

Introductory text to the historical core part of the exhibition

10 October is a day of celebration of the great idea of the right to self-determination of peoples, which unfortunately has not come to fruition in other peace treaties... Therefore, we are now able to celebrate 10 October in the knowledge that we do not hurt anybody's feelings, be it within or without our nation's borders. And when we thank those who remained faithful to Austria and to an undivided Carinthia in 1919 and 1920, in the years of hunger and financial breakdown, much of our gratitude is also directed at the Slovenian Carinthians loyal to the homeland, who, in spite of all temptations, decided in favour of the old Austrian homeland... .

This original quote of Federal Chancellor Schober's welcoming address on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Carinthian plebiscite is now 90 years old. Nevertheless, it accurately characterises the nature of this Carinthian festive day. 10 October is the Carinthian day of self-determination, on which German- and Slovenian-speaking Carinthians have spoken out in favour a common homeland and against national division.

In the 19th century, Carinthia was one of the smaller "crown lands" in the multi-ethnic state that was the Habsburg monarchy.

Austria-Hungary was no "prison for peoples", but a state under the rule of law, which assured equal rights to all ethnic groups.

All nationalities were vying for influence in the entire state and in the provinces.

In the early 20th century, Austria was on the rise, not only as a sizeable economic area but also with regards to the democratic transformation of its institutions. Then, in the summer of 1914, a terrorist attack in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo triggered the end of the old Europe. 105 years ago, on 23 May 1915, Carinthia itself becomes a war zone of World War I, after Italy declared war. 12,000 Carinthian volunteer marksmen face the superior Italian forces.

They succeed in holding the line on the mountain ridges of the Carnic and Julian Alps, until regular troops arrive as reinforcements. In twelve defensive battles at the Isonzo river, thousands of Carinthians die. After the victory at Caporetto, the entire Friuli region, all the way to the Piave river, is occupied by Austrian forces in late October 1917.

However, it is much too late for a turnaround.

The supply situation is catastrophic. Famines break out. The population is weary of war.

The ethnicities of the empire start going their own ways. National catalogues of demands are set up.

Future border conflicts can already be glimpsed.

In November 1918, the multi-ethnic state of the Habsburg monarchy collapses.

In those “crown lands” that are of mixed nationality, the struggle for unity begins. The Slovenian National Council in Ljubljana demands the annexation of large parts of Carinthia into the South Slavic state, and orders their military occupation.

On 11 November 1918, the provisional regional assembly of Carinthia proclaims the annexation of the region into the state of German Austria. In doing so, the Carinthian regional parliament invokes the right to self-determination of peoples. It makes a clear distinction between the German-speaking and the mixed-language parts of the region.

We declare, in the name of the people and the area represented by us, under the right to self-determination of peoples:

The contiguous German settlement area of the former duchy of Carinthia, and those mixed-language settlement areas of this duchy which join the territory of the state of German Austria on the basis of the right to self-determination of its inhabitants and in accordance with the constitution, form a separate, autonomous province of the state of German Austria, under the name “Province of Carinthia”...

South Slavic units occupy many communities in southeastern Carinthia. On 30 November 1918, they cross the Drava and occupy Völkermarkt.

Now, Klagenfurt is under immediate threat.

On 5 December 1918, the Carinthian regional assembly, with the regional administrator Dr. Arthur Lemisch, makes a daring and far-reaching decision. *In the face of the actions of the Yugoslavian forces in Carinthia, which make a mockery of the right to self-determination of peoples, the regional assembly decides to oppose the intrusion of Yugoslavian forces with all our might.*

Ludwig Hülgerth organises the resistance fight as regional commander. Carinthian volunteer units, together with units of the *Volkswehr* militia, liberate large parts of Carinthia within a few days.

More than 20,000 soldiers were involved in the military conflict of Carinthia in 1918 and 1919. This conflict was therefore a regional war of considerable size.

The battles of the turn of the year 1918/1919 direct the attention of an American study commission, which studies problems of future border demarcations in Europe from its base in Vienna, to the Carinthian question. In late January, an American delegation, led by Sherman Miles, tours Carinthia. The American experts, all of them outstanding professionals, try to obtain an objective view of the sentiment amongst the population. Their final report, which will decisively influence the attitude of the American peace delegation in Paris, is unambiguously in favour of Austria.

... From the point of view of national desires, our investigation convinced us that the majority of the people between the Drau and the Karawanken preferred Austrian rule. The outstanding fact is the large number of Slovenes who avowedly prefer Austrian rule, or whose political creed is an undivided Carinthia. ... The Slovene who does not want to be a Yugoslav is a curiosity we should never have believed in had we not seen him, and in large numbers. ...

The Miles commission recommends that the American diplomats adopt the Karawanks mountain range as the future border and argues that the whole of Carinthia should remain with Austria.

Since 22 February 1919, a designated commission of the Paris peace conference attempts to tackle the border question.

Soon, experts of this commission advocate for a plebiscite to be held in the Klagenfurt basin.

The final decision, however, is to be made by the leaders of the major allied powers.

For three months, the situation in Carinthia remained relatively calm. A Yugoslavian attack on 29 April 1919 leads to the second phase of the resistance fight.

Carinthian volunteers and units of the *Volkswehr*, the professional army of the First Republic, fight side by side.

Soldiers from Tyrol, Lower Austria and Vienna are also involved. The Carinthian units do not heed the prohibitions of the federal government. They cross the demarcation line and within a few days they liberate the whole of Carinthia. Particularly heavy fighting occurs at the Karawanks tunnel near Rosenbach and at the town of Völkermarkt. At the same time, the pivotal negotiations take place in Paris. On 12

May 1919, the Supreme Council decides in favour of a plebiscite for the entire contested area in Carinthia. The Yugoslavian delegation protests this decision vehemently. They propose a division of the Klagenfurt basin, without any plebiscite. The American President Wilson, however, insists on holding a plebiscite, based on the judgement of the Miles commission.

The Austrian delegation, led by State Chancellor Renner, is not afforded treatment as an equal partner in the negotiations.

They can only file written petitions. Carinthian interests are represented by Vinzenz Schumy, a bilingual, rural politician from the Gail valley, and by the historian Martin Wutte. As a geographer, he devised all the essential documents of the Carinthian border question, and as a contemporary historian he authored, in his 1922 work "Carinthian fight for freedom", the basic description of this dramatic period of time.

In late May 1919, the Carinthian conflict approaches its climax. On 27 May, the Supreme Council in Paris makes its final decision in favour of a plebiscite regarding the Carinthian question. Almost simultaneously, Yugoslavian troops attack with superior numbers. By 29 May, the regional commander Hülgerth already had to order a retreat. On 30 May, the regional government relocates to Spittal an der Drau. On 2 June, the front in the Lavant valley collapses; Völkermarkt is occupied again by the Yugoslavs.

On 6 June, Yugoslavian forces occupy the regional capital of Klagenfurt and large parts of the Klagenfurt basin. The military resistance ends in a devastating Austrian defeat. Nevertheless, it made a decisive contribution to the Carinthian success on 10 October. The social democratic party leader Otto Bauer, who was the Austrian foreign minister at the time, expresses this clearly in his memoirs "The Austrian Revolution":

After two nice victories, the resistance fight ... still ended in a defeat of our arms.

Even so, it was not in vain. It has significantly influenced the peace negotiations in Paris and thereby contributed greatly to save Carinthia from the looming Slavic, foreign rule.

On the Austrian side, 272 people, amongst them 46 civilians, are killed in the armed conflict.

Two thirds of the soldiers killed are members of the *Volkswehr*. The Carinthian resistance fight is thus the largest military conflict the Austrian Armed Forces have ever fought against a foreign power. On the South Slavic side, 140 soldiers die – only five of them hail from present-day Carinthia.

In remembrance of the resistance fights, the Carinthian regional government establishes, on 4 November 1919, the Carinthian Cross for Bravery or Merit. 17,832 Carinthian Crosses are awarded.

This number illustrates the scope of the involvement of much of the population during the Carinthian resistance.

In June 1919, the situation seems hopeless. Thousands of people flee from the Yugoslavs to the unoccupied parts of Carinthia. Italian troops occupy the railway leading from Villach to St. Veit and prevent the Yugoslavs from advancing further. On 15 June, the allied military commission orders the creation of a neutral zone.

It is not until late July that the Yugoslavs retreat from Klagenfurt.

In the meantime, the exact conditions for a future plebiscite in Carinthia have been defined in Paris.

The plebiscite area is divided into two zones. This a serious disadvantage for Austria. Zone I remains under Yugoslavian administration and military occupation. It is there that the first round of the plebiscite is to be held. Around 70 % of the population is Slovenian-speaking.

On 10 September, Dr. Karl Renner, being the representative of the Republic of Austria, signs the State Treaty of St. Germain in Paris.

Carinthia has to accept a bitter loss of territory. The Kanal valley with the town of Tarvis goes to Italy; the Mieß valley with Unterdrauburg and the community of Seeland is ceded to Yugoslavia. Now, the long wait for the plebiscite begins. Many months pass until the treaty is ratified – it finally enters into force on 16 July 1920. Now, the plebiscite must be held within three months.

Zone I of the plebiscite area remains under Yugoslavian administration during this period of time. It is almost isolated from the rest of Carinthia. Serb soldiers stand at the demarcation line. Their arrogant demeanour as occupiers lets the population's sympathies for the South Slav state dwindle.

As early as 22 August 1919, the Carinthian Homeland Service is founded as non-partisan institution in Spittal an der Drau. It is meant to organise the propaganda for Austria. Its most important mouthpiece is the *Kärntner Landsmannschaft*, a traditional

association. Leading writers and artists enlist in the service of the Austrian propaganda. Massive numbers of pamphlets are printed and clandestinely smuggled into the Yugoslavian-occupied plebiscite zone.

On 16 July 1920, the international plebiscite commission finally arrives in Carinthia. They deem it their most important task to ensure fair conditions for the plebiscite.

Proclamation to the population of the Carinthia plebiscite area!

Before the day of the plebiscite, to which you will soon be called, the allied commission of England, France and Italy has arrived in your midst...

It guarantees that voting rights will be exercised in a free and sincere manner. It cannot allow either pressure before or retributions after the plebiscite.

It will not condone any dishonest manoeuvring, which may lead to a false election result.

It will fulfil its mission in an impartial manner and act with utmost justice in this solemn moment, in which the events demand of you to cast your vote, to the best of your knowledge and belief, in order to designate the state of which you shall henceforth be a part.

*S. Capel Peck
Great Britain
President*

*Charles de Chambrun
France*

*(Prince) Livio Borghese
Italy*

Now, the situation for the Austrians quickly improves. The demarcation line has to be opened.

Thousands of refugees are finally able to return home. The heated phase of the campaign begins. All parties struggle together for the unity of the land.

The Austrian propaganda primarily uses economic and social arguments.

- Austria is a republic with exemplary social legislation.
- Austria has no compulsory military service and will not fight any wars in the future.

- The Klagenfurt basin represents an economic unit. Without the markets of Klagenfurt and Villach, the farmers could not survive.

The Austrian propaganda is consistently bilingual. One Slovenian-language pamphlet summarises the arguments most impressively:

Mi koroški Slovenci ostanimo zvesti naši domovini!

Mi bomo tudi pod Avstrijo v enotni Koroški našljubi materen jezik govorili, Slovenci bomo ostali!

Mi nočemo plačevati za srbski militarizem ...

Mi vemo, da noben človek Karawanke ne more prestaviti. Celovec in Beljak zaprt – to je naša gospodarska smrt!

Srb ogroža našo vero in vzame naše sine za svoje balkanske vojske. Mi nočemo tak konec vzeti! Živeti hočemo! Živeti kot prosti slovenski Korošci v enotni, mirni Koroški! Zato glasujemo mi 10. oktobra zeleno!

We Carinthian Slovenes stay faithful to our homeland!

As a part of Austria, in an undivided Carinthia, we will still speak our beloved mother tongue, we will remain Slovenes!

We do not want to pay for Serb militarism...

We know that no human can move the Karawanks mountains. Klagenfurt and Villach closed to us – this is our economic death!

The Serb threatens our religion and takes our sons for his Balkans wars.

We do not want to end this way! We want to live! Live as free Slovenian Carinthians in an undivided, peaceful Carinthia.

This is why we vote green on 10 October!

Just before the plebiscite, the Carinthia regional parliament addresses its Slovenian compatriots in a solemn proclamation:

In its 66th session on 28 September 1920, the Carinthian regional assembly has unanimously decided that the principles of future regional politics should be reconciliation and justice.

In full knowledge of the responsibility this hour demands, the regional assembly thus declares, in the name of the population it represents, that it intends to uphold the linguistic and national characteristics of its Slovenian compatriots, now and for all time, and that it will care for their spiritual and economic flourishing as diligently as for the flourishing of the German inhabitants of the land. A detailed elaboration of these principles will be arranged with representatives of the Carinthian Slovenes after the reunification.

Many older voters are still illiterate. The voting procedure keeps them in mind: one has to tear apart what one rejects.

The ballots in their sealed wooden boxes are counted in a central location.

The international supervision leads to a valid plebiscite. Three days of uneasy waiting follow.

It is not until 13 October that the result is announced at the Neuer Platz in Klagenfurt, and it is surprising in its unambiguousness. More than 59 % of the voters vote for the plebiscite area to remain with Austria.

The birth certificate of the undivided Carinthia is an unassuming piece of paper. The result of the plebiscite, so gratifying for Austria, is recorded there in English language. The Yugoslavian delegate Jovanović, too, confirms without objection the validity of the plebiscite and its result with his signature.

All contemporaries knew well that the Austrian success is based to a substantial degree on the votes of countless Slovenian-speaking Carinthians.

Accurate analyses of the election have revealed that over 10,000 Slovenian-speaking Carinthians voted for Austria. The plebiscite of 10 October 1920 was thus not a national decision, but a vote against nationalism and for a united Carinthia.

Few people at the time believed in Austria. In other provinces, large majorities voted in plebiscites for the annexation into Germany. 10 October, on the other hand, was a clear commitment to Austria.

Because of this, there was much rejoicing in the federal institutions in Vienna. In a greeting, the presidium of the Austrian national assembly voices its joy most impressively:

... The official news out of Carinthia confirm the victory for the Carinthian cause, which from day one has been an Austrian cause and has remained so until the present day. ...The national composition of the population asked to vote, comprising

*Germans and Slovenes, heightens the moral significance of the plebiscite result. ...
This day marks a great victory for the idea of an Austrian state.*

In addition to such declarations of joy, there were also more thoughtful comments.

Valentin Podgorc, a Slovenian clergyman who had stood on the Austrian side, called for reconciliation. However, he also articulated the expectations of his compatriots.
Now the die is cast after all this bloodshed, after the eruptions of hatred, after all the Balkans experiments! Everything has come to fruition! And now, everything that has happened between the two peoples of this land in the past days shall be forgiven and forgotten.

The 15,000 Slovenes who voted for Yugoslavia also had their reasons, but those who voted for German Austria were in the majority – a parliament of people: this is how the maturity of a people shows itself, when the minority recognises the will of the majority. ...

With joy, the Slovenes take note of what the regional assembly in St. Veit has solemnly assured them on 28 September: that it “intends to uphold their national characteristics, and that it will cultivate their spiritual and economic flourishing as diligently as the flourishing of the German part of the land” – This is all that the German compatriots of this land need to offer them; this is also all that they can offer them. Also, it should be taken for granted that the nations leave this disastrous national discord behind and work together to heal the large, severe wounds of the war and the even more severe spiritual damages, into which humanity has sunk.

Literature:

Martin Wutte: Kärntens Freiheitskampf 1918–1920. Klagenfurt 1985.

Claudia Fräss-Ehrfeld: Geschichte Kärntens 1918–1920. Abwehrkampf – Volksabstimmung – Identitätssuche. Klagenfurt 2000.

Der 10. Oktober 1920. Kärntens Tag der Selbstbestimmung, published by the Carinthian Regional Archive.

Digital, extended reprint of the second edition of 1990. Klagenfurt 2019.

Conception and construction of the historical core part of the exhibition

The historical core part of the exhibition comprises four display walls:

- Wall 1: Collapse of the Habsburg monarchy, foundation of the Republic of Austria.
- Wall 2: The military conflict (Carinthian resistance fight) in correlation to the peace negotiations in Paris.
- Walls 3 and 4: The plebiscite of 10 October 1920 (preparation, propaganda of both sides, result, analysis).

The **screen projections** in walls 2 and 4 each contain around 40 pages, with an average presentation time of 15 seconds, and therefore a total running time of around 10 minutes. They enable the visitors to engage more deeply with the topics of the resistance and the plebiscite.

Contemporary photos, posters and pamphlets convey a living picture of Carinthia's tumultuous years of 1918 to 1920.

They are accompanied by explanatory statistics and graphs, as well as short statements by contemporary witnesses or excerpts from original sources.

On wall IV, visitors can see **statistics with the detailed results of the Carinthian plebiscite** for each community.