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**The American Impact on Western Europe:
Americanization and Westernization in Transatlantic Perspective**

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The 'Border Kreise' -
Fostering Democracy in Face of Communism

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Note of the author:

The following text is not identical with the paper presented to the participants of the conference. It is the text of my presentation at the conference itself, maps not included. A short abstract of the comprehensive paper is forwarded for better understanding.

Abstract:

Although the Potsdam Agreement of August 1945 determined the democratization of Germany as a common effort of all allied powers, every occupying power developed its own tasks and ways to proceed in its zone. On the whole, the programs of the western allies had more similarities than differences, especially when seen in comparison with the soviet program. In the period of the Allied High Commission, the programs of the western powers loosened their close connection with the respective zone of occupation. Generally, they adapted to Germany's increased sovereignty. While the expenses of the British and French stagnated or were reduced, the Americans increased their budget until 1952.¹ If we consider the total of expenditure until 1955 regarding money as an appropriate criterion, the Americans undoubtedly undertook the greatest effort in the field of democratization.

After 1952, the American budget was reduced and the Field Organization of HICOG (High Commissioner in Germany) was dissolved, including the most critical institution for German-American relations on a local level - the Kreis Resident Offices. Until that moment, the Kreis Resident Officer (KRO), the successor of the Liaison & Security Officer of the OMGUS (Office of Military Government, U.S.) period, was responsible for liaison, lower HICOG administration, refugees and displaced persons problems, economic and political activities, problems arising at border areas, and most importantly the democratization mission of HICOG.

Like Kreis Resident Office the name 'Border Kreise' was a composed German-American language term. The Americans made abundant use of that name 'Border Kreise' in documents of the OMGUS and HICOG period. Its popularity reflect the very close attention the Americans paid to these areas which had a common border either with East Germany or Czechoslovakia. The direct neighbourhood to communist countries, the many possibilities to cross the border easily without documents, and the close ties between families and settlements in areas (especially between East and West Germany), which were suddenly separated, made the Border Kreise and their population according to American assumptions vulnerable to communist propaganda, but also the first stronghold against the communist influence in the West.

Presentation:

As you might have noticed while reading my paper it is my intention to take a closer look on the impact of civil American offices of the HICOG period on the German political culture at a local level in the years 1949 to 1952.

Intending to match the 15 minutes deadline for a presentation I will not repeat every argument of my paper, rather summarize it very shortly while giving some additional information on this curious Kreis Resident Offices.

¹ Hermann-Josef Rupieper, *Die Wurzeln der westdeutschen Nachkriegsdemokratie. Der amerikanische Beitrag 1945 - 1952* (Opladen 1993), 35f., and Thomas A. Schwartz, "Reeducation and Democracy: The Policies of the United States High Commission in Germany", in: Michael Ermarth, ed., *America and the Shaping of German Society 1945 - 1955* (Providence/Oxford 1993), 35-46, here 40f.

In the time of direct military government in the American zone of occupation (OMGUS) the personnel of local offices of the Field Organization, which had been implemented in every county of the zone to monitor and fulfill intelligence and liaison tasks, worked for the American democratization program increasingly. Therefore Liaison & Security Offices not longer contacted primarily higher intelligence units, they rather worked very closely together with Civil Administration Division, Political Affairs Division, Information Services Division and Educational & Cultural Relations Division. Fundamental principles of the democratization program, which had been formulated by Military Governments on the state level in the year 1947, assigned to the L&S Offices similar functions as to Kreis Resident Offices, later in the HICOG period. Detailed descriptions asked the L&S Officers to choose 'key persons' to initiate actions of the democratization program.² It also included the admonition not to use threats or other pressure to enhance the number of participants. The paper of OMG Bavaria dated May 1947 emphasized

Direct operation and affirmative orders should be avoided when possible even though the authority exists. Utilization of German agencies and accomplishment of results by suggestion and advice are far preferable.³

At the first look the latter demand seems to be contrary to the common practice of American self-praise like in the case of the Marshall Plan aid. In short you could describe that attitude with 'do something good and talk about it'. Considering the behaviour of Liaison & Security or of Kreis Resident Officers this impression has to be modified. Articles in German local newspapers and their own reports to other American units of occupation force show a somehow quite different picture of their activities. Probably you could name it the 'Microsoft way': *Selling a software, without mentioning interwoven, hidden subroutines*. The American share in welfare actions, taking part in programs to build schools, youth centers, or community centers, the feeding of German pupils in school, the providing of books, toys or sportskits, any teaching material, the financing of cultural events like concerts or the Film program were made public, explicitly. While in the case of their impact on the local political culture the L&S- and Kreis Resident Officers tried to keep a low profile. German sensibilities regarding re-education were well-known, one of the manifold reasons why Americans used expressions like re-orientation or community programs to describe their democratization task since 1948.⁴ But verbal modifications did not indicate a change in the

² National Archives (U.S.), RG 260, 390/48/7/4 box 112, Office of Military Government Land Wuerttemberg-Baden (OMGWB), First Military Government Battalion (SEP), "Reorientation Program", 10 March 1948.

³ National Archives (U.S.), RG 260, 390/48/7/4 box 112, Office of Military Government for Bavaria, "Basic Factors affecting Democratization and Decentralization of the Bavarian Government", 19 May 1947.

⁴ The establishment of a Democratization Branch of Civil Administration Division, OMGUS, under Harold W. Landin, previous Director of Civil Administration Division, Office of Military Government Hesse, in 1948 highlighted the development towards a positive program to democratize Germany.

basic principle of the democratization program, which was: try to reach every single citizen in order to awaken individual civic consciousness and encourage the citizen to participate in community life and politics.

By the change from OMGUS to HICOG and the newly shaped American occupation administration the importance of this principle in the democratization program becomes obvious. The Field Organization of HICOG was explicitly designed for democratization measures. As mentioned in my paper, the task of Kreis Resident Officers had been 'to foster and encourage the democratization of the German people'.⁵ Kreis Resident Offices existed in Bavaria, Hesse, Bremen and Wuerttemberg-Baden. At the end of the year 1950, 160 Americans and 882 men and women of local civil personnel had been employed on the level of Land Commissions, amounts that indicate that 30 % respectively 20 % of its personnel belonged to Kreis Resident Offices. In comparison to the total amount of employees of HICOG it still were 8 % of personnel working for the democratization program at a grass-root level.⁶

Personnel assigned to HICOG Headquarters

US employees	1431	Public Affairs Division	142 = 9,92%
Local employees	6282	Public Affairs Division	3345 = 53,25%

Division Breakdown of HICOG Personnel on Land Commissioner Staffs

US employees	524	Field Organization	160 = 30,53%	(at Bremen 2)
Local employees	4374	Field Organization	882 = 20,17%	(at Bremen 11)

The relation between American and local personnel of Field Operation Division had been 1 to 5.5. In Wuerttemberg-Baden every Kreis, in sum 29, had his own Resident Office and a Resident Officer. Two additional Americans on this level either had been Junior Resident Officers in Stuttgart or had been assigned to the staff of the Land Commissioner for supervision.

⁵ Office of the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany, *Kreis Resident Officer Classification Standards Report* (July 1950), 2.

⁶ Guy A. Lee, ed., *Documents on Field Organization of the Office of the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany 1949 - 1951* (1952), Document No. 22 and 23. In addition to the Kreis Resident Officers some of the personnel of Public Affairs Division took part in the democratization program on a local level.

In Hesse there existed 41 Kreise but only 35 positions for Kreis Resident Officers. In this case more than half of the Kreise had been covered by Resident Officers who had been responsible for two Kreise. This structure made at least 29 Kreis Resident Officers in Hesse necessary. Like in Wuerttemberg-Baden there had been some additional Resident Officers, altogether 6, which assisted in bigger cities like Frankfurt and Wiesbaden or worked directly with the Land Commissioner Staff. In Hesse several Kreise (Kassel-Hofgeismar, Witzenhausen, Eschwege, Rotenburg- Melsungen, Hersfeld-Huenfeld, and Fulda) had a common border with East Germany.⁷

In Bavaria the border line had been even longer.⁸ 23 Kreise had a border either to East Germany or Czechoslovakia, 11 Kreise towards East Germany and 13 towards Czechoslovakia with Rehau as the Kreis with a border line to both of these countries. In Bavaria in some cases one Kreis Resident Officer had to take care of three Kreise, which occurred in rural areas of Ober- and Mittelfranken, Niederbayern and Swabia. This structure allowed 84 Kreis Resident Officers to cover 142 Kreise. Here also some additional positions were allotted to cities and the Land Commissioner. As mentioned in my paper, even if a Kreis Resident Officer was responsible for more than one Kreis - in every Kreis existed a Kreis Resident Office with some local personnel.⁹

The majority of Border Kreise had been Kreise with a rural structure. Some of this Kreise really had been a little bit out of the way of everything with few infrastructure concerning transportation. The KRO Mellrichstadt once complained that there existed only two streets with pavement in his Kreis.¹⁰ Resident Officers in rural areas adapted democratization measures, often designed by intellectuals for a somehow well educated urban population, to the given conditions. An evaluation of documents of several Kreis Resident Offices¹¹ seems to indicate that KROs in Border Kreise preferred decentralized activities.

⁷ A map of Land Hesse - Kreis Resident Officer, Administrative Districts, can be found in: Guy A. Lee, ed., *Documents on Field Organization of the Office of the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany 1949 - 1951* (1952), Document No. 20.

⁸ A map of Bavaria Field Organization can be found in: *ibid*, Document No. 19.

⁹ These offices were staffed by several German employees like driver, file clerk or translator, including personnel like Reorientation Assistant, Women's Affairs Assistant, and Intelligence Assistant. In the diverse Field Organizations of Land Commissioners existed minor differences in naming these positions but the main duties were the same.

¹⁰ The problem of poor transportation facilities and its negative impact on the democratization program is mentioned repeatedly. Thomas L. McMahon, KRO Ebern, stated: "Different interest groups remain apart from one another not only because of their opposing opinions, but because of the lack of transportation to convene together." National Archives (U.S.), RG 466, 250/72/13/3-4.

¹¹ The sample includes the Kreise Coburg, Ebern, Hofheim, Kronach, Mellrichstadt, Naila, Regen, Rehau, Rotenburg a.d.F., Tirschenreuth, Waldmünchen, and Wolfstein.

Generally speaking, the population of urban counties moved towards an event, while in rural counties most KROs highlighted measures which reached towards the population. Many KROs shared the problems of a certain reluctance of the population to participate in democratization activities and the hostile attitude of elected magistrates and sometimes clerical personnel. In urban areas Resident Officers could try to find persons with a positive attitude toward American ideas on democracy for example by newspaper articles announcing that there are plans to create a discussion group on contemporary topics and everyone interested to participate should come to a given place at a date. I do not suggest that this sufficed to establish such a group, but I would like to emphasize that the number of persons which are likely to be interested in such activities had been smaller in rural areas. Kreis Resident Officers often described the population in predominantly agricultural areas as deeply conservative and hardly open to new ideas. But they also faced the problem of few intellectuals, few persons having attended any higher school education, few being able to read or speak English. So, the plain number of persons, which many of the democratization measures tried to reach making them to multipliers of its underlying ideas, had been smaller than in an urban surrounding. The Kreis Resident Officers in rural areas just had to go along with officials, teachers, clergy etc., because there had been few others on which they could rely to run a democratization program in a given Kreis. The border situation and the often quite direct confrontation with communist propaganda urged the Kreis Resident Officers to cooperate with local elites.

In some aspects the conditions in Border Kreise made this cooperation more easy. As quite often mentioned in reports to Intelligence Division, rural police, 'Buergermeister' and civil servants were eager to help in identifying communist influence in their area. The mutual interest smoothed the dealing with a lot of administrative inquiries and it seems that sometimes the cooperation in this anti-communist measures established a basis for further activities. On one hand the close neighborhood to communist areas enhanced fears that the Russians would seek retaliation for participation in American-sponsored programs, if they gain ground in West Germany and therefore some reluctance had to be overcome.¹² On the other hand quite a lot of people in Border Kreise had personal experiences with the conditions in East Germany or Czechoslovakia and looked at the Americans, if not positively and favourable, but at least as much less bad, which increased the readiness to participate.

As mentioned in my paper, there had been a wide range of different kinds of measures, which could be part of a democratization program in a Kreis. Resident Officers in rural areas generally tended to strengthen adult education, town meetings, community activities as a way to get the citizen to work together (street repair, construction of community or youth centers, etc.), decentralized youth activities

¹² HICOG, *Classification Standards Report*, 8-9. Examples for this kind of behavior can be found in the reports of KROs in answer of a survey "Essential Elements of Information: Conditions on the Border Kreise", June/July 1950. National Archives (U.S.), RG 466, 250/72/10/1, e.g. the KRO Bad Kissingen stated, "In the border area the people are genuinely afraid to openly work in a democratization program for fear of reprisals...", July 17, 1950.

and the film program, which had been very popular. In March 1951, the monthly attendance reached the number of 2,000,000.¹³

They also made use of local newspapers and school newspapers, latter often founded by American grants, to announce activities, explain American policies and to 'sell' information on different topics. They tried to find a level to get in touch with the rural population, which also meant that they abandoned sophisticated ideas and referred to very basic information. For example, a lot of Resident Officers in rural areas used quizzes and small prizes for the winner as a measure in their democratization program, following an example for quiz questions in a school newspaper.¹⁴

- . What difference is made between men and women in the basic law?
- . Under what conditions can a policeman make a house search?
- . What are the colours of the Federal Government?
- . What is a citizen?
- . Of what consists the Bundestag?
- . Who can be elected to public office?
- . Who is the owner of the waterways?
- . Owner of the Autobahn?
- . What is the highest penalty in the Federal Government?
- . How many Federal Duties do we have?
- . How many states are in the Federal Government?
- . Who is eligible to vote at the Gemeinde elections?
- . Who is not allowed to vote?
- . What persons is the community council composed of?
- . For what period is a member of the city council elected?
- . How is a Buergermeister in a community of less than 5000 inhabitants elected?
- . Are there more professional than elected Buergermeister in Bavaria?
- . Who has to bear the expenses for local elections?

They also incorporated quizzes and documentaries in a series of 'Heimatabende', which a Resident Officer of a rural area had started and which had been promoted by senior and district resident officers

¹³ For a graphic see: Film Program Attendance Office of Public Affairs, in: Henry P. Pilgert, *The History of the Development of Information Services through Information Centers and Documentary Films* (1951).

¹⁴ National Archives (U.S.), RG 466, 250/72/13/3-4 box Rehau. The questions had been published in the Schoenwald School Newspaper by the Resident Officer of Landkreis Rehau. The winners of the quiz got prizes and publicity in local newspapers.

startled by his success in getting high rates of attendance.¹⁵ Such a 'Heimatabend' started most likely with a German folk song, often presented by a local choir and later an invitation at the audience to join in singing it. A program followed made up by a quiz, music pieces, the showing of one to three documentaries, some discussion about the topics of these films, and more quiz programs. It ended with the singing of some folk songs, again. This kind of mixed feature was very popular and could easily set up without a lot of logistical support. It was normally run by a German employee of the Resident Office and the HICOG film projectionist of the Kreis.

I will stop here, a little bit as sudden as the democratization program of the Field Organization stopped when HICOG had been dissolved. As mentioned in my paper, there had been in addition to the official American democratization program on a local level a hidden support of German non-governmental organizations which were active on the field of democratization and the impact of American non-governmental institutions which did not cease their work. In 1952, Kreis Resident Officers asked if the American democratization had been a success in their opinion, were less negative in their answers than the personnel of OMGUS in 1949.¹⁶

HICOG personnel used several expressions to describe the function of Kreis Resident Officers in the democratization program. One of them, HICOG's ambassador in the Field, had been a very fastidious one.¹⁷ Kreis Resident Officers themselves used the image of a midwife at several occasions. To stay with this picture, one could say that with the end of the institution of HICOG and the dissolution of the Field Organization, the Kreis Resident Officers, like mothers or nannies, looked at their toddlers with mixed emotions, doubting if they really had been grown big enough to leave their area of protection and face the world without helping hands.

¹⁵ National Archives (U.S.), RG 466, 250/72/13/3-4, box 3.

¹⁶ Rupieper, *Wurzeln*, 15f. is providing a list of critical authors. The more positive judgements in the year 1952 are reflected by the slightly positive remark in the last "Report on Germany" of U.S. High Commissioner John J. McCloy: "Obviously, democratic institutions are not so firmly rooted in Germany as they are in countries with longer, unbroken traditions of popular government. There are still some unfortunate authoritarian influences in German life. But the beginnings that have been made in Germany give ample promise." Office of the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany, *Report on Germany September 21, 1949 - July 31, 1952* (1952), 62.

¹⁷ The term was used by high-ranking officials in speeches, articles and even as a title of a publication by HICOG: U.S. Office of High Commissioner for Germany, ed., *The Resident Officer - HICOG's Ambassador in the Field* - (Frankfurt 1951).