

Commemoration with the thematic focus on **civil courage** & presentation of the first Subcamp Stele

Peter Turrini [This No]

This No

which I want to finally say

was thought about a hundred times

was shaped in silence

was never spoken

It burns in my stomach

takes my breath away

is crunched between my teeth

and leaves

my mouth

as a friendly Yes

We are a memorial initiative in the town where the biggest former satellite concentration camp in Lower Austria was situated. Between April 1944 and April 1945 about 14,400 prisoners speaking 38 native languages were unjustly detained here, for racist reasons, or because of their religion or ideology, their political attitude, sexual orientation, sexual identity, or way of life; and 4,884 of them were killed due to direct or institutional violence.

We do memorial work in a town where, beyond that, in the 1930s, Jewish families were deported and murdered, where people with physical handicaps or mental illnesses were displaced and murdered. As a memorial initiative we try to uphold the memory and the dignity of the victims and to stand up for respect, tolerance, and solidarity actively and directly, while vehemently opposing all forms of discrimination, marginalization, and denigration. But doing this as a memorial initiative alone won't be enough.

In a time when wars threaten the global order, when national state populism threatens European and humanist values, when the DNA of authoritarianism – often even the DNA of National Socialism with its murderous ideology – starts creeping in again because we – and I quote the Austrian Federal President – “look for culprits, disparage other people, ridicule and mock those who think differently, stretch the limits, make it OK to utter the unutterable”,

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then we – if we take ourselves seriously as a memorial initiative – we need to be vocal in light of electoral successes and government participations by right-wing populist and extremist parties. But I think, if we all take ourselves seriously and take commemoration seriously, then this applies not only to us as a memorial initiative.

It probably won't be enough to loudly articulate our worries. We need to constructively lead by example, by showing through the way we live our lives the value of diversity and exchange, by reminding ourselves as well as others how enriching open-mindedness and encounters with the unknown can be, that life is possible only through exchange. In a town which profits economically from this exchange and open-mindedness, where one encounters the variety of languages so very often through its visitors, a town where so many immigrants and refugees have found a new home, we will continue our work in the usual way. For us this means not only to commemorate all the discriminated, persecuted, tormented, and assassinated people in the nazi era, but also to create references to the present, to current political events. We are committed to antifascism and explicitly oppose antidemocratic tendencies – all this also in the spirit of the Mauthausen Oath taken by the former prisoners of the concentration camp – and we want to shape the present with respect.

I would like to mention two thoughts from the commemoration in the Austrian parliament last Friday which moved me.

Michel Friedman analyzed that History teaches us that a democratically elected party isn't automatically a democratic party. We always need to be conscious of the fact that the democratic right to vote entails the responsibility to vote for democracy.

The stele which we present today shows that this democratic humanist self-concept can be fragile in all directions, even here with us.

Michel Friedman continues: “If we seriously speak about nipping things in the bud, if we seriously say that respect towards all opinions must reign in a parliament, then I ask myself as a philosopher: Is hatred an opinion or is it solely violence?”

Which reminds me that civil courage begins very early.

In that regard I hope that, in all necessary opposition, our “NO” won't be crunched between our teeth and will leave our mouth as a “YES”

and that our explicit YES for an equitable society won't change into a NO because of self-interest, tactics, overexertion, or cowardice.

Bundesminister für Inneres Gerhard Karner

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear “memorial community“ in Melk,

Here at this site the unreal became reality then.

Millions of murdered people, and many more maltreated, downtrodden, and humiliated human beings at that.

The holocaust is and needs to be a duty for us to remember these persons – to give them back their names and to tell their stories.

These days we remember the liberation from the Nazi terror at many places and sites.

But memorial work mustn't be limited to only a few days and to only a few people!

We have to remember again and again, whenever and wherever the occasion presents itself.

For if memorial work should be successful, it must be wide-ranging and long-term!

Because we still have some tasks before us: only in the last months we had to witness that during demonstrations related to COVID-19 measures people were wearing the “yellow star badge”. In this regard we need to be alert, as a society, but also as individuals.

At the same time, we have already accomplished a few things, too – I'd like to mention two examples:

Last week I had the opportunity to attend the presentation of a film about forced labor in the nazi era in the tank factory in St. Valentin, not far from here. Even if the room was big enough for as many as 600 visitors, a good deal more people had come who wanted to discuss this topic which had been hushed up for a long time.

A few days ago in the former concentration camp of Gusen, the long forgotten twin camp of Mauthausen, I could learn that more than 1000 persons had already applied themselves to help with the redevelopment of the properties which the Austrian Republic had recently purchased there.

These examples show: Memorial work is broadening!

The same is true for Melk, one of the more than 40 subcamps in the Mauthausen system. With the inauguration of the first Subcamp Stele here in Melk we want to reinforce the role of the subcamps in the collective remembrance. Because the nazi terror in Austria didn't only happen in Mauthausen, but in most corners of the country – and also here in this region.

I would like to thank Dr. Barbara Glück from the Mauthausen Memorial for this initiative. But in the same way I would like to thank those who have supported the memorial work here for many years and have made it possible: the international victims' associations, the local

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Mauthausen Committee, Alexander Hauer and his association MERKwürdig, and especially the Austrian Armed Forces.

And today we particularly think of Andrew Sternberg who, as a survivor of the Melk concentration camp, commemorated here with us for many years – and who participates again in the first year after his death in our thoughts.

In his spirit our common task is thus to make the memorial work wide-ranging, open and long-term!

Stiftsgymnasium Melk

**Civil Courage** (Miriam Langthaler)

Dust and sand. In my shoes, socks, eyes. The faint taste of iron in my mouth. The taste of blood. A dull buzzing in my ears. I only heard their insults as if through a thick glass pane. Their blows to my body which was lying on the ground just wouldn't stop. The pain became one single droning throbbing which nearly rendered me unconscious. I already noticed how my field of vision became narrower and braced myself for passing out. Or for dying. I felt how blood was running down my face, warm and sticky, mixing with dust and sweat. Then, as if from afar, I heard a strange voice: "Are you nuts? Leave him alone!" Reluctantly I had to grin. So this is how it felt to fantasize about being rescued at death's door. But then there suddenly was a strong warm hand on my grazed wrist. And that – literally – saving hand was real and not only my imagination. I was still half blind from pain when she pulled me off the street. I had never seen the girl who was standing in front of me. But nevertheless, she had stopped instead of walking on by. Instead of looking away and keeping silent.

Unfortunately, 80 years ago, most people had done just that: turned a blind eye and kept silent. They closed their eyes and kept silent in regard to what happened here in the concentration camp in Melk and elsewhere in the Third Reich. But we made a vow: never again. And that "never again" starts again every day with us. It starts again every day with us when we see the apparent injustice in our world and don't stay silent.

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**TOGETHER** (Miriam, Franziska St., Anna)

Corona 2020;

We are stuck, living in great fear,  
sitting at home, listening closely to the news,  
buying groceries for grandma  
as an escape from the virus.

The situation is dire and yet we are not willing to help others.  
Our love for others keeps us together, political stability can keep us from worrying.

I think back to when things were different, full of danger and dread.

All of Europe at war, ending in victory for none.

Civil courage meant something different back then.

Dealing in packs of cigarettes, sleepwalking at night out of agony,  
there was hope for a better life only because we knew we could count on each other.

To help us all get back up again, we even had to lie for each other.

this was no pleasure, but it was done anyway.

All together in the same boat fighting for survival until the next light of dawn.

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(Teresa Wagner)

Dear audience, today I would like to tell you a story. A story which my mother has always told me.

Some time ago a young man lived with his family in a country where personal opinion didn't count much. All children and young people had to join a youth organization, take part in festive parades, and their weekends were well planned out. The adults had to join a party, and it was best to not give it much thought. But some of them didn't, this young man didn't join the party although he would have had a thousand good reasons for doing it. Because his life and that of his family would have been so much easier. They would have had a TV and a car, he would have been allowed to work as a teacher in a school, they wouldn't have been among the last families to get a telephone in their village. Not everybody would have known that they didn't "belong". But this young man committed himself to his own course, he didn't abandon his principles, he remained true to himself and didn't give up even when it was far from easy, and his life was anything but comfortable.

How does the story end? It has a happy ending: since the end of the dictatorship the young man has led a happy life, and he and his family continue to live a good life today.

The young man in the story is my grandfather. He was one of the few who put up resistance. There were few who dared, but they existed. In National Socialist Germany or, like in my story, in Communist Hungary. Heroes then, and heroes now. They should be our role models and show us how to remain true to ourselves even in difficult times.

I admire my grandfather and all people who stood their ground, who fought for the right cause, who helped the oppressed, who demonstrated civil courage. They demonstrated strength, courage, and willpower, but also honor, because "honor is the true reason for doing something or not. It defines who you are or who you want to be."

I wish that we would all become more like these people, that our fears don't keep us from supporting the right causes, that we can demonstrate civil courage day after day.

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**Civil courage** (Aurelia Erhart)

Civil courage. The courage to advocate human and democratic values, for example: human dignity.

Civil courage. To go to somebody's rescue without sparing a thought about the possible consequences for oneself. To help somebody without the goal of deriving a benefit from it.

Civil courage. To help, to not look away. Selflessness instead of egotism. To act in support of a fellow human, without any ulterior motives.

Civil courage today, an example: A man wants to put his purchase on the conveyor belt at the supermarket checkout, when he drops everything. Two possibilities: I can either kneel down and help the man: "What of it, if I help him? It harms nobody. If I don't help him, nobody will." The others stand around, watching the man narrowly and act as if nothing had happened. Or I keep standing and mind my own business. "Why should I help him, what do I get out of it? Just let somebody else help him." Nobody else gives him a hand, there is no "somebody else". Everybody looks at the man awkwardly picking up his groceries, while he is probably wishing the ground would open up and swallow him whole.

Civil courage during the Second World War, an example: New arrivals must once again take the well-worn path from the train station to the camp. I live where they walk by. Again two possibilities: either I hurry out of the house and try to sneak a piece of bread to one of the prisoners. "I can help. I can at least give one or two men something to eat. Maybe it helps them a little." Or I remain within the safety of my four walls and stay put. "If I go out there and approach "them" and even help, maybe I will be forced to join them. No, absolutely not. It's not worth it. One piece of bread won't make much difference. Why should I put myself in danger for that?"

Civil courage requires bravery. Civil courage cannot be found very often. Not many people dare to take that leap. People fear resisting prevailing opinions. To offer resistance.

What would you do? Stand back and think that somebody else should do something? Or would you take a stand for somebody, risk something, sacrifice something?

Civil courage. A small deed which can achieve great things.

Civil courage. Something that everyone is capable of.

Civil courage. Act, don't look away.



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**Ten Steps Towards a Better World** (Lena Zuser)

Step 1 – Expect the best and yet don't expect anything – from people as well as from poems.

Step 2 – Be fully aware of the past and look ahead cheerfully.

Step 3 – Talk to people, keep learning: who knows, maybe you get a treat.

Step 4 – Learn from mistakes, it won't be easy, but rest assured that whatever you do will be enough.

Step 5 – Scrutinize the majority and think for yourself; it is good to distinguish between obedience and blind faith.

Step 6 – Remain true to yourself always; it is up to you if you do what you think is right or what you are told.

Step 7 – Stand up for the weak, it is your duty; and speak up for those who don't have a voice.

Step 8 – Don't demand any gain, nor honor, nor fame; if you help others, you don't earn a principality.

Step 9 – There are situations when it is better to keep silent, but certainly not if somebody acts unjustly.

Step 10 – The most important thing in this list is, of course, civil courage.

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**A Little Bit of Courage:** (Emma Mössner)

Everything is wrong, everything is cold, everything is different. I am so lonely; I don't feel well. But how do others feel? Do they suffer the same way I do, or maybe even more? No! Always look forward, don't despair. I must think of myself, of the people who are my friends and my family. How do any others even concern me? What have they done for me?

And yet, it would take only a little bit of courage to take the first step. A little bit of courage to elude the pressure to conform and a little bit of courage to see the truth which can change the world. For one drop becomes a wave, the wave becomes a movement, a commotion which spreads even to the furthest corners where resistance isn't tolerated. It all starts out small, and yet there is nobody who possesses a little bit of courage. A little bit of courage to start something big.

Something is holding us back. Fear? We need fear. It keeps us alive, protects us, and can grant us the strength we didn't know we had. It is the very foundation of the courage which drives us to do the right thing. To help the right people, to support the truth. Without fear there is no courage, and without courage there is no change.

All I ask for, all our humanity asks for is a little bit of courage for a drop of hope. A person who stands up and says "No", a person who sets in motion the change, who looks closely and doesn't look away. A person with a little bit of courage: yes, that is what we need.

Ludovic Piron (Amicale de Mauthausen)

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we are at the site of where the Melk Kommando was situated between April 21, 1944 and mid-April 1945. One of the biggest subcamps of the Mauthausen concentration camp system was established right here. Within a year, nearly 15.000 prisoners were subjected to an extremely violent system of dehumanization on a daily basis, and had to perform forced labor, till death, as part of the Quartz project.

This year's thematic focus chosen by the Mauthausen Committee Austria is "civil courage" / "civil disobedience". I have given this notion a lot of thought. If I had to give a definition, mine would be: the capacity to keep a distance from the set-up of a general propaganda, from a majoritarian mindset, from the "spoon-fed", as well as from the urge to act impulsively and mindlessly.

During the Second World War civil courage was certainly: to take risks, to put your life in danger to defend just causes, to help prisoners, to save lives, to defend the greater good along with its conceived ideas. Evade the order and the orders, especially those established by the Nazi authorities. Comport yourself with humanity and promote universal principles.

Apart from the opposition of a few residents of Melk who protested against the brutal treatment of the prisoners by the concentration camp guards, there are – as far as I know – few direct witness reports about civilians who demonstrated courage in Melk. Which doesn't mean that they didn't exist. Probably not in groups, but surely on their own. The more time passes, the more difficult it will become to register them. But I am still convinced that, thanks to historians, we will one day know a little more about them. Only a little more, because most of them will remain unknown to us. One thing is certain: they were a small minority amidst a population largely committed to National Socialist ideas.

Obviously, I need to mention Doctor Josef Sora, the head of the Melk camp's sick bay, of whom we know for helping sick prisoners as much as he could by smuggling in medication, and for supporting the detainees' resistance. When I mention Doctor Sora, I also do so to call to mind the part he played alongside the then head of the district authority Landrat Leopold Convall. Upon the advice of Doctor Sora, Mr. Convall, a proven opponent of the Nazi regime, contacted the Gauleiter of the Nieder-Donau area, so that the latter might intervene with the authorities in the Mauthausen concentration camp. As a result, the inmates of the subcamp in Melk would not be killed in the underground tunnels in Roggendorf, even though the sticks of dynamite had already been put in place. Thanks to that the prisoners' lives were saved.

What have we been doing here in Melk for decades? We commemorate, and we bear witness, using two approaches:

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\*collective commemoration: which we owe to all who were deported here and who died here. I, for one, declared right here a year ago how essential it was for me to honor my grandfather who arrived here on April 24, 1944 (three days after the establishment of the subcamp) and who died here in July of the same year.

\*historical research: In my opinion the historian's work is fundamental, in a different, longer timeline so that the facts are described and analyzed, as they actually happened, whatever the sources are, with that varied structure with which researchers deal scientifically.

In this context I would like to greet Christian Rabl, the chief historian of Melk's Center for Contemporary History, and express my support for the research program which he initiated. This indispensable work concerns the history of the camp, from its establishment to its evacuation, its purpose, its day-to-day operations and what happened to it after the war. Furthermore, it deals with the way the Austrians took ownership of this place – very late, as we know. I am convinced that, while doing their research and studying documents and sources, historians will stumble upon more testimonies of civil courage in Mauthausen.

In our 21st century societies, there's nothing worse than the swift rewriting of facts: each attempt to challenge or criticize an official narrative or history is heavily attacked by using certain stock phrases which exclude any controversy.

This is all the more true in times of social networks, the paradise of definitive statements, where hate is expressed ever more freely, without any kind of filter. On a more global scale the numerous authoritarian excesses, in Europe and elsewhere, must prompt us to do more educational work so that the horror which characterized the everyday life of the prisoners in Melk doesn't happen again.

Unfortunately, the temptation to rewrite History tends to spread a little too dangerously these last years as to not worry.

The past obliges us as much as the present.

Thank you.

Dov Shilony

This is an excerpt from the story of Haim Shilony - Holoshi my father who arrived at the age of 17 and a half at Auschwitz Birkenau in February 1944, and was released at the age of 18 and a half from Mauthausen in May 1945.

Through his story we commemorate all the members of his family who were murdered and who did not get to tell their own terrible stories.

Everyone has a name -

His father Yoel Dov

His mother Gital

His sister Broria

His brother Israel

We will remember what was done and we will never forget.

I WAS A- 12558

Regarding my father Yoel Dov, I learned that he was in a hospital room and it is not known what his condition is. They explained to me how to get there - after the "dark" order in the morning to stand still and not go to work. Then they would approach me to see what the problem is. From my experience I knew that those who did this were beaten to death. My desire to meet my father surpassed all logic.

Even though I was scared, I stayed following the morning order.

Before we got to Melk, I walked in the death march and there two of my fingers froze and pus oozed out of them. I decided that this would be the reason to go to the hospital. The next morning I stood in

the morning order and did not go to work. They called me repeatedly to join and advance, but then I showed my swollen and pus-filled legs and the Germans ordered me to come to the sick room. I met a doctor in the hospital room. The doctor was not allowed to talk to me, so he shouted at me and also said that my father is here and he will hospitalize me so that I can meet him.

All the time, bodies were being taken out of the clinic to the crematorium, but I was only thinking about my father, how we would meet and hug him.

The next day I was hospitalized, the filth was terrible.

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At first they shaved my head, groin and armpits, then I was told to get into a tub with ice water in the month of February naked and then with a hose with a very strong current they washed me. Every drop that hit me was like a knife. The temperature was below zero. After that I received only a shirt. I froze. In the clinic there were bunks on two floors and in each one two people slept. As soon as I arrived I asked where is Yoel Dov? "Who are you?" asked the Heptlings, I answered, I am his son.

Then the prisoner in the bunk told me a few days ago Yoel Dov passed away, he was really here but he gave up on everything and stopped eating. You missed it by a few days.

I felt my heart skip a beat and I broke down tears choked my throat I started to cry. A terrible despair gripped me. In a moment I too will arrive at the crematorium, my heart torn to pieces.

To this day I regret that we did not meet, because I am sure that if he had seen me, he would have received new strength to continue the fight and survive. I lay down on the bunk terribly tired, I was hungry, cold, I was very sick. I wet the bed because of the cold. Whoever wet the bed was punished terribly. At the end of the room were beds with dying people waiting to die, and from there the way was to the crematoria.

Lying on this bed means that you are sentenced to death. I was instructed to lie on such a bed for 24 hours.....

And so I was left in the clinic alone without my father for many days without any treatment. The fingers hurt terribly and pus oozed from them. In the hospital we received very little food, because

we did not work. Once a thin soup, and once a day a piece of moldy bread.

The hunger was terrible and gnawed at me very much, a torture that cannot be described in words.

During the day I wanted it to be night and at night I wanted it to be day.

After many days I was transferred to die in the Mauthausen camp.

Camp Melk was the worst of all the camps I've been to.

You can call it hell on earth.

Here I lost the last member of my family, my father, Yoel Dov.

Because I didn't get to reach him a few days earlier.

### Epilogue

Haim was eventually released from Mauthausen weighing 29 kg. Remarkably, he qualified for relocation to the Land of Israel, went on to serve in the Israel Defense Forces, marry and

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enjoy knowing children, grandchildren and even two great-grandchildren. He always told me "I feel like I won"!

Prey EL MALE RAHAMIM

כנפי על, נכונה מנוחה המצא, במרומים שוכן רחמים מלא אל  
את, מזהירים הרקיע כזוהר, וטהורים קדושים במעלות השכינה  
אבי מצד והן אימי מצד הן, וקרובותיי קרובי כל נשמות  
ושנשרפו ושנשחטו ושנהרגו שהומתו והטהורים הקדושים  
צדקה אתן נדר שבלי בעבור, השם קידוש על ושנחנקו ושנטבעו  
בעל לכן, מנוחתם תהיה עדן בגן, נשמותיהם הזכרת בעד  
החיים בצרור ויצרור, לעולמים כנפיו בסתר יסתירם הרחמים  
משכבותיהם על בשלום וינוחו, נחלתם הוא 'ה, נשמותיהם את  
אמן ונאמר

Ute Bauer-Wassmann: Presentation of the Subcamp Stele in Melk on May 8, 2023

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today the term *Mauthausen* represents the largest former concentration camp on Austrian soil and all its associated crimes, as well as the terror which emanated from there. For thousands of innocent people *Mauthausen* signified to be exposed to unspeakable anguish, arbitrariness, torture, sometimes even death. However, *Mauthausen* couldn't and can't only be linked to a single location in Upper Austria.

With the ongoing war and the ruthless use of concentration camp prisoners in the armaments industry, Mauthausen evolved into the organizational center of a network of more than 40 satellite camps. At the same time Mauthausen itself became an extermination camp for all the exhausted and sick prisoners who had become unusable to the SS and were therefore transported back from the subcamps to the main camp.

Miles and miles of tunnel complexes – which were created by concentration camp prisoners in Ebensee, Sankt Georgen an der Gusen or Roggendorf near Melk so as to transfer armament production sites underground – still attest to that today, even if they are barely or not at all visible. At many of the old sites of the crimes we don't find commemorative monuments or information which would allow us nowadays to make the connection to Mauthausen. To grasp *Mauthausen* means, however, to understand the *Mauthausen System* with all its more than 40 subcamps. To comprehend that the concentration camp crimes reached most of Austria, that *Mauthausen* was situated, so to speak, “on our doorstep”.

This was the motivation for the Mauthausen Memorial's Commemorative Department to launch a project about two years ago, with the goal to develop a visible and recognizable sign which clearly shows how many sites were crime scenes, places of exploitation, misery, and death for concentration camp prisoners. Representatives of local memorial initiatives and experts in different special fields were part of the process to determine the informative content and the composition of such a sign, based on a simple signpost showing the way to Mauthausen. The result is the Subcamp Stele which is presented here today: a four-meter-high stele made of piled-up concrete prisms to locate the crime scenes of the Mauthausen concentration camp system. The stele here at Melk memorial is the first one to be erected, and others will follow.

The Subcamp Stele does not only indicate that the respective site was part of the Mauthausen concentration camp system, but also brings together all the other sites of former subcamps in one spot, as a list without hierarchy, and makes the spatial connections more comprehensible, by showing distances and directions. It thereby becomes easier to



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retrace the concentration camp prisoners' different deportation routes, which often brought them to more than one subcamp.

The repetitive triangular basic design of the Subcamp Stele is derived from the so-called “Prisoner Badges” (Winkel), the colored triangular cloth emblem which detainees had to wear on their clothing. These identifying badges indicated why each prisoner was persecuted by the Nazis, as well as their country of origin. Persons with various nationalities, different biographies, attitudes, and dreams were thus represented in an extremely simplified way, broken down into the lowest (supposedly) common denominator. This determined their place in the camp's hierarchy, their daily life in the concentration camp, as well as their chances of survival. In this stele the clearly defined geometrical shape of a triangle becomes a more diffuse entity, as attempt to address the Nazi terror network by using something measurable – namely, directions and distances. At the same time the stele raises more questions than it can answer: What are these places? Why are there so many of them? Which places are situated in my own surroundings? And finally: Why do so many of them still stay undetected and forgotten? The Stele is a landmark and a signpost, but it doesn't provide definitive orientation. It remains platform for association and discussion.

With the creation of every future stele, additional links and cross-references will emerge, condensing the topography of the crime scenes within the Mauthausen concentration camp system.

As painful as the reason for the creation of the Subcamp Stele may be, it is, however, delightful that this commemorative monument could be developed together with representatives of local memorial initiatives and that the first place of the project's implementation is here in Melk.

At this point we – because I also speak on behalf of my colleague Stephan Matyus –, we would particularly like to thank the memorial initiative MERKwürdig, with Alexander Hauer leading the way, and the Birago Barracks, especially Commander Michael Fuchs, as well as Alexander Lechner, Martin Gruber, and Gregor Bauer who, after all, made it possible that the Subcamp Stele could be erected in this place in this way. Our thanks also go to the planners Wilhelm Luggin and Christoph Wassmann as well as the sculptors Mischa Guttmann and Roman Spiess who with their careful attention to every detail have ultimately succeeded in making something complicated look simple, and something simple look appropriate.

May many more subcamp steles follow at other places, in the same spirit of dedication and commitment to commemoration and warning, and may they spread the demand: Never again! Never forget!