



Project information

Resolution on the renewal

In July 2009, in a move to implement Item 17 “Responsibility towards the victims of National Socialism” of the chapter “Art and Culture” of its governmental program, the Austrian Federal Government passed a resolution to renew the Austrian memorial at the former concentration and extermination camp and present-day State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland. The National Fund was entrusted with the planning and implementation of the entire project.

For years, people in Austria had been calling for the 1978 exhibition to be renewed in keeping with the latest findings on an appropriate culture of remembrance. The main body of criticism came from Austrian visitors to the National exhibition, but the Austrian Consulate General in Krakow also received complaints from abroad.

Above all, the main premise propagated by the exhibition “11 March 1938. Austria – First Victim of National Socialism”, which also glossed over the question of collaboration, no longer conformed with Austria’s official stance following Federal Chancellor Franz Vranitzky’s 1991 avowal of “shared responsibility for the suffering that, although not inflicted by Austria as a nation, was indeed inflicted on other people and peoples by citizens of this country”.

Other countries and institutions also needed to adapt their national exhibitions to portray a view of history that was in keeping with the latest research. Over the last few years, Russia, Israel (Yad Vashem), Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia have all renewed their exhibitions in the former inmate barracks. The museum itself is also currently working on a new permanent exhibition.

In the Year of Remembrance 2005, as a temporary solution a notice funded by the National Fund and worded in consensus with the Foreign Ministry was put up in the foyer of the Austrian exhibition. In January 2012, the text was updated to provide information on the ongoing renewal process.

Chronological overview of the exhibitions at the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau

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1947	Establishment of the museum
1947	First permanent exhibition
1950	Expansion of the permanent exhibition
1955	New permanent exhibition (partially preserved today)
1960	First national exhibitions
1960	Opening of the CSSR national exhibition
1960	Opening of the Hungarian national exhibition
1961	Opening of the Soviet Union's national exhibition
1961	Opening of the GDR's national exhibition
1965	Opening of the Belgian national exhibition
1967;	Unveiling of the first international memorial at Birkenau
1968	Opeining of the first exhibition on the fate of European Jewry
1968	Opening of the Danish national exhibition
1970	Opening of the GDR's updated national exhibition
1970	Opening of the updated Hungarian national exhibition
1977	Opening of the Bulgarian national exhibition
1978	Opening of the Austrian national exhibition
1978	Opening of the updated exhibition on the fate of European Jewry
1979	Opening of the French national exhibition
1979	Visit to the memorial by Pope John Paul II
1979	Museum added to the list of UNESCO World Heritage sites

1980	Opening of the Italian national exhibition
1980	Opening of the Dutch national exhibition
1980	Opening of the updated Hungarian national exhibition
1985	Opening of the Soviet Union's updated national exhibition
1985	Opening of the Polish national exhibition
1993	"The Future of Auschwitz". International conference on the preservation of the memorial site
1990s	Closure of national exhibitions: GDR, Denmark, Bulgaria
2000s	Closure of the National exhibition of the Soviet Union
2001	New concept for the national exhibitions
2001	Opening of the Roma-Sinti exhibition
2002	Opening of the Czech national exhibition
2002	Opening of the Slovakian national exhibition
2004	Opening of the new Hungarian national exhibition
2005	Opening of the new Dutch national exhibition
2005	Opening of the new French national exhibition
2005	Placard with information on the changed view of Austria's history put up at Austria's national exhibition
2006	Opening of the new Belgian national exhibition
2009	Establishment of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation for the preservation of the memorial
2009	Closure of the National exhibition of Yugoslavia
2010s	Closure of the Italian national exhibition
2013	Placard with information on the exhibition's renewal put up at Austria's national exhibition
2013	Opening of the Russian national exhibition
2013	Opening of the new exhibition on the fate of European Jewry
2013	Closure of the Austrian national exhibition

Source: National Fund, Auschwitz.org

The project

The National Fund was responsible for contracting the necessary services for all aspects of the renewal. It reached its decisions in consultation with the project's Steering Committee. In addition to companion projects such as the development of an exhibition website and the publication of a book documenting the previous exhibition, its main tasks were to oversee the development of the new exhibition and the renovation of the former inmate barracks of Block 17 in which the exhibition will be housed.

Besides the funding and coordination provided by the National Fund, a series of public institutions also contributed financial and administrative support to the renewal project: the Future Fund of the Republic of Austria, the National Fund, the Federal Chancellery, Federal Ministry of European and International Affairs the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, the Concentration Camp Memorial Mauthausen (previously the Federal Ministry of the Interior), the federal provinces and the Austrian Castle and Fortress Authority.

In order to ensure that the new exhibition is of an high scientific standard and to safeguard the interests of the social and political groups affected, the project was supervised by an Academic Advisory Board and a Societal Advisory Board.

More information on the organisational aspects of the project.

The development of the new exhibition

The new exhibition was to portray the fate of the Austrian victims at Auschwitz, the resistance put up by Austrian inmates and the involvement of Austrians as accessories to and perpetrators of the crimes committed there.

Following a pan-European call to tender, from April 2014 a team of curators and academics led by Hannes Sulzenbacher worked on developing the contents of the exhibition.

The exhibition design was also put out to tender across Europe in autumn 2014, and the Viennese architect Martin Kohlbauer was selected by the expert evaluation commission. He was commissioned to design the exhibition in March 2015.

Both the content of the exhibition and the exhibition design had to be endorsed by the museum and the Auschwitz Council – an international committee comprising victims' groups and experts.

A website was developed to accompany the exhibition and extend its reach beyond the exhibition space. It contains information on the contents of the exhibition, in-depth texts, databases and biographies of both Austrians imprisoned and murdered in Auschwitz and Austrian perpetrators.

A further aspect that had to be addressed within the scope of the renewal was the previous exhibition of 1978 and how to deal with it. In October 2013, it was dismantled and archived by the National Fund. A publication documenting and reflecting on the previous exhibition was published in 2015. It contains photos, texts and interviews in tribute to the exhibition.

The development of the exhibition's contents, its visual implementation and the renovation of the building required a high degree of care and sensitivity. They were carried out in the awareness that the Republic of Austria should be represented at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial – probably the foremost place of remembrance of all for those persecuted and murdered by the Nazi regime – by a fitting exhibition that is also in keeping with the latest historical findings.

In addition to the discourse surrounding a responsible approach to Austria's past through the involvement of the advisory boards in the renewal process, the National Fund as Coordination Office for the renewal had in its contractual partner, the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau, an institution at its side which takes its important role as a memorial very seriously. While the exhibition was being developed it was important to move forward successfully with this domestic and bilateral process.

All decisions relating to the project were taken in consensus with the project committees and then agreed on with the museum.

On 4 October 2021 the exhibition was opened with a ceremony attended by the Austrian President and leading members of government.