Austria

Country located in central Europe, which gained independence in 1918 after the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

On March 11, 1938 the German army marched into Austria annexing the country to the German Reich. Most of the Austrian population happily accepted this move, which was termed the *Anschluss*, meaning "annexation" or "union". Austrian enthusiasm for unification with the Reich manifested in rampant anti-Jewish rioting. Members of the Austrian Nazi Party quickly began the process of excluding the country's Jews from Austria's economy, culture, and social life.

By March 18 the authorities had closed down the offices of the Jewish community and Zionist organizations in Vienna and imprisoned their officers. During the first weeks after the *Anschluss,* Jews were fired from their jobs in theaters, community centers, public libraries, and universities. Throughout Austria, Jews were arrested and imprisoned. In fact, the situation was so miserable for the Jews that from February to March 1938, the number of Jewish suicides increased 20-fold.

Soon, an office was established in Vienna to implement the confiscation of Jewish property. In late June, Jews and all non-Jews married to Jews working in the private sector, were fired from their jobs. The Germans' immediate goal was to "encourage" the Jews to leave the country. Senior SS officer Adolf Eichmann was in charge of Jewish emigration from Austria. In August 1938 Eichmann established the Central Office for Jewish Emigration (*Zentralstelle Fuer Juedische Auswanderung*) in the Rothschild palace, which the Nazis had seized from its owners.

During the *Kristallnacht* pogrom of November 1938, Jews and Jewish businesses were attacked throughout Germany and Austria. Many synagogues were desecrated and Jewish homes were vandalized. After *Kristallnacht,* Eichmann began detaining Austrian Jews into Nazi concentration camps in order to blackmail them for money and to convince them to leave the country. When such an inmate was released, he was given

a limited amount of time to get out of the country. If he was still in Austria at the end of his grace period, he was put back in jail. The *Kristallnacht* pogrom also helped speed up the process of liquidating Austria's Jewish communities. By May 1939, 27 of 33 Jewish community councils had been dissolved.

Prior to the war, 126,445 Jews managed to escape Austria, leaving 58,000 Jews in the country. Of the remaining Jews, some 2,000 were able to emigrate. By October 1941, the Nazis halted all Jewish emigration from the Reich.

In October 1939, 1,584 Austrian Jews were deported to the Lublin district of Poland, as part of a grand plan to concentrate all of Europe's Jews in one area of the *Generalgouvernement* (see also Nisko and Lublin Plan). In February and March 1941 some 5,000 Austrian Jews were deported to Kielce in Poland; during 1942 they were exterminated in Belzec and Chelmno. In October 1941 the Nazis began deporting the Jews of Austria en mass. Thousands of Jews were sent to Lodz and ghettos in the Baltic region. After the Wannsee Conference of January 1942, during which steps were taken to better coordinate the murder of Europe's Jews, deportations from Austria were sped up. Thousands were transported to Riga, Minsk, and Lublin. During the second half of 1942 nearly 14,000 Jews were sent to the Theresienstadt Concentration Camp. The Jewish community of Vienna was liquidated in November 1942, leaving only 7,000 Jews in Austria - most of whom were married to non-Jews. All those strong enough to work were placed in forced labor. Small-scale deportations continued into 1943; by the end of 1944 only some 6,000 Jews remained in Vienna.

Altogether, including Austrian Jews who had fled to countries the Nazis later occupied, over 65,000 Austrian Jews died in the ghettos and concentration camps of Eastern Europe. After the war, Austria became the center for the Bericha movement.