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The Yugoslav State Security Service and the Bleiburg Commemorations

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Summary

This article, based overwhelmingly on primary sources produced by the Yugoslav State Security Service, provides a historical overview of their work with respect to the commemorations at Bleiburg. It summarizes the stance of the Yugoslav State Security Service towards Croat émigrés by focusing on the concrete measures and the entire spectrum of available methods undertaken by the Service in conjunction with the commemorations. After a general summary of the work of the Yugoslav security services with respect to émigrés, the article provides detailed examination of two events separated by two decades (1966 and 1985). The 1966 commemoration was notable not only because it was the year in which the émigrés purchased a plot of land in Bleiburg, but also because the aftermath of that year's commemoration was marred by a bomb attack. The second case is the fortieth anniversary commemoration in 1985, which was perceived by both the agents of the Yugoslav state and the émigrés themselves as being particularly important. Together the two cases provide insight into the Yugoslav State Security Service's long-term operation aimed at curtailing and suppressing Croat émigré activity. The article shows that even though the Yugoslav State Security Service was willing to use violent means in this struggle, the preferred means remained infiltration, disinformation, provocation, and constant surveillance.

Keywords: Bleiburg, Yugoslav State Security Service, Croatian Émigrés, Commemorations

Introduction

Throughout the existence of socialist Yugoslavia, the state's intelligence services closely monitored the activities of Croat émigrés scattered throughout the diaspora. Given that Bleiburg represented a central event in the Croat émigré community, the commemoration of the mass killings also served as a useful focus for those who

wished to monitor and counter the intentions of these émigrés.¹ This article will provide an overview of the work of the Yugoslav State Security Service with respect to the commemorations at Bleiburg. After first summarizing the stance of the Yugoslav State Security Service towards Croat émigrés, the article will focus on the concrete measures undertaken by the Service in conjunction with the commemorations. As space does not allow for an extensive analysis of the entire history of the Yugoslav State Security Service's operations covering the Bleiburg commemorations, the article will provide a more detailed examination of two events separated by two decades. After a general summary of the work of the Yugoslav security services with respect to émigrés, I will first describe the case of the commemoration that took place in 1966. This commemoration was notable not only because it was the year in which the émigrés purchased a plot of land in Bleiburg, but also because the aftermath of that year's commemoration was marred by a bomb attack. The second case I will examine is the fortieth anniversary commemoration in 1985, which was perceived by both the agents of the Yugoslav state and the émigrés themselves as being particularly important. Together the two cases will provide insight into the Yugoslav State Security Service's operations with respect to the Bleiburg commemorations.

Before proceeding to the specific topic of this article, a few words regarding the structure of the Yugoslav security services are necessary. The structure of the Yugoslav State Security Service (*Služba državne bezbednosti*, SDB), the primary civilian security service, mirrored that of the federal Yugoslav state. At the pinnacle stood the Federal State Security Service which was a constituent part of the Federal Secretariat for Internal Affairs (*Savezni sekretarijat za unutrašnje poslove*, SSUP). Below this, each of the six republics had its own republican secretariat for internal affairs; within Serbia, Kosovo and Vojvodina also each had provincial secretariats for internal affairs. All of these secretariats had constituent state security services. After the purge in 1966 of Aleksandar Ranković – the original head of the Yugoslav State Security Service – and especially after the promulgation of the new constitution in 1974, the republican and provincial secretariats for internal affairs enjoyed greatly increased powers. Nevertheless, even after 1974 all operations outside the borders of Yugoslavia required the permission of the SSUP SDB, not only in order to initiate a given operation but also on a running basis during the operation itself.

¹ In the existing literature, the events in Bleiburg in May 1945 have been qualified in many different ways, up to and including the use of the term “genocide”. As it is not the intention of this article to qualify, legally or otherwise, these events, I use the term “mass killings” as a simple descriptive characterization. Martina Grahek Ravančić provides an overview of much of the terminology and historiography about Bleiburg (Grahek Ravančić, 2015).

The primary focus here is on the Yugoslav State Security Service, by which is meant all of its aforementioned component parts. Besides the SSUP SDB and its subordinate services, a number of other Yugoslav security services also undertook operations related to the suppression of hostile émigré activities. The Federal Secretariat for Foreign Affairs (*Savezni sekretarijat za inostrane poslove*, SSIP) maintained its own civilian intelligence service, the Service for Research and Documentation (*Služba za istraživanje i dokumentaciju*, SID).² The SID made extensive use of Yugoslav embassies and consulates to counteract émigré activity. In addition to organizing and participating in covert operations, the SID also interacted with foreign governments by both making representations to them about the harmful nature of extreme émigrés and by demanding that state authorities take appropriate repressive measures against anti-Yugoslav activities. The SID also monitored the foreign press and intervened to prevent or protest against reporting that was perceived to be hostile towards Yugoslavia.

On the military side, two separate services participated in monitoring émigré activity. One was the Security Administration of the Federal Secretariat for People's Defense (*Uprava bezbednosti Saveznog sekretarijata za narodnu odbranu*). The other was the Second Administration of the General Staff of the Yugoslav People's Army (*Druga uprava Generalštaba Jugoslovenske Narodne Armije*). The military services were primarily interested in counteracting any possible hostile actions that the émigrés might take with respect to military facilities and personnel in Yugoslavia. This interest linked logically to the presumption of a connection between NATO forces and Yugoslav émigrés in Western Europe and North America (Grubišić et al., 1986: 148). Although Yugoslavia had broken with the Soviet Union in 1948, the Yugoslav authorities continued to perceive the West as a threat to national security. The Yugoslav leadership feared that both the East and the West could exploit émigré organizations as a resource against Yugoslavia (*ibid.*: 31, 96-97, 148-151, 203-207). Hence, both with respect to émigré activities generally and the Bleiburg commemorations specifically, inter-agency cooperation existed.³

In the case of the Croats in Western Europe, the émigré community consisted of a mixture of veterans of the so-called Independent State of Croatia who had arrived immediately after the Second World War, refugees from communist oppression who arrived in the years following the war, and economic migrants (*Gastar-*

² The SID was earlier known as the Administration for Research and Documentation (*Uprava za istraživanje i dokumentaciju*, UID).

³ See, for example, SSIP SID, Security Information: Preparations of the Croat Hostile Emigration for the "Commemoration" in Bleiburg, 18 March 1985; SSUP SDB(?), Ustasha Emigration Held Traditional Commemoration of "Bleiburg Victims" in Bleiburg in Austria, 31 May 1985, Arhiv Republike Slovenije (ARS), f. 1931, RTZ 132 (OO "Pliberški vod").

beiter) who had settled in Western Europe with official permission starting in the early 1960s.

Seen with Yugoslav eyes, this mixture was a potentially volatile cocktail. In discussing “the hostile emigration” (*neprijateljska emigracija*), the Yugoslav State Security Service over time identified two categories: “the fascist emigration” (*fašistička emigracija*) and “the extreme emigration” (*ekstremna emigracija*). According to Obren Ž. Đorđević’s seminal course book on the foundations of state security, “among the fascist emigration are to be counted members of émigré organizations whose goal is the creation of a fascist regime, or who by means of sabotage or terrorist activity engage in political struggle. Those émigré organizations which engage themselves against the constitutional order in our country are defined as the extreme emigration” (Đorđević, 1980: 152-153).

From the very outset of the Yugoslav state, the Yugoslav State Security Service undertook operations aimed at the émigré communities. In the early period, the focus was mainly on identifying the many thousands of alleged war criminals who had escaped abroad to avoid prosecution. In 1957, a formal desk (*referat*) for the surveillance of émigrés was established in the Second Department of the Federal State Security Service and in the republican state security services.⁴ The Second Department remained primarily responsible for émigrés in capitalist countries until the collapse of Yugoslavia.

Like all other aspects of the work of the Yugoslav State Security Service, the methods, rules, and regulations affecting the monitoring of émigrés were constantly revised. It is, however, possible to provide a general overview of the ambit of this work, as this was summarized in the reporting guidelines issued by the federal secretary for internal affairs in both 1969 and 1975.⁵ As pertained to “enemy activity of the emigration”, the relevant constituent units of the State Security Service had to report on the following:

1. The creation or attempted creation of illegal hostile organizations or groups in Yugoslavia on the part of the emigration or the joining of such organizations or groups;
2. The creation of hostile émigré organizations or groups with the intention of hostile activity against Yugoslavia;

⁴ Letter of Deputy State Secretary Đuro Stanković to the Slovenian Deputy Secretary Bogomir Peršič, 19 March 1957, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 1189.

⁵ SSUP SDB, “Regulations on the Manner of Reporting in the State Security Service”, 1969, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 1195; SSUP SDB, “Regulations on the Manner of Reporting in the State Security Service”, 1975, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 2234. See also: SSUP SDB, “Regulations on the Amendment of the Regulation on the Reporting in the State Security Service”, 1 May 1977, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 1463.

3. The organization of the illegal smuggling of persons or material over the Yugoslav border in order to undertake hostile activity, or the creation of smuggling channels or points or the participation in these on the part of the emigration or by persons, who are organized by the emigration; the crossing of the border with forged travel documents;
4. Activities of the emigration with the goal of preventing visits of leading Yugoslav officials to other countries and institutions;
5. The sending of petitions, memoranda and other material with hostile content to foreign governments and institutions;
6. Attempts to unite émigré organizations of various nationalities;
7. Attempts to unite various émigré organizations of one nationality or the coordination of actions of individual organizations or groups;
8. Contradictions and conflicts among individual leaders of émigré organizations, or among émigré organizations;
9. The financial and other material support of the emigration by official organs or representatives of the authorities;
10. Bans and dispersals of émigré meetings by official organs because of hostile activity against Yugoslavia;
11. The expulsion by the police of émigrés who act hostilely towards other countries;
12. The banning or dispersal of terrorist émigré organizations or groups by official organs;
13. The banning of terrorist activities by official organs;
14. Measures of the security services in every documented case of hostile activity.⁶

All of the items mentioned in this detailed list can be seen to have been implemented in practice as regards the monitoring of the Bleiburg commemorations by the Yugoslav State Security Service.

Based on an examination of available documentation from the Croatian and Slovenian archives, one can conclude that the Yugoslav State Security Service regarded the Croat émigrés as the greatest threat of any émigré community. This assessment was based on the importance of Croatia and Croats to Yugoslavia, the size of the Croat nation, the number of émigrés, and – not least – on the past existence of the NDH and the radical solutions advocated by some Croat émigrés.

⁶ SSUP SDB, “Regulations on the Manner of Reporting in the State Security Service”, 1969, 84-6, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 1195.

The Yugoslav State Security Service had worked diligently since 1945 to counteract Croat émigrés, and the Service availed itself of an entire array of measures ranging from dissuasion to targeted assassinations. However, the infiltration and armed uprising staged by Croat émigrés near Bugojno in 1972 further convinced the Yugoslav leadership that an offensive stance was necessary to combat the hostile intentions of the émigrés.⁷ On 21 July 1972, President Josip Broz Tito issued a directive in which he spoke of a “special war”, that was being fought against Yugoslavia, within which the émigrés played an integral part.⁸ In accordance with the directive, the SSUP SDB decided that “the activity of the extreme emigration must be suppressed with all available methods and measures of the service in all regions and areas in which the emigration is located”.⁹ In order to effectuate this offensive stance, the Yugoslav State Security Service had to establish “robust positions” in émigré structures and in particular monitor “the intellectual part of the hostile emigration”.¹⁰

The Bleiburg Commemorations

The following analysis is based primarily on archival sources stemming from the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia (ARS). In the ARS, the greatest concentration of documents related to Bleiburg can be found in RTZ 132 (Pliberški vod) and in the much larger RTZ 56 (Pevec), which covered Croat émigré activities.¹¹ “RTZ” stood for *registrirana tekoča zadeva* (registered current affair) and was used to identify large operations involving the Slovenian State Security Service (*Služba državne varnosti*, SDV). RTZ 132 existed in the Slovenian SDV from 1964, and it was only officially closed in December 1990, approximately a half year after the first democratic elections in Slovenia.¹²

Generally speaking, the work of the Second Department of the Yugoslav State Security Service was organized in such a manner that each republic was primarily responsible for those émigrés who originally stemmed from (or had most recently resided in) the respective republic.¹³ However, owing to the proximity of Slove-

⁷ SSUP SDB, “Overview of the Newest Announcements of Sabotage and Terror Actions of the Extreme Part of the Emigration and Our Measures”, 18 September 1972.

⁸ President Josip Broz Tito, “Directive”, 21 July 1972, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 1404.

⁹ SSUP SDB, “Operation ‘Raduša’”, 4 May 1973, 123-124, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 1160.

¹⁰ SSUP SDB, “Operation ‘Raduša’”, 4 May 1973, 123-124, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 1160.

¹¹ The majority of these documents are available in ARS, f. 1931, šk. 2538-42.

¹² USDV RSZNS RS, Fifth Department, 19 December 1990, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 2538.

¹³ The Yugoslav State Security Service frequently changed internal terminology, and the Second Department was in the last decades known as the Second Administration at the federal level.

nia to Austria, the Slovenian State Security Service also played an important role in monitoring Croat émigrés who were active in Austria, including at the Bleiburg commemorations. Since at least 1966, the SDV maintained an operational dossier called “Ustashe in Carinthia”.¹⁴

Because of their regular nature, the Bleiburg commemorations served a useful purpose for the Yugoslav State Security Service. Commemorations obviously brought together a considerable number of people and provided an occasion for prominent members of the émigré community to hold speeches in which they expressed their political views. As such, the commemorations provided the Yugoslav State Security Service with a “who’s who of the anti-Yugoslav emigration” in Austria and West Germany and a convenient way of gauging émigré sentiments. The geographical proximity of the commemoration, right across the border from Yugoslavia, was simultaneously an advantage and a threat for the Yugoslav State Security Service. In an evaluation of the SDV from September 1972, a connection was drawn between Croat extremists with terrorist intentions and the Bleiburg commemoration.¹⁵ In addition to the Yugoslav State Security Service, the SID also lent a hand in monitoring the Bleiburg commemorations.¹⁶

The May 1966 Commemoration

In the early years of post-war Austria, the commemoration of Bleiburg was forbidden. Those Croat émigrés wishing to go to Bleiburg to pay their respects had to do so furtively and covertly. However, by the mid-1960s, the Austrian authorities began to tolerate the commemoration, and the émigrés moved to formalize their engagement by purchasing a plot of land at Bleiburg field. Each year, a small but motivated group of émigrés would gather in Bleiburg in May, and again in November for All Saints’ Day.

A 1965 report, most likely authored by the SSUP SDB, on the “Ustasha emigration in Carinthia” estimated that 350 of the 600 émigrés in Carinthia were loyal towards Yugoslavia.¹⁷ Of the remainder, 100 were estimated to be associated with the Bleiburg Honour Guard (*Počasni bleiburški vod* or PBV), which was based in Klagenfurt (Celovec). The PBV was headed by Niko Martinović, and the other senior members listed were Mirko Kračić, Ilija Abramović, Petar Miloš, and Adem

¹⁴ UZNZ Maribor, Informational Report, 28 May 1966, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132. DSC_0002.jpg.

¹⁵ SDV, Evaluation of the Security Situation in SR Slovenia, 12 September 1972 (cited in Elste et al., 2015: 152).

¹⁶ SSUP SDB, First Administration to SZNZ SRS UDV, 1 June 1966, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 2538. 20131105_090131.

¹⁷ SSUP SDB(?), Report on Ustasha Emigration in Carinthia, 9 June 1965, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 2538. 20131105_084320.jpg.

Delić. The PBV was assessed to be an illegal organization as it was not properly registered with the Austrian authorities. The SSUP SDB wrote that

the basic political activity of the Ustasha organization in Carinthia consists of maintaining the cult of the so-called victims of communism and Yugoslavia, whose symbol is represented by the Ustasha cemetery at Bleiburg (more specifically Unterloibach at Bleiburg – Spodnje Libuče), where the captured Ustasha army was allegedly liquidated in 1945. In addition, the activity regarding the commemoration of “10 April”, the name day of Ante Pavelić, as well as political activity of convenient religious character (1 November, the Assumption of Mary, etc.). Almost every political manifestation is camouflaged with some kind of liturgical and religious ceremony, which is conditioned by the position of the Austrian authorities, who forbid the Ustasha organization[s] from engaging in any political activity. ... The prime mover... in Carinthia is undoubtedly priest Vilim Cecelja (based in Salzburg) who practically runs this organization.¹⁸

The SSUP SDB caustically observed that the Carinthian émigré community consisted mostly of “primitive” and “almost illiterate” workers and peasants. There were “almost no intellectuals”, though Petar Miloš was noted as an exception. Most émigrés in Carinthia were unskilled labourers without solid financial means, and the SSUP SDB believed that they did not represent “any kind of factor”. Many were married to Austrian women.

In February 1966, the Slovenian SDV laid out several objectives with respect to Bleiburg, the first of which was the prevention of these émigrés’ activities through coordination with the Austrian police.¹⁹ The SDV intended to infiltrate the PBV and focus on covering the places where they regularly convened, such as the restaurant Hrust. Appended to the planning report was a list of names of relevant émigrés, including their dates of birth, their addresses and occupations and detailed information about their cars. Collecting this information was not “a very difficult job. Émigrés unwillingly divulge information about themselves. Besides that, most of them introduce themselves with fake names and even officially give fake information. It is impossible to arrive at complete and accurate information in a relatively short period of time.”²⁰

¹⁸ SSUP SDB(?), Report on Ustasha Emigration in Carinthia, 9 June 1965, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 2538. 20131105_084320.jpg. On the dissatisfaction expressed by the Austrian clergy in Bleiburg regarding the commemorations, see RZNZ Slovenia, Information Report, 30 October 1965, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 2538. 20131105_084614.jpg.

¹⁹ SDV, Introductory Report for the Initiation of Processing of the Ustasha Group “Bleiburg Guard” in Klagenfurt, 23 February 1966, 20131105_083140.jpg, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 2538.

²⁰ SSUP SDB(?), Broader List of Emigration on the Territory of the GK in Klagenfurt, undated, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 2538. 20131105_083839.jpg, list commences at 20131105_083609.jpg.

According to a subsequent report of the SID, approximately 50 individuals participated in the commemoration of Bleiburg on 8 May 1966. After the commemoration, the group of émigrés headed to the nearby restaurant Hrust for lunch, but a few minutes before their (tardy) arrival a bomb went off in the restaurant. No one was injured in the explosion, but the lunch was called off and the local authorities immediately launched an investigation.²¹

The SID was briefed directly on the investigation by the chief of what an informant identified as the “Austrian state police in Klagenfurt”, Dr. Winkler. He speculated that the bomb could have been left by either a smaller group of pro-Yugoslavs, a rival group in the émigré community, or extreme Croats who wanted to draw attention to themselves. The SID also monitored the reaction to the incident in Austrian media and proactively intervened to have the local communist newspaper – *Der Volkswille* – print an attack on the extreme émigrés asking how long the authorities would tolerate “fascist groups on the very border”.²² None of the local newspapers pointed the finger at Yugoslavia, even though the *Volkszeitung* reported that the detonator was allegedly of Yugoslav origin. The *Volkszeitung* referred to the device as a “stink bomb”, which could easily have caused real injuries.²³

The local police made the rounds among émigrés, warning them to abstain from threats against Yugoslavia and the local consulate. Apparently this warning did not dissuade the more extreme émigrés, who were almost unanimously convinced that the Yugoslav State Security Service stood behind the bombing.²⁴ The fear of being killed by the “Udba” – the catchall term used by émigrés to refer to the Yugoslav security services – was palpable, and there was dissatisfaction with the fact that the Austrian police was investigating the émigrés.

It is worth underlining that nothing in the SID report betrayed anything more than rumours about the possible involvement of the Yugoslav State Security Service in the bombing. However, the documents of the Yugoslav State Security Service explicitly acknowledge that the bomb was placed by the Slovenian SDV and describe precisely how this was accomplished. On 12 May 1966, the First Sector of the SDV wrote to the Second Administration of the SSUP SDB reporting how three agents four days earlier had crossed from Yugoslavia over to Austria.²⁵ The agents quickly

²¹ There exist allegations that the bomb was placed by the Yugoslav State Security Service – and that the soup that was to be served had also been poisoned (Elste et al., 2015: 626). The SDV also monitored reporting in the Austrian press about the bombing. See also First Sector of SDV to SSUP SDB, Second Administration, 10 May 1966, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 2538.

²² SSUP SDB, First Administration to SZNZ SRS UDV, 1 June 1966, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

²³ SDV translation of article in *Die Volkszeitung*, 27 August 1966, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 2538.

²⁴ UZNZ, Informational Report, 16 June 1966, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

²⁵ SDV, First Sector to Second Administration of SSUP SDB, 12 May 1966, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 2538.

assembled the bomb, parts of which had been acquired as early as 1953. They then immediately went to the restaurant, where they placed a timed detonator in the restaurant before returning to Yugoslavia. The agents only spent 90 minutes in Austria. Fortunately for the émigrés, the timer on the detonator malfunctioned, exploding at 11:15 a.m. instead of at 1 p.m. The agents had used a British lighter in order to disguise the origin of the bomb, and the detonator was made in Yugoslavia, though without any indication that would betray the identity of the manufacturer.

Throughout the existence of socialist Yugoslavia, an interdependent relationship existed between the real and alleged acts of the Yugoslav State Security Service and the real and alleged acts of extreme émigrés. Thus, immediately after the failed explosion, the thoughts of the émigrés turned to revenge. Already on the day of the explosion, the priest Vilim Cecelja, while claiming that divine intervention had averted a tragedy, claimed that the time had come for vengeance. “They will avenge themselves by organizing assassinations on Yugoslav representations in [West] Germany and Austria.”²⁶

Notwithstanding the incident in May 1966, about 100 émigrés gathered again in Bleiburg in November, and the All Saints’ Day celebration once more featured lunch at the restaurant Hrust.²⁷ The local informants of the Yugoslav Security Service reported that the Austrian police had received orders to monitor the commemoration closely and to collect detailed information about all participants. Petar Miloš stated to one of the informants that the police had told him that they had concluded that the Yugoslavs were behind the bomb that had exploded in May.²⁸ In the meantime, the émigrés also directed a number of their vengeful thoughts towards the looming state visit of President Tito to Austria. This visit occurred in February 1967, albeit without any violent incidents.²⁹

²⁶ UZNZ Celje, Informational Report, 16 June 1966, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 2538. 20131105_090204.jpg. The phrase “assassinations on Yugoslav representations” (*atentati na jugoslovenska predstavništva*) is somewhat nonsensical, and could refer to assassinations of Yugoslav diplomats and/or attacks on Yugoslav consulates and embassies or even Yugoslav (state) companies, all of which transpired. According to a May 1968 report, a bomb also exploded in the restaurant Hrust on 8 May 1968. Comparatively little information is available about this incident. SDV Maribor, Informational Report on Ustashe in Carinthia, 22 May 1968, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 2538.

²⁷ UDV, Operational Information, 3 November 1966, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 2538.

²⁸ UDV, Operational Information, 3 November 1966, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 2538.

²⁹ UZNZ Murska Sobota, Information Report, 5 July 1966, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 2538; UNZ Maribor, Report on Informants, 23 February 1967, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 2538. On Tito’s visit see also Aufzeichnung des Ministerialdirigenten Frank, 1 March 1967 (in Schwarz, 1998: 353-354). See also Hans Sima (2015: 114).

Intermezzo (1967-1984)

In the subsequent years, the Yugoslav State Security Service continued to monitor the Bleiburg commemorations and the activities of the PBV very closely. In 1967, the army also assisted the police station in Mežica, the border police and the SDV in monitoring the commemoration.³⁰ Instructions were given in advance to local informants so that both the preparations and the commemoration itself would receive adequate surveillance. The SDV was interested in obtaining information about the number of participants, the attitude, mood and comments of the participants and the local inhabitants, security measures implemented by the Austrian authorities, lunch arrangements, the content of the speeches in the church in Loibach, and the license plate numbers of participants' vehicles. The SDV often had very detailed information from its informants, such as one who met with the wife of an Austrian police officer. She confided that she was unhappy with the extra burden imposed on her husband and his colleagues because of the commemoration. Another source summarized the content of the mass. The SDV noted the names of all travelers who passed the local border crossing between Austria and Yugoslavia on the day of the commemoration.

As regards the Austrian authorities, the Yugoslav State Security Service was interested in how they communicated, whether the police and gendarmerie came only from the local area or from other areas of Austria, and to what extent they themselves checked the identities of participants or interrogated them. In June 1967, the Slovenian State Security Service described the troubled economic state of the émigrés, who complained internally of how the Austrian police "harassed" them. "The majority of them are in their more mature years and there is not as much zeal as there was a few years ago."³¹ And in May 1971, the deputy mayor of Bleiburg municipality acerbically remarked that the Bleiburg commemoration was "insignificant, that it counted as a rally of homeless people, who represent nothing".³²

Recording the identities of the participants in the commemoration ceremonies was obviously a significant part of the task of the Yugoslav State Security Service and their agents. Photographs were taken of the participants, and in some cases photos of particularly important Croat émigré figures were shown to informants to see whether they recognized these persons as having been present. Indeed, some Croats avoided the commemoration out of fear of being photographed.³³ As technology ad-

³⁰ UZNS Maribor, Operational Report, 9 May 1967, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

³¹ IDV Maribor, Report on Meeting with Informant "Petrič", 12 June 1967, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 2538.

³² SDV Maribor, Operational Report, 19 May 1971.

³³ IDV Kranj, Informational Report, 10 June 1970.

vanced, video recordings also later came to be used for this purpose.³⁴ New participants were identified by their physical appearance if their names were not known to the observers. The Yugoslav State Security Service was intricately involved: an effort was made to ascertain who paid for the group lunch following the ceremony, and one informant's wife participated in the preparation of the dining room. No detail was too minor to be noted, as in the case where one informant reported that one participant had donated money in Deutschmarks.³⁵

As was the case with all operations, exact accounts were maintained by the Yugoslav State Security Service of expenditures incurred. In addition to paying informants in advance or later reimbursing their expenditures (in Austrian shillings), "reward" payments were also paid to some informants.

The Yugoslav authorities encouraged their colleagues in Austria not only to monitor the commemorations at Bleiburg but also to ban them outright. In October 1972, the Second Administration of the SDB SSUP reported that it had received news from the SSIP that a commemoration in Bleiburg scheduled for All Saints' Day had been banned by the Austrian authorities.³⁶ All such future events were also to be banned – the reference here seemed to encompass only gatherings in November, not the annual commemorations in May. In addition, the Austrian police had spoken to the priest Vilim Cecelja and informed him that permission of the Austrian Ministry of Internal Affairs was necessary to go to Bleiburg. However, the SDB SSUP expressed doubt that the ban would be enforced and recommended that monitoring of known emigrants proceed. From the available documentation, it is clear that the gathering of émigré Croats in Bleiburg on All Saints' Day later resumed.³⁷

In May 1973, when the participants in the annual commemoration wanted to sing the Croatian national anthem "*Lijepa naša domovino*", they were interrupted by officials of the Austrian state intelligence service, who informed the participants that they only had permission for a religious service. The singing of the song was regarded as a political act. One émigré tried in vain to argue that "the communist state had issued a whole record of this song".³⁸ Interestingly, one of the informants of the SDV, who had obtained access to the commemoration site by posing as a student at

³⁴ SDV Maribor, Informational Report, 23 July 1967, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

³⁵ SDV Maribor, Operational Report, 19 May 1971, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

³⁶ SSUP SDB Second Administration, Dispatch to RSUP SDB of BiH, Croatia and Slovenia, 27 October 1972.

³⁷ SSIP, Informational Report on Ustasha Manifestations at the Cemetery in Bleiburg, 16 November 1977.

³⁸ SDV Maribor, Operational Report, 15 May 1973, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

the university in Graz and a freelance reporter for the *Neue Zeitung*, was asked by one of the Austrian state security officers for his opinion about the decision to stop the singing of the anthem.³⁹ The informant pretended not only to not know precisely what the song was about, but even claimed not to understand Croatian fluently, and opined that it was probably a political song.

The violent death of Nikola Martinović in 1975 arguably marks the peak of the Yugoslav State Security Service's engagement against the Bleiburg commemoration. Martinović was the president of the PBV. I will not here explore in detail the targeted killings perpetrated by the Yugoslav State Security service outside of Yugoslavia, although it has been established beyond a reasonable doubt that the Service did indeed carry out such assassinations (Nielsen 2015; 2016). An operations manual of the Yugoslav State Security Service from 1974 explicitly included "the physical destruction" of target persons as one possible operational outcome.⁴⁰ Suffice it to say that the work plan for the Slovenian SDV for the period from November 1974 to December 1975 specifically envisaged the "paralyzation" (*paralizacija*) of Martinović and his colleagues by May 1975, the thirtieth anniversary of Bleiburg.⁴¹ While it would be a mistake to treat the term "paralyzation" as a simple euphemism for assassination, it is irrefutable that Martinović was killed in February 1975. Yet other persons identified by the SDV as being close collaborators of Martinović were not killed.

In the 1970s and 1980s, there were indications that the Austrian authorities had adopted a more restrictive approach towards the commemoration. In 1981, the police informed Vilim Cecelja that the placing of a wreath was forbidden.⁴² Cecelja had also heard that Austrian consulates in West Germany were purposely delaying the issuing of visas to Croat émigrés. At any rate, the only wreath placed at Bleiburg in 1981 stemmed from the Croat Peasant Party (*Hrvatska seljačka stranka*, HSS), which was unsatisfactory for many more nationalist émigrés. The Austrian authorities had furthermore banned the musical association Matija Gubec from performing, and several individual émigrés were refused access to the cemetery on the day of the commemoration.

The émigrés were well aware that the commemoration was under pressure from the Austrian authorities. One émigré was heard to say that "not much can be

³⁹ SDV Maribor, Operational Report, 15 May 1973, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

⁴⁰ SSUP, Center for Professional Education, "Operational Processing – Materials – Second Part", 1974, 76, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 2308.

⁴¹ SDV, Work Plan of the Organs for Internal Affairs of SR Slovenia for the Protection of the Constitutional Order (November 1974 – December 1975), November 1974, 282.

⁴² SSIP to SDB SSUP, Second Administration, 29 May 1981, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

said” in Bleiburg because of the restrictions imposed, and the SSIP noted with satisfaction that the police presence had been stronger and that the usually more vocal émigré members had been muted. “This year’s commemoration in Bleiburg, compared to previous ones, has been significantly poorer in content and in the participation of émigrés who because of subjective or objective reasons could not or did not want to participate in the commemoration. The opinion of the majority of émigrés present is that this year’s Bleiburg was ‘poor and miserable’ and that it passed without any kind of publicity.”⁴³

At the All Saints’ Day celebration in November 1981, the Austrian police continued to apply similar restrictions. For instance, one bus with “pilgrims” from Hannover in West Germany was refused entry to Austria because some of the émigrés lacked Austrian visas. Because not all passengers had visas, all of them were denied entry to Austria.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, about 180 people did participate, and not all of them obeyed the instructions of the Austrian police banning political speeches and the display of Ustasha symbols. Hence, Cecelja referred to the alleged miraculous appearance of the Virgin Mary at Medugorje as a “warning” to Yugoslavia and to communists. He also warned those present to be wary, as four Croats had recently been killed by the Yugoslav State Security Service. Moreover, Cecelja criticized the United States of America for protecting “Serbs and Jews”.⁴⁵

The May 1985 Commemoration

Marking the fortieth anniversary, the May 1985 commemoration was the final major marking of Bleiburg prior to the collapse of Yugoslavia. Unsurprisingly, the Yugoslav authorities expressed particular concern regarding this commemoration.⁴⁶ Multiple émigré associations were involved in the planning, as there was a desire to project unity among the often dueling and bickering groups. The Croat Peasant Party, the émigré remnant of the dominant Croat political party in the inter-war period, seemed again to be taking the lead in the planning. However, the president of the HSS, J. Krnjević, expressed fear that he could be kidnapped by the Yugoslav State Security Service, given the proximity of the Yugoslav border. The prospective participants also discussed toning down the anti-Yugoslav character of the ceremo-

⁴³ SSIP to SDB SSUP, Second Administration, 29 May 1981, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

⁴⁴ SDB SSUP(?), Informational Report on Émigré Demonstration Held in Bleiburg, 19 November 1981, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

⁴⁵ SDB SSUP(?), Informational Report on Émigré Demonstration Held in Bleiburg, 19 November 1981, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

⁴⁶ SDB SSUP, Preparations for the Marking of the “40th Anniversary of Bleiburg”, 19 December 1984, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

ny in light of the anticipated measures that the Yugoslavs would request from their Austrian colleagues.

Compared to earlier decades, a softening of the Austrian stance towards the commemorations could be perceived in the early 1980s. By May 1985, the Austrian authorities had decided to approve the registration of the Croat Cultural Society Bleiburg (*Hrvatsko kulturno društvo Bleiburg*, HKD Bleiburg), which had been founded in October 1982.⁴⁷ However, the Austrians continued to insist upon obtaining exact lists of all participants from the organizers. Despite the pleas of the leader of the HKD, Petar Miloš, the Austrian police also still maintained a blacklist of persons forbidden from entering Austria and/or participating in the Bleiburg commemorations.⁴⁸ The Bleiburg commemorations in both May and in November at All Saints' Day were permitted, but the Austrian authorities demanded that the commemorations be of an "exclusively cultural character and be shorn of any kind of political characteristics".⁴⁹ The number of participants was not an issue, only the nature of the commemoration itself, and the participants must not (rhetorically) attack the Yugoslav state. Émigrés were warned that violations of the ban against political speeches could lead to the dissolution of HKD Bleiburg. The Austrian police insisted on being updated regularly and in a detailed manner about the planning for the commemoration. This meant that HKD Bleiburg had to seek approval for their meetings and send the minutes to the police.

In the weeks leading up to the fortieth anniversary, the leaders of HKD Bleiburg remained concerned about the effect of restrictions on the commemoration. Having heard that they might be turned back at the Austrian border, some émigrés were reconsidering their attendance. Others worried that they would be filmed at Bleiburg, which could create problems for them or their relatives still remaining in Yugoslavia. Yet some members of HKD Bleiburg believed that the spectacle of Croats being refused entry to Austria might itself generate media coverage for the Croatian cause.

Some of the ideas that the émigrés conceived for the commemoration in 1985 bordered on the comical. As noted, Bleiburg was located right across the border from Yugoslavia. Given this proximity, Petar Miloš proposed releasing approximately 100 balloons with the Ustasha seal and flag, with the intention that they would then fly into Yugoslavia. According to the SSUP SDB, "although he was

⁴⁷ SSIP SID, Commemorations in Bleiburg, undated (May 1985), ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132. See also Bruna Esih i Bože Vukušić, "Kako je nastalo Hrvatsko kulturno društvo Bleiburg", 17 May 2013, *Dnevno.hr*.

⁴⁸ SSIP SID, Security Information, Activity of the Austrian Police in Monitoring the Preparations for the "Commemoration" in Bleiburg, 18 March 1985, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

⁴⁹ SSIP SID, Security Information: Austrian Police Demanded Information from the Organizers about the "Commemoration in Bleiburg", 5 November 1985, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

warned by the Austrian police and ordered to destroy the balloons, Miloš stated that he would nevertheless find a way to send these balloons into Yugoslavia”.⁵⁰

The members of HKD Bleiburg, and Croat émigrés generally speaking, were of course interested in attracting public attention for the Croat cause. The purpose of the commemorations was not just to pay homage to the victims of Bleiburg, but also to draw attention to what they saw as the systematic violation of the human rights of Croats in Yugoslavia. The émigrés wanted to rally international support for Croats and Croatian independence, and in November 1985 Petar Miloš encouraged his comrades to join Amnesty International.⁵¹ Given that these matters were overtly political, the Austrian authorities, however, took a bleak view towards them. In the specific case of the 1985 commemoration, the Croats in Austria tried to force the hand of the authorities by scheduling a press conference in Vienna in conjunction with the commemoration.⁵² In the view of the SID, a press conference would be “an escalation of the whole thing. ... We believe that it should be insisted to the Austrians through the Embassy in Vienna that the organizing of a press conference be thwarted.”⁵³

Right up until the commemoration, the SID feared that the press conference would nonetheless proceed.⁵⁴ On 23 April 1985, the émigré organization *Hrvatsko podporno i prosvjetno društvo Matija Gubec* (Croatian Support and Educational Society Matija Gubec) from Klagenfurt distributed a flyer announcing that a press conference would be held on 13 May in Vienna.⁵⁵ However, on 9 May the Federal Police Directorate in Vienna wrote to Georg Aschner (aka Milivoj Ašner) – an émigré who was also a notorious former Ustasha police chief suspected of war crimes – and informed him that the press conference was banned.⁵⁶ It is worth noting that

⁵⁰ SSUP SDB(?), Ustasha Emigration Held Traditional Commemoration of “Bleiburg Victims” in Bleiburg in Austria, 31 May 1985, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

⁵¹ SSUP SDB, Commemoration in Bleiburg, 3 December 1985, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132. DSC_0112. At this time, the Yugoslav authorities regarded Amnesty International as a hostile organization. SSUP, Administration for Investigation, Analysis and Information, Anti-Yugoslav Activity of Amnesty International, 26 July 1984, ARS, f. 1931, šk. 2325.

⁵² SSIP SID, Security Information: Agreement of V. Cecelja, M. Ašner and P. Miloš Regarding the Demonstration in Bleiburg, 27 April 1985, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

⁵³ SSIP SID, Security Information: Agreement of V. Cecelja, M. Ašner and P. Miloš Regarding the Demonstration in Bleiburg, 27 April 1985, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

⁵⁴ SSIP SID, Security Information: HSS Specifies Date and Time for the Holding of Press Conference in Vienna on the Occasion of Bleiburg, 8 May 1985, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

⁵⁵ *Hrvatsko podporno i prosvjetno društvo Matija Gubec – Landsmannschaft der Kroaten*, Flyer, 23 April 1985, DSC_0082.

⁵⁶ Bundespolizeidirektion Wien, Letter to Dr. Georg M. Aschner, 9 May 1985, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

copies of both the original flyer and the letter from the Federal Police Directorate are located in the archives. These and similar copies demonstrate that the informants of the Yugoslav security services were able to provide relevant documentation on a running basis. The archival holdings in Slovenia also include copies of commemorative pins that were produced for the fortieth anniversary of Bleiburg.

On 11 May 1985, the SSUP SDB was able to relay information from the SID according to which the police in Klagenfurt had explicitly banned all political demonstrations and insisted on a purely cultural event with performances by folklore groups.⁵⁷ The director of the Federal Police Directorate in Klagenfurt Winkler had also demanded that Petar Miloš provide a translation of his planned speech by 25 April and an overview of the entire program. If these items were not provided, so Winkler, the entire commemoration would be cancelled.

In an initial summary, the SSUP SDB characterized the fortieth anniversary commemorations as “casual commemorations” (*prigodne proslave*), which had “occurred within the range of evaluations of the Service”.⁵⁸ On 11 May, a plaque dedicated to “Croat victims” had been unveiled in a church in Klagenfurt, and in the evening a cultural folklore program had been held. The following day, approximately 500 people – “which was a lot less than what the organizer expected” – attended the main commemoration in Bleiburg.⁵⁹ Several prominent émigré leaders such as Mate Meštrović and Mirko Vidović, whose participation had been announced, were absent, which had been commented upon by the attendees. Although the SSUP SDB was dissatisfied with the “extreme” nature of some of the speeches, the measures and restrictions imposed by the Austrian authorities were assessed to be “in accordance with the promises given earlier and [they] completely monitored this demonstration”.⁶⁰ In addition, “the SDB through its operational positions performed a photo documentation of the demonstration, and measures were also taken to transfer this documentation to [Yugoslavia] as soon as possible for operational processing”.⁶¹

⁵⁷ SSUP SDB, “Bleiburg 85” – Measures of the Austrian Organs, 11 May 1985, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

⁵⁸ SSUP SDB(?), Initial Information about the Commemoration of the Ustasha Emigration Held in Bleiburg, Austria, undated (May 1985), ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

⁵⁹ SSUP SDB(?), Initial Information about the Commemoration of the Ustasha Emigration Held in Bleiburg, Austria, undated (May 1985), ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

⁶⁰ SSUP SDB(?), Initial Information about the Commemoration of the Ustasha Emigration Held in Bleiburg, Austria, undated (May 1985), ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

⁶¹ SSUP SDB(?), Initial Information about the Commemoration of the Ustasha Emigration Held in Bleiburg, Austria, undated (May 1985), ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132. A recent study has found that the Yugoslav State Security Service in 1979 possessed 72 “operational positions” in Austria, of which 40 were operatives and 32 were informants (Elste et al., 2015: 16).

By the end of May 1985, the SSUP SDB had composed a more detailed summary of the fortieth anniversary commemorations. They noted the “extensive preparations” that had been designed to make that year’s observation special, particularly in order to “direct the attention of the international public to the ‘Croatian question’ and to bluntly provoke” Yugoslavia.⁶² This year’s broadly conceived demonstration had a special security significance because it concurs with the broader context of pressure on Yugoslavia, as regards among other things the belittling of its contribution to the defeat of fascism. The SSUP SDB pointed out that the commemorations had been billed as a way of asserting “the responsibility of Yugoslavia for the greatest genocide against the Croat nation”.⁶³

The Yugoslav security services of course also infiltrated the HKD Bleiburg and reported on its activities. There was no question of merely relying on the Austrian police to do the job. In this manner, an informant of the SID was able to report that Miloš had subsequently stated that HKD Bleiburg “will not proceed as they have been asked. Namely, they will not tell everything to [the Austrian police] and will do as they please and as such ‘deceive both the Yugo [sic] and the Austrians’.”⁶⁴ The SID also obtained firsthand information about the content and attendees of HKD Bleiburg meetings, including knowledge that the members of the association were deliberately violating the Austrian police’s requirement that meetings be announced to the police in advance and be monitored by the police.⁶⁵ Petar Miloš tried various tactics of obfuscation and subterfuge to circumvent police monitoring of the meetings. However, it seems that most if not all planning meetings were attended by informants for the Yugoslav security services, who dutifully reported on the proceedings.⁶⁶ (Incidentally, some within the Austrian police were also playing a double role, as one of them hoped to use the commemoration to secure extra business for a

⁶² SSUP SDB(?), Ustasha Emigration Held Traditional Commemoration of “Bleiburg Victims” in Bleiburg in Austria, 31 May 1985, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

⁶³ SSUP SDB(?), Ustasha Emigration Held Traditional Commemoration of “Bleiburg Victims” in Bleiburg in Austria, 31 May 1985, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

⁶⁴ SSIP SID, Security Information: Austrian Police Demanded Information from the Organizers about the “Commemoration in Bleiburg”, 5 February 1985, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132; SSIP SID, Security Information: Activity of the Austrian Police Covering the Preparation of the “Commemoration” in Bleiburg, 18 March 1985, ARS f. 1931, RTZ 132.

⁶⁵ SSIP SID, Security Information, Meeting of HKD Bleiburg Regarding Preparations for the Ustasha Commemoration in Bleiburg, 6 March 1985, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132. See also SSIP, Meeting of Members of HKD Bleiburg Regarding Membership Dues, 15 March 1985; SSIP, Security Information: In HKD Bleiburg an Account of Expenses of the “Commemoration” in Bleiburg Was Conducted, 1 July 1985, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

⁶⁶ SSIP SID, Security Information, Session of HKD Bleiburg in Freilassing Regarding Preparations for the “Commemoration”, 8 May 1985, ARS, f. 1931, RTZ 132.

colleague who owned a restaurant in Krumpendorf.) However, Cecelja and others also advocated obeying the rules and regulations set by the Austrian authorities in order to avoid giving Yugoslavia further reason for countermeasures. In this sense, the members of HKD Bleiburg would themselves act to enforce these rules and regulations, and those deviating from the plan set by HKD Bleiburg or those who wanted to hold separate celebrations were identified as “saboteurs”. In the remaining years before the collapse of Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav State Security Service continued to keep a close eye on the Bleiburg commemorations.

Conclusion

There can be no doubt that the Bleiburg commemorations provided a focus for the activities of not just Croat émigrés, but also of the Yugoslav State Security Service. As an annual or semiannual gathering for Croat émigrés a stone’s throw from the Yugoslav border, Bleiburg provided a convenient event during which the guardians of the Yugoslav state could “take the temperature” – easily and with modest expense – of the émigrés’ activities.

As we have seen in this article, Austria and Yugoslavia tended to cooperate in keeping tabs on the activities of Croat émigrés. Suspicious activities of persons of Yugoslav origin as well as incidents such as the theft of weapons or explosives near the Yugoslav border were reported immediately to the Yugoslav authorities by their Austrian colleagues, and restrictions were imposed upon the activities and utterances of Croat émigrés. In the context of the Cold War and Austria’s neutrality, the Austrian state had a strong and consistent desire to maintain friendly relations with all of its neighbours. In 1965, the Yugoslav State Security Service summarized Austrian cooperation as “some kind of oscillation between obligations from the convention on refugees, fulfilment of the clauses of the [bilateral] agreement (to not permit on its territory hostile activity against states of the anti-Hitler coalition) as well as the existing good neighbourly relations with Yugoslavia”.⁶⁷ This remained a fitting description of Austrian attitudes until the fall of Yugoslavia, though a softening of attitudes towards the émigrés was, as noted, apparent in the 1980s. Despite this cooperation, the Yugoslav authorities constantly suspected the Austrian authorities of not only being insufficiently interested in monitoring the émigrés themselves, but in fact even of supporting them. Additionally, the Yugoslav state security service also relied upon a well-developed network of informants in Austria, both among émigrés and among non-émigré Austrian citizens.

⁶⁷ SSUPSDB(?), Report on the Ustasha Emigration in Carinthia, 9 June 1965, 20131105_084345.jpg.

This article is based overwhelmingly on primary sources produced by the Yugoslav State Security Service. We should of course be wary of taking the sources of the Yugoslav authorities in these official documents at face value. These sources provide only one side of the picture, and the people producing the documents had a vested interest in interpreting certain events and actions in a certain way. Like other security services in socialist countries, the Yugoslav State Security Service frequently provoked or even instigated the very types of activities it was trying to suppress or undermine, although not to the extent that apologists for the violent terrorist acts of the émigrés sometimes claim. Exaggerations of the potentially violent intentions of the émigrés by individual agents or chiefs of section or department could also have served as bureaucratic justification of expenses and existence.

The Bleiburg commemorations provide a case study of a long-term operation of the Yugoslav security services aimed at curtailing and suppressing Croat émigré activity. In the course of this operation, the Yugoslav security services made use of the entire spectrum of available methods and measures against the émigrés. Although the cases of Nikica Martinović and the bomb in 1966 show that the Yugoslav State Security Service was willing to use violent means in this struggle, the preferred means remained infiltration, disinformation, provocation and, of course, constant surveillance.⁶⁸

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⁶⁸ On bombings perpetrated by the Yugoslav State Security in Austria, see Omerza, 2011; Elste et al., 2015.

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