

Bleiburg –the myth.

On the history and current
relevance of the Ustaša-Meeting
in Kärnten/Carinthia/Koroška

SUPPORTED BY



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»The ground on which the monument stands today was given by the Loibach farmers to the Ustaši. Most of them were Nazis. The farmers, who were not, nevertheless arranged about 100 meters of path and graveled it so that they could reach the monument with the cars.«

- Pavla Apovnik,
contemporary witness from Bleiburg/Pliberk

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For years, the historical revisionist commemoration of the Loibach Field/ Libuško polje at Bleiburg/Pliberk has been observed and is the subject of anti-fascist criticism. This attracted only marginal attention despite the size of the meeting. After all, we live in Austria. In 2015 - the anniversary year of the events in Bleiburg/Pliberk - 30,000 people attended the meeting. As a result of this record number of visitors, the meeting increasingly attracted the attention of a critical public. Even if this record number has not been achieved again, the commemoration of a fascist regime constantly attracts over 10,000 people each year. In 2017, a major media debate took place for the first time. In 2018 conditions had to be fulfilled and increased media interest and media presence ensued. Although these seem to have scared off a part of the visitors

and, above all, annoyed them, the meeting nevertheless fundamentally remains what it was. The devotional items are now sold in the parking lot, the beer is drunk in advance and the T-shirts with the forbidden symbols are simply turned inside out. It is and remains one of the largest right-wing extremist meetings in Europe.

The work of the AK Bleiburg/Pliberk started in 2016, at the beginning of 2017 we went public with our blog (www.no-ustasa.at). This booklet is a cross-section of two years of research into the annual commemoration at the field. It is an attempt to make our work accessible to a wider audience. While our blog provides a more comprehensive analysis and contextualization, this booklet is designed to provide an introductory overview. Six articles deal with various aspects: the historical background, the myth of Bleiburg, the history of the

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memorial site, the meeting with its visitors and its procedure, the role of the authorities and other actors as well as the symbols exhibited at the meeting. We hope to provide a good introduction. The brochure is available in German, Slovenian, Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian and English.

At this point, we would also like to thank everyone who made this brochure possible through their cooperation and support: layouters, translators, lecturers, external authors and research. Thank you very much.

Against any historical revisionism!

Smrt fašizmu!

AK Bleiburg/Pliberk, April 2019

Bleiburg – pronounced /blaibu:rg/

Brief historical summary



Area of the fascist NDH state starting from 1941 as well as the surrounding areas of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia occupied by the Axis Powers (Italy, Germany); (Source: Wikimedia, public domain).

ITALY

ALBANIA
(ITALIAN PROTECTORATE)

A SOUTHERN SLAVIC STATE EMERGES

In 1918, emerging from the collapse of Austria-Hungary, a constitutional monarchy was formed called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (“Kraljevina Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca”, short: SHS), which encompassed large parts of the Balkans. Right from the beginning, individual parties were skeptical about the centralism of the new state. Central actors for an independent Croatian state were the “Croatian Peasant Party” (“Hrvatska seljačka stranka”, short: HSS), as well as the nationalist “Croatian Party of Law” (“Hrvatska stranka prava”, short: HSP), from which later the Ustaša emerged. The Croatian Peasant Party, which became the third largest force in the 1920 Yugoslav elections, refused any parliamentary work until 1924 and was in fundamental opposition to the SHS.

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THE HSP BECOMES THE USTAŠA

Already in 1915, the later “Poglavnik” (“leader”) of the Ustaša movement, Ante Pavelić became party secretary of the HSP, which was founded in 1861. The HSP rejected any form of Yugoslav state and called for a nationalistic Greater Croatia. Together with the HSS they formed the Croatian-nationalist opposition of Yugoslavia. However, this cooperation only lasted until 1924, when the Peasant Party made a declaration of loyalty to the Yugoslav state or rather to the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and participated in the government and in parliamentary work. Thus the Peasant Party gave up its refusal of the centralized state and demanded henceforth more autonomy within the state (see Hory/Broszat 1967).



When the internal Yugoslav tensions reached a climax in 1928, the leader of the Croatian Peasant Party Stjepan Radić and two other members of parliament were shot inside the parliament and King Alexander I. established a royal dictatorship following these events, the Peasant Party again went into strict opposition. Under these circumstances, the HSP thought the time ripe for a fascist overthrow attempt and began to expand its activism to militant actions. Armed groups were formed, which immediately began to carry out anti-Serb attacks. However, the HSP soon realized that there would be no Croatian-national revolution, partly because the Peasant Party under its new leadership was unwilling to support the activities of the HSP. With the proclamation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the consequent prohibition of all parties in 1929, the “Ustaša Hrvatska Revolucionarna Organizacija” (“Croatian Revolutionary Organization of Insurgents”), short: Ustaša was founded. Pavelić and his confidants went abroad to establish contacts with Croatians in exile and politically related organizations and began to build up paramilitary units. There were two training camps in fascist Italy, which supported the Ustaša, and another in Hungary. In the following years, there were attacks and insurrection attempts, as well as lively propaganda activity outside and within Yugoslavia (see Hory/Broszat 1967). As a result of the fatal assassination of the Yugoslav King Alexander I in 1934, which was attributed to the Ustaša, fascist Italy reduced its support until it completely ended in 1937 due to a treaty of friendship between Italy and Yugoslavia: the training camps were dissolved, the leadership of the Ustaša placed under police surveillance and their members imprisoned. Supporters and structures of the Ustaša were also to

be found in the “Third Reich”, but there was no such open support as from Italy, mainly due to diplomatic reasons. This severely restricted the activity of the Ustaša from 1937-41 (see Hory/Broszat 1967).

THE FOUNDING OF THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF CROATIA (NDH)

In 1941, due to heavy pressure from Nazi Germany, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia joined the Axis Powers (Germany, Italy, Japan), abandoning its policy of neutrality. On the same day there was a coup in Yugoslavia, which was directed against the common policy with the Axis Powers and wanted to restore the previous policy of neutrality. Ten days later, on April 6th, 1941, the Nazi invasion of Yugoslavia began in response to the coup. On April 10th, the Independent State of Croatia (“Nezavisna Država Hrvatska”, short: NDH) was proclaimed and since Vladko Maček (HSS) already refused to act as leader of the state before its founding, this role was taken on by Pavelić after he returned to Zagreb from exile on April 15th (see Calic 2010).

With the proclamation of the NDH a state emerged which covered parts of the territory of today's Croatia as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. In addition to a Croatian-administered area, there was a German and an Italian military zone. In fact, this meant that the NDH was a vassal state of fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany, but could control a large part of its territory and act freely. With the seizure of power, an attempt was made to restructure society based on the model of National Socialist Germany. For example, the Nuremberg Race Laws were adopted on April 17th, 1941 with the introduction of the “Law for the Protection of the People

and the State” (see Calic 2010). There were also immediate anti-Serb and anti-Semitic measures and actions. A special feature of the NDH was, in contrast to other allies of Germany, the independent administration of a concentration camp system, which was operated without German help. In the largest concentration camp Jasenovac 80,000-90,000 Serbs, Jews, Roma_Romnij and political opponents were murdered (see Radonić 2004).

In addition to the NDH army and the Croatian police, the Ustaša also maintained regular and irregular militias. Like the National Socialists, the Ustaša also had an “elite unit” under their command - the 1st regiment of the Ustaša militia, the “Crna Legija” (“Black Legion”). Known for numerous massacres, this regiment is still worshiped on the Loibach Field/Libuško polje (see Korb 2013). In the summer of 1941, the Ustaša murdered more than 100,000 Serbs in mass shootings and expelled another 200,000 to Serbia (see Korb 2010). Soon the Ustaša militia used the same techniques as the German Einsatzgruppen did against the civilian population of the conquered Soviet Union: gathering of prisoners, letting them dig pits, mass shooting into the pits (see Korb 2013). Ideological similarities between National Socialism and the Ustaša movement are revealed most prominently in that they share extermination anti-Semitism as their base as well as the reference to the ideology of the as Aryan defined ethnic group. The main difference between the two is the clerical, catholic line of attack of the Ustaša. At the same time, Italian fascism was also an important reference point for the Ustaša. The Ustaša ideology can best be described as the “synthesis of national socialism and fascism with adaptation to the Croatian conditions” (see Radonić 2004).



NDH propaganda poster, 1942. Croatian fascism joins the Axis Powers Germany and Italy; Translation “Combat of the United Europe” (Source: Anton Brilly/NDH-Staat, 1942; Jareb/Bekavac: Politički plakat u NDH. Zagreb, 2015, S. 76).

CATHOLIC CROATIA AND THE USTAŠA

A major point of conflict for the SHS and later for the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was religion from the very beginning, precisely because it was considered an indication of national affiliation. 5.5 million inhabitants (about 46%) were Orthodox, 4.7 million (about 39%) Roman Catholic and 1.3 million (about 11%) Muslim (see Deschner 1982). There were also smaller Protestant and Jewish communities. Especially between the two largest religious branches there

Joint parade of church dignitaries and officials of the NDH state, September 1944; on the right in the picture: Bishop Alojzije Stepinac (Source: NDH-Staat 1944, public domain).

were power conflicts that were nationally charged. Serbia, together with Macedonia and Montenegro, was predominantly orthodox, Slovenia and Croatia catholic. The respective church played a major role in the corresponding national identification and the question of how power was distributed in the relatively young state. In addition, catholic Croatia was a strategically important place for the seat of the Roman Catholic Church, the Vatican, against Orthodoxy as well as Islam in the Balkans. The completion of a concordat, a state church treaty between the Catholic Church and the Yugoslav State, worsened the dispute at the end of the 1930s. Both Serbian-national and Croatian-national movements never felt their interests to be sufficiently represented (see Deschner 1982). The Catholic Church obtained special



rights in the NDH state, not least because of its importance for the seizure of power and the enforcement of the Ustaša regime. So it is not surprising that the proclamation of the NDH began with “God’s Providence and the will of our great ally” and with “God be with the Croats! Ready for the Fatherland!” ended (see Hory/Broszat 1965). At the same time the Orthodox Church was deprived of all rights. For Serbs this meant that they either had to convert by coercion, were deported and/or murdered. On May 3rd, 1941, there was already a “legal ordinance on the change of religion” which also specified who could convert at all. Orthodox priests, wealthy individuals and intellectuals should therefore only be allowed to convert in exceptional cases (see Dedijer 2011).

The assets such as the possessions of the Serbian Orthodox Church and of wealthy Orthodox individuals were often times transferred to the Roman Catholic Church. Furthermore all Jews were expropriated - one of the first steps towards the planned extermination. In addition, they had to wear a Star of David, Serbs a blue armband with a “P” for “Pravoslavac” (Orthodox person). Orthodox persons, as well as Jews, were denied access to many public places, such as sidewalks, offices, shops, restaurants, public transport and life in many parts of Zagreb (see Deschner 2012). Also, many of them were dismissed from their jobs and arrested, the Cyrillic scripture banned (see Dedijer 2011). Orthodox churches became Catholic or transformed into department stores, slaughterhouses, public toilets, stables, prisons, execution sites or completely destroyed. If Serbian children were still very small and without parents - for example, through murder or deportation of their parents - they were partly taken in by the Croatian Caritas to re-educate them (see Deschner 2012). While many Orthodox priests were murdered, the first

officials of the Ustaša were often Catholic priests “appointed as senior field camp commandants, camp leaders and district and state superintendents” (see Dedijer 2011). This was, amongst other things, due to the fact that they had previously been in noticeable and distinguished opposition to Yugoslavia. Especially the Franciscan Order and its monks were in important positions in the system of the Ustaša. Their monasteries served as weapons depots or organizing and training centers for the Ustaša. Members of the order acted as political advisors, civil governors and executioners in concentration camps. After the war, Franciscan monasteries in Austria, Italy and France took in fleeing Ustaša and Nazis (see Deschner 1982).

THE 13TH WAFFEN MOUNTAIN DIVISION OF THE SS “HANDSCHAR”

In March 1943, the formation of the “1st Croatian SS Volunteer Division”, later called “13th Waffen Mountain Division of the SS”, began. Recruitment took place within the NDH state, especially in areas with a Bosnian majority population. Within a very short time 12,000 soldiers were registered, who were trained in the Bavarian Mittenwald and in southern France. The unit, which was sworn to both Adolf Hitler and Ante Pavelić, received German and Austrian officers and ultimately had about 25,000 soldiers. The unit consisted mainly of Bosnian and Herzegovinian Muslims and between a quarter and a third (non-Muslim) Croats (see Korb 2010). The “Handschar” wore both symbols of National Socialist Germany and the coat of arms of the NDH state and were given, instead of field chaplains, Muslim field imams (from Zagreb) for their care. This unit was the first practical attempt to harness the common thread of



anti-Semitism between Islam and National Socialism. The soldiers of the “Handschar” received ideological training on these questions, and the field imams also carried out anti-Semitic agitation.

The “Handschar” was involved in numerous operations of the NDH state from 1943 to 1945. The more threatening the situation became for the NDH state, the more soldiers deserted: partly to get to their villages, partly to defect to the partisans – sometimes whole groups of hundreds with their equipment. In the autumn of 1944, the situation became so acute that the officers recommended a disarmament of the unit – which reinforced the desertions. At the end of 1944, a large part of the unit was actually discharged. While the German and Austrian

Parade of the 13th Waffen Mountain Division of the SS “Handschar”, supervised by the Grand Mufti Amin al-Husseini together with SS officers, 1944. (Source: Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-1980-036-05/Unbekannt/CC-BY-SA 3.0).

members of the unit fled to Austria via Hungary, numerous Bosnian and Croatian members found themselves in Bleiburg/Pliberk in May 1945.

THE END OF THE NDH STATE

With the advance of the Yugoslav People’s Liberation Army and the looming surrender of the German Wehrmacht, Ustaša associations, Croatian Home Guard (Domobrani), sympathizers, high-ranking Ustaša officials, Chetniks, German Wehrmacht and (Waffen-) SS troops etc. began to flee from the advancing Partisans towards the British-liberated zone. They hoped to surrender there in order

not to fall into Yugoslav imprisonment, knowing full well about their crimes and the accompanying fear of retaliation. The Yugoslav People's Liberation Army wanted to prevent this by any means, they tried to cut off the escape route. Therefore strong military conflicts were common still until May 25th, 1945. Some units reached the Loibach Field/Libuško polje near Bleiburg/Pliberk on May 14th, where they contacted British troops to surrender. However, the British troops refused the surrender in their territory and the units had to surrender to the Yugoslav People's Liberation Army who brought the soldiers, who had surrendered, to Yugoslav territory. On the way back, there were revenge actions, which killed tens of thousands. From these events, the Bleiburg victim myth was constructed. Contrary to the myth, shootings never happened in Bleiburg/Pliberk, these took place on Yugoslav territory. Bleiburg/Pliberk itself also does not represent THE unconditional surrender of the Ustaša, but is rather one surrender among several that took place in these areas (see Dietrich 2008).

Several thousand (including high-ranking and important) Ustaša officials were able to escape into exile with their relatives, where they made contact with sympathizing Croatian exile groups and from where they could continue their propagandistic and organizational activities. Pavelić himself fled via the Catholic "ratline" to Argentina. There he was under the protection of the autocratic president Perón and founded an exile government. Later he was forced to flee to Spain due to an assassination attempt, where he was once again protected, this time Franco's, and died in 1959 (see Dietrich 2008 and Deschner 1965).

FROM SOCIALIST YUGOSLAVIA ...

After the end of the Second World War and the coming to power of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, the "Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia" was founded. Remembrance policy and culture was practiced and established according to "Fraternity and Unity" ("Bratstvo i jedinstvo"), one of the central ideas of socialist Yugoslavia. The fight and struggle of the Partisans as a founding myth of Yugoslavia created the conditions for this: All blame was put onto the defeated non-communist enemies, any discussion concerning perpetrators, victims and resistance fighters was prohibited. The only admissible memory was the memory of the anti-fascist struggle, which banished items such as non-Yugoslav nationalism, perpetrators and fascism from the public sphere and thus the debate. Through this a kind of national harmony should have been established. This repression of and disassociation with the past and (reactionary) ideologies should, or could, not work long: Starting in the 1960s/1970s, nationalist efforts and intentions could be heard more often.

In the 1960s, there was an increase in debates among Serbian and Croatian historians about the respective national participation in the partisan movement. Above all Franjo Tudman, later to become the first President of the Republic of Croatia, occupied a central position in this debate (see Radonić 2008). As a result of the nationalist debates, new victim myths emerged in the 1980s. Instead of accounting for and coming to terms with the past, a nationalist "remembering" took place. Here, too, Tudman had a central role: In his 1989 published book "Horrors of War: Historical Reality and Philosophy" he summarized his view of history: He

systematically downplayed the numbers of those murdered in the concentration camp Jasenovac and contrasted them with the same number of, allegedly in Bleiburg/Pliberk, murdered people by the Partisans. At the same time, he consistently spoke of Jasenovac as a “labor camp” claiming that Jews were themselves responsible for their extermination and postulated anti-Semitism as a constant of history. He did not deny the Ustaša crimes, but systematically offset them against crimes committed by Chetniks and Partisans in order to downplay them (see Radonić 2008).

| ... TO PRESENT-DAY CROATIA

In April 1990 Franjo Tudman and the “Croatian Democratic Community” (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica, short: HDZ), which was founded by him, won the first free elections in Croatia. After the independence of Croatia in June 1991, Tudman, who ruled in a nationalist-authoritarian manner until his death in 1999, continuously referenced the NDH state positively: places were renamed after Ustaša officials, partisan monuments and removed the currency again called Kuna (as it was in the NDH) (see Calic 2010 and Radonić 2008). Although the HDZ today portrays itself as a pro-European, conservative party, the positive reference to the NDH remains a major part of Croatian society and HDZ policy.

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The Myth of Bleiburg

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Reactionaries of all stripes gather each year at the memorial on the Loibach Field/Libuško polje. They all commemorate a tragedy that, as it is portrayed, never took place: an alleged massacre on the field. As has been clarified in the previous text, there was never a massacre at Loibach Field/Libuško polje. The only events with proof of occurrence are deaths and injuries in the last battles of May 14th & 15th, 1945 around Bleiburg/Pliberk and various suicides at Loibach Field/Libuško polje, for example the suicide of Ustaša general Tomislav Rolf. Nevertheless the myth continues to live on in the historical revisionist consciousness. It represents a central point of reference for Croatian nationalism and neo-fascism.

REVISIONIST MYTH CREATION

The central element of the myth is a painted picture of unknown date, which is showcased every year at the beginning of the procession to Loibach Field/Libuško polje. It shows refugee Croatians surrounded by Partisans. A British fighter aircraft flies above them, British soldiers watch the scenery idly and the soil appears to be soaked in blood. The victim staging is perfected here: the heroic Croatian people, betrayed by the British army, are massacred by the cruel Partisans. The trees at the Loibach Field/Libuško polje are also depicted in the painting, although they did not exist in their present form in 1945. The myth of the massacre was mainly cultivated by publications from Croatian exile communities after 1945 (see Dietrich



2008). As mentioned before in the public of socialist Yugoslavia, on the other hand, the only official commemoration was that of the anti-fascist struggle for freedom (see Radonić 2008). Under Franjo Tuđman, the myth was established in the Croatian national narrative starting in 1990 and came to support the state, made possible by the increased involvement of Croatian exile communities and their narratives of the events.

In 1990, the taboo prevailing during the Yugoslav era was broken with a first report by the massively advertised and attended memorial service. The first, distanced report of the memorial service in the state newspaper *Vjesnik* mentioned “a few hundred citizens from exile and from Croatia”, while in 1991 they already spoke about 1,100 and by 1993 of several thousand visitors. As early as 1992, a delegation from

Oil painting intended to depict the imagined massacre; in the center of the picture soldiers and families are murdered by partisans, in the foreground and on the left in the picture soldiers are led away (“death march”), on the right and in the top part of the picture is the British army, which betrayed the Croats (Source: unknown., presumably Exile-Community).



The framed picture is carried around throughout the entire celebration (Source: AK Bleiburg/Pliberk, 2017).

the Croatian Parliament was represented in Bleiburg/Pliberk, headed by Vice-President Vukojević, the history revisionist commission for recording war and post-war victims, as well as delegations from the HDZ and the HOP (“Hrvatski oslobodilački pokret”) which was founded by Ustaša leader Pavelić while living in exile. While in 1990 the first cautious *Vjesnik* article mentions the “so-called tragedy of Bleiburg” (see Radonić 2010), as early as 1992 a member of the Ustaša organization HOP emphasized that Bleiburg was “just the beginning of the most terrible genocide in the history of the Croatian people” (see Radonić 2010), while a 1993 report speaks of “one of the most tragic dates in the recent history of the Croatian people” or rather

the “biggest tragedy in recent Croatian history” (see Radonić 2010). This makes the “Croatian people” protagonists and equates them with the Ustaša, Croatian Home Guard (Domobrani) and civilians killed in 1945. That many Croats fought against the NDH regime - and in fact to a very significant extent, unlike in Austria - is thereby obscured. In 1995, the Croatian parliament took over the patronage of the memorial in Bleiburg/Pliberk, for the first time there was a live television broadcast and Tudman extended the commemoration to a commemoration of all those that fell for Croatia in the Croatian War of Independence (1991-1995).

RELIGIOUS ROMANTICIZATION OF THE MYTH

In the characterization of events, the frequent use of religious terms is striking. The term “Way of the Cross” has been used by the longtime exile participants of the commemorative event for the marches, which started in Bleiburg/Pliberk. From the very beginning since reporting started, the term was adopted. The President of Parliament spoke at the commemoration session in the Parliament in 1995 of the “tragedy of Bleiburg and the Golgotha-like Way of the Cross” or a “national Golgotha” (see Radonić 2010). The escape towards Bleiburg is referred to as the “great exodus of the Croatian people” (see Radonić 2010). Apart from the religious collective symbols, terms are also used that seek to be equated with the fate of Jews, such as the “column of death” (see Radonić 2010). The first Bleiburg memorial service in Sarajevo explicitly mentions “death marches” (see Radonić 2010).

The events around Bleiburg/Pliberk are thus equated with the exodus of the “chosen people”, with the sacrifice of Jesus for the sins of mankind, with the marches in the final phase of the Nazi regime and finally with concentration camps and the Holocaust itself. The “Croatian people” are on the one hand compared with the persecuted Jews. On the other hand, Bleiburg is interpreted as a collective Jesus-like sacrifice for the Croatian resurrection in the form of statehood. The history of the Second World War was so distorted that Bleiburg was interpreted as a crime on the “Croatian nation”.



On site, fascist symbols and flags are not only worn openly and displayed, but also sold on the grounds of the memorial in professional as well as in improvised booths next to the street; top: sales booth with Croatian and fascist clothing, bottom: Memorial picture of the leader of the NDH state, Ante Pavelić (Source: AK Bleiburg/Pliberk, 2008/2017).

COMPETING COMMEMORATIONS

In the Tudman era from 1990 onwards, the Yugoslavian commemoration policy shifted in favor of the myth of Bleiburg: the commemorations of the Jasenovac concentration camp and the alleged events in Bleiburg/Pliberk are equated, thus relativizing the Holocaust and the genocide of Serbs and Roma_Romnja.

After Tudman's death in 1999 and the demise of the HDZ in 2000, there was a break with the revisionist policy of the Tudman era regarding Jasenovac, while initially the national commemoration in Bleiburg/Pliberk continued unchanged. This period is marked by the attempt to demand the same attention for Jasenovac as for Bleiburg. The revisionism in relation to the Ustaša crimes is no longer only addressed by marginalized agents, but also by the president. President Stjepan Mesić's condemnation of all crimes committed in the name of the Croatian state, which took place in 2003, can be described as a turning point in the discourse.

The HDZ, reformed by Ivo Sanader, after their election victory in 2003, against their own clientele, implemented the removal of Ustaša monuments and the renaming of streets that were named after the Ustaša Minister Mile Budak. Sanader no longer spoke of Bleiburg in Jasenovac and, like Mesić, condemned Ustaša crimes. However, he persistently condemned the crimes of "black and red totalitarianism" and relativized the Ustaša crimes by referencing the socialist ones. He also regularly linked Jasenovac's teachings to the 1990s "Homeland War", thus replacing the "old" national victim myth about the "Croatian tragedy" of Bleiburg with a new myth according to which "the Croats" had become victims of a "new fascism" in the 1990s.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

After the electoral victory of the Social Democrat-led coalition in 2011, the patronage of the Parliament for the memorial service in Bleiburg/Pliberk was terminated. But with the victory of the HDZ presidential candidate Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović in the elections of 2015 and especially the HDZ-led coalition in the parliamentary elections in the same year - and the re-election of 2016 - a revival of the Bleiburg commemoration can be observed, including renewed parliamentary patronage. Although the meaning attributed to this mythical place depends heavily on the government, it seems to remain inseparably connected to the Croatian national identity. The terms "Way of the Cross" and "death marches" are so widespread in Croatia that even in critical texts about the commemoration culture in Bleiburg/Pliberk they are used without being questioned.

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From Field to Pilgrimage Site



In a field near Bleiburg/Pliberk in the southeast of Carinthia/Koroška, near the border with the former Yugoslavia, the British army handed over escaping Ustaša to the Yugoslav People's Liberation Army. "Bleiburg" symbolizes several places where unconditional surrenders took place. On the Austrian side of the border it was also possible for exiled Ustaša and former soldiers of the NDH to hold meetings after 1945. On All Saints Day in 1952 a first memorial service took place at the cemetery of Unterloibach/Spodnje Libuče, near the town of Bleiburg/Pliberk (see Čvrlijak 2015). The Loibach Field/Libuško polje was at that time really only a field, nothing more. In 1965, an initial plot of land was purchased from farmers from Bleiburg, and from then on, commemorations were also held there (see Pavlaković 2008).

On the occasion of 40 years "Bleiburg" there was an initiative to erect a memorial stone on the field. The Austrian authorities completely rejected a monument at first (mainly for reasons of foreign policy). After a year, they gave their consent on the condition that the monument cannot commemorate the "Croatian Army", which also inevitably would include the (Waffen-) SS, the Ustaša and the Croatian Home Guard (Domobrani). The memorial erected in 1987 thus had a bilingual inscription, but the inscriptions are not equal in content: "U ČAST I SLAVU / POGINULOJ / HRVATSKOJ VOJSCI / SVIBANJ 1945 / ZUM GEDENKEN / AN DIE / GEFALLENEN KROATEN / MAI 1945." (IN MEMORY / OF THE / FALLEN CROATS / MAY 1945). The literal translation of the Croatian inscription, however, reads: "To Glory and Honor / the fallen / Croatian Army." To the left of the inscription a Christian cross made of metal is embedded, and additionally



Memorial stone at Loibach Field/Libuško polje in 1987; the picture shows the stone in its original design (coat of arms still white-black), also the memorial site is not yet built (stage, cemetery; Source: private, 1987).

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a crescent moon with a star on the right (as a reference to Ustaša soldiers of Muslim faith, and those within the 13th Waffen-SS-Division Handschar). Furthermore, to the left of the inscription, the Croatian coat of arms of the NDH state (chessboard pattern starting with white) was engraved.

In 1995, another memorial plaque was erected by the "Brotherhood of the Croatian Dragon" ("Družba Braća Hrvatskoga Zmaja"). It is a nationalist secret society, founded in 1905 whose reputation became better in 1941 during & by the fascist NDH state, then it was banned in socialist Yugoslavia in 1946 and re-established itself in 1990. This memorial plaque commemorates "the victims of the Way of the Cross, which began here on May 15th, 1945;" and the "sons and daughters," who "suffered death because they loved their people and their homeland" (own translation).

The permanent stage, built in 2007 on the newly purchased land, including altar and lectern, right next to the memorial stone (not on the picture); (Source: AK Bleiburg/Pliberk, 2008).



In November 2003, the whole memorial was to be expanded. Donations mainly came from the HDZ-led Croatian government. In total, it donated 125,000 EUR for the purchase of additional land and remodeling of the memorial site (see Čvrlić 2015 and Kolstø 2010). The project was rejected by the Austrian authorities, in particular the mayor of Bleiburg, with reference to the historical revisionism of the celebration and the danger of “neo-Nazi meetings”. However, the board of the “Bleiburger Ehrenzug” got support from within the Catholic Church, the Austrian Federal Government (at the time a coalition of ÖVP-BZÖ) and the Carinthian Provincial Government, whose governor at the time was Jörg Haider. A permit was issued in March 2004 and remodeling began in June 2004.

ONE STEP FORWARD AND TWO STEPS BACK

In order to get the desired massive expansion and remodeling of the memorial approved, which would include parking space, a frame of the monument as well as stands for

Commemorative plaque of the “Brotherhood of the Croatian Dragon” erected in 1995 at Loibach Field/Libuško polje in memory of the “dead of Bleiburg and to the victims of the Way of the Cross” (Source: AK Bleiburg/Pliberk, 2008).

wreaths, and after (soft) media criticism of the inscription, a change of the inscription text was agreed upon with the authorities. As of April 25th, 2005 the monument on (brief) display read: “U SPOMEN / NA NEDUŽNE ŽRTVE / BLEIBURŠKE TRAGEDIJE / ZUM GEDENKEN / AN DIE UNSCHULDIGEN OPFER / DER BLEIBURGER TRAGÖDIE.” (“In memory / of the innocent victims / of the tragedy of Bleiburg”) At the same time, the surface of the Croatian chessboard pattern was painted in white-red (before that the red fields were not filled with color), so that now clearly the coat of arms of the NDH state and the 13th SS Division could be discerned.

Maybe already in 2007, at the latest in 2008, the inscription was changed back, after criticism from Croatia and the exile communities. Since then and until today the version of the inscription from the 1980s can be read on the memorial, which commemorates the Croatian army in the passage written in Croatian.



Memorial stone after the text had been changed back; Coat of arms beginning with white, Croatian text with reference to the Croatian army. (Source: AK Bleiburg/Pliberk, 2008).

However, the chessboard pattern to the left of the inscription was not changed again, the coat of arms of the Ustaša state remains to be seen. In addition, a fixed stage with altar and lectern was built on the newly acquired land around the monument in 2006/2007.

The complete remodeling of the memorial site will also include a military cemetery which is to be built on the land. The goal seems to be a consolidation of the myth of the “tragedy of Bleiburg” by means of buried bones, which, however, would have to be brought there first. Construction started in 2013. The Austrian authorities were informed of the plan for an enclosure for the first time in 2010. According to media reports, the Municipality of Bleiburg/Pliberk and the District Commissioner of Völkermarkt/Velikovec asserted that the project had been stopped and that permissions for dedicated use of the land had already been withdrawn. Carinthia’s Catholic Church insists that they would not agree to an ossuary being built. In May 2017, Wolfgang Sobotka

(ÖVP), then Interior Minister, responded to a parliamentary inquiry that there was no request for exhumation and reburial (see Parliament.gv.at 2017). Since then, everything seems to have gotten quiet - but the probability of initially everyone being against the cemetery and in the end no one doing anything against it is very high.

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The Protagonists





The original club flag is still central to the celebration today; here during the march (procession) from Unterloibach/Spodnje Libuče to the Loibach Field/Libuško polje (Source: AK Bleiburg/Pliberk, 2017).

The history of the extreme-rightwing association “Bleiburger Ehrenzug” (“Počasni Bleiburški vod”, PBV) and the development of the, by them organized, Ustaša meeting in Bleiburg/Pliberk are closely interwoven and were strongly influenced by Croatian and (ex-) Yugoslav domestic and foreign policy.

MODEST BEGINNINGS

One year after the first “memorial service” on All Saints Day in 1952, the association was founded by former Ustaša and since 1955 regularly organizes the revisionist commemoration of the dead at the Loibach Field/Libuško polje (see Kolstø 2010). At the beginning of its activities in the 1950s, the “Ehrenzug” had a handful of members who had direct links to the NDH state until 1945 or were themselves in the ranks of the Ustaša. An example for this is the former Ustaša, founding member and longtime chairman, Ilija Abramović. In its early years, the “Ehrenzug” was also supported by the priest Vilim cecelja, who after years alongside the Ustaša leader Ante Pavelić, settled down in Salzburg and actively supported the activities of extreme right-wing exile Croatians (see Posavski-Vremeplov 2016). Originally, the “commemoration

ceremonies” at Loibach Field/Libuško polje were held around All Saints Day (November 1st) as well as in May. However, the event in

May developed into the central celebration, although switching from Sunday to Saturday (see Kolstø 2010).

The activities of the “Ehrenzug” were a thorn in the flesh of socialist Yugoslavia. Especially in the 1970s, there were conflicts between the Yugoslav intelligence service (Uprava državne bezbednosti, UDBA) and the “Ehrenzug”. Thus, in 1966 the UDBA placed a bomb in Bleiburg/Pliberk, which however went off too early. Also, the murder of a member of the “Bleiburger Ehrenzug”/PBV, Nikica Martinović, in Klagenfurt in 1975 is attributed to the UDBA and illustrates the scope of the conflict between the Yugoslav intelligence service (“Uprava državne bezbednosti”, UDBA) and right-wing extremist Croatian organizations which were active abroad (see Nielsen 2018).

Before the collapse of Yugoslavia, the meeting was limited to a few hundred visitors, most of them being exile-Croatians from Europe, Australia and North America. The “Ehrenzug” and the Ustaša meeting increased in importance only with the independence of Croatia in 1991 and the support of the nationalist and revisionist HDZ government under Franjo Tuđman. Since then, the glorification of individual war criminals or military organizations from the war in Yugoslavia and the showing

of their symbols and flags are a regular part of the celebrations in addition to the display of symbols of the Ustaša/NDH state.

ALLIES IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM ...

Depending on the composition of the government, the Croatian parliament will henceforth grant patronage over the meeting as well as financial support. Large cash flows, currently a six-digit figure in Euros, made not only the purchase of land at Loibach Field/Libuško polje possible but also the building of new infrastructure, which in 2007 led to the construction of a stage (see Kolstø 2010). The course of the event is divided into several places. The annual celebration begins in the small cemetery in Unterloibach/Spodnje Libuče near Bleiburg/Pliberk with a Christian devotion. However, the vast majority of visitors gather directly at the monument, which is about two kilometers outside of Bleiburg/Pliberk. The participants march from the cemetery on the road to the monument. The public roads are closed off by the Austrian police throughout the day. During this march, flags and political banners are also carried. At the monument, the actual celebration begins with a Catholic mass and numerous speeches by right-wing and conservative Croatian politicians. Highlight is the wreath-laying at the monument. The celebration is officially declared by the organizer as a “procession” in order to not have to adhere to legal standards usually applied to assemblies and events.

In the anniversary year 2015, the striking number of people of 30,000 gathered at the Loibach Field/Libuško polje to mourn the NDH state (see Kleine Zeitung 2015). For a number of years now, the formal part of the



Picture of the Croatian general Ante Gotovina on a T-shirt during the march/procession, Bleiburg/Pliberk 2015 (Source: AK Bleiburg/Pliberk, 2015).



Croatian Vice-Premier Minister Tomislav Karamarko (HDZ) visited the memorial service in 2016 and was enthusiastically welcomed by other participants, a behavior that underlines Bleiburg's importance as a domestic political campaign stage (Source: AK Bleiburg/Pliberk, 2016).

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ceremony has also been broadcasted live in the Croatian public broadcasting service HRT. The event is by no means merely a place of networking of explicitly right-wing extremist associations and personalities. It is more than that: Serving mythological stories of suffering that bind citizens to the identities and experiences of the Ustaša regime allows an exchange of right-wing extremist and historical revisionist ideas that reach deep into the conservative political camp as well as the Croatian Catholic Church.

In this sense, the Croatian parliament under an HDZ majority contributes not only to the financing of the event, highest ranking political officials also attend it every year. In 2016, for example, the then Deputy Prime

Minister Tomislav Karamarko (HDZ) and the controversial then Minister of Culture Zlatko Hasanbegović (HDZ) were present. Premier Ministers and even the current right-wing President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, on the other hand, often visit the memorial a few days before the ceremony and lay wreaths. The fear of compromising oneself seems too big to have oneself be associated with the event and its participants on an international stage. On the side of the church it was Želimir Puljić, the Archbishop of Zadar, who led the mass in 2018. This is the same cleric who three years earlier proposed a referendum on the reintroduction of the fascist greeting “Za dom spremni” (“Prepared for the homeland”) in the Croatian military (see Novi List 2015).

... AND THE USUAL SUSPECTS

War criminals such as Dario Kordić are courted in this mix of prominent public figures. Kordić was a politician of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian HDZ, who was sentenced by the International Criminal Court in The Hague to 25 years in prison for crimes against humanity. His excellent relationships with, for example, Miroslav Piplica, chairman of the HDZ branch in Austria and co-organizer of various cultural events in Vienna, make him a welcome guest (see Der Standard 2014). It goes without saying that the celebration in Loibach/Libuče is also used as a stage by officials of the neo-fascist HČSP party or the TV journalist Velimir Bujanec who very obviously shows which side he stands on. He outed himself during the civil wars of the 1990s as an open Ustaša supporter and has now, through the fame of his own TV talk show, turned into a member of the HDZ that maintains the best relations with top government officials (see Balkan Insight 2016). Right-wing extremist networking also takes place on an international scale in Loibach/Libuče: the FPÖ/FPK politicians Anneliese Kitzmüller, Austria's Third National Council President since 2017, as well as Josef Lobnig, the Third President of the Carinthian Parliament, were welcome guests of the "commemoration". While Croatian right-wing extremist Tomislav Sunić gave speeches at SS commemorations of the dead at Ulrichsberg/Šenturška gora, representatives of Carinthian far right extremism such as Willi Überfellner (Kärntner Abwehrkämpferbund) or Peter Mussi (Akademische Sängerschaft Tauriska zu Klagenfurt) visited the event in Bleiburg/Pliberk in 2017.

Applause comes from numerous sympathizers and religious believers, most of whom travel to the celebration from Croatia or from the Croatian diaspora.



The Croatian neo-fascist and journalist, Velimir Bujanec, at the 2016 celebration, surrounded by fans (Source: AK Bleiburg/Pliberk, 2016).



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»Administrative offence, at the most«

The Austrian Authorities and the Ustaša-Meeting

The annual Ustaša meeting in Bleiburg/Pliberk can only take place with the support, or at least active disregard by the responsible local authorities and public institutions in their present form. An example of this is the “translation error” on the memorial stone: while in Croatian the “Croatian Army” before 1945 is commemorated, in German only the “fallen Croats” are commemorated (see “From Field to Pilgrimage site” page 22). The authorities not only ignored this fact, but even agreed to the massive expansion and remodeling from a single memorial stone to the current memorial site, including the stage and cemetery.



The beer tents on the grounds of the memorial service serve as a safe retreat for the Croatian fascists who have come to the celebration, including Ustaša songs and Hitler salutes; In 2018, beer tents were prohibited for the first time (Source: AK Bleiburg/Pliberk, 2017).

After the founding of the NDH state (1941) - a vassal state of the Third Reich - the Ustaša used the Hitler salute in the same form in parades, marches and inaugurations - only they did not scream "Heil Hitler" but "Za dom spremni" ("Prepared for the homeland").

ONLY A "CROATIAN GREETING"?

Every year during the Ustaša meeting at Bleiburg/Pliberk, right-wing, right-wing extremist and partly fascist ideas are presented in songs, on clothing, in speeches or by showing the Hitler salute. Although the latter is forbidden by the Prohibition Act in Austria, there is discussion whether here it is not merely a "Croatian greeting". For example, in 2017, a police officer asked a journalist, after he pointed out a Hitler salute, whether the journalist would really insist on making a complaint about this trivial matter - which would maximally amount to an administrative offence (see Donnerbauer/Glanzl 2017).

The State Office for the Protection of the Constitution Carinthia (LV Kärnten) also officially speaks of the "Croatian greeting", which is not sanctionable. Such a "Croatian greeting", independent of the Hitler salute, is

historically doubtful. In June 2017 Member of Parliament Karl Öllinger reported 14 cases of Hitler salutes in a factual presentation to the district attorney of Klagenfurt and presented photos of them to the best of his abilities (see Öllinger 2017). Nevertheless the cases were closed in autumn 2017 by the prosecuting district attorney of Klagenfurt. The reason: these were no Hitler salutes or rather the perpetrators thereof could not be found. In 2018, after public criticism, the police intervened more, took people into investigative custody and trials even happened afterwards with convictions due to the Prohibition Act (Verbotsgesetz). Apparently, the Carinthian security authorities no longer wanted to be accused of inaction after three years of media reports, which were dominated by pictures of Hitler salutes.



Every year during the commemoration ceremony at the Loibach Field/Libuško polje and in its immediate vicinity, dozens of times Hitler salutes were shown, however, the police never intervened, only in 2018 arrests were made for the first time after years of medial criticism; Pictured: Hitler salute for a souvenir photo next to the main stage (Source: AK Bleiburg/Pliberk, 2017).

PROCESSION, EVENT OR ASSEMBLY?

The annual ceremony in Bleiburg/Pliberk consists of a procession on public roads, as well as a rally on private grounds including a fair and political speeches. The local authorities take the easy way out: all parts of this multi-hour event are part of the church ceremony. Parking of 300 buses on a main road and bike path: church ceremony. Hitler salutes next to the memorial stone or on the main road on the way to the memorial stone: church ceremony. Sea of flags of far-right Croatian parties: church ceremony. Fascist T-shirts, flags and banners: church ceremony.

This is made possible by §5 of the Assembly Act, which excludes ecclesiastical (church) celebrations and processions from the restraints which apply to all other kinds of assemblies. In practice however, this is only possible because all levels of administration close their eyes to the fact

that this is not just a church ceremony. Mayor, district commissioner and governor play along cheerfully. This perception is also perceivable in the official language: The celebration is called “Croatian celebration” and “former Mother’s Day commemoration of Croatian emigration” (see Ordinance of the Municipality of Bleiburg 2015) in internal documents of the municipality of Bleiburg/Pliberk and the district commissioners headquarters.

For years, the Carinthian state government has withdrawn itself to its position that only the Federal Government could take action against the event. For example, state commissioner Peter Kaiser noted at his inauguration on April 12th, 2018 in the Carinthian State Parliament, that these were “right-wing extremist rallies in the lap of a (...) church procession” (own translation) and that “the event [could] not be banned, legally (...) the Federal Ministry of the Interior would be responsible in accordance with the Police Security Act”



Participants of the commemoration ceremony with Ustaša hats and fascist T-shirts stand next to an impromptu sales booth, behind them beer tents; the T-shirt on the left shows an Reichsadler in conjunction with the NDH coat of arms, underneath the fascist motto: "Za dom spremni" ("Prepared for the homeland"; Source: AK Bleiburg/Pliberk, 2008).

(own translation) (see Kurier 2018). As worthy of support as these clear words on the nature of the event may be, the inactivity of politics and administration is even more incomprehensible.

As already described, the celebration in Bleiburg/Pliberk is a central event for Croatian domestic politics, a fixture in the domestic political calendar. For example, the commemorations in 2015 and 2016 were the stage for elections that took place shortly thereafter. In 2016, Tomislav Karamarko, Croatian Deputy Prime Minister, and the neo-fascist Minister of Culture Zlatko Hasanbegović visited the meeting to use it for election purposes. However, since Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's election campaign in Austria in 2016, campaign advertisement and campaigning by foreign parties and representatives have been under special

scrutiny. In 2017, the Right of Assembly was changed to make this more difficult in the future. Now, special conditions apply to the "intended participation of representatives of foreign states" (own translation) (§2, Abs. 1a VersG). This applies to the Bleiburg ceremony - if it were not for the fact that the Carinthian bishop makes the event a religious mass through his signature. 2019 is the first year that a permit was not signed by the bishop. The consequences of this decision are still as of yet unclear.



After years of bad press, the police responded with increased controls in 2018. No steps were taken against fascist symbols though, such as here the flag and coat of arms of the NDH state (Source: AK Bleiburg/Pliberk, 2018).



The police also like to pose with the fascists who travelled from Croatia - which they officially state to monitor strictly. Here, Carinthian police pose in 2017 with officials from the "H.V.R." Association, a nationalist "knightly order" that refers positively to Ustaša fascism (Source: stopptdierechten.at, 2017).



LACK OF JURISDICTION AND FAKE NEWS

Numerous neo-Nazis and organized neo-fascists take part in the Ustaša celebration in Bleiburg/Pliberk. This is not denied, but officials act as if this cannot be prevented: Representatives of the organizers say that they have no influence, they have no attendance list of persons, since it is simply a commemoration of the church, to which anyone and everyone can come. The Catholic Church says they have no influence on the events outside the Catholic Mass, which is a private event. The security authorities (State Office for the Protection of the Constitution Carinthia - LV Kärnten, State Police Department Carinthia - LPD Kärnten and District Commission - BH Völkermarkt) state that one does not know in advance who will come to the ceremony,

The march from the cemetery to the Loibach Field / Libuško polje is officially an "ecclesial procession", but many political posters and flags of political parties are also carried during the march which underline its already prominent political character (Source: AK Bleiburg/Pliberk, 2016).

since it is a private event and the freedom of expression and assembly is to be protected at all costs (see statement of the Diocese Gurk-Klagenfurt, LPD Kärnten and BH Völkermarkt 2018).

For the police and the security authorities in the Federal State of Carinthia/Koroška the problem is not the meeting itself, but rather the negative reports about it. The reports of fascist symbols, agitating songs and neo-Nazis from Austria, Croatia and Germany are leading to insecurity in the public and to criticism of the executive powers. Moreover, reports of at the ceremony present neo-Nazis would only draw the attention of like-minded people to



Beer bar during the "memorial service" in 2017; the friendly gentleman wears a T-shirt with the inscription "FCK Antifa" (Source: AK Bleiburg/Pliberk, 2017).

the event, which would lead to even more neo-Nazis - leading to even worse news coverage. The solution is obvious to the authorities present at the event. Since they do not want to do anything against Hitler salutes, fascist symbols or neo-Nazis, one has to exclude the commenting media and photographers. While the authorities claim they are not able to recognize neo-Nazis, they insinuate that journalists only want to report badly about Carinthia.

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Symbols of Croatian Fascism

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For the Ustaša celebration not only place, persons and historical dates are of great importance, but also the symbols shown and used there. These serve the participants to easily identify themselves with the content of the events or rather to create a direct positive reference to the fascist ancestors of the event, through the associated historical references.

PROHIBITION OF SYMBOLS

Various Austrian laws regulate the wearing of fascist symbols (VerbG., EGVG, Badge Law, Symbols Act), but are partly rigidly focused on the historical National Socialism of Austria. Other historical fascist movements are not or difficult to grasp with these regulations (Arrow Cross Party, Ustaša, Franquists, etc.). The majority of the symbols shown and sold at the Ustaša celebration in Bleiburg/Pliberk are therefore not prohibited in Austria.

While this brochure was being printed, an amendment to the “Symbols Act” was voted on and passed. With this amendment, symbols of the Ustaša are now forbidden since March 1st, 2019 even though one symbol is never shown in Bleiburg / Pliberk anyways: an Ustaša crest with a blue letter “U” inside a red knot-pattern over it. The other symbol (Ustaša-U with a grenade) is explained below.

MODERNIZED ADOPTION OF FASCIST SYMBOLS

The symbols of the NDH state are rarely used in their historical variants but in modernized versions. For example, in the Croatian War of Independence (1991-1995), soldiers and paramilitaries used variations of Ustaša symbols on flags or uniforms. This complicates the correct recognition for anti-fascists (as well as also press and authorities).

» NDH flag (with Ustaša emblem and Ustaša crest)

These examples show the flag of the NDH state (1941-1945) without any adaption, a tricolor of red, white, and blue with the Ustaša symbol in top-left corner (letter “U” surrounded by Croatian interlace) and the Croatian coat of arms (with the first field white) in the center. Exhibition is highly problematic with regard to the crimes committed under this flag and in the name of the NDH state. From a legal point of view (VerbG, EGVG, AbzG) there is no sanction against this flag.



» Ustaša emblem (“U”)

The central identification symbol for the Ustaša is the “U”. It was historically used mostly in combination with the Ustaša coat of arms, but sometimes also appears alone - both historically and in Bleiburg/Pliberk. The “U” appears in Bleiburg/Pliberk in various combinations and new designs. Displaying this symbol (on flags/T-shirts/etc.) is highly problematic with regards to the crimes committed in the name of the Ustaša. From a legal point of view (VerbG, EGVG, AbzG) nothing can be done against the “U”.



» Ustaša coat of arms (chessboard)

The Ustaša coat of arms consists of a chessboard pattern (Croatian: Šahovnica/chessboard) with a 5x5 field, which begins with a white field. It is to be strictly distinguished from today's coat of arms of the Republic of Croatia (chessboard, starting with red field). The Ustaša coat of arms is the central symbol of the Ustaša and the NDH state. It already appeared in the fascist propaganda before 1941 and attained its elevation to the state coat of arms in the NDH state. As such, it is featured



on propaganda posters, the uniforms of the Croatian Home Guard (Domobrani), Ustaša, Croatian Wehrmacht members, the Croatian SS unit (13th Waffen-SS-Division, “Handschar”), airplanes of the Croatian Air Force, etc. The Ustaša coat of arms is also an important part of many other symbols, such as the paramilitary Croatian Defence Forces (HOS), the “Bleiburger Ehrenzug”, etc. The Ustaša coat of arms was worn by the 13th Waffen-SS-Division “Handschar” as sleeve insignia. Thus it falls under the prohibition standard of the Austrian Badge Law. It may not be shown or sold in Austria, exhibition of it is punishable by a fine of up to 4,000 Euros and results in the seizure of the symbol/object, although the Carinthian authorities refuse to do so with reference to the coat of arms already being used before 1941.

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» *Ustaša-U (with grenade)*

This symbol of a large “U” and an ignited grenade inside it is an early Ustaša symbol, but in particular it was a military badge. Thus it is to be found on the Ustaša cap as a badge (Kokade) or on the collar. Its most terrible association probably comes from this Ustaša symbol being part of the entrance sign to the Jasenovac concentration camp. Showing this symbol (on flags/T-shirts/ etc.) is extremely problematic due to the crimes associated with it, since March 1st 2019 it is punishable under the symbols act.



» Symbols of the Croatian Home Guard (Domobrani)

Historical symbols of the Croatian Home Guard (“Hrvatsko Domobranstvo”, black cross on a white background, so-called “Croatian Trefoil”) are shown less frequently in Bleiburg/Pliberk than Ustaša symbols. Numerous visitors wear a small Domobran pin on the lapel. Supporters of the Domobrani are also present with flags and symbols at the celebration, although the symbols represent new formations and are not historical symbols. However, the historical reference is clear and problematic. The example shows a banner with the inscription “Hrvatski Domobran - za Hrvatsku uvijek” (“Croatian Home Guard - always for Croatia”) and the years 1868-1941-1991. This builds a very shaky historical continuity: 1868 refers to the establishment of the Croatian-speaking “Honvéd/Landwehr” (territorial forces) after the Compromise between Austria and Hungary, 1941 refers to the founding of the fascist NDH state and 1991 to the newly established army of the Republic of Croatia. Showing the “Croatian Trefoil” (on flags/T-shirts/etc.) is highly problematic with regard to the crimes committed on behalf of this union. From a legal point of view (VerbG, EGVG, AbzG, Symbols Act) it is not punishable.



» *Thompson symbols and T-shirts*

Thompson is both the nickname of Marko Perković and the name of his band. Perković is a neo-fascist musician who glorifies Ustaša fascism and the NDH state in his songs. He participated in the Croatia War of Independence as a paramilitary, which contributes to his popularity in Croatia and among exile-Croatians. Thompson's performances include, among others, the fascist Ustaša song "Jasenovac i Gradiška Stara", in which the murder of Jews and Serbs in the Jasenovac concentration camp and one of its subcamps is applauded. Various T-shirts of the band can often be seen during the Ustaša celebration in Bleiburg/Pliberk, in some years they can also be acquired. There are no legal means against Thompson garments, also not according to the Symbols Act.



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» *Reichsadler with Ustaša coat of arms*

Probably to emphasize the ideological/political intention behind the Ustaša coat of arms, it is sometimes combined on T-shirts with the imperial eagle of the Nazi state. The imperial eagle carries the Ustaša coat of arms - instead of the swastika - in its claws. The resulting symbol thus represents a clear reference both to the fascist NDH state and to National Socialist Germany. As a "replacement symbol" for a Nazi symbol, it falls under the Badge Law, wearing and selling this symbol is prohibited in Austria and carries a one-time administrative penalty of up to €4,000. Although the Carinthian authorities refused to do so.



» *Flags of political parties*

Numerous Croatian right-wing parties are also represented in Bleiburg/Pliberk (flags, T-shirts, jackets, wreaths, etc.), their symbols/flags are not prohibited. These parties and their logos are:

- * HSP (Hrvatska stranka prava, Croatian Party of Rights), logo: crest with diagonal beams, wolf; the party is openly fascist and right-wing extremist; it was not until 2017 that it had made an election poster in the style of the National Socialist “Winterhilfswerk” (Winter Relief of the German People).
- * HSP-AS (Hrvatska stranka prava Dr. Ante Starčević), logo: crest with diagonal beam; the right-wing extremist party split from the HSP in 2009; Starčević is the originator of a Greater Croatia ideology.
- * HSP-1861 (Hrvatska stranka prava 1861), logo: coat of arms with diagonal beam; the right-wing extremist party split from the HSP in 1995, the 1861 refers to the original founding date of the HSP
- * HČSP (Hrvatska čista stranka prava), logo: coat of arms with Croatian interlace knot in the middle; the right-wing extremist party was founded in 1992 as a spin-off from the HSP.



» **HOS Emblem**

The HOS (Hrvatske obrambene snage, “Croatian Defence Forces”) was a paramilitary unit (Croats, Bosniaks, German/Austrian neo-Nazis) during the Croatian War of Independence (1991-1995). The HOS took numerous borrowings from the NDH state and the Ustaša movement. For example, the HOS logo carries the Ustaša coat of arms centrally on top of a blue knot pattern similar to the NDH coat of arms, including the NDH greeting “Za dom spremni”. The abbreviation “HOS” (for Hrvatske obrambene snage) is a deliberate reference to the name of the army of the fascist NDH state (Hrvatske oružane snage/ HOS, “Croatian Armed Forces”). The HOS logo, on flags and T-shirts, is to be seen everywhere in Bleiburg/Pliberk but it is not forbidden.



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» **Crna Legija**

The “Crna Legija” (“Black Legion”) was both a sub-unit of the Ustaša Army and a sub-unit of the HOS (see above), which in turn referred to the former. Both committed numerous war crimes and atrocities during World War II and during the Croatian War. References to Crna legija are created during the Bleiburg ceremony by flags and T-shirts, numerously worn and sold.



» Ustaša-U with cross

What can often be seen as sprayed graffiti in (large) cities, such as in Vienna, can hardly be found in Bleiburg/Pliberk: the Ustaša-U with a cross above it. In the context of graffiti, its primary purpose is to take up space, usually in competition with other nationalist symbols. One reason why it is barely seen in Bleiburg/Pliberk: The authorities have no objection to the original fascist symbols being shown, so there is no reason to bother with the “replacement symbol”.



Glossary

Abramović, Ilija: *1925 in Croatia, Ustaša, lives in Carinthia/Koroška since 1945, founding member of the Bleiburg Ehrenzug, functionary of the Catholic Church in the city of Klagenfurt/Celovec.

Akademische Sängerschaft Tauriska zu Klagenfurt: german-national fraternity, founded in 1888 as the “Association of German Carinthian Students”.

Apovnik, Pavla: *1902, deceased; contemporary witness and supporter of the partisans in Carinthia/Koroška.

Arrow Cross Party: Hungarian fascist party, from 1935–1945, which was explicitly oriented towards National Socialism. Supporters of Hungarian fascism in its organized form from 1935–1945 are called “Pfeilkreuzler” in German.

Austria-Hungary: Real Union as Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the last phase of the Habsburg monarchy, existed from 1867–1918.

Axis Powers: originally meant the “Axis Berlin - Rome”, meaning the cooperation of National Socialism and Italian Fascism. With the outbreak of the Second World War it meant Germany, Italy, Japan and their allies.

Badge Law (Abzeichengesetz, AbzG): the law, passed in 1960, prohibits the display of symbols in Austria of banned organizations under penalty of administrative punishment. It concerns symbols of National Socialism.

Bleiburg/Pliberk: bilingual municipality in the southeast of Carinthia/Koroška, **Bleiburg** became synonymous for the events surrounding the handover of Ustaša to Yugoslavia in May 1945.

Bleiburger Ehrenzug (Počasni Bleiburški vod, short: PBV): a history revisionist association founded in 1953 in Klagenfurt/Celovec by former Ustaša. Organizes the commemoration in Bleiburg/Pliberk and receives financial support from the Croatian government.

British-liberated zone: in the context of this brochure, the parts of Carinthia/Koroška that were liberated in May 1945 and then governed by the British army.

Brotherhood of the Croatian Dragon (Družba Braća Hrvatskoga Zmaja): nationalist Croatian Secret Society founded in 1905.

Budak, Mile: *1889, †1945; Ustaše, Minister of Religion and Education, and later Foreign Minister of the NDH state.

Bujanec, Velimir: *1974; Croatian extreme right-wing journalist and television presenter.

BZÖ - Bündnis Zukunft Österreich (Alliance Future Austria): split-off from the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) under the leadership of Jörg Haider, represented in the Austrian Parliament from 2005 to 2013.

Caritas: welfare organization of the Roman Catholic Church. The international umbrella organization is officially called Caritas Internationalis.

Cecelja, Vilim: *1909, †1989; Deputy Military Vicar of the NDH Army, close confidant and confessor of Ante Pavelić, central figure of Caritas Croatia and escape agent of high-ranking Ustaša. After internment by the Allies, establishing the Croatian Catholic community in Salzburg, central figure of the Croatian (fascist) diaspora.

Chetniks (Četnik): collective term for Serbian and Montenegrin royalty-loyal nationalist and/or anti-communist (up to fascist) militia during the Second World War.

Communist Party of Yugoslavia (Komunistička partija Jugoslavije - KPJ): communist party and ruling party in real socialist Yugoslavia from 1919 - 1990. In 1952 it was renamed the League of Communists of Yugoslavia.

Concordat: term for an agreement or treaty between the Roman Catholic Church and a state; in Austria especially since 1933.

Crna Legija (Black Legion): elite unit of the Ustaša from 1941-1945.

Croatian Home Guard (Domobrani): members of "Hrvatsko Domobranstvo", until 1944 the regular forces of the "Independent State of Croatia" - NDH state.

Croatian War of Independence: war in Croatia from 1991-1995 in the context of the Yugoslav wars. The trigger was the declaration of independence of Croatia from Yugoslavia.

District Commission (BH - Bezirkshauptmannschaft): middle administrative level in Austria under the direction of a district commissioner in all federal states (except Vienna). As part of the indirect federal administration, commander in charge in Bleiburg/Pliberk.

EEVG - Einführungsgesetz zu den Verwaltungsverfahrensgesetzen (Introductory Act to the Administrative Procedure Acts): penalizes the dissemination of National Socialist ideas with administrative punishment,

unless the offence can be punished under the Prohibition Act.

Erdoğan, Recep Tayyip: *1954, authoritarian President of the Republic of Turkey.

Exodus: exodus of the Israelites from Egypt described in the Old Testament.

Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia: from 1945-1963 official name of the real socialist Yugoslavia. From 1963-1992 the official name was "Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia".

FPK - Freiheitliche Partei Kärntens (Freedom Party of Carinthia): split-off from the BZÖ, from 2009-2013 independent right-wing extremist party in Carinthia/Koroška, since 2013 again part of the FPÖ.

FPÖ - Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Freedom Party of Austria): founded in 1955 right-wing extremist party, currently part of the Austrian Federal Government.

Franco, Francisco: *1892, †1975; fascist general and dictator, from 1936-1975 Head of State of Spain.

Francoism: ideological underpinning of the dictatorship of Francisco Franco.

Franciscan Order: a Catholic Order, developed between 1210 and 1220, refers to Francis of Assisi, in Croatia staff involved in the system of rule of the Ustaša.

Fraternity & Unity (Bratstvo i jedinstvo): motto of the Yugoslav People's Liberation Struggle, later the leitmotiv of the politics of remembrance in socialist Yugoslavia under which only the memory of the fight of the partisans was allowed. There was no talk

of non-Yugoslav nationalism, complicity or fascism.

Grabar-Kitarović, Kolinda: *1968; since 15.02.2015 President of Croatia (independent), previously Croatian Minister (HDZ) and Deputy Secretary General of NATO.

Golgotha: name of the hill near ancient Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified according to the New Testament.

Haider, Jörg: *1950, †2008; extreme right-wing Austrian politician, formerly FPÖ, then BZÖ. 1989-2000 Chairman of the FPÖ, 1989-1991 and 1999-2008 Governor of Carinthia/Koroška.

Handschar, The 13th Waffen Mountain Division of the SS: division of the Waffen-SS, founded in 1943, recruited in the territory of the NDH state, involved in numerous war crimes in the Balkans. Handschar being German for "Khanjar", a traditional dagger originating from Oman.

Hasanbegović, Zlatko: *1973, history revisionist historian, until October 2016 Minister of Culture of Croatia (HDZ). Excluded from the HDZ in 2017, currently independent parliamentarian in the Croatian parliament. Former vice-chairman of the association "Počasni Bleiburški vod".

HČSP (Hrvatska čista stranka prava): "Croatian Pure Party of Rights", right-wing extremist, neo-fascist party, refers positively to the Ustaša.

HDZ (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica): "Croatian Democratic Community", nationalist, right-wing conservative party. Currently the strongest party in Croatia.

HOS (Hrvatske obrambene snage): "Croatian Defense Forces", Croatian paramilitary organization from 1991-1993, who fought together with the regular Croatian Armed Forces and the Croatian Defense Council (HVO) in the Bosnian and Croatian Wars. Their goal was a Greater Croatia. The name was deliberately inspired by the name of the armed forces of the NDH state.

HOS (Hrvatske oružane snage): "Croatian Armed Forces", from 1944 onwards the official name for the armed forces of the NDH state.

HOP (Hrvatski Oslobodilački Pokret - Croatian Liberation Movement): an organization founded in exile by Ante Pavelić for Croatian-fascist networking, organization, propaganda and the armed struggle against socialist Yugoslavia.

HSP (Hrvatska stranka prava): "Croatian Party of Law", right-wing extremist, fascist party. First established in 1861, the Ustaša emerged from it. Reestablished in 1990.

HSP-1861 (Hrvatska stranka prava-1861): "Croatian Party of Law-1861", founded in 1995, a spin-off from the HSP, as one of the few right-wing parties in opposition to Franjo Tudman.

HSP-AS (Hrvatska stranka prava Dr. Ante Starčević): "Croatian Party of Law Dr. Ante Starčević", founded in 2009, a right-wing spin-off from the HSP. At the 2014 EU-election and the 2015 general election they ran in an alliance with the HDZ.

HSS (Hrvatska seljačka stranka): "Croatian Peasant Party", conservative party founded in Croatia in 1904, played significant role in the SHS state. Re-founded in 1989, represented

today in the Croatian Parliament as an opposition party.

Jasenovac: place in Croatia. The concentration camp Jasenovac, the largest concentration camp of the NDH state, was in the immediate vicinity.

Kaiser, Peter: *1958; Austrian politician of the SPÖ (Social Democratic Party of Austria) and since 2013 governor of Carinthia/Koroška.

Karamarko, Tomislav: *1959; Croatian politician and former chairman of the HDZ.

Kärntner Abwehrkämpferbund (Carinthian Defense Forces Federation): founded in 1955, according to the Documentation Archive of the Austrian Resistance (DÖW) a “right-wing extremist organization”. Works against an imagined “Slovenisation” of Carinthia/Koroška and implements German nationalistic politics, representatives take part in the meeting in Bleiburg/Pliberk.

Kitzmüller, Anneliese: *1959; Austrian politician of the extreme right-wing FPÖ and since 20.12.2017 Third President of the Austrian National Council.

King Alexander I.: *1888, †1934; King of Yugoslavia 1921 – 1934.

Kordić, Dario: *1960; Bosnian-Herzegovinian politician of the HDZ BiH, vice president of the, from 1991-1996 existing, internationally not recognized, Croatian Republic of Herceg-Bosna.

Kuna: 1941-1945 currency of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH state), since 1994 again the name of the currency of the Republic of Croatia.

LPD (Landespolizeidirektion - State Police Department): In Austria, a security agency subordinate to the Federal Ministry of the Interior, it is thus the second security authority but in most cities also the first authority. Each of the nine federal states has its own State Police Department.

Lobnig, Josef: *1958; Austrian finance official and politician of the FPÖ (earlier FPK, FPÖ/BZÖ); since 1999 Member of Parliament of the Carinthian State Parliament and since March 2013 Third President of the Carinthian State Parliament.

Loibach Field/Libuško polje: field near Bleiburg/Pliberk, on which the alleged massacre of Bleiburg supposedly happened. This is where the historical revisionist memorial site is located and where most of the annual memorial service takes place.

Maček, Vladko: *1879, †1964; after the murder of Stjepan Radić in 1928, chairman of the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS).

Mesić, Stjepan “Stipe”: *1934; co-founder of the HDZ, but partly turned his back on it in the 1990s. From 18.02.2000-18.02.2010 President of Croatia.

Mussi, Peter: old boy of the german-nationalistic “Akademische Sängerschaft Tauriska zu Klagenfurt”.

NDH state (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska - Independent State of Croatia): Croatian fascist Nazi vassal state, 1941-1945.

Öllinger, Karl: *1951; Austrian politician of the Green Party (“Die Grünen”).

ÖVP (Österreichische Volkspartei - Austrian People’s Party): right-wing

conservative Austrian party. At the federal level in a governing coalition with the FPÖ since 20.12.2017.

Partisans (Yugoslav): in the context of this brochure resistance fighters against National Socialism and Italian fascism who organized themselves in the Yugoslav People's Liberation Army.

Pavelić, Ante: *1889, †1959; leader of the Ustaša and the NDH state.

Perković, Marko: founder and lead singer of the right-wing extremist Croatian rock band Thompson, founded in 1991. The band is named after the nickname of Perković - Thompson -, which derives from the gun with which Perković supposedly fought in the Croatian War of Independence.

Perón, Juan: *1895, †1974; general, autocratic president of Argentina.

Piplica, Miroslav: chairman of the HDZ Austria, the Association for Veterans from the Croatian War of Independence abroad and the Croatian-Austrian Coordination for Culture and Sport.

Prohibition Act (VerbG – Verbotsgesetz): Austrian Federal Constitutional Law, which regulated the denazification and sanctions offences regarding National Socialist topics as well as denial of and homage to NS crimes.

Puljić, Želimir: *1947; Archbishop of the Roman Catholic archdiocese of Zadar in Croatia. In 2015 he campaigned for a legalization of the Ustaša greeting “Za dom spremni” within the military.

Radić, Stjepan: *1871, †1928; politician and leader of the HSS - “Croatian Peasant Party”.

Rolf, Tomislav: *1899, †1945; Ustaša, general of the NDH state.

Sanader, Ivo: *1953; Croatian politician, face of the “reformed” HDZ, from 2003-2009 Prime Minister of Croatia.

Šahovnica/chessboard: colloquial name for the coat of arms of Croatia. It is historical as well as contemporary since it is in the coat of arms of the Republic of Croatia, where it begins with a red field on the top left. In the NDH state this coat of arms was also used, however, it begins with a white field on the top left.

SHS (Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, “Kraljevina Jugoslavija”): originated in December 1918 from the merger of the State of the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs with the Kingdom of Serbia. After a coup, from 1929 onwards a royal dictatorship with the official name Kingdom of Yugoslavia, invaded and smashed in 1941 by the German Reich.

Sobotka, Wolfgang: *1956; politician of the ÖVP, from 21.4.2016-18.12.2017 Minister of the Interior, from 20.12.2017 onwards First President of the Austrian National Council.

Starčević, Ante: *1823, †1896; Croatian nationalist, politician, author and co-founder of the HSP. He demanded a Greater Croatia and was an opponent of a Yugoslav idea. He is still celebrated today for his commitment to the Croatian nation-state.

State Office for the Protection of the Constitution and Counter-Terrorism (LVT); in addition to the Federal Office for

the Protection of the Constitution and the fight against terrorism (BVT) part of the Austrian constitution protection. The LVT is part of the respective LPD – State Police Department.

Sunić, Tomislav: *1953; Croatian and US-citizen and formerly in various Croatian diplomatic functions (1993-2001), nationalist, anti-Semite and active within the neo-nazi white nationalist spectrum in the USA.

Symbols Act (SymbG - Symbolgesetz): Federal law that originally banned the use of Islamic State and Al-Qaida symbols. 2018/2019 broadening to other groups, amongst others the Ustaša.

Thompson: right-wing extremist Croatian rock band, named after the rifle with which the lead singer of the band, Marko Perković, fought in the Croatian War of Independence.

Tuđman, Franjo: *1922, †1999; historical revisionist historian and politician as well as co-founder of the HDZ. He was the autocratic president of the Republic of Croatia from 1990-1999.

Überfellner, Willi: Official of the “Kärntner Abwehrkämpferbund” (Carinthian Defense Forces Federation).

UDBA (Uprava državne bezbednosti): founded in 1946, the secret police of Yugoslavia, renamed SDB in 1966. Its main task was the fight against and the liquidation of external and internal enemies and opponents of the real socialist Yugoslavia.

Ulrichsberg/Šenturška gora: a 1022m high mountain near Klagenfurt/Celovec in Carinthia, a church ruin on the mountain serves as a memorial for various (Waffen-)

SS-organizations and Wehrmacht units. Scene of the revisionist Ulrichsberg meeting in addition to the Zollfeld/Gospodsvetsko polje.

Ustaša Hrvatska Revolucionarna Organizacija (Croatian Revolutionary Organization of Insurgents), Ustaša: founded in 1929, the Croatian fascist movement began as a right-wing extremist terrorist secret society and then took over power in the NDH state.

Vukojević, Vice: *1936; politician of the HDZ, former Member of the Croatian Parliament, from 1999-2007 Croatian Constitutional Court judge.

Waffen-SS: (“Armed SS”) part of the SS (“Schutzstaffel” – Protection Squadron), from 1939 onwards the designation for the already existing military formations of the SS. Combat units as well as guard units for concentration and extermination camps belonged to the Waffen-SS.

Wehrmacht: regular armed forces of National Socialist Germany. Involved in war of aggression, war of extermination and massive war crimes.

Yugoslav People’s Liberation Army (Narodnooslobodilačka vojska, NOV): Communist Partisan Organization in Yugoslavia, fought for the liberation of Yugoslavia from National Socialism and Fascism in 1941-1945.

Za dom spremni: translated: “Prepared for the homeland”. Since the 1930s the motto and greeting of the Ustaša which was used during the Second World War as an equivalent to »Heil Hitler«.

Suggested further reading

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Korb, Alexander: **Im Schatten des Weltkriegs: Massengewalt der Ustaša gegen Serben, Juden und Roma in Kroatien 1941 – 1945**. Hamburg, Hamburger Edition, 2013.

Pavlaković, Vjeran, Brentin, Dario: **The Controversial Commemoration: Transnational Approaches to Remembering Bleiburg**. Zageb, croatian political science review, Vol. 55, Nr. 2, 2018.

Radonić, Ljiljana: **Krieg um die Erinnerung: kroatische Vergangenheitspolitik zwischen Revisionismus und europäischen Standards**. Frankfurt/M., Campus-Verlag, 2010.

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