

Heldenplatz

A Chapter of European History in the Very Heart of Vienna

As Vienna is to the Empire, so is the Hofburg to Vienna: the true heart of the city.«

Richard von Eitelberger, 1859

At first, space had to be made for the development of a square. The history of Heldenplatz (Heroes' Square) began when French troops destroyed the bastion surrounding the Hofburg Palace during their decampment in December of 1809. With his conquest of Vienna on May 13, 1809 and the subsequent conclusion of the Schönbrunn Peace Accord on October 14, 1809, Napoleon had reached the zenith of his power. The French emperor had won a bloody, fiercely contested victory, and for the first time his invincibility seemed less than certain. In the Battles of Aspern and Essling, Napoleon had surrendered to a single power for the first time. Fifty years later, a monument to Archduke Carl (1771–1847), the victor of these battles, was to adorn the Äußere Burgplatz (Outer Palace Square). As a last-ling reminder of his six-month reign in Vienna, Napoleon ordered his army to scrap the fortifications around the Hofburg Palace before its withdrawal. However, with this supposed act of humiliation, the French troops actually carried out some work which Emperor Francis I (1768–1835) would have had to commission sooner or later. As new military technologies required a new fortification system, the era of bastions had come to an end.

The emperor's forces took their time to clear away the rubble and demolish the guardhouses on the outside wall of the bastion. Not until 1816 did workers level the site of the Palace Bastion, which to a great extent is covered by today's Heldenplatz. Archduke Johann was in charge of the clearing work and design of the new square. The »genius corps« at his command was an elite unit of the imperial army, consisting of particularly accomplished engineers and military strategists. In 1818, demolition crews pulled down the old Palace Gate, which had been erected to fortify the town during Emperor Leopold I's reign in 1660. In the following year, the remnants of the blasted fortifications were cleared away completely and the moat was filled.

The designation »parade ground«, in use until 1821, indicates that the new free space was first used to assemble and drill troops. Soon thereafter, the planners were entertaining novel ideas of a less military character, however. Following the lead of many other European residence cities, the square in front of the imperial palace was designed as a recreational ground for the court and the public. When Emperor Francis I commissioned the French landscape architect Louis Rémy to lay out the Volksgarten (»People's Garden«) in 1819, he fulfilled the wish of the Viennese population to build a substitute for the highly popular parks on top of the bastions. The Cortische Kaffeehaus, a coffeehouse established on the Palace Bastion in 1784, thus reopened in the new Volksgarten. Peter von Nobile (1774–1854), one of the most renowned architects of his time, redesigned the Outer Palace Square. Not only did he find a space for the Cortische Kaffeehaus, but he also created two of the most striking monuments of late Neo-Classicism in Vienna – the Theseus Temple (1819) and the Outer Palace Gate. The Theseus Temple, a smaller version of the Theseion in Athens, housed Antonio Canova's (1757–1822) monumental sculpture »Theseus slaughters the Minotaur,« which the artist had created between 1805 and 1819. The sculptural group, which was later interpreted as an allegory of Napoleons defeat, was transferred to the stairwell of the Kunsthistorische Museum in 1890. Luigi Cagnola won the architectural contest for the New Palace Gate. The cornerstone ceremony took place on September 22, 1821. After his death, the New Palace Gate, which was also called »the columned gate«, was completed according to Nobile's plans. The construction with its five round arched gates carries an inscription of Emperor Francis' motto: »iustitia regnorum fundamenta« (Justice is the basis of all kingdoms.) Intent on imitating the Propylaea in Athens, the architect designed the columned side to face the palace. The construction was executed »Roman style« – only soldiers carried out the work. Symbolically, the gate was solemnly inaugurated on the anniversary of the Leipzig Battle of the Nations on October 18, 1824. As was often the case in later years, the square in front of the Hofburg served as a stage for international politics.

While the Volksgarten was conceived for the public, the Kaisergarten (»Imperial Garden«) on the other side of the palace was reserved for the court. This small, well-groomed park with its old stock of exotic trees and a pond in the center of a symmetrical design ranks among Viennas most idyllic green spaces. Friedrich Ohmann's (1858–1927) glass constructions of overarched hothouses from the beginning of this century also deserve special mention. The park is adorned with several monuments, among them a life-size equestrian statue of Emperor Francis I (Francis Stephan of Lorraine) by Balthasar Ferdinand Moll. The Kaisergarten, which diminished in size after the New Hofburg was redesigned, was opened to the public under the name of Burggarten (»Palace Garden«) in 1919. Not until many years later, in 1953, did the Mozart Statue by Victor Tilgner (1844–1896), one of the most photographed sights in Vienna, find a home in the Burggarten. Bombs had severely damaged its original location on the Albrecht Square in front of the Albertina Graphic Collection as well as the adjacent Philipphof in April of 1945.

The public could only gain access to the Hofburg from the Outer Palace Square. In the Biedermeier era, i.e. before 1848, this square was even more elongated than today, and its lawns were lined with paths and poplar avenues. Nobody suspected this square might assume a symmetrical shape, as it was popularized in the 1850s. The southwestern façade of the Schweitzerhof Wing provided a view over the city center. Adjacent to it, the Knight's Hall protruded into the Outer Palace Square. Very soon, this annex, which court architect Louis Montoyer (1749–1811) erected in 1804, was aptly dubbed »the nose« in common parlance. Until 1918 the Ceremonial Hall with its lavish coffered ceiling and 24 rounded columns of red artificial marble served as a throne room. Following an old tradition, Emperor Francis Joseph I would wash the feet of twelve old men in this hall every Holy Thursday. Balls and concerts reserved for the court took place here, as well.

The people and the court, the public and private sphere were all assigned their special place in front of the imperial palace. Citizens of the empire would promenade to see and be seen and enjoyed being part of the crowd. This idyllic atmosphere was deceptive, however. In the long run, this »peace, the primary duty of the citizen,« imposed upon the Empire by Chancellor Clemens Lothar Prince Metternich (1773–1859), could not obscure the fact that social and political tensions were rising. The February Revolution in Paris set off a spark which, fueled by crop failures and mass unemployment, also led to an explosion in Vienna in March of 1848. The course of this revolutionary year reflected the different political, national and social goals of all the various groups which rose up in arms. Disagreement among the insurgents, who grew more and more distrustful and even hostile toward each other, was one of the main reasons why the Revolution of 1848 finally failed. The only goals achieved were the liberation of peasants from indentured servitude and the abolishment of the much hated censorship laws. Once voiced and demanded, other principal ideals of the revolution, such as the legal equality of all citizens and general, equal and free suffrage, apparently fell into oblivion. Decades later, these ideals were again brought to the fore by Austrian citizens, who insisted that they be embodied in the law.

The riots of 1848 unfolded in three stages. The participants in the March Revolt were primarily members of the bourgeoisie and students. An initially peaceful demonstration, in which a catalog of demands was presented to the Hofburg, escalated into violence after the military intervened. Most of the casualties occurred among workers who had vented their anger independently of groups representing the middle class, peasants and students. Factories were burnt down in the Viennese suburbs. The bourgeoisie and students established a national guard of their own. Confronted by this unrest, Prince Metternich left Vienna. Emperor Ferdinand I (1793–1875) granted freedom to the press and promised to enact a parliamentary constitution as demanded by the insurgents. Since the bourgeoisie had reached its goal by achieving representation in the body politic, it had no reason to continue the riots and thereby endanger its accomplishments. These middle class »insurgents« had never been keen on changing the form of government in the first place. After Metternich's resignation in April of 1848, a new government headed by Baron Franz Pillersdorf (1786–1862) enacted a first constitution »by decree« without involving the population. Students in particular violently opposed this step. In their minds, the way the April constitution had been promulgated was proof of the fact that the emperor had not kept his promise. Students were primarily intent on amending electoral regulations in the Imperial Diet. They erected barricades to draw attention to their demands. The Academic Legion started to gain control of the city. At the height of the May Revolution, Emperor Ferdinand and his imperial retinue left Vienna for Innsbruck, but returned to the city after the situation had calmed down in August. Months earlier, the revolution had already spread to the other provinces. Hungary, Bohemia and the Italian provinces primarily demanded national and political autonomy. If those in power had conceded to these demands, the entire empire would have disintegrated. As the Habsburg rulers were well aware of the explosive force of these ideas, they took rigorous military steps against insurgents in Prague, Budapest and Upper Italy. When Count Theodor Latour (1780–1848), Minister of War, wanted to send an additional regiment to support imperial troops in Hungary in October of 1848, soldiers refused to follow his orders. In Vienna, the situation got out of hand when incensed factory workers stormed the imperial arsenal and armed themselves. Emperor Ferdinand I left the Hofburg Palace for a second time on October 7, 1848. He escaped to the bishopric of Olomouc in Northern Moravia. The October Revolution was staged largely by factory workers who wanted to have a say in political matters and abolish the monarchy. They encountered little understanding for their demands among the propertied classes, who left the capital in droves. The situation in the city came to a head when an army loyal to the emperor under the command of Count Alfred Windisch-Graetz (1787–1862) sound-ed the attack against Vienna on October 28. During three days of fierce battles, in which more than 2000 people were killed, the army concentrated on the Palace Gate and the Palace Square, behind which members of the former National Guard and of a newly formed Mobile Guard were entrenched. After a three-day bombardment, the city's resistance broke down. Count Windisch-Graetz marched into town and ordered the execution of rebellion leaders by sentence of a court-martial. After Emperor Ferdinand I's abdication in favor of his nephew Francis Joseph I (1830–1916) on December 2, 1848, a new era dawned. This new age of neo-absolutism, however, could only delay the inevitable realization of the ideals of the revolution.

»Public institutions, notably an opera-house, imperial archives, a library, a town hall and other buildings for museums and galleries shall be constructed. Building sites shall be selected and measured to develop these projects.« With this carefully drafted, hand-written decree of December 20, 1857, Emperor Francis Joseph I launched a new era in Vienna's architectural history. Projects to expand the city caused heated debates, with optimism and skepticism in delicate balance. When the city wall was razed, the first step towards city expansion was taken. In the next few decades Vienna underwent one of the most crucial architectural makeovers in its history. Building machines, scaffolding and work-ers scurrying around construction sites dominated the cityscape. The construction of the Ringstraße proceeded according to a carefully outlined plan. The chestnut-tree-lined boulevard, which was to measure four kilometers in circumference and 57 meters in width, was to mirror a new society. Members of the wealthy bourgeoisie and the new mon-eyed aristocracy had 55 mansions built on the Ringstraße. The emperor's influence on the avenues design was limited to the area surrounding the Hofburg Palace. Friedrich von Amerling (1803–1887), an elderly painter, openly voiced his criticism, »Your Majesty, many buildings are rising in Vienna. What I don't like, however, is that architects have been using so many different styles. The city looks like a restaurant menu built in stone.« »I had no say in it. All the artists in charge should be better judges of that,« Francis Joseph I answered with resignation. Initially, the emperor did not want to include his home, the Hofburg area, in the redevelopment project. »The area surrounding my palace as well as the gardens on both sides shall remain unchanged until further notice.« This personal wish, which was expressed in the hand-written decree on city expansion of 1857, did not correspond to the actual situation, however. Because of its central location and significance as an architectural monument and imperial residence, the Hofburg could not be excluded from the redevelopment project. Soon afterwards, architects submitted plans to include the Hofburg in the wreath of historic buildings surrounding it. After an intensive planning stage and several architectural contests, Franz Joseph gave approval for the construction of an »Imperial Forum,« designed by Gottfried Semper (1803–1879) in 1869. The architect wanted to integrate Heldenplatz and the museum area in front of the Palace Gate into an imperial complex of impressive size and balance. For this forum to take shape, the old court theater had to be demolished so that the St. Michael's Wing could be expanded and completed. Semper's plan also included the construction of a new court theater, which was to be connected to the Hofburg Palace through an expansive annex to the St. Leopold's Wing. The Palace Gate and two triumphal arches over the Ringstraße were to connect the imperial museums to the entire unit. Semper also planned far-reaching alterations to the Outer Palace Square, which had been renamed »Heldenplatz« after two monumental equestrian statues were put in place. The monument to Archduke Carl bore particular proof of the political determination during this era. Programmatic considerations behind the monument became clearly visible: the monuments were to emphasize the dominance of the imperial dynasty, with Emperor Francis Joseph I following in the footsteps of victorious generals. After the defeats in the Upper Italian theaters of war at Solferino and Magenta in 1859, initial plans to dedicate the monument to Archduke Carl on the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Aspern (May 22, 1859) could not be realized. The ceremony was therefore postponed for one year. When Emperor Francis Joseph I inaugurated the Ringstraße in a ceremony on May 1, 1865, the second equestrian statue in the Outer Palace Square was to be unveiled. Prince Eugene of Savoy was the first and only non-Habsburg dignitary to whom a monument in the Hofburg area paid homage. The sculptor Anton Dominik Fernkorn (1813–1878) had received the commission to design and execute these two monuments. As Fernkorn suffered two strokes in 1864 and was mentally incapacitated at times, Emperor Francis Joseph I ordered his arsenal to supply additional bronze from its stock of cannons to accelerate the work in the imperial foundry in the district of Wieden. The monument to Prince Eugene was unveiled on October 18, 1865, the birthday of the »wise advisor to three emperors and glorious victor over Austria's enemies,« as the inscription on the pedestal reads. After both statues had been erected, the name »Heldenplatz« came into common use, even though the square was officially referred to as »Outer Palace Square« until 1918. According to Semper's plans, the new imperial residence was to rise here, consisting of two magnificent buildings with concave colonnaded fronts facing each other. The narrow side of Semper's planned square would thus have been closed in by a wing with a towerlike throne room in its center. Semper only built parts of the Imperial Forum because of lack of funds and a waning interest on the emperor's part. Only on rare occasions in architectural history did a construction torso please the eye as much as Heldenplatz has to this day. The absent western wing of the New Hofburg affords a view over a breathtaking panorama: Heldenplatz in its full expanse is visible from the New Hofburg's loggia. Behind the Volksgarten a wreath of monumental buildings emerges: the two museums on Maria-Theresa-Square, Parliament, City Hall, the Burgtheater and further down the boulevard, the silhouette of the University. This pleasant view was still a huge construction site in the 1880s; groundbreaking for the New Hofburg took place in 1881. Things did not change when Kaspar Zumbusch's monument of Empress Maria Theresa was unveiled »in front of the Palace Gate« on the other side of the Ring on the Empress's birthday on May 13, 1888, with a huge crowd in attendance. One year later, Emperor Francis Joseph I visited the Natur-historische Museum to open it to the public on August 10, 1889. The Kunsthistorische Museum was inaugurated on October 17, 1891. At 11 a.m. sharp the Emperor arrived on

Maria-Theresa-Square in his carriage. The festival committee guided him through the museum for two hours. After that, Baron Karl Hasenauer (1833–1894), who had taken charge of the construction of the two imperial museums after Gottfried Semper's death on May 15, 1879, received the emperor's words of thanks on behalf of all workers involved in the construction.

Since their inception, Ringstraße and Heldenplatz have served as venues for religious commemorations, festive parades and political rallies. The first one was the »Pageant of the City of Vienna« on the occasion of the silver wedding anniversary of the imperial couple on April 27, 1879. The eminent Viennese painter Hans Makart (1840–1884) was in charge of arranging and designing the parade. More than 14,000 participants in historical costumes marched around the Ringstraße, passing by guests of honor on bleachers and 300,000 curious onlookers who would not have missed this colorful spectacle for the world. Their enthusiasm could not even be dimmed by the fact that most of the Ringstraße buildings were still scaffolded or only finished in the rough. Almost thirty years later, another festive high-light took place on the Ringstraße. On June 12, 1908 a pageant in the emperor's honor on the occasion of Francis Joseph I's sixty-year reign lasted for two hours. In the historical part of the parade, nineteen groups represented eminent Austrian figures, from King Rudolf I to field marshal Johann Joseph Radetzky. Delegations of the Viennese bourgeoisie and representatives from the 15 provinces in their national costumes followed. The adornment of the colonnaded front of the New Hofburg at Heldenplatz reflected the patriotic agenda of the pageant. Twenty life-size figures placed between the columns represented major epochs and figures of Austrian history in chronological order. They ranged from Marcoman, Bavarian, Slavic, and Magyar characters to Viennese citizens and Tyrolean resistance-fighters against Napoleon in 1809.

Emperor Francis Joseph I's death on November 21, 1916 marked the long foreseen end of an era. Six days later, on November 27, the emperor's mortal remains were transferred from Schönbrunn Palace to the Hofburg Chapel. After the population had had a chance to bid a final farewell to its emperor, the funeral procession started to move away from the Hofburg. All of Vienna's church bells were ringing at that moment on November 30, 1916. At 1:30 p.m. the civil servants of the Military and Cabinet Chancellery gathered on the Outer Palace Square in front of the Prince Eugene Monument to join the cortege on its way through the Kohlmarkt to St. Stephen's Cathedral. In light of recent events during the war, Emperor Francis Joseph I had initiated a campaign entitled »Laurel for our Heroes« only a few weeks before his death. In memory of all soldiers killed in action, 38 laurel wreaths made of tombac, a red and gold copper alloy, were hung up on the outer attic and 45 on the inner attic over the cornice of the Palace Gate. For the first time in its history, the inscription »Laurum militibus lauro dignis« (Laurel to the soldiers worthy of laurel) turned the Palace Gate into a war monument. When architect Rudolf Wondracek (1886–1942) redesigned the Palace Gate as a memorial to all soldiers killed in action during World War I from 1933 to 1934, it was officially rededicated as a war monument.

Several tens of thousands of people lined the Ringstraße when Dr. Franz Dinghofer (1873–1956), the first president of the newly constituted provisional National Assembly, proclaimed the Republic of German-Austria from the parliament ramp on November 12, 1918. Only moments later, armed members of the Communist Red Guard seized the red-white-red flag, tore out the white stripe in the middle and hoisted the red banner. The birth of the First Republic was thus marred by two deaths and forty injuries, some of them severe. Doubts about the political and economic viability of a republic severely reduced in size marked life in Vienna. A new government slowly began to form. The new republic was primarily concerned with stabilizing the situation and reacting to political unrest and coup attempts. While inexorably linked to the Habsburg dynasty, Heldenplatz remained a public forum even after the fall of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Its size, central location and symbolic power gave the new rulers an opportunity to legitimize themselves as the successors to the former empire. In the summer of 1920, this symbolism became manifest in the first large-scale parade of the newly created armed forces. As the only troop, the infantry regiment No. 4, better known as the »Hoch- und Deutschmeister,« were solemnly presented with a red-white-red flag with the coat of arms of the Republic of Austria. At that time, many parts of the New Hofburg were only finished in the rough. It was not until the 1930s that the interior was completed and the building complex was rededicated to correspond to the new political situation. Gradually, the new republic took possession of Heldenplatz. Mass demonstrations and rallies reflected political and social changes. Different governments asserted their power on Heldenplatz. On October 27, 1929 the Heimwehr, a paramilitary organization with close ties to the Christian-Socialist party, openly voiced their claim to power. The 12,000 participants also included 2000 riflemen, who served in the »private army« of Prince Ernst Rüdiger Starhemberg (1899–1956), the leader of the Heimwehr. As all political camps were gearing up for aggressive acts, deep, seemingly irreparable craters were riven in the hearts of all Austrians. The National Socialists, in particular, who were gaining political ground, left a bloody trail in Austria. When the riots came to a head in 1932, the Nazis occupied the Heldenplatz territory for the first time. At their party congress in the Austrian gau, Josef Goebbels and Ernst Roehm enthused a fanatic audience with their inflammatory speeches. The Nazis efforts to destabilize the republic and seize power were supported by the climax of the Depression: more than

600,000 Austrians had lost their jobs by 1933. In addition, these efforts were also furthered by the tragic events of February 1934, which, after the dissolution of parliament, had led to a violent civil war between the Social-Democrats and the Christian-Socialists, who had imposed their authoritarian rule. Again, Heldenplatz served as a stage for Austrian history. After the square had been turned into a camp for the reserves of the armed forces ready to quell the revolt of the Social-Democratic »Schutzbund« on February 12, 1934, it served as a venue for the funeral ceremony for the Austrian chancellor Engelbert Dollfuß (1892-1934) on August 8, who had been murdered by National Socialist putschists on July 25. 150,000 supporters of the Patriotic Front voiced their readiness to fight the Nazis and defend Austria's independence. However, only a minority supported the ideals of the corporative state. Its inner conflicts weakened Austria's resistance against increasing pressure from Nazi Germany. With the creation of an axis between Rome and Berlin, Austria lost its last chance to retain its sovereignty.

Again, Austria's fate was decided in the month of March. When German troops crossed the Austrian border during the night of March 11 to March 12, they encountered no resistance, but instead were greeted with enthusiasm.

Apparently, all floodgates had opened. Impressed by the population's jubilant cries and pressured by Hermann Göring, Adolf Hitler decided to annex Austria to the German Reich immediately and forego a personal union.

Reactions abroad ran the gamut from inactivity to benevolence. Yugoslavia and Romania even sent congratulatory telegrams to Berlin. Only Mexico protested against the »Anschluss« in the League of Nations. When Adolf Hitler proclaimed Austria's integration into the Third Reich from the New Hofburg's loggia on March 15, 1938, more than 250,000 people rallied at Heldenplatz. The masses' incessant jubilation bore both dismaying and shameful testimony to the fertile Viennese ground on which National Socialist propaganda had fallen. But not all Austrians rejoiced. Tens of thousands fell victim to a first series of arrests which the Gestapo, the Secret State Police, carried out immediately after the invasion.

In 1945, Vienna bore the marks of severe war-time destruction. Hitler had mounted his »pearl« in smoke and rubble. Nevertheless, the National Socialists were still planning extensive architectural revisions: They wanted to pave Heldenplatz and convert it into a parade ground for the Third Reich, thus completely disfiguring the square.

According to the plans of the new regime, the square's axis would have run parallel to the Ring. One of its end points would have been a semi-circular temple with a bay like projection on the Volksgarten side; on the other side, the Theseus Temple would have been moved in front of New Hofburg's colonnaded façade and raised onto a pedestal. The two equestrian statues of Archduke Carl and Prince Eugene would have been transferred onto a horizontal axis. Fortunately, the course of World War II prevented the realization of this monstrous plan, which would have perverted the square's original conception. All the open-air propaganda events the Nazis held in honor of the successful German army, e.g. »The Victory in the West« in 1940, were ludicrous enough.

In April of 1945, Maria-Theresa-Square and Heldenplatz became battlefields. While the Kunsthistorische Museum was severely damaged by bombs and fires, destruction of Heldenplatz was limited. Even though the loggia and the façade of the New Hofburg bore visible signs of shellfire, the complex as a whole had largely remained undamaged. On April 10, 1945 Russian combat units occupied the Kunsthistorische Museum. Soon afterwards, the Hofburg area also came under Soviet control. The oversized red star on the roof of the Epstein mansion on Dr.-Karl-Renner-Ring, which today houses the Viennese Board of Education, marked the military command center of the Russian occupational powers and was a symbol for the new overlords. The banquet halls of the Hofburg served as a Soviet officer's mess in which big receptions took place until 1955. The Russians also used Heldenplatz for military parades. Soon after the war ended, however, the Second Republic also laid claim to the Hofburg. This became evident on December 19, 1945 when an exhibition of masterworks from the picture gallery of the Kunsthistorische Museum opened with Austrian chancellor Leopold Figl (1902-1965) and the commanders of the American and French military governments, Generals Mark Clark and Marie Emile Béthouart attending. This show proved that Austria had again become conscious of its identity. With this exhibit, the new government expressed its hope that it would soon be in charge of its own affairs. Meanwhile, the Allied Forces still had the final say in Austrian politics. The Austrian government had to consult with the Inter-Allied Council in all important matters. While the Viennese districts were divided into four occupational zones, the center of town held a special position. It housed the headquarters of the High Commissioner, a post which rotated among the American, English, French and Russian forces every month. The relief of the Allied guards and the approach of the High Commissioner's car had become a regular ritual at Heldenplatz. Overall, a general routine had set in again after the war.

When the Austrian State Treaty restored full sovereignty to the country after many years of negotiations on May 15, 1955, Heldenplatz remained empty. On this occasion, the Belvedere Palace served as a venue for one of the most important events in twentieth-century Austrian history. After 1955, the Second Republic redefined its role in the international community of states. Because of its history, permanent neutrality and geopolitical location, it became a mediator between countries with different world views and ideologies. Vienna has made its mark as headquarters of

international organizations and has become a meet-ing place for high-ranking policy-makers from East and West. The Hofburg has served as a historic setting for these events.

Austrians have always cherished and upheld their traditions. The Second Republic has also used Heldenplatz for military ceremonies, be it the annual homage to those killed in action during both world wars in the crypt of the Outer Palace Gate, or the Great Tattoo Ceremony in which Austrian presidents are sworn in or retire. More frequently than in the past, ordinary citizens have also used the Heldenplatz for spontaneous rallies. On April 8, 1965, for example, more than 25,000 people gathered at the funeral ceremony for retiree Ernst Kirchwegger. He had been beaten to death by a Neonazi when German-Nationalist groups clashed with an anti- fascist demonstration. After the Austrian skiing champion Karl Schranz was excluded from the Olympic Winter Games in Sapporo in 1972, more than 100,000 enthusiastic Viennese citizens celebrated him as a national hero on his ride from the Westbahnhof Railway Station over the Ring to the Hofburg. This event released patriotic emotions beyond any imagination – to many a frightening reminder of the past. In 1983, John Paul II was the first pope to visit Austria after more than 200 years. One of the highlights of the papal visit included a »European Vespers Service« at Heldenplatz. Upon his descent from the »Papamobile,« 130,000 believers and a crowd of curious onlookers cheered the head of the Catholic Church, who extolled the virtues of peace and reconciliation. Today, a simple metal cross reminds us of the event. The impressive final rally of the campaign »SOS Mitmensch« (»SOS Fellow-Citizen«) on January 23, 1993 was also dedicated to dialog. 250,000 people followed this campaign, demonstrating against xenophobia and racism with candles in their hands. This event went down in his-tory as »the Ocean of Candles.« When it became clear that a vast majority of Austrians had voted for an accession to the European Union on the evening of June 12, 1994, citizens again expressed their joy at Heldenplatz. Among the many celebrations in 1995 with which Austria commemorated the 50-year existence of the Second Republic and the fortieth anniversary of the State Treaty, one event at Heldenplatz was especially impressive: under the motto of peaceful co-existence, citizens of different faiths, colors and cultures united. In spite of torrential rains, tens of thousands of people, mainly younger in age, danced and celebrated in the open air. Their faith in a multicultural society is an assurance that false prophets who misuse terms such as »home-land« and »nation« have little chance of success in this day and age.

The Hofburg's preeminent rank in European intellectual and cultural history was reflected in international press reactions to the news of the fire in the palace's ballrooms in November of 1992. For one night, the Volksgarten welcomed some famous and unusual guests. After the Lipizan horses were saved at the very last minute, they calmed down in their new environment, enjoying fodder to which they were unaccustomed. Only five years after this disaster, the ballrooms sparkled in new splendor: many delighted guests reinaugurated the Hofburg and Heldenplatz.

In 1998, Pope John Paul II paid a third visit to Austria. More than 60,000 Roman Catholics attend-ed a papal mass at Heldenplatz on June 21. As many people gathered on the square on July 1, 1998 when Austria assumed the presidency of the European Council. The country celebrated this event with a lavish musical performance. Austria presented itself to Europe as a land of diversity, whose citizens have learned a lesson from centuries of history: in spite of all differences, they work, communicate with one another, and celebrate together in peace.

Herbert Haupt