

Commemoration and liberation ceremonies 2021 “Destroyed diversity”

Millions of people were murdered by the Nazi terror regime. About two thirds of the Jewish population living in Europe before World War II, as well as countless Roma/Romnija and Sinti/Sinteza people, fell victim to the Nazis’ racist politics. The racist persecution of the Nazis also included Slavs and other ethnic groups that were considered “inferior”. People with illness or disabilities were denounced “parasites to the healthy body of the German people” and later systemically murdered. The Nazis’ killing-machinery also claimed many victims among those who refused to follow their views, for political and/or for religious reasons. Basically, any person who was “different” in only the broadest sense, was at threat of being marginalised, persecuted, and even murdered. Due to the lack of workforce after the beginning of the war, more and more prisoners of war and civil forced labourers were captured in the occupied territories and deported to the “German Reich”. There were countless camps for forced labourers in Austria. Racist principles were also applied to prisoners of war and forced labourers, and many of them were detained in concentration camps as well.

Mauthausen’s camp system spread over all of Austria’s states, except for Tyrol and Vorarlberg (where the subcamps were part of Dachau concentration camp) and Burgenland. The concentration camps that were part of the Mauthausen complex were never for Austrians only. The prisoners came from **72 different nations**¹. An important factor contributing to survival was knowledge of the German language, as all SS commands were given in German only. Not understanding a command and thus not being able to follow it fast enough was life-threatening to the prisoners. Moreover, solidarity amongst one mostly national group could increase the chances of survival for the individual.

“The members of the SS, clearly suffering from an inferiority complex, and also certain primitive prisoner functionaries were especially brutal towards Jews, intellectuals such as artists, teachers, students, and with the Soviet officers.”

Hans Maršálek

Within the Mauthausen camp system, there was a segregated camp society, divided according to racist principles by the SS. The SS “categorised” prisoners according to nationality, “race”, political affiliation, and reason for arrest. According to the Nazi ideology, German and Austrian prisoners were on top of the hierarchy. They were followed by Northern European prisoners, and then those from Western Europe. At the bottom end of the ranks were those stigmatised as “Jews”, “Gypsies”, and “homosexuals” as well as Soviet prisoners of war and many other Slavic groups of prisoners.

The largest group of prisoners in Mauthausen was “political” prisoners and those who were persecuted for racist reasons. The “category” to which a prisoner was assigned determined their chances of survival. For people from certain nations and for certain prisoner categories, Mauthausen was almost without exception a death camp.

¹The counted 72 nations at Mauthausen concentration camp must not be confused with nations that existed back then, nor today. A nation was and still is considered the affiliation to an ethnic group or an ethnicity, regardless of one’s citizenship. For instance, all Soviet prisoners at Mauthausen were indeed Soviet citizens, but at the same time, they also belonged to a nation within the Soviet state territory: Russians, Ukrainians, Georgians, Kazakhs, Belarusians etc. This basically applies to all multi-ethnic states, but also to French prisoners, who were separately recorded as Alsations or Lorrains. The number of nationalities is thus considerably higher than the number of nations whose citizens were detained as prisoners in Mauthausen.”

“The worst living conditions for Jewish prisoners were between the autumn of 1940 and December 1945; the Soviet prisoners of war suffered the same fate between October 1941 until late 1942, and the so-called K-prisoners in the years of 1944/45². Among the rest of the prisoners, those from Spain, Poland, Czechia, Yugoslavia, Italy, and Hungary had to suffer the worst.”

Hans Maršálek

Jewish prisoners, who were among the most discriminated groups in the camp according to the Nazi racist ideology, were forced to work almost without exception at building the camps and they had to carry the stones in the so-called penal companies of the stone quarries. The Soviet prisoners of war, who were officially brought to the “Mauthausen/Gusen labour camp as prisoners of war”, had to work at setting up the “Russenlager” and as forced labourers in the quarry. Austrian and German “criminal” and “political” prisoners had the best chances of survival in the concentration camp. Nearly all other prisoners had virtually no chance at survival in that phase. This was due to constant undersupply of food, medical care, and basic hygiene measures, aside from the permanent abuse.

The total number of prisoners at Mauthausen is estimated to have been more than 200,000. More than 15,000 children and young people, and more than 10,000 women were among the prisoners. There will never be a final number, as countless prisoners were deported to Mauthausen without registration and then simply murdered. At least 90,000 people were murdered at Mauthausen Concentration Camp between August 1938 and May 1945, or they died immediately after the liberation from the effects of their imprisonment. The Nazis’ racial fanaticism also manifested in the numerous forced labour camps and penal camps by the Gestapo - for the most part, all camps were strictly divided according to racist criteria. There were Gestapo penal camps for German Nazi opponents, there were forced labour camps for “Western labourers of German descent” from Flanders, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Norway. Next in the hierarchy were forced labourers from France, Italy, Spain, Czechia, Poland, and Yugoslavia, and at the very bottom there were Soviet (also referred to as “Eastern labourers”) and Jewish forced labourers.

Shortly after the liberation, on 16 May 1945, the survivors of Mauthausen Concentration Camp took the “Mauthausen oath”, to ***follow a common path; the one of freedom - indispensable for every population, of reciprocal respect, of collaboration in the great work of constructing a new world that is free and just for all.*** The concept of human rights was non-existent for the Nazis. With the images of two devastating world wars still clear in the minds of the victims, this concept was put into written form a few years after the end of the war by the International Community as the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” and included in the national constitutions. The development of equality and equal rights for all humans still does not come up to the oath by the survivors of Nazi terror. The establishment of “We against the Others” groups is becoming ever stronger. Marginalisation and discrimination happen daily and are simply accepted by the majority of our society. Racism, antisemitism, sexism, and right-wing extremism are society-wide problems. People are rejected because of their headdress or their sexual orientation, categorised according to their origin or religion, and even classified as parasites or assailants; women are still fighting for equality and against violence.

In the very recent past, more racist incidents than ever before were reported in Austria. Media reports about discrimination, hate crimes and violent crimes have become the new daily normal. We have all started noticing such incidents in our personal surroundings. On top of that, we are faced with permanent baiting and scaremongering. Some people see their prejudices confirmed through this. An increase in racially motivated police brutality, violence, and discrimination against women and homosexuals, right-wing extremist crimes on the one side, are faced with international solidarity movements such as “Black Lives Matter” or “Me too”, which rouse people from their apathy and thoughtlessness. Each and every one of us is called upon not to look away and to help other people - in our analogous as well as in our digital world.

Annex I: Categorisation by the SS

“Protective custody prisoners” (“political prisoners”)

This category includes very different people, namely not only political prisoners in the sense of resistance fighters or

² The SS used the following abbreviations in their prisoner transport files: K = Kugel (bullet); RU = Rückkehr unerwünscht (Return undesirable); NN = Nacht und Nebel (Night and fog, meaning prisoners were made to disappear). The note “K” meant a certain death sentence for the prisoners.

opponents of the regime.

It basically included anyone who did not welcome the NS ideology unconditionally. This group was marked with the “red triangle”.

“Bible students” (Jehovah’s Witnesses)

As early as 1933, the International Association of Bible Students (called Jehovah’s Witnesses today) was banned by the Nazis. The reason for the ban was their refusal to take oaths and commit to military service as well as to governmental organisations in general. This group was marked with the “purple triangle”.

“§ 175” (“Homosexuals”)

People who were persecuted under §175 as homosexuals were close to the bottom of the camp hierarchy and even after the liberation of the concentration camps, they had to face severe prejudice and huge difficulties to be acknowledged as victims of the Nazis. § 175 was also used as a pretext to persecute and imprison many priests in concentration camps. This group was marked with the “pink triangle”.

“Rotspanier” (Spanish Republicans)

After the end of the Spanish Civil War, between 400,000 and 500,000 Spanish Republicans emigrated to France (mostly to Southern France). After the occupation of the Northern part of France by the German Wehrmacht, Heinrich Himmler ordered that all Spanish fighters, even in the so-called “free South” must be taken into protective custody. These mass arrests were carried out with the massive contribution of the French collaborationist government. The first large transport with “Rotspaniern” (engl. Red Spaniards) arrived in Mauthausen on 6 August 1940. At first, Spanish people were very low down in the hierarchy of the camps, with death rates of up to 90%. With time, the Spanish prisoners managed to improve their position, as the only group in Mauthausen Concentration Camp. Their group was marked with the “blue triangle”.

“Civilian workers”

By abducting foreign workers from the occupied territories, the Nazis tried to compensate for the labour shortage caused by the war in the German Reich. Different types of offence at the workplace, such as political activity, sabotage, or sexual contact with Germans (“Rassenschande”; engl. Racial defilement) meant that they would be sent to the concentration camp. The majority of civilian workers at Mauthausen Concentration Camp were from Soviet Union, and smaller groups came from Poland, Yugoslavia or Greece. Like the political prisoners, they were marked with the “red triangle”.

Jews

With the exception of the last few years of existence of Mauthausen Concentration Camp, when a large number of Hungarian and Polish Jews arrived, the Jews were a minority group at Mauthausen. This was not least because they were usually deported to extermination camps to be murdered with poisonous gas, and not to concentration camps. They were marked with the “yellow triangle”. Thousands of them were deported to Mauthausen from the “evacuated” camps in the east; tens of thousands of them were sent on death marches from the Hungarian-Austrian border. The names of only a minority of them were recorded; today, we don’t even know the names of many of them.

“Antisocials”

It was very easy to be branded “antisocial” in the Third Reich: Unemployed people who turned down offered work three times, apprentices who left work without permission, or young people who listened to swing music instead of marching music - many of them were denounced “antisocial”, prosecuted, and then deported to concentration camps by the Gestapo. Just like for homosexuals, it was very difficult for this group, too, to be acknowledged as victims of the Nazis after the liberation. Their group was marked with the “black triangle”.

“Criminals”

“BV” (“Befristete Vorbeugehaft”, engl. precautionary closure)

The deportation to concentration camps of prisoners in precautionary closure happened through the elimination of courts by the judicial police. Precautionary closure - in the language of the Nazis - was imposed on “professional” and “habitual criminals” as well as on those who were “a danger to the public”. Especially shortly after the set-up of the camps, this group produced a lot of the so-called prisoner functionaries who collaborated with the SS. This is one

of the reasons why this group of prisoners is still perceived as solely negative, even though not all of them collaborated.

"SV" ("Sicherheitsverwahrte"; engl. preventative detainees)

Based on an agreement between RFSS Himmler and justice minister Thierack in September 1942, prisoners from the penal system were also brought to Mauthausen Concentration Camp. This was mainly because of the need for additional labour in the arms industry.

The alleged criminal activities of SV prisoners were often also an excuse; quite often, there were political reasons for the alleged crime, such as illicit slaughtering to support partisans. The death rate among SV prisoners was (as opposed to the "BV prisoners") extremely high and sometimes reached up to 90%.

Both groups were marked with the "black triangle".

"Gypsies" (Roma and Sinti people)

The theoretical foundation for the persecution of Roma and Sinti was their classification according to the "Nuremberg laws" as "inferior humans". In Austria, the Nazis were able to draw on existing "gypsy files" that the Austrian authorities had started creating as of 1928. As the claimed "racial inferiority" (even according to Nazi logic) was never clarified, this group was persecuted as "antisocials" and marked with the "black triangle" in the concentration camps. Among the first 300 prisoners who arrived in Mauthausen on 8 August 1938 from Dachau Concentration Camp, there were many Roma and Sinti from Burgenland. They, too, were very much towards the bottom of the camp hierarchy and had very low chances of survival - more than 90% of the Austrian Roma and Sinti were murdered. After the war, the few survivors were refused their recognition as Nazi victims for a long time. Many of them had to face the same prejudices that had existed before.

„SU.Kgf." (Soviet prisoners of war)













On 20 October 1941, Soviet prisoners of war were deported to Mauthausen Concentration Camp. They were recorded in separate files, independent of the other camp administration, and they were interned in isolation, away from the rest of the camp. Out of the 5,333 Soviet prisoners of war that arrived between 1941 and 1942, only about 300-450 were still alive by 31 December 1942.

Over 5,000 more Soviet prisoners of war arrived with other transports in Mauthausen; they received a regular prisoner number in the Mauthausen system. Death rates were very high among these prisoners, too.

As of April 1944, the so-called "Aktion K" ("Kugel", engl. bullet) had at least 4,3000 Soviet officers and sergeants deported to Mauthausen only to be murdered there. The names of none of these prisoners were recorded, and almost all of them were shot. The desperate breakout of Mauthausen Camp by around 500 of these Soviet officers in February 1945 led to the notorious "Mühlviertel Hare Hunt".

Kennzeichen für Schutzhäftlinge in den Konz. Lagern

Form und Farbe der Kennzeichen

	Politisch	Berufs- Verbrecher	Emigrant	Bibel- forscher	Homosexuell	Asozial
Grundfarben						
Abzeichen für Rückfällige						
Häftlinge der Strafkompanie						
Abzeichen für Juden						
Besondere Abzeichen	 Jüd. Rasse- schänder	 Rasse- schänderin	 Flucht- verdächtig	 Häftlings- nummer	<p style="text-align: center;">Beispiel</p> 	
	 Pole	 Tscheche	 Wehrmacht angehöriger	 Häftling Ia		