhibition<sup>2</sup> about the founding of the republic is on display.



Photo 01: Entrance portal of the House of History (© Bernhard Trautwein, January 10, 2019).

In terms of the direction in which this *House of Austrian History* will develop in the medium term and what will be displayed inside, there has still been little information released. The financing of the *House of Austrian History* beyond 2019 is also yet to be explained. It even remains uncertain where the *House of Austrian History* will be housed in the long-term. The current location in the museum complex of the Viennese Hofburg on *Heldenplatz* is of a temporary nature only. In the medium term, it is planned for the House of History to be relocated to a new building on *Heldenplatz*. However, the existing political majority in Austria has changed since the project started, and the current government is yet to reveal its intentions for the *House of History*.

The deliberations on the creation of a museum of Austrian contemporary history are as old as the republic itself. In 1919, directly after the foundation of the republic, the establishment of a chamber of Austrian history was unsuccessful.<sup>3</sup> In 1945, after the liberation from National Socialism, the preparations for a "*Museum of the First and Second Republic*" were already at an advanced stage. However, the exhibits which had been set up in the Viennese Hofburg were eventually removed.<sup>4</sup> In the middle of the 1990s, the debate over the establishment of a history museum intensified after a consensus had been reached across all party lines that Austria would require an institution which occupied itself with the history of the republic as well as with contemporary history. Above all, it was the two governing parties at the time, the SPÖ (Social Democratic Party of Austria) and the ÖVP (Austrian People's Party), who developed specific concepts, plans, and a whole row of feasibility studies.<sup>5</sup> According to opinion polls, a majority of the Austrian public also stood behind the plans.<sup>6</sup>

However, despite the House of History project being integrated into all coalition agreements since the turn of the millennium, the political parties were still unable to agree on a definite project.<sup>7</sup> Despite cross-party commitments, being embedded in coalition agreements, the public's approval and the fact that there were already fully-developed suggestions, concepts, plans, and feasibility studies simply waiting to be implemented, it was not until the beginning of 2015 when a political settlement was reached, which was celebrated in the Austrian press as the cutting of the "Gordian knot."<sup>8</sup> How it ultimately came to be—considering the long lead time and the almost perfect political overall conditions—that only a mini exhibition with an uncertain future was opened, constitutes the focal point of this article. In doing so, not only the historical-ideological differences and positions which were behind the debate and which made political agreement impossible for such a long time will be presented in detail, but also the process itself—in the course of which the originally ambitious plans of 2015 were gradually "vaporized" and downsized—shall be revisited. Finally, the question of the direction in which the *House of Austrian History* should develop in the medium term and how to categorize what we know about this so far according to a historical-didactical perspective shall also be pursued.

## 2 "Contemporary History in Austria is [...] politically still a hot potato"<sup>9</sup>

As already indicated in the introduction, there had always been intensive discussions dating back to the foundation of the republic in 1919 which centered on the establishment of a museum dealing with Austrian contemporary history. In the middle of the 1990s, the debate once again gained momentum. It had become obvious that the museum landscape in Austria was displaying serious shortcomings in the area of contemporary history. Central aspects of Austrian contemporary history such as Austria's Nazi past and the interwar period were, at most, only discussed within the limits of temporary special exhibitions or special collections. There was no museum specializing in the recent history of the republic with its own collection of contemporary history exhibits.<sup>10</sup>

Subsequently, the political parties commissioned concepts, had a whole row of feasibility studies and policy documents developed and vetoed each other's proposals and counter-proposals, without being able to agree on a specific project.<sup>11</sup> Superficially, it was the quarrel

about the precise location of the planned institution which seemed to dominate. The actual points of conflict, however, lay elsewhere:

On the one hand, *the Social Democratic Party of Austria and the Austrian People's Party* had completely different ideas concerning the museological-didactical objective of the project. Whilst the *Social Democrats* wanted to conceive of the "House of History" as a kind of education, research, documentation, and community center, the *People's Party* campaigned for the creation of a museum of the republic and a house of history which placed emphasis on preservation and the formation of identity.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, profound historical-ideological differences in opinion and distrust between the *Social Democrats* and the *People's Party*, whose roots reach back to the Austrian interwar period, came to light in the course of the debate.<sup>13</sup> Although the two main parties<sup>14</sup> had succeeded in developing Austria into a consensus democracy or consociational democracy after the liberation from National Socialism and the re-establishment of the republic in 1945, contemporary history remained, up to the present day, "politically still a hot potato."<sup>15</sup> The Austrian interwar period in particular was evaluated in a completely different way by both parties.<sup>16</sup> It was a time when the predecessors of the *Social Democratic Party* and the *Austrian People's Party* were so unable to find reconciliation that the democratic-republican order of the young Republic perished in 1933 amidst this antagonism, oppositional social democracy was banned, and Austria was governed by Christian-social chancellors in an authoritarian manner and without the parliament's involvement. The *People's Party* honored the efforts of the so-called "Christian-social Corporate State" to preserve Austria's statehood in the interwar period and mythologized Chancellor Dollfuß - he was murdered in a failed coup d'état by Austrian National Socialists in 1934 - as a martyr and resistance fighter against National Socialism. The *Social Democrats*, on the other hand, held Engelbert Dollfuß and the Dollfuß-Schuschnigg regime which has been termed "Austrofascism" responsible for the exclusion policies against social democracy, the failure of Austrian democracy, the subsequent civil war, and the so-called *Anschluss* (*Annexation of Austria into Nazi Germany; in the following: Anschluss*) of Austria into Nazi Germany.<sup>17</sup> The Austrian press mainly attributed the fact that the *Social Democratic Party* and the *People's Party* could not agree on a specific project which inevitably would also have had to deal with the highly controversial Austrian interwar period to this old, historical-ideological conflict with which the country has never come to terms.<sup>18</sup>

### 3 "[W]hen hardly anyone reckoned with the fact that something would happen in Vienna regarding the House of History"<sup>19</sup>

The endless number of concepts, roadmaps, and feasibility studies which emerged beginning in the 1990s remained stored and unused for a long time in the party offices and relevant ministries. It took until 2014, "when hardly anyone reckoned with it,"<sup>20</sup> as the Austrian press later summarized, for the *ÖVP* politician and then-Governor of Lower Austria, Erwin Pröll, to give a new impetus to the proceedings: He announced the opening of a *House of History* in the Lower Austrian capital of St. Pölten. The management of the project was entrusted to the historian Stefan Karner, who was quickly judged by certain newspapers to have close ties to



the *Austrian People's Party*.<sup>21</sup> Press coverage reported that, in light of the impending one-hundred-year anniversary of the Republic and presumably to avoid falling behind with respect to the *House of History* which was initiated by the *Austrian People's Party*, the *Social Democratic Party* of Austria was forced to act quickly in order to be able to produce "a worthy anniversary project on a national level."<sup>22</sup> It was therefore only a few months later when the SPÖ Minister for Culture Josef Ostermayer presented his plans for a "*House of History*" in the Viennese Hofburg which was to open—at least partially—in November 2018, in time for the occasion of the one-hundred-year anniversary of the foundation of the First Republic. The completion of the permanent exhibition was set for the year 2019.<sup>23</sup> The project was assigned to the Viennese contemporary historian Oliver Rathkolb, who was then immediately referred to by the media as having a close relationship with the *Social Democratic Party*.<sup>24</sup>

The fact that now two Houses of History were to emerge within a short period of time was interpreted by press coverage as an unofficial contest between the *Social Democratic Party* and the *People's Party* over the right to seek a definite interpretation of Austrian contemporary history. In this context, several commentators warned against a presentation of history influenced by party politics and an appropriation of Austrian contemporary history by the two governing parties.<sup>25</sup> The politicians responsible for these projects, Minister for Culture Josef Ostermayer of the *Social Democrats* and the ÖVP Governor of Lower Austria, Erwin Pröll, attempted to quell these suspicions in a series of newspaper articles, interviews, and statements. They emphasized that the two museums would pursue different focal points—both chronologically and in terms of content—and that they would by no means be in competition with each other. Furthermore, they denied following any political motives and promised that they would not interfere with the content-related work done by the commissioned experts.<sup>26</sup> The two experts Oliver Rathkolb and Stefan Karner also assured the press of their political independence and explained that their respective projects would not be in competition with each other.<sup>27</sup>

However, concerns still remained. It soon became evident that both initiatives were indeed pursuing similar spatial and temporal objectives. Although the beginnings of Lower Austrian regional history were also to play a role in St. Pölten, the main emphasis of the exhibition was, as in Vienna, to be placed on the time after 1848. Even in terms of contextualization, similar approaches were chosen: Whilst the history of Austria's neighboring countries was also to be included in St. Pölten, the *House of History* in the Hofburg in Vienna was to discuss Austrian history against the backdrop of the development of Central Europe.

The fact, however, that the *People's Party* and the *Social Democratic Party* were able to agree on a specific project in 2015, after decades of debating and quarrelling, was also attributed by press coverage to a window of opportunity which Josef Ostermayer had skillfully used to his advantage.<sup>28</sup> By downsizing the *Weltmuseum Wien*, the former *Museum für Völkerkunde* (Museum of Ethnology)<sup>29</sup>, which at the time was under reconstruction, the SPÖ politician succeeded in attaining the necessary exhibition space in the Hofburg and acquiring financial resources for the *House of Austrian History* without requiring additional budgetary funds. As quoted by the press, Austria, said Josef Ostermayer, would thus be getting "two museums for the price of one."<sup>30</sup> His political approach certainly yielded Josef Ostermayer recognition in the

press. He showed "decisiveness,"<sup>31</sup> cut "the Gordian knot"<sup>32</sup> and submitted a "doable concept"<sup>33</sup> without "waiting a decade to plan, finance, and carry out a new construction."<sup>34</sup>

However, the decision to place the *House of Austrian History* in the Hofburg in close proximity to the *Heldenplatz* received a mixed reception. Some commentators saw in the decision a unique opportunity to "unequivocally, and in a republican-democratic manner, occupy"<sup>35</sup> the imperial Hofburg and the Heldenplatz, where on 15 March 1938 Adolf Hitler had declared the so-called *Anschluss* of Austria into the German Reich and which is considered in Austria to be historically burdened. There were however also those who feared that an "Austria-themed museum on Heldenplatz [...] would always be in the shadow of 15 March 1938"<sup>36</sup> and who preferred a non-specified "more neutral location."<sup>37</sup> In addition to this, the necessary changes in the space utilization concept of the Hofburg were another aspect that did not meet with undivided approval. The envisaged exhibition space was criticized as being "too small for a content-related and methodically nuanced presentation"<sup>38</sup> which was furthermore described as being completely inadequate "in order to create a modern atmosphere which would also appeal to young people."<sup>39</sup>

The question of the financing of the *House of History* was afforded relatively little attention by press coverage. Initially, it was the higher costs in comparison to the *House of History* in St. Pölten which caused particular concern.<sup>40</sup> However, it was also criticized that the designated funds did not suffice in terms of implementing the ideas which had already been developed.<sup>41</sup> In turn, the historian Eva Blimlinger<sup>42</sup> spotted deficits in the long-term financial safeguarding of the House for the time after the developmental phase—and was to be proved right in the end.<sup>43</sup> The Ministry of Finances had also led a similar argument by criticizing the overall cost estimates of the project and pointing out that "several questions and details, in particular the total amount and the subsequent costs, still remained unsolved."<sup>44</sup> Finally, there were also those who had questioned the whole project itself in the face of scarce state funds.

The main criticism, however, concerned the lack of a content-related overall concept. When Josef Ostermayer presented his project to the public in January 2015, he could present neither specific museological and didactical concepts nor plans revealing "what should even be displayed in the museum."<sup>45</sup> He merely announced that the *House of History* must "not become a dry affair,"<sup>46</sup> but a "place where history must be discussed."<sup>47</sup> In order to create an overall concept and to clarify open questions, Ostermayer commissioned a team of historians under the leadership of Oliver Rathkolb.<sup>48</sup> Lasting right up until the presentation of the concept, a fierce controversy over the objective and content-related orientation of the *House of History* broke out and was discussed in detail by press coverage.

There had only been agreement on the fact that a typical museum would be inappropriate in terms of appealing to a young demographic and that a modern *House of Austrian History* would need a concept that "did not limit itself to collecting, preserving, and presenting exhibits of contemporary history, but instead allowed the *House* to become an open forum for discussion about the past, present, and future."<sup>49</sup> With regards to the question of how much importance should be attached to the exhibits and material objects in the planned exhibition, there were however already varying points of view. Whilst some were "strongly in favor of the

use of new media and virtual exhibitions,"<sup>50</sup> others warned of "presenting everything digitally merely for the sake of new trends."<sup>51</sup>

However, the specific main contents also proved to be a point of controversy and discord. Indeed, *SPÖ* minister Ostermayer and his counterpart from the *People's Party*, State Secretary Mahrer, had declared that the historical-ideological divisions between the two parties had been overcome and that the Austrian interwar period no longer harbored any potential for conflict.<sup>52</sup> Despite this, it was apparent that concerns still remained. Members of the *People's Party* in particular frequently became anxious about an appropriation of the *House of Austrian History* by the *Social Democratic Party* and a politically motivated representation of Austrian contemporary history. In this respect, the *People's Party's* culture representative Maria Fekter warned that the "project [...] risked manifesting enemy concepts for the future which would bring about a division in society."<sup>53</sup> Later, on the occasion of the resolution of the *House of History* in parliament, with the *Social Democrats* and the *People's Party* voting in favor of it, Maria Fekter promised "to ensure that the *House of History* would not become an *SPÖ*-museum."<sup>54</sup> However, concerns about the *Social Democratic Party* having too strong an influence over the *House of History* were also voiced by the *FPÖ* (Freedom Party of Austria), who warned that Ostermayer was planning a "politically biased *House of History* [...] which would lean towards a 'leftist ideology.'"<sup>55</sup>

Numerous newspaper commentators also perceived the *House of Austrian History* and Oliver Rathkolb as having close ties to the *Social Democratic Party* of Austria. In this vein, the *House of History* was described as a "red project"<sup>56</sup> and Oliver Rathkolb as an "*SPÖ* sympathizer,"<sup>57</sup> a "red contemporary historian,"<sup>58</sup> and a "social-democratic purveyor to the court"<sup>59</sup> respectively. Minister for Culture Ostermayer attempted to downplay the criticism and pointed to the fact that Rathkolb had "also received general approval outside the circle of *Social-Democratic* party members."<sup>60</sup> The majority of press coverage also shared this opinion, describing Oliver Rathkolb as a "brilliant,"<sup>61</sup> internationally renowned, and successful contemporary historian and proven expert of Austrian history and identity. In addition to this, those historians who had publicly spoken out during the debate over the *House of History* did not have any doubts about Rathkolb's professional expertise and his qualifications. Even for the historian and former *ÖVP* Governor of Salzburg Franz Schausberger<sup>62</sup>, Rathkolb was "first and foremost [...] certainly a good historian—who happens to have political origins."<sup>63</sup>

Oliver Rathkolb himself brushed off the accusations. He explained in several articles that "as a contemporary historian he is used to the fact that politicians get involved or at least try to."<sup>64</sup> He emphasized however that there would be "no politicization."<sup>65</sup> In this context, Rathkolb referred to the advisory committee made up of international experts which would not only watch over "the complete freedom of decision-making granted by the Minister for Culture,"<sup>66</sup> but would also guarantee that there would be "no content-related controversies regarding the interpretation of the 'Corporate State' for example."<sup>67</sup> Rathkolb continued by saying that the *House of History* would portray the numerous controversies of Austrian contemporary history, such as the historical-ideological quarrels between the *Social Democratic Party* and the *People's Party* about the interwar period, from different angles and put them up for discussion so that visitors would be able to pass their own judgement.<sup>68</sup> Press coverage believed that,

ultimately, Rathkolb had succeeded with his concept to "put aside the fears of the black 'Austrian half'"<sup>69</sup> and thereby obtain the *People's Party's* support without losing the trust of the *Social Democratic Party* of Austria at the same time.

#### 4 "There is still the impression of a quick-fix, simply to meet the target date of 2018"<sup>70</sup>

In autumn 2015, the roughly one hundred-page implementation concept was presented.<sup>71</sup> Accordingly, the *House of Austrian History* would cover the time between 1918 and the present, whilst frequently referring to the year 1848. As laid out in the concept, the permanent exhibition itself would be divided into three main topics (the development of democracy and its ruptures; war, violence, and peace movements; Austrians' experiences with the Holocaust and the persecution and extermination policies of the National Socialists—victims and perpetrators). The idea was, to introduce a contemporary communication style and an incisive narrative, in order to invite to a critical exploration of Austrian history.<sup>72</sup>

The Austrian daily newspapers received the concept highly enthusiastically.<sup>73</sup> They celebrated the "outstanding historian Oliver Rathkolb"<sup>74</sup> and the "competent [...] director of the national library,"<sup>75</sup> who by 2018 would create an "interactive, multimedia center of contemporary history spanning over 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> for young and old, far away from political historiographies, in a place where Austrian history had been written."<sup>76</sup>

In March 2016, the *SPÖ* and the *ÖVP* decided together in parliament on a *House of Austrian History* and finally set out the budgetary, organizational, and legal general conditions.<sup>77</sup> In organizational terms, the *House of Austrian History* was assigned to the Austrian National Library<sup>78</sup>, receiving its own management and budget, however. In addition to this, an advisory committee was installed, consisting of academics who had been assigned by the gubernatorial conference, the *SPÖ*-led ministry of culture, and the ministry of science which was headed by an *ÖVP* minister, and who—together with the general management of the Austrian National Library—were charged with posting and filling the director vacancy in the *House of History*.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, the National Council commissioned the establishment of a concrete schedule up until the museum's inauguration in the year 2018.<sup>80</sup>

At the presentation of the schedule in May 2016, there was widespread disillusion. The ambitious aim of Josef Ostermayer to open the *House of Austrian History* in the anniversary year of 2018 was no longer feasible.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, the political environment had changed due to a government reshuffle. As a further consequence, the ministry of finance led by the *People's Party* vetoed the budget which had already been pledged. Despite this, Josef Ostermayer's successor, Thomas Drozda, explained that he still wished to achieve "the sensible objective of finishing in time for the anniversary of the republic in 2018."<sup>82</sup>

After budget negotiations with the *ÖVP* Minister of Finance Schelling, Thomas Drozda finally presented in October 2016 what was, according to him, "in terms of both budget and content [...], a much better"<sup>83</sup> and "pragmatic solution."<sup>84</sup> Schelling and Drozda had reduced the budget of thirty-six million euros down to ten million, and nearly halved the exhibition space



from 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> down to 1,800 m<sup>2</sup>. By doing so, the *House of History* would be able to then at least partly operate in the anniversary year of 2018. Like his predecessor, Drozda reiterated the intention to accommodate the House in "an entirely new building on Heldenplatz"<sup>85</sup> in the medium term.

The press was divided in its appraisal of the new, strongly reduced version of the *House of History*. Thomas Drozda's „better“<sup>86</sup> solution for „the new ‘House’“ which in fact isn't one at all<sup>87</sup> was described as "a quick-fix"<sup>88</sup> which was only necessary in order "to meet the target date of 2018."<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, the reduction of the exhibition space was also criticized. In this vein, the press called it "grotesque [...] that costumes of knights' armor and historical musical instruments took up nearly three times as much space in the building in which the *House of Austrian History* has emerged as the presentation of Austrian history itself,"<sup>90</sup> which was now being shown in a "suite of rooms"<sup>91</sup> rather than in a "*House of History*."<sup>92</sup>

However, some newspaper commentators showed understanding for the budget cuts "in the face of record unemployment in the country."<sup>93</sup> Moreover, "it would have been impossible to do more, what with the tight schedule leading up to November 2018."<sup>94</sup> Thomas Drozda, therefore, "did not make the worst decision, considering the limited leeway the coalition gave him"<sup>95</sup> and had made it possible that Austria would "have a holding organization for history museums until the one-hundred-year anniversary of the republic"<sup>96</sup> which would "perform good work"<sup>97</sup> and "continue to be open to possibilities."<sup>98</sup>

The head of the expert advisory committee, Oliver Rathkolb, was above all pleased that the *House of History* had finally "got the ball rolling."<sup>99</sup> He added that it would not matter whether the museum was "bigger or smaller by 1,000 m<sup>2</sup>."<sup>100</sup> However, he promised, together with the international expert advisory committee, to ensure "that the temporary solution will not become a permanent solution."<sup>101</sup>

After the advisory committee of academics had been selected, the director vacancy was posted in November 2016.<sup>102</sup> Among the 13 applications, there were four women and only one applicant from abroad.<sup>103</sup> In a tie, the former museum curator and culture manager Monika Sommer-Sieghart and the director of the Stadtmuseum Graz Otto Hochreiter both occupied the top place on the shortlist.<sup>104</sup> The fact that Monika Sommer-Sieghart was eventually entrusted with the management of the *House of History* prompted some newspapers to argue against the law for equal opportunities and against quota systems.<sup>105</sup> Apart from that, her hiring was welcomed as a "provisional keystone in the long-term construction site that is the *House of Austrian History*."<sup>106</sup> The new director described the *House of History* as a "project of the heart"<sup>107</sup> and said she was confident of being able to meet the politically decreed inauguration date of November 2018, despite the exhibition space having not yet been completely adapted at the time of her appointment and "the absence of infrastructure, employees, and even a website."<sup>108</sup>

With regard to the question of what would even be displayed in the House of Austrian History, Monika Sommer-Sieghart explained that "the development of democracy and its ruptures [...]" would play "a central role."<sup>109</sup> According to her, the *House of Austrian History* would not pass judgement on the great coalition conflict over Austrofascism and the Corporative State, "but

instead exhibit it"<sup>110</sup> and open it up for debate so that visitors would be able to form their own opinions.<sup>111</sup>

##### **5 "In case it should now come to a coalition without social democrats, would the House be history before it opens?"<sup>112</sup>**

In May 2017, the government coalition of the *Social Democratic Party* and the *People's Party* finally broke down. In the national elections that then followed in October 2017, the existing political majority changed significantly, and it soon became clear that Austria would receive a new government without *Social-Democratic* participation. In light of the establishment of a black-blue coalition consisting of the Christian-Conservative *People's Party* and the right-wing populist *Freedom Party*, the media began to speculate about the future of the *House of History*. On the one hand, as reported by the media, the *People's Party* "was not particularly enthusiastic about the *House of Austrian History*, which was based on the conceptual groundwork of Oliver Rathkolb."<sup>113</sup> On the other hand, the former ministers Josef Ostermayer and Thomas Drozda had failed to provide the *House* with substantial financing. The financial planning beyond 2019 was based solely on an oral agreement of the now former minister Drozda. Due to this, some commentators speculated that, without the *Social Democratic Party* in the coalition, the *House of History* could be history before it even opened.<sup>114</sup>

Up until the opening day, practically no specific ideas were leaked out to the public in regard to what exactly would be displayed in the *House of Austrian History*. This uncertainty over the exhibition's contents did not go unnoticed by the academic members of the advisory committee and in the summer of 2018 two members resigned from the board, claiming that there was still "no overall concept available concerning the technical direction of the *House*,"<sup>115</sup> that "the question of the exhibition's narrative structure"<sup>116</sup> was yet unsolved, and that information regarding the "exhibition's central statements as well as context-related stances"<sup>117</sup> were missing.

Meanwhile, the team of director Sommer-Sieghart has put a website online, assumed control over the exhibition spaces, curated an opening exhibition, and developed a communication concept. The planned opening date was successfully met and since the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2018, the day of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Austrian Republic, the *House of Austrian History* has been open to visitors.

The inaugural exhibition entitled "Aufbruch ins Ungewisse - Österreich seit 1918" (Into the Unknown – Austria since 1918) displays key issues of the Austrian Contemporary History in seven sections. The sections one to six are organized thematically and focus on the founding of the first Austrian Republic ("Long Live the Republic!"), the Austrian economy ("Economic Miracle?"), the period of fascism ("Dictatorship, Nazi Terror and memory"), the changing of borders ("Borders change?") and on equality ("Equal Rights?!"). In addition to this, a seventh section ("Make Images!") presents pictures on important events and themes of the Austrian History in chronological order.<sup>118</sup>



The way Austria's contemporary history is displayed in the *House of Austrian History* was intensely discussed by the newspapers right after the inauguration of the museum. In general, commentators were delighted that the project had finally been completed in time.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, the opinions on how the exhibition was showing what, differed considerably. The author and journalist Otto Brusatti, for instance, described the *House of Austrian History* as a moral institution which, with a flood of posters, copies, documentaries and lectures, presented contemporary Austrian history as "a story of minor and major heroic deeds"<sup>120</sup>. In his opinion, the exhibition avoided a critical examination and the discussion of uncomfortable truths.<sup>121</sup>

Other commentators were less critical. They described the exhibition as a successful, exciting and instructive presentation of the contradictory Austrian contemporary history and stated that there were only few points of criticism with regard to the displayed content.<sup>122</sup> Also, the former ÖVP politician and president of the parliament, Andreas Kohl, expressed himself complaisant in a newspaper commentary. For him, the exhibition was an "exciting journey through history"<sup>123</sup> which was also addressing the controversial phases of Austrian contemporary history, such as the question of the Dollfuss-Schuschnigg regime between 1934 and 1938, or the role of Austrians in the National Socialist era in a careful, fair and well-balanced manner. Nevertheless, he criticized that the exhibition would ignore or omit important aspects and themes of Austrian contemporary history. He complained that Austria's way of dealing with its Nazi past was, from his perspective, presented almost exclusively in connection with the affair surrounding the ÖVP politician and former Presidential candidate Kurt Waldheim, without also going into the role of the SPÖ, which had cultivated a highly problematic hand in dealing with Austria's National Socialist heritage, too. He furthermore regretted that achievements of ÖVP Chancellors and politicians were neglected in the exhibition, whereas the era of SPÖ Chancellor Kreisky was given much space.<sup>124</sup>

Once again, however, the focus of the press coverage was not on what was to be seen in the museum, but on the rooms and the overall concept. There was a broad consensus that the exhibition space in the Hofburg was unsuitable for the demands of a modern historical museum. Most commentators described the exhibition as too small, too cramped, and overcrowded.<sup>125</sup> Also the signage of the exhibition was judged unsuitable, as it did not succeed in giving orientation to the visitors. According to the critics, the visitors were literally lost in view of the sheer number of objects, display boards and installations which did not rely on a chronological, narrative structure but depicted contemporary Austrian history in thematic sections and from different perspectives. Visitors would therefore depend on guided tours. The responsibility for this situation was given to the politicians in charge, who had failed to provide the *House of Austrian History* with the sufficient facilities, financial and human resources. Compromises and cutbacks had therefore been inevitable.<sup>126</sup>

From a historical-didactical perspective, however, the *House of Austrian History* adopts a highly ambitious approach. History is presented there as a retro-perspective construction which is rooted in the present and orientated towards future interests, with the potential to substantiate, support, strengthen - but also question - collective and individual identities. Moreover, the *House of Austrian History* approaches Austrian contemporary history by dealing

with present-day key issues and with the help of thematically and chronologically arranged sections, which are presented and discussed from various perspectives.<sup>127</sup>

#### **A compilation of student statements after visiting the House of History**

"The exhibition had a well-structured structure. Especially the small details, which can only be noticed on closer inspection, give the exhibition its true greatness. (...) Compared to other exhibitions on similar subjects, this one has something for every character, from politics to society, to sport. The exhibition appears varied."

"However, you cannot dedicate yourself to all the exhibits within one or two visits because there are so many. So you make a subjective selection of what you want to see. However, when you exclude what seems to be uninteresting, this is not helpful for the whole understanding of Austria and its history."

"(...) nevertheless I have to say that I personally found a little too much information in a confined space, which made the exhibition a bit confusing. (...) The museum is very modern and therefore interesting because it offers a new perspective on Austrian history."

"It was a good idea, but too crowded. That made it difficult to see everything and unfortunately you overlooked a lot."

"I found the whole room overcrowded because there was a lack of space. The rooms should have been arranged better and everything could have been arranged more clearly."

"There were so many special things that the choice was almost too difficult for me. But if I had to choose 3 objects, my choice would probably be the Nazi game, the wooden horse and a notebook, in which the opponents of National Socialism were taken together. (...) I found the way of protesting with a horse interesting. A fascinating way of protesting, isn't it?"

"Whoa! Really amazing, but I was just in the house of history and even for youngsters it is interesting and really exciting. Anyone who is interested in Austrian history or simply in our country in general should give it a chance. So try it and stop by at the exhibition 'Into the Unknown'."

(Excerpts from student's written reports on their visit to the House of Austrian History. January 11, 2019, Vienna.)

The next weeks and months will show whether Monika Sommer-Sieghart and her team have succeeded in practically implementing central historical-didactical principles like present- or-



future-oriented approaches, activity orientation, and multi-perspectivity and subject orientation. There still remains a golden opportunity that, instead of a typical national history museum with a well-polished consensual narrative backed by the Grand Coalition, Austria has received a functioning and modern place of learning, where the politically influenced meta-narratives of the Austrian interwar period, which have accompanied the realization of the *House of Austrian History* for such a long time, have once and for all been broken up, put up for discussion, and perhaps even vanquished. Whether this is the case, whether the opening of the *House of History* has been successful, whether the *House of Austrian History* has done justice to its own aspirations, whether it will be accepted by visitors, and whether it is capable of encouraging them to pass their own judgement—all this will be revealed within the coming months.

Meanwhile, many classes and pupils / students have already visited the *House of Austrian History* and teachers have to wait long to get a guided tour. In order to find out whether the exhibition is attractive for the young generations and how the exhibition concept affects them, the author of this article has accompanied one class during their visit in January 2019.<sup>129</sup> After the visit, the pupils had to write down their impressions.

In these reports the pupils explained that the large number of objects in the exhibition provided new approaches to Austrian history and would satisfy diverse interests. Some, however, also described the exhibition as confusing, because too much information was presented in a too small place. Visitors would thus have to make a subjective selection, which, according to the pupils, is not helpful for understanding Austria and its history, especially because important aspects will sometimes go unnoticed. The reports also revealed that the presentation of the Nazi past of Austria and its reappraisal dominated the exhibition. In relation to this, the other thematic sections of the exhibition received less attention.



Photo 02: Waldheim Horse (© Bernhard Trautwein, January 10, 2019).

This can also be confirmed in the list of the three most interesting exhibits of the museum. In their reports, all pupils named the so-called Waldheim horse,<sup>130</sup> which in the exhibition is used to illustrate the paradigm shift in dealing with the Nazi past in post-war Austria, among the three most important and interesting exhibits of the House of Austrian History. Still, despite all criticism, the pupils drew a rather positive picture of the *House of Austrian History*. Apparently, the visit of the exhibition and the guided tour had been a "varied" experience. After analysing the reports, one can say, that the *House of Austrian History* has successfully created an attractive exhibition for pupils, and therefore done justice to at least one of its various aspirations.

As far as the future of the *House of Austrian History* is concerned, much remains to be clarified. So far, there have been no decisions made about the long-term safeguarding of the project, nor has it been considered in which direction the *House of Austrian History* should continue to develop after the anniversary celebrations of 2018. Up to this day, the new government has not shown any signs of changing the legislation about Austria's federal museums, nor are there any indications that point to either scrapping the *House of Austrian History* completely or modifying it. There are no specific plans for the politically indefinitely postponed relocation of

the *House of History* to the oft-mentioned new building on Heldenplatz, either. On the occasion of the creation of a commission to discuss the future of the *House of Austrian History*, the President of the Austrian Parliament, Wolfgang Sobotka, declared in January 2019, that "everything was open".<sup>131</sup> The Republic's self-congratulatory birthday present, which was completed in record time, now threatens to go to waste as a half permanent, half makeshift solution which in the medium term will remain in the "Neue Burg."



Photo 03: "Eigene Bilder machen – Erinnerungen an die ‚Gastarbeit‘" [Making Your Own Pictures – Memories of ‚Guest Work‘] (© Bernhard Trautwein, January 10, 2019).

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hdgoe.at/> (last accessed 12 January 2019) .

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hdgoe.at/exhibition> (last accessed 12 January 2019) .

<sup>3</sup> Andrea Brait, "Ein Museum, das seinesgleichen sucht" [A museum without equal], *Der Standard*, September 05, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> "Karl Renners Lieblingsschöpfung. Von 1946 bis 1957 wurde in der Hofburg ein ‚Museum der ersten und zweiten Republik‘ aufgebaut" [Karl Renner's favorite creation. From 1946 to 1957, a museum of the first and second republic was set up in the Hofburg], *Der Standard*, November 08, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> "Um Geduld wird gebeten" [Patience is requested], *Kleine Zeitung*, Mai 05, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> "'Volksanwalt' Helmut Zilk" [Ombudsman' Helmut Zilk], *Die Presse*, June 22, 2002.; Stefan Weiss, "Die Bühne als ewiges Politikum" [The stage as an eternal political issue], *Der Standard*, August 21, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> "Gemeinsam einsam: 21er Haus und Haus der Geschichte" [Lonely together: House 21 and the house of History], *Die Presse*, January 16, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Diem, "Ein bürgerliches Trauerspiel. Der politische Streit um das geplante Haus der Geschichte Österreichs" [A bourgeois tragedy. The political quarrel over the planned House of Austrian History], *Wiener Zeitung*, September 28, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Gehler, "Ein Haus der Geschichte, Republik, Zukunft?" [A house of History, Republic, Future?], *Die Presse*, October 09, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> "Österreich feiert sich selbst", [Austria is celebrating itself] *Kurier*, November 12, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> "Ein Leidensweg".; Brait, "Gedächtnisort", S. 612ff.

See some of these proposals:

<https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/documents/131008/0/Haus%20der%20Geschichte%20c3%96sterreich/9a01bfa9-cfef-46e7-8794-96aed6a92d46> (last accessed 12 January 2019);

<https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/documents/131008/0/Umsetzungsstrategie%20e2%80%93%20Haus%20der%20Geschichte%20c3%96sterreich,%20barrierefre/0a5ba4d4-eb5e-4799-9525-c4ecbd1353d4>. (last accessed 12 January 2019);

<https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/documents/131008/0/Haus%20der%20Geschichte%20Konzept%20Teil3/9ded4a4b-a212-4c3a-840d-46475c163533> (last accessed 12 January 2019);

<https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/documents/131008/0/Haus%20der%20Geschichte%20c3%96sterreich%20Konzept%20Teil1/dd7484b4-a017-40a4-9112-6051a0b3d52a> (last accessed 12 January 2019);

<https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/documents/131008/0/Haus%20der%20Geschichte%20Bericht/c0f30d88-c8ea-4f24-8775-dee86fdcc164> (last accessed 12 January 2019).

<sup>12</sup> "Ein Leidensweg".; Brait, "Gedächtnisort", S. 625-628.

<sup>13</sup> Trautl Brandstaller, "Haus der Geschichte – Test für demokratischen Konsens" [House of History – A test for a Democratic Understanding], *Der Standard*, April 23, 2003.; Ernst Trost, "Sie geht immer noch um, die Angst vor der eigenen Geschichte" [The fear of the own history is still wandering around], *Neue Kronen-Zeitung*, September 21, 2003.

<sup>14</sup> In the history of the Second Republic, the SPÖ and ÖVP temporarily represented up to 90 percent of the Austrian voters, "Nationalratswahlen. Historischer Rückblick" [Legislative election. A historical review], [http://bmi.gv.at/412/Nationalratswahlen/Historischer\\_Rueckblick.aspx](http://bmi.gv.at/412/Nationalratswahlen/Historischer_Rueckblick.aspx) (last accessed 12 January 2019).

<sup>15</sup> Gehler, "Ein Haus".

<sup>16</sup> To understand the politically influenced metanarratives of the Austrian interwar period, see: Anton Pelinka, "The Dollfuss/Schuschnigg Era in Austria. A Reassessment" (London: Routledge, 2017); Gerhard Botz, "The coming of the Dollfuss-Schuschnigg Regime and the Stages of its Development", in: Rethinking fascism and dictatorship in Europe, ed. António Costa Pinto, Aristotle Kallis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 121-153.





<sup>17</sup> "Mythen, Fakten und blinde Flecken in der Geschichte Österreichs" [Myths, facts and blind spots in the history of Austria], *Die Presse am Sonntag*, March 12, 2017.; Thomas Kramar, "Lasst den Faschismus sein!" [Let fascism be!], *Die Presse am Sonntag*, April 10, 2016.; Thomas Trenkler, "Die Angst vor der Vergangenheit" [The fear of the past], *Kurier*, October 04, 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Diem, "Ein bürgerliches Trauerspiel".

<sup>19</sup> Bernhard Baumgartner, "Explainity in der Clusterstele" [Explainity in the Clusterstele], *Wiener Zeitung*, September 08, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Baumgartner, "Explainity".

<sup>21</sup> Baumgartner, "Explainity".

<sup>22</sup> "Auferstehung einer Idee: Das Haus der Geschichte" [Resurrection of an Idea: The House of History], *Kurier*, December 02, 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Baumgartner, "Explainity".

<sup>24</sup> "Österreich ist Land der Länder" [Austria is a country of provinces], *Salzburger Nachrichten*, February 03, 2016.

<sup>25</sup> "Pröll prescht mit Museum vor" [Pröll is pressing ahead with a museum], *Salzburger Nachrichten*, April 11, 2015.; Stefan Weiss, "Haus der Geschichte Niederösterreich. Kaiserrock, Staatsvertrag und Dollfußbild" [House of Lower Austrian History. The emperor's clothes, the state Treaty and the portrait of Dollfuß], *Der Standard*, September 09, 2017.; Stefan Weiss & Nina Weißensteiner, "Ein Provisorium fürs Republikjubiläum" [A provisional solution for the Republic's anniversary], *Der Standard*, October 25, 2016.

<sup>26</sup> "Pröll prescht mit Museum vor", *Salzburger Nachrichten*, April 11, 2015.; "Die Republik bekommt ein Museum" [The Republic gets a museum], *Salzburger Nachrichten*, September 10, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Götz, "Haus der Geschichte. Wie Erwin Pröll Wien ausbremste", [The House of History. How Erwin Pröll stopped Vienna] *Neue Vorarlberger Tageszeitung*, April 11, 2015.

<sup>28</sup> "Dollfuß – kein Problem mehr. Der Kulturminister über seine Pläne für den Heldenplatz" [Dollfuß – no problem anymore. The Minister of Culture on his plans for Heldenplatz], *Kurier*, February 21, 2015.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.weltmuseumwien.at/> (last accessed 12 January 2019)

<sup>30</sup> "Neue Burg' teurer als geplant?" [Is the New Viennese Hofburg more expensive than planned?] *Die Presse*, Mai 07, 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Gerald Matt, "Eine gute Entscheidung" [A good decision], *Vorarlberger Nachrichten*, November 03, 2015.

<sup>32</sup> Diem, "Ein bürgerliches Trauerspiel".

<sup>33</sup> Diem, "Ein bürgerliches Trauerspiel".

<sup>34</sup> Diem, "Ein bürgerliches Trauerspiel".

<sup>35</sup> Heidemarie Uhl, "Haus der Geschichte. Was für die Hofburg spricht" [House of History. The benefits of the Viennese Hofburg], *Die Presse*, March 13, 2015.

<sup>36</sup> "Das Durchhaus der Geschichte" [Passage through history], *Salzburger Nachrichten*, February 07, 2015.

<sup>37</sup> "Das Durchhaus".

<sup>38</sup> Gudula Walterskirchen, "Ein Antifa-Museum im Kuhhandel für Werner Faymanns Wiederwahl" [An antifascist museum in the horse trade for Werner Faymann's re-election], *Die Presse*, March 02, 2015.

<sup>39</sup> "Neue Burg".

<sup>40</sup> Stefan, Weiss, "Kulturspenden werden steuerlich absetzbar. Minister Ostermayer gab Einblick in Details des Kulturbudgets für 2016" [Cultural donations will be tax deductible. Minister Ostermayer gave insight into details of the cultural budget for 2016], *Der Standard*, November 19, 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Kriesche, "Ein Haus der Geschichte und der Zukunft" [A house of history and the future], *Der Standard*, January 12, 2016.

<sup>42</sup> Eva Blimlinger was a member of the scientific advisory committee of the House of Austrian History. In the summer of 2018 she resigned from the board.

- <sup>43</sup> "Blimlinger gegen Haus der Geschichte" [Blimlinger against House of History], *Wiener Zeitung*, January 5, 2016.
- <sup>44</sup> "Heldenplatz: Schelling hat keine Stoptaste gedrückt" [Heldenplatz. Schelling didn't press the stop button], *Kurier*, November 27, 2015.
- <sup>45</sup> "Platzsuche", *Kleine Zeitung*, July 18, 2015.
- <sup>46</sup> Kerstin Kellermann, "Am Judenplatz. Bilderausstellung von Adolf Frankl in Gefahr. Denkmal als Spiegel der Synagoge" [At Judenplatz Exhibition of paintings by Adolf Frankl in danger. Monument as mirror of the synagogue], *Augustin*, December 21, 2016.
- <sup>47</sup> Walter Hämmerle & Ina Weber, "Am geplanten ‚Haus der Geschichte‘ in der Hofburg scheiden sich die Geister" [Opinions differ on the planned 'House of History' at the Hofburg], *Wiener Zeitung*, March 26, 2016.
- <sup>48</sup> Wolfgang Sablatnig, "Geschichte an einem sprechenden Ort" [History in a place of historical relevance], *Tiroler Tageszeitung*, December 25, 2015.
- <sup>49</sup> Trautl Brandstaller & Peter Diem, "Federkrone und Wappenadler" [Feather crown and heraldic eagle], *Wiener Zeitung*, December 06, 2014.
- <sup>50</sup> Stefan Weiss, "Die Republik und ihr Gedächtnis" [The Republic and its memory], *Der Standard*, October 14, 2015.
- <sup>51</sup> Trautl, "Federkrone".
- <sup>52</sup> "Die Republik".
- <sup>53</sup> Trenkler, "Die Angst".
- <sup>54</sup> "Gesetz für Haus der Geschichte" [Act for House of History], *Die Presse*, March 18, 2016.
- <sup>55</sup> "Ursula Stenzel, die FPÖ und die 'Volkschädlinge'" [Ursula Stenzel, the FPÖ and the 'Volkschädlinge'], *Kurier*, September 28, 2015.
- <sup>56</sup> Ernst Langthaler, "Zwei Häuser, aber welche Geschichte?" [Two houses, but what story?], *Die Presse*, May 07, 2015.
- <sup>57</sup> "Mann der Geschichte. Zur Person Oliver Rathkolb" [Man of history. About the person Oliver Rathkolb], *Kurier*, May 14, 2016.
- <sup>58</sup> "Unterwegs in die Dritte Republik" [On the way to the Third Republic], *Die Presse*, Mai 23, 2016.
- <sup>59</sup> Gerfried Sperl, "Das Haus der Geschichte ins Museumsquartier" [The House of History to the Museumsquartier], *Der Standard*, August 17, 2015.
- <sup>60</sup> "Haus der Geschichte ist auf dem Weg" [House of history is on its way], *Vorarlberger Nachrichten*, March 18, 2016.
- <sup>61</sup> "In Hofburg wird Geschichte geschrieben" [History is written in the Hofburg], *Heute*, September 25, 2015.
- <sup>62</sup> Later Franz Schausberger became a member of the scientific advisory committee of the House of Austrian History.
- <sup>63</sup> "Österreich ist Land".
- <sup>64</sup> "Die Chance auf ein zweites Museums-Quartier" [The Chance of a Second Museumsquartier], *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*, August 08, 2015.
- <sup>65</sup> "Im Banne eines historischen Schlüsseljahres" [Under the spell of a historic key year], *Der Standard*, January 29, 2015.
- <sup>66</sup> "Die Chance".
- <sup>67</sup> "Die Chance".
- <sup>68</sup> "Die Chance".
- <sup>69</sup> Harald Walser, "Ein Haus, eine Republik und ihre Geschichte" [A house, a republic and ist history], *Der Standard*, August 13, 2015. (Harald Walser was a politician of the Greens).
- <sup>70</sup> "Hätte mir mehr Kühnheit von dieser Bundesregierung erwartet" ["I expected more boldness from this federal government"], *Der Standard*, October 25, 2016.
- <sup>71</sup> Ina Weber, "Small bis medium" [Small to medium], *Wiener Zeitung*, September 10, 2015.

<sup>72</sup> Weber, "Small".

<sup>73</sup> "Republiks-Geschichte an imperialem Ort" [History of the republic in an imperial place], *Tiroler Tageszeitung*, November 16, 2015.

<sup>74</sup> Gerald Matt, "In Hofburg wird Geschichte geschrieben" [History is written in the Hofburg], *Heute*, September 25, 2015.

<sup>75</sup> Matt, "In Hofburg".

<sup>76</sup> Matt, "In Hofburg".

<sup>77</sup> "Geschichte zunächst nur in Teilen" [History only in parts], *Salzburger Nachrichten*, May 06, 2016.

<sup>78</sup> <https://www.onb.ac.at/> (last accessed 12 January 2019).

<sup>79</sup> The following persons were nominated in the advisory committee of the House of Austrian History: Oliver Rathkolb, Aleida Assmann, Eva Blimlinger, Gerhard Baumgartner, Franz Schausberger, Wolfgang Madterthaler. "Start im Oktober für das Haus der Geschichte" [The House of History starts in October], *Die Presse*, September 15, 2015.

<sup>80</sup> "Um Geduld".

<sup>81</sup> Michael Wurmitzer, "Haus der Geschichte: Vorstudie veröffentlicht" [House of History: Preliminary study published], *Der Standard*, May 06, 2016.

<sup>82</sup> "Drozda forciert HGÖ-Eröffnung" [Drozda pushes HGÖ opening], *Tiroler Tageszeitung*, September 12, 2016.; "Drozda hält an Haus der Geschichte fest" [Drozda sticks to the house of history], *Tiroler Tageszeitung*, May 19, 2016.

<sup>83</sup> "Haus der Geschichte eröffnet 2018" [House of History opens in 2018], *Wiener Zeitung*, October 21, 2016.

<sup>84</sup> Stefan Musil, "Haus der Geschichte soll 2018 eröffnen. Klein & billiger!" [House of History is scheduled to open in 2018. Small & cheaper], *Kronen Zeitung*, October 23, 2016.

<sup>85</sup> Stefan Musil, "Geschichte wird abgespeckt" [History is slimmed down], *Kronen Zeitung*, October 23, 2016.

<sup>86</sup> "Haus eröffnet".

<sup>87</sup> Stefan Weiss, "Haus der kleinen Geschichte" [House of small history], *Der Standard*, October 21, 2016.

<sup>88</sup> "Hätte mir mehr Kühnheit erwartet".

<sup>89</sup> "Hätte mir mehr Kühnheit erwartet".

<sup>90</sup> "Hätte mir mehr Kühnheit erwartet".

<sup>91</sup> "Hitler-Balkon' bekommt eine Kunstinstallation" [The Hitler balcony becomes an art installation], *Salzburger Nachrichten*, July 27, 2017.

<sup>92</sup> "Die wahren Gründe" [The real reasons], *Kurier*, December 25, 2016.

<sup>93</sup> Weiss, "Haus der Geschichte. Verständliches Ärgernis" [House of History. Understandable annoyance], *Der Standard*, October 25, 2016.

<sup>94</sup> Musil, "Klein & billiger".

<sup>95</sup> Weiss, "Haus der Geschichte".

<sup>96</sup> Weiss, "Haus der Geschichte".

<sup>97</sup> Weiss, "Haus der Geschichte".

<sup>98</sup> Weiss, "Haus der Geschichte".

<sup>99</sup> "Haus eröffnet".

<sup>100</sup> "Ester Schritt zum Haus der Geschichte" [First step on the road to the House of History], *Tiroler Tageszeitung*, October 21, 2016.; Katrin Nussmayr, "Haus der Geschichte: Drozda erwägt Neubau" [House of History: Drozda considers a new building], *Die Presse*, October 21, 2016.

<sup>101</sup> Nussmayr, "Drozda".

<sup>102</sup> "Das Haus der Geschichte sucht jetzt eine Leitung" [The House of History is looking for a manager], *Kurier*, November 11, 2016.

<sup>103</sup> "Überblick", *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*, December 13, 2016.; Thomas Trenkler, "Das Plantschen geht weiter" [The dabbling continues], *Kurier*, January 1, 2017.



<sup>104</sup> "Monika Sommer wird Haus der Geschichte leiten" [Monika Sommer will be the head of the House of History], *Kurier*, January 26, 2017.

<sup>105</sup> Barbara Petsch, "Eine Mutter von vier Kindern für das Haus der Geschichte. Die neue Direktorin, Monika Sommer-Sieghart, sei willkommen" [A mother of four children for the House of History. The new director, Monika Sommer-Sieghart, is welcome], *Die Presse*, January 27, 2017.; Michael Tschida, "Gleiche und Ungleiche" [Equals and unequals], *Kleine Zeitung*, January 27, 2017.

<sup>106</sup> Reinhold Reiterer, "Frau Direktor geht ins Museum" [Mrs. Director enters the museum], *Kleine Zeitung*, January 27, 2017.; "Von der Vergangenheit für die Zukunft lernen" [Learning from the past for the future], *Salzburger Nachrichten*, January 27, 2017.

<sup>107</sup> "Geschichte als Projekt des Herzens" [History as a matter close to the heart], *Tiroler Tageszeitung*, January 27, 2017.

<sup>108</sup> "Projekt des Herzens"; "Und wieder macht eine Linzerin Karriere" [Once again, a woman from Linz makes career], *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*, January 27, 2017.

<sup>109</sup> "Wie schaffen wir ein demokratisches Museum?" [How to create a democratic museum?], *Die Presse*, May 26, 2017.

<sup>110</sup> Jasmin Bürger, "Österreichs Identität auf der Spur" [Tracing Austria's identity], *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*, June 10, 2017.; Stefan Weiss, "Jetzt sind die Geschichtsmuseen dran" [Now it's the turn to the history museums], *Der Standard*, May 26, 2017.

<sup>111</sup> Weiss, "Geschichtsmuseen".

<sup>112</sup> Katrin Nussmayer, "Monika Sommer-Sieghart leitet Haus der Geschichte" [Monika Sommer-Sieghart is the head of the House of History], *Die Presse*, January 27, 2017.; Thomas Trenkler, "Eine Urne als Glücksbringer des Hauses der Geschichte" [An urn as a lucky charm of the house of history], *Kurier*, October 23, 2017.

<sup>113</sup> Trenkler, "Eine Urne".

<sup>114</sup> Trenkler, "Eine Urne".

<sup>115</sup> "Haus der Geschichte. Blimlinger und Baumgartner verließen Beirat" [House of History. Blimlinger and Baumgartner left the advisory board], *Der Standard*, July 7, 2018.

<sup>116</sup> "Haus der Geschichte. Blimlinger".

<sup>117</sup> "Haus der Geschichte. Blimlinger".

<sup>118</sup> <https://www.hdgoe.at/aufbruch-ins-ungewisse> (last accessed 12 January 2019) .

<sup>119</sup> Stefan Weiss, "Haus der Geschichte eröffnet. Ein Jahrhundertsprung auf sechzig Metern" [A century jump at sixty meters], *Der Standard*, November 7, 2018.

<sup>120</sup> Otto Brusatti, "Haus der Geschichte Österreichs. Begnadet für das Schiache?" [House of Austrian History. Blessed for the ugly?], *Die Presse*, December 7, 2018.

<sup>121</sup> "Begnadet für das Schiache?" ..

<sup>122</sup> "Haus der Geschichte eröffnet".

<sup>123</sup> Andreas Kohl, "Vielversprechender Beginn – mit Luft nach oben!" [A promising start with potential for improvement], *Der Standard*, November 19, 2018.

<sup>124</sup> "Vielversprechender Beginn".

<sup>125</sup> "Haus der Geschichte eröffnet"; "Vielversprechender Beginn"; "Begnadet für das Schiache?".

<sup>126</sup> Michael Huber, "Haus der Geschichte Österreich. Ein erster Rundgang" [House of Austrian History. A first tour], *Kurier*, November 7, 2018.

<sup>127</sup> Thomas Winkelbauer, "Welches Haus? Welche Geschichte? Welches Österreich?" [What house? What history? Which Austria?], *Der Standard*, April 14, 2015.; "Republiks-Geschichte".

<sup>129</sup> I accompanied Monika Erckert and her 17 students at the age of 16 and 17 years from the Viennese Grammar School Wenzgasse (<http://www.wenzgasse.at/>) (last accessed 12 January 2019) , who visited the House of Austrian History on the 10th of January 2019.

<sup>130</sup> The Waldheim horse is probably the most prominent material relict of the anti-Waldheim protests in Austria. The protests marked a paradigm shift in Austria's dealings with its Nazi past and, were triggered

by the candidacy of former UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim for the office of Austrian Federal President in 1986. In the course of the election campaign, the Austrian media had revealed that Waldheim had incompletely and partly incorrectly reported on his time during the Second World War in which he had been an officer of an SA equestrian corps in Greece. The debate whether Waldheim had personally been involved in Nazi war crimes and the mass deportation of Jews in Greece, or whether he had at least known about it, resulted in an internationally led, controversial and fierce debate that strongly polarized the Austrian public. On the one hand, Waldheim became an identification figure for the war generation, who, as Waldheim himself had put it, had only "fulfilled their duty" in the Wehrmacht.

On the other hand, Waldheim's memory gaps and his selective depiction of the Nazi past provided the starting point for a long overdue reassessment of Austrian Nazi history, which continues to this day. For the first time, the founding myth of the Second Republic was challenged and Austria was no longer seen exclusively as the first victim of National Socialism, but as a country whose inhabitants were complicit in the crimes of National Socialism.

Kurt Waldheim's election and presidency were accompanied by numerous protests in Austria and abroad. The wooden horse, which carries a SA-cap, also goes back to these protests. It was constructed on the occasion of Waldheim's inauguration by a group of artists under Alfred Hrdlicka as a kind of Trojan horse which concealed within itself the attitude of those in Hitler's army who claimed merely to have been doing their duty. At the same time, however, the wooden horse also refers to a statement by the then Federal Chancellor Fred Sinowatz, who laconically stated that he accepted that "Waldheim was never in the SA, only his horse".

After his investiture, Waldheim remained internationally isolated, was banned from entering the USA, and finally renounced re-election. A personal engagement in war crimes, which he had always denied, could never be proven to him. However, a commission of historians concluded that he must have been well informed about the crimes.

<sup>131</sup> Stefan Weiss: „‘Alles offen‘ beim Haus der Geschichte“ [House of Austrian History. 'Everything is open'], *Der Standard*, January 11, 2019.; "Expertenteam für Haus der Geschichte" [A team of experts for the House of History], *Wiener Zeitung*, January 4, 2019.

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