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## **CROATIA, AUSTRIA AGREE BLEIBURG COMMEMORATION 'WITHOUT FASCIST INSIGNIA'**

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The speaker of the Croatian parliament and the president of the Austrian National Council, the lower house of the countrys legislature, said on Monday that the annual commemoration near the town of Bleiburg will be held this year, but in accordance with Austrian laws that ban certain symbols of the Croatian fascist Ustasa movement.

[National Council] president [Wolfgang] Sobotka expressed his understanding of the importance for Croatia of holding [the event], said a press release issued by Croatian parliamentary speaker Goran Jandrokovic.

The two presidents agree on showing reverence for the victims of the Communist-totalitarian regime after the Second World War, which must be the focus of the commemoration, and agree that it should not be instrumentalised for political purposes, Jandrokovic added.

Sobotka told reporters on Monday that they agreed that neither side wants or tolerates fascist insignia.

Jandrokovic confirmed that the commemoration would be held in accordance with Austrian laws.

Symbols of the WWII fascist Ustasa movement have often been seen at the annual Croatian right-wing gathering in Bleiburg, which commemorates the tens of thousands of Nazi-allied Croatian troops and civilians killed by Yugoslav Partisans in 1945.

At the Bleiburg commemoration in 2018, Austrian police arrested seven people and filed nine complaints about violations of the countrys law against praising fascism.

Earlier this year, the Austrian Interior Ministry banned the display of two Croatian Ustasa movement symbols – the letter U with a grenade, and the checkerboard coat of arms of the Nazi-backed WWII-era Independent State of Croatia.

The ban came into force on March 1, and the fines for violating it will be up to 4,000 euros, or 10,000 euros for repeat offenders, Austrian media have reported.

The list of banned symbols also includes those of Hamas, the Kurdistan Workers Party, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Turkish ultra-nationalist Grey Wolves organisation. It expands an existing ban on the use of al-Qaida and ISIS symbols.

The Catholic Church in Carinthia in Austria in March rejected a request from the Croatian Bishops Conference to hold an annual mass at the Bleiburg commemoration this year because it said the

event is being used to promote nationalist ideas.

But Jandrokovic has argued that the ban on holding a mass only concerns bishops, and that a religious ceremony could be held by a priest instead.

In May 2016, the Croatian parliament decided to reintroduce state sponsorship of the Bleiburg event after it was withdrawn in 2012 due to concerns that it served to rehabilitate the ideology of the WWII Ustasa regime.

<https://balkaninsight.com/2019/04/09/croatia-austria-agree-bleiburg-commemoration-without-fascist-insignia/>

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