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DOCUMENT_ID: 179140263
DOCNO: 002478
PRODUCER: VIENNA
SOURCE: STATE
DOCTYPE: IN
DOR: 19980319
TOR: 183526
DOCPREC: P
ORIGDATE: 199803191642
MHFNO: 98 0888660
DOCCLASS: U

HEADER
PP RUEAIIB
DE RUEHVI #2478 0781642
ZNR UUUUU ZOC STATE ZZH
MSI2988
PP RUEHC
DE RUEHVI #2478/01 0781642
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 191642Z MAR 98
FM AMEMBASSY VIENNA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5557
INFO RUEHOL/AMEMBASSY BONN 0343
RUEHRL/USOFFICE BERLIN 0033
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 0172
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 0291
RUEHMZ/AMCONSUL MUNICH 0037
RUEHFT/AMCONSUL FRANKFURT 1007
BT

CONTROLS
UNCLAS VIENNA 002478

E.O. 12958: N/A

TEXT
TAGS: PGOV, PREL, PHUM, SCUL, AU
COMBINE: COMPLETE

SUBJECT: WIESENTHAL LETTER ON WAFFEN SS MEMBER GROSZ

(U) SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. PLEASE TREAT ACCORDINGLY.

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

1. (SBU) SIMON WIESENTHAL SENT THE AMBASSADOR A COPY OF HIS OPEN LETTER TO CHANCELLOR KLIMA PROTESTING THE SPONSORSHIP BY SALZBURG CONSERVATIVE POLITICIANS OF AN ART EXHIBITION BY A FORMER WAFFEN SS MEMBER, WALTHER GROSZ. THE LETTER IMPLIES THAT GROSZ' EXHIBITION, WHICH CONSISTS OF PAINTINGS AND SCULPTURE DEPICTING HIS LIFE IN A SOVIET WORK CAMP, IS MEANT AS A COUNTER-EXHIBITION AGAINST A CONTROVERSIAL SHOW ON THE CRIMES OF THE WEHRMACHT THAT IS CURRENTLY ON DISPLAY IN SALZBURG. ALLUDING TO THE INVOLVEMENT OF MEMBERS OF GROSZ' UNIT IN WAR CRIMES

~~FOR~~ COORDINATION WITH ed State

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NAZI WAR CRIMES DISCLOSURE ACT
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COMMITTED AGAINST U.S. POW'S IN 1944, WIESENTHAL'S LETTER ARGUES THAT THE EXHIBITION IS UNACCEPTABLE IN VIEW OF AUSTRIA'S FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. AFTER NEWS THAT WIESENTHAL SENT A COPY OF THE LETTER TO THE AMBASSADOR APPEARED IN PRINT, GROSZ WROTE THE AMBASSADOR AND INVITED HER TO THE EXHIBIT. COMMENT: UNLESS INSTRUCTED OTHERWISE, WE DO NOT PLAN TO RESPOND TO EITHER LETTER, NOR DO EMBASSY PERSONNEL PLAN TO ATTEND THE GROSZ EXHIBITION. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

LETTER TO AMBASSADOR

2. (SBU) AMBASSADOR HALL HAS RECEIVED A COPY OF AN OPEN LETTER FROM SIMON WIESENTHAL AND TWO ANTI-FASCIST ACTIVISTS TO CHANCELLOR VIKTOR KLIMA. THE LETTER PROTESTS THE FACT THAT CONSERVATIVE (OVP) POLITICIANS FROM THE PROVINCE OF SALZBURG, INCLUDING THE HEAD OF THE PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE HELMUT SCHREINER AND THE SALZBURG MAYOR JOSEF DECHANT, ARE SPONSORING IN THE SALZBURG CITY HALL AN EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS AND SCULPTURE BY WALTHER GROSZ, A FORMER MEMBER OF THE SPECIAL WEHRMACHT UNIT WAFFEN SS. THE ART DEPICTS SCENES FROM GROSZ' YEARS OF DETENTION IN SOVIET LABOR CAMPS AFTER THE WAR.

EXHIBIT AND COUNTER-EXHIBIT?

3. (SBU) THE TWO ANTI-FASCIST ACTIVISTS WHO SIGNED THE LETTER TOGETHER WITH WIESENTHAL, ALBERT LICHTBLAU AND WALTER MANOSCHEK, ARE THE ORGANIZERS OF THE CONTROVERSIAL EXHIBITION "A WAR OF DESTRUCTION - THE CRIMES OF THE WEHRMACHT 1941 TO 1944," WHICH IS CURRENTLY ON DISPLAY IN SALZBURG THEY CLAIM THAT GROSZ' SHOW IS A COUNTER-EXHIBITION AGAINST THEIR PROJECT. THE "CRIMES OF THE WEHRMACHT" EXHIBITION HAS BEEN SHOWN IN 25 CITIES IN GERMANY AND AUSTRIA TO DATE AND IS SCHEDULED TO BE DISPLAYED AT THE SIMON WIESENTHAL CENTER IN LOS ANGELES, AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY, AND AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO IN 1999. THE EXHIBITION HAS BEEN CRITICIZED BY WORLD WAR II VETERANS WHO PROTESTED THE ALLEGATIONS OF THE WEHRMACHT'S INVOLVEMENT IN WAR CRIMES.

GROSZ' SERVICE IN WAFFEN SS

4. (SBU) THE SIGNATORIES OF THE LETTER TO KLIMA SENT A COPY TO AMBASSADOR HALL (AND TO THE BELGIAN AMBASSADOR), SAYING THAT THE LETTER "ALSO DEALS WITH CRIMES OF THE WAFFEN SS AGAINST AMERICAN POW'S." ACCORDING TO THE LETTER, GROSZ SERVED IN THE FIRST WAFFEN SS PANZER DIVISION "LEIBSTANDARTE SS ADOLF HITLER." MEMBERS OF THAT DIVISION KILLED 71 AMERICAN POW'S AND 93 BELGIAN CIVILIANS IN THE BELGIAN TOWN OF MALMEDY IN DECEMBER 1944. THE SIGNATORIES OF THE LETTER STRESS, HOWEVER, THAT THEY DO NOT ACCUSE GROSZ OF PERSONAL CO-RESPONSIBILITY FOR WAR CRIMES. THEY CRITICIZE HIM FOR NOT DISTANCING HIMSELF FROM HIS VOLUNTARY MEMBERSHIP IN THE WAFFEN SS AND THE WAR CRIMES OF HIS UNIT. THEY ALSO ASK FOR CLARIFICATION ON

HOW GROSZ COULD HAVE JOINED THE AUSTRIAN MILITARY AND

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ACHIEVED THE RANK OF GENERAL "WHEN A NUERNBERG MILITARY COURT DEFINED THE WAFFEN SS AS A CRIMINAL ORGANIZATION" -- AND, ADDITIONALLY, WHEN THE AUSTRIAN STATE TREATY OF 1955 BARRED FORMER MEMBERS OF THE SS FROM SERVING IN THE AUSTRIAN ARMY. THE LETTER CONCLUDES BY EMPHASIZING IT IS "UNACCEPTABLE WITH REGARD TO AUSTRIA'S DEMOCRACY AND THE FRIENDLY RELATIONS TO THE U.S. AND BELGIUM" THAT GROSZ' EXHIBITION IS BEING DISPLAYED IN THE SALZBURG CITY HALL, AND THAT SALZBURG POLITICIANS, "TOGETHER WITH A LEADING AUSTRIAN RIGHTWING EXTREMIST NAMED OTTO ROSSKOPF," ARE PATRONS OF THE EXHIBITION.

"NEWS" COVERAGE OF THE LETTER

5. (U) IN ITS MARCH 12 EDITION, THE WEEKLY MAGAZINE "NEWS" CARRIED A REPORT ON THE LETTER TO KLIMA, AND ON THE FACT THAT A COPY WAS SENT TO AMBASSADOR HALL. "NEWS" (COMMENT: KNOWN FOR ITS FREQUENTLY-SENSATIONAL STYLE) CHARACTERIZED THE LETTER AS "CONTAINING ENORMOUS FOREIGN POLICY EXPLOSIVE POTENTIAL" DUE TO THE SENSITIVITY "OF THE U.S. EMBASSY AND MOST U.S. MEDIA ON ISSUES SUCH AS THE SS AND WAR CRIMES." "NEWS" MAINTAINED THAT FOREIGN MINISTER AND CONSERVATIVE PEOPLE'S PARTY (OVP) CHAIRMAN WOLFGANG SCHUESSEL HAD TO "ACT NOW, SINCE GROSZ' SHOW, OPENED BY THE OVP PRESIDENT OF THE SALZBURG PROVINCIAL DIET, IS UNACCEPTABLE."

GROSZ LETTER TO AMBASSADOR

6. (SBU) FOLLOWING RECEIPT OF THE COPY OF WIESENTHAL'S LETTER TO KLIMA, THE AMBASSADOR ALSO RECEIVED A LETTER FROM WALTHER GROSZ IN WHICH HE STRESSED THAT THE INTENTION OF HIS EXHIBITION WAS TO DESCRIBE HIS SUFFERING IN THE SOVIET LABOR CAMPS, AND HIS LONGING FOR PEACE AND A RETURN TO HIS FAMILY. HE EMPHASIZED THAT HIS SHOW WAS IN NO WAY INTENDED TO COUNTER THE EXHIBITION ON THE CRIMES OF THE WEHRMACHT. INVOKING PERSONAL AND ARTISTIC FREEDOM, GROSZ ASKED THE AMBASSADOR TO SHARE THESE VIEWS AND "TAKE A STANCE AGAINST COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY AND FOR FREEDOM OF THE ARTS."

COMMENT

7. (SBU) IT IS CLEAR THAT THIS IS A TRANSPARENT ATTEMPT BY BOTH SIDES TO GET THE EMBASSY TO LEAP INTO A POLITICAL FEUD IN SALZBURG. WE ARE PERSUADED THAT CHANCELLOR KLIMA, WHO HAS BEEN VERY COMMITTED TO DEALING FORTHRIGHTLY WITH ISSUES STEMMING FROM AUSTRIA'S NAZI PAST IN THIS 60TH ANNIVERSARY MONTH OF THE NAZI TAKEOVER OF AUSTRIA, WILL BE ABLE TO HANDLE THIS WITHOUT US REACTING PUBLICLY. IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT WIESENTHAL ABSTAINED FROM ACCUSING GROSZ OF ANY PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR WAR CRIMES-- ALTHOUGH THE FACT THAT HE VOLUNTARILY JOINED THE WAFFEN SS, WHICH GROSZ ACKNOWLEDGED IN HIS LETTER TO THE AMBASSADOR, HAS BEEN THE SOURCE OF MUCH CRITICISM. WE ARE ALSO INTERESTED IN THE LEGAL ASPECTS OF HOW HE WAS ABLE TO JOIN THE AUSTRIAN MILITARY, AND WILL FOLLOW UP WITH LOCAL EXPERTS.

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8. (SBU) UNLESS INSTRUCTED OTHERWISE, WE DO NOT PLAN TO RESPOND TO EITHER THE WIESENTHAL OR GROSZ LETTER, NOR DO EMBASSY PERSONNEL PLAN TO ATTEND THE GROSZ EXHIBITION. WE HAVE NO PLAN TO COMMENT ON THE LETTERS UNLESS PRESSED (WHICH SEEMS UNLIKELY, SINCE WE HAVE NOT GOTTEN QUESTIONS TO DATE), BUT WOULD IN ANY CASE CONFINE OUR RESPONSE TO NOTING THAT AS WE HAVE NOT SEEN THE EXHIBITION IN QUESTION, WE DO NOT PLAN TO MAKE ANY SUBSTANTIVE COMMENT.
DETHOMAS

ADMIN
END OF MESSAGE

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