

Anschluss

German word meaning connection or annexation that is used to refer to the takeover of Austria by Germany in March 1938. In German political jargon, the term *Anschluss* came into use at the end of World War I to denote the desire to include Austria in a united Greater Germany. However, based on the peace treaty made in 1919 between Austria and the allies who won the war, known as the Treaty of St. German, Austria was forbidden to unite with Germany, and instead was made into an independent country - the Republic of Austria. During the 1930s the leader of Austria's Christian Socialist Party, Engelbert Dollfuss, allied himself with Fascist Italy and set himself up as Austria's dictator. Dollfuss was strongly opposed both to Austria's Social Democrats and to its Nazi Party. In July 1934 the Nazis tried to take over the government, but failed when the Italian authorities stopped them. Nonetheless, the Nazis did succeed in assassinating Dollfuss right in his own office. Dollfuss's successor, Kurt von Schuschnigg, tried to reach a compromise with Hitler, but Hitler would not back down: he wanted to annex Austria to the Reich and nothing else.

Over the next few years Austrian support for the Nazi Party increased greatly and, as a result of the German-Italian alliance of 1938, Italy withdrew its support for an independent Austria. Thus, Austria was not strong enough to defy Hitler for long. On March 13, 1938 German troops marched into Austria, and declared the country a part of the German Reich.

The *Anschluss* was supported by many Austrians, among them Austrian Nazis, who saw it as a political, social, and cultural reunification with their brother country, Germany. Thousands turned out to greet Adolf Hitler, the native son who was returning to his homeland. On the other hand, the leaders of the West saw the *Anschluss* as an invasion, pure and simple. Despite this, not one government made a move to stop Hitler who, without interference, felt free to embark upon the next step in his scheme to conquer all of Europe.