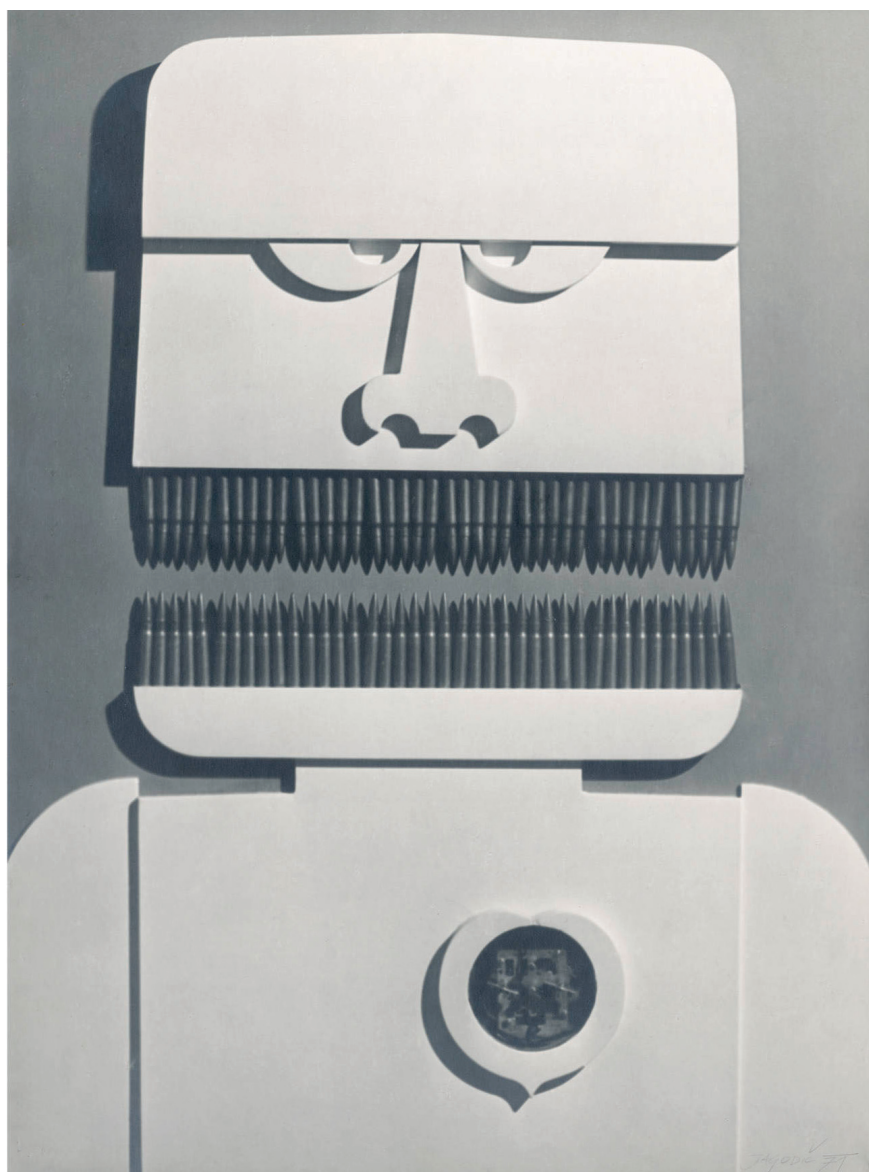


Peace Policies and Practices in Yugoslavia and Beyond



PEACE, UNCONDITIONAL!

Edited by
Sanja Petrović Todosijević and Martin Pogačar

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Belgrade, Ljubljana
2025

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Non-State Actors as Active Agents of Peace in Cold War Europe***

Abstract The chapter explores grassroots peacebuilding efforts in the mid-1960s and 1970s, focusing on the Yugoslav veterans' association and the International Firefighting Association (CTIF). It highlights the roles of members from non-aligned Yugoslavia, neutral Austria and the Yugoslav-Norwegian Friendship Society in promoting peace, solidarity, disarmament and efforts to transcend Cold War divisions. Yugoslav veterans contributed to the founding and development of the World Veterans Federation, which held its pivotal meeting in Rome in 1971. The principles established there on European politics, safety and cooperation were later incorporated in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. The Yugoslav Firefighting Organisation also advocated for peace. Although CTIF's Firefighting Olympics, launched in the early 1960s, initially included only Western European participants, Yugoslavia was a notable exception. The 1966 and 1969 Olympics, held in Yugoslavia and Austria, marked the first time Eastern European volunteer firefighters could take part, fostering East-West engagement through civic exchange.

Keywords SUBNOR, Yugoslav-Norwegian Friendship Society, firefighters, CTIF, neutrality, non-alignment



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Introduction

After the Second World War, the society found itself, on the one hand, in a landscape shaped by lingering post-war violence and unresolved conflicts, while on the other, new peace societies were being (re-)established. In the hard realities of post-war power politics, peace advocates were often portrayed as idealists. With the establishment of the Iron Curtain, “peace” became a contested concept in different geographical and political contexts. But from the 1950s and 1960s, the politics of peace emerged as a result of the gradual convergence between the ideal and pragmatic aspects of international relations.¹ Détente, a period in which the Cold War tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States eased from the late 1960s to the late 1970s, paved the way for a more pragmatic politics of peace among political leaders. The triumph of détente has been attributed to high-level diplomacy, which led to the détente from below. However, this article suggests that both government diplomacy (top-down diplomacy) and cooperation between non-state actors (bottom-up diplomacy) played a role in establishing and maintaining détente. This chapter focuses on two mass organisations, the Yugoslav Partisan veterans, gathered in the Federation of Veteran Associations of the People’s Liberation War (*Savez udruženja boraca narodnooslobodilačkog rata*, SUBNOR) and the International Firefighting Association (*Comité Technique International de prevention et d’extinction de Feu*, CTIF) in order to highlight bottom-up cooperative initiatives in pursuing peace and cooperation across the Cold War divide. On the one hand, the chapter shows the cooperation between the East and West, and on the other hand, it explores the role and possibilities of neutral and non-aligned states in fostering peaceful cooperation among European citizens.

SUBNOR’s internationalism: Building peace and friendship through cooperation

Veterans’ internationalism

The two total wars in the 20th century profoundly changed veteran mentalities, social standings and political strategies in the postwar reality. Apart from large-scale terror, the Great War offered a transformative transnational experience that involved many international contacts and transfers, linking various categories of war participants by their common needs. Veterans recognized that internationalism, with all its current potential, was becoming a valuable outlet for improving status and well-being and promoting the

enduring international culture of peace and reconciliation. The first international veteran organizations emerged by the mid-1920s, trying to navigate internationalist and pacifist veterans’ actions through the cultures of victory and defeat in Europe and different ideological backgrounds.² Even though the ambiguities of rising militarism and dictatorial regimes contaminated veteran internationalism and its message, the movement remained a notable forerunner in building a post-conflict society based on humanitarianism, solidarity, reconciliation and friendship that went beyond the national borders.³

Compared to the interwar period, the international veterans’ movement after 1945 benefited from the emergence of a widely embraced culture of peace, rising living standards, greater global interconnectedness, and the enhanced exchange of knowledge and technology among nations. These developments transcended the glorification of victory-centred memory, elevating the movement to new levels and fostering a more pragmatic platform for meaningful, far-reaching change on a global scale.⁴ Paradoxically, former belligerents proved to be the pioneers of postwar international reconciliation already in the 1950s. Through the creation and activities of international veteran organizations, such as the International Confederation of Former Prisoners of War (CIAPG) in 1949, which in 1950 became the International Federation of War Veterans Organization (later World Veterans Federation, WVF), as well as through partnership and exchange programmes, civic education and international solidarity initiatives, veterans from the warring countries, like the French and West German veterans, promoted mutual rapprochement, which gradually evolved into an initiative for European unification.⁵ Still, the divide between the East and West, particularly in relation to pro- and anti-communism, remained a major obstacle to further progress. Soon after the war, a new international veterans’ organization – the Federation of Former Political Prisoners (FIAPP) – emerged, bringing together various veteran groups united by comparable wartime experiences, including participation in resistance movements and persecution, as well as a shared orientation grounded in postwar radical leftist ideology.⁶ Later, at its Third Congress in Vienna in 1951, FIAPP was reshaped into the International Federation of Resistance Fighters, Victims and Prisoners

1 Petra Goedde, *The Politics of Peace. A Global Cold War History* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 2.

2 Julia Eichenberg and John P. Newman, eds., “Introduction,” in *The Great War and Veterans’ Internationalism* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1–7; Julia Eichenberg and Natali Stegmann, “Divided by war, united by welfare: the International Labour Organization promoting war invalids’ internationalism,” *European Review of History* 29, no. 4 (January 2022): 590–613; Ángel Alcalde, “War veterans as transnational actors: politics, alliances and networks in the interwar period,” *European Review of History* 25, no. 3–4 (July 2018): 492–500.

3 John Horne, “Beyond Cultures of Victory and Cultures of Defeat? Inter-War Veterans’ Internationalism,” in *The Great War and Veterans’ Internationalism*, 219–220.

4 Ángel Alcalde, “The World Veterans Federation: Cold War politics and globalization,” in *War Veterans and the World after 1945: Cold War Politics, Decolonization, Memory*, edited by Ángel Alcalde and Xose Núñez Seixas (London – New York: Routledge, 2018), 45–46.

5 Jörg Echternkamp, “From foe to friend? Veterans as a driving force of international reconciliation after Second World War,” *Contemporary Military Challenges* 19, no. 2 (June 2017): 49–58.

6 Šmídkal Václav, “The International Federation of Resistance Fighters. Communist anti-fascism, Germany and Europe,” in *War Veterans and the World after 1945*, 17–18.

of Fascism. From 1954, the organization operated under a shorter name, the International Federation of Resistance Fighters (FIR), creating a network of veterans with communist leanings and a clear influence from Soviet politics. Yugoslav veterans participated in founding the organization named the European Federation of Former Partisans in Prague and Belgrade during 1946/47, which agreed to merge with FIAPP in 1947.⁷ However, during the anti-Yugoslav campaign triggered by the Tito-Stalin split in 1948, Yugoslav veteran delegates were expelled from FIR membership in late April 1950. An invitation to rejoin came in the mid-1950s, once Yugoslav-Soviet relations improved, but the Yugoslav veterans chose to participate only as observer members. They ultimately found that cooperation with the network of veterans' organizations within the WVF was more advantageous for their cause.⁸

The WVF, which is now the largest global network of veterans, was founded in Paris at the end of November 1950. Its main goals were to preserve world peace, contribute to the defence of human rights and engage in projects for veterans' rehabilitation and development. In its first year of operation, the organization gained consultative status at the United Nations. The WVF was primarily pro-Western, as most of its financial donations came from the United States. Veteran organizations from Eastern Europe, such as the Soviet Committee of War Veterans and communist-oriented veteran associations like the National Association of Italian Partisans (*Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d'Italia*, ANPI), were not accepted as members due to their orientation towards Soviet foreign policy until the final phase of the Cold War. Consequently, the Yugoslav veterans' organization held a unique position in the international veteran movement. They took part in the founding conference in November 1950 alongside veterans from France, the US, Belgium, Finland, Italy, Turkey and other observers. The Yugoslav veterans hosted the first WVF General Assembly in Belgrade the following year and had one of the six vice presidents from the council members.⁹ The WVF representative regularly attended congresses and assemblies of the Association of War Invalids and the Combatants' Union, which were integrated into the SUBNOR later in 1961.

SUBNOR's focus was promoting the non-interference and non-aligned policy to bridge the gap between the two blocs. SUBNOR was particularly active in the WVF's Permanent Commission for European Affairs, where they advocated for unbiased cooperation with non-WVF members (mainly FIR members) to bring European veterans together for the common goal of preventing revanchism and neo-fascism in Europe and preserving peace.¹⁰ After several years of preparations, the all-European meeting of veterans,

resistance movement participants and war victims was finally held in Rome in November 1971. The conference brought together over 300 delegates from 19 European countries, as well as representatives of 80 national and 7 international veterans' organizations. The attendees discussed basic principles for conducting European relations and international politics and expressed support for further multilateral cooperation, particularly around preserving security. The meeting resulted in a joint resolution named the European Veterans' Appeal document, which became an integral part of the Helsinki Declaration adopted at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in 1975.¹¹ The next conference was held in 1986 in Vienna as part of the International Year of Peace. The focus was on immediate nuclear disarmament, condemnation of terrorism and the development of human rights. In addition to FIR and WVF, CIAPG and the European War Veterans' Federation (*Confédération Européenne des Anciens Combattants*, CEAC) were tasked with devising a plan to promote and disseminate joint resolutions.¹² The latter organization, along with other European international war victims' associations, also held an anti-communist viewpoint. They had their own vision of a united continent and regularly challenged the FIR's legitimacy as a representative of the European resistance movement.¹³ As shown, transnational advocacy networks, such as international veterans' organizations, were not entirely unaffected by the Cold War divisions and political dynamics of the superpowers. However, they were able to establish a convenient communication avenue to pursue a common humanitarian goal, thereby altering the international discourse on peace, cooperation and disarmament among veterans and transferring these ideas to their domestic environments.¹⁴ By speaking openly about their experiences of loss, grief and the long-term consequences of war – experiences often silenced in official state narratives – veterans were able to mobilize individuals to engage with the idea of peace on a more personal level. The emotional power of mass gatherings, amplified by the prominent voices of veterans, shifted the discourse on peace away from abstract hopes for the future toward recognizing the heavy price already paid to achieve it. This discourse was further enriched by paternalistic notions emphasizing the responsibility to secure a peaceful future for younger generations. At the same time, veterans sought to redirect wartime values, such as sacrifice, courage and collective commitment, into a new form of civic motivation, encouraging dedication to postwar reconstruction and labour as a continuation of their service to society.¹⁵

⁷ Ibid., 18–19.

⁸ Archives of Yugoslavia (AJ), Federal board of SUBNOR Yugoslavia (297/I), 1, *Treći kongres Saveza boraca NOR-a Jugoslavije, O radu i zadacima Saveza boraca – referat druga Aleksandra Rankovića*, 27–28. April 1955.

⁹ Alcalde, "The World Veterans Federation," 33–40.

¹⁰ Croatian State Archives (HR-HDA), SUBNOR Croatia, Republican board (1241), 264, Informacija o susretu predstavnika nacionalnih organizacija evropskog pokreta otpora, January 1968; Nacrt pisma FMAC-u povodom projekta pravilnika Stalne komisije za evropska pitanja, 1968.

¹¹ HR-HDA, 1241, 264, Dopis Saveznog odbora svim republičkim i pokrajinskim odborima, 31. March 1972.

¹² HR-HDA, 1241, 263, Drugi svjetski susret boraca, učesnika pokreta otpora i žrtava rata – Beč, 1986, 3. December 1986.

¹³ Šmidrkal, "The International Federation of Resistance Fighters," 28, 29.

¹⁴ On transnational advocacy networks see Kathryn A. Sikkink and Margaret E. Keck, "Transnational Advocacy Networks in International Politics: Introduction," in *Activists Beyond Borders. Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, edited by Kathryn A. Sikkink and Margaret E. Keck (Ithaca – London, Cornell University Press, 1998), 1–38.

¹⁵ For a discussion of the importance of cultural representation and personal conceptualizations of the ideal of peace among veterans and soldiers, with a focus on the Soviet context, see Claire E. McCallum, "We Know What War Is: Veterans, Soldiers, and Military Masculinity in the Soviet 'Fight for Peace,' c. 1955–65," *The Russian Review* 83, no. 4 (October 2024): 548–572.

Contextualising SUBNOR's peace policy

With its million-strong membership at the federal level and branches of the organization in every corner of the federation, SUBNOR was one of the voluntary socio-political organizations involved in preserving peace and stability and enhancing society's defence readiness. From its founding in 1947 until Yugoslavia's dissolution, SUBNOR closely adhered to the policy framework of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY; Savez komunista Jugoslavije, SKJ) and cooperated with other mass organizations. The concept of an extended socialist revolution, coupled with a favourable political environment, made the organization's position unique within the veteran community. Its activities extended beyond typical veteran concerns such as care and reintegration; it was also tasked with mobilizing, promoting the socialist ideology and contributing to the construction of a strong and stable socialist society. Following the introduction of self-management in the 1950s, SUBNOR gained considerable self-reliant space for activities involving memory work, promoting socialist ideology and values rooted in the National Liberation Struggle, advocating for comprehensive socio-material state support, participating in collective actions and daily political life and fostering cross-border collaboration with other veteran organizations.¹⁶

Cross-border comradeships and international connections among veterans began to form a cooperative network in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Following the Tito-Stalin split, SUBNOR's position within the international veteran movement shifted in the 1950s, as reflected in its role in establishing and operating within the WVF. In this period, personal friendships and individual visits transformed into organized trips for veteran delegations, which included meetings, gatherings, gift exchanges and visits to cemeteries and memorials. By the 1960s, cooperation intensified as more members of SUBNOR, as well as entire municipal delegations, began participating, with joint trips abroad partially funded by the organization and municipal budgets. This led to the creation of specialized commissions for international cooperation within SUBNOR at both regional and local levels. The establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement opened new opportunities for mobility and knowledge exchange within an anti-colonial solidarity framework.¹⁷ Cooperation with other veteran organizations reached its peak in the 1970s, involving not only social events and meetings but also joint efforts to commemorate sites of suffering, maintain graves and monuments, publish works on war history and memory,

16 Iko Mirković, *Borci NOR Jugoslavije i njihova organizacija* (Beograd: NIRO Četvrti jul, 1987), 123–128; Tina Filipović, "Borački prioriteti i autoriteti: SUBNOR u lokalnoj zajednici 1970-ih i 1980-ih godina," in *Mikrosocijalizam. Mikrostrukture jugoslavenskoga socijalizma u Hrvatskoj 1970-ih i 1980-ih*, edited by Igor Duda (Zagreb – Pula: Srednja Europa – Sveučilište Jurja Dobrile u Puli, 2023), 125–148; Tina Filipović, "Politička aktivnost SUBNOR-a u 1970-ima i 1980-ima na primjeru općina Labin i Sisak," *Historijski zbornik* 76, no. 1 (October 2023): 153–176; Jelena Đureinović, "Internationalizing the Revolution: Veterans and Transnational Cultures of Memory and Solidarity between Yugoslavia and Algeria," *International Review of Social History* 69 (April 2024): 139–144.

17 Đureinović, 151–153.

organize joint or travelling exhibitions and film screenings on the National Liberation Struggle and create programs to engage young people in promoting anti-fascist values through Partisan marches, celebrations and similar events.¹⁸

SUBNOR's international cooperation was fundamentally shaped by the principles of Yugoslav foreign policy as outlined in the LCY Program and the SFRY Constitution. The key aspects of this cooperation were commitment to non-interference, peaceful coexistence, disarmament initiatives, equitable global socio-economic development and Yugoslavia's vision of non-alignment. The model of self-managed socialism was seen as the optimal approach to overcoming the divisions of a polarized world. A central tenet was the avoidance of imposing one's system or policies on others, a stance made explicit in the LCY Program of 1958, which stated, "Peace requires the peaceful coexistence of peoples and states with diverse social and political systems in the modern era".¹⁹ By the late 1960s, SUBNOR had formed partnerships with over 70 national veteran organizations worldwide. Its closest collaborations were naturally with Partisan veterans from the neighbouring countries (especially Italy, Austria and Hungary), former Partisans in Eastern Europe (mostly Polish, Soviet, Czechoslovak, Bulgarian and Romanian veterans) and veterans of the resistance movements across several European nations (England, Greece, Finland, Denmark, etc.). This also extended to veteran organizations from non-aligned countries, particularly those with a strong anti-fascist orientation or those committed to promoting anti-fascism (Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Mali, India and Indonesia).²⁰

Internationalism was not only a key aspect of the official political discourse but also deeply embedded in the social interactions of regular SUBNOR members. Beyond cultural cooperation and solidarity efforts in the post-colonial world, such as the collaboration between SUBNOR and the Algerian veterans of the War of Liberation,²¹ Yugoslav veterans felt the practical effects of internationalism through direct, face-to-face interactions in various contexts. For instance, when foreign visitors travelled to Yugoslavia for summer vacations as part of the FIR exchange program in 1961, they were predominantly hosted by SUBNOR. While there were initial difficulties in welcoming Italian guests at

18 *Treća skupština Saveza udruženja boraca NOR Hrvatske* (Zagreb: Republički odbor SUBNOR SRH, 1969), 62–64; *Sedmi kongres SUBNOR Jugoslavije: Zagreb 19, 20. i 21. jun 1974* (Zagreb: SUBNOR Jugoslavije, 1974), 39; HR-HDA, 1241, 263, Zapisnik sa sjednice Komisije za međunarodnu suradnju i veze RO SUBNOR SR Hrvatske, 20 December 1971.

19 *Program Saveza komunista Jugoslavije: prihvaćen na Sedmom kongresu Saveza komunista Jugoslavije* (22–26. travnja 1958. u Ljubljani) (Zagreb: Stvarnost, 1965), 78.

20 HR-HDA, 1241, 264, Savezni odbor SUBNOR – Komisija za međunarodnu suradnju i veze: Saradnja SUBNOR-a sa nacionalnim boračkim organizacijama, 31 May 1968; HR-HDA, 1241, 263, Izvještaj o radu Komisije od svibnja mjeseca 1978. do svibnja 1979. godine, May 1979; State Archives in Rijeka (HR-DARI), Coordination board of SUBNOR of the Community of Rijeka municipalities (375), 1972–1989, Suradnja SUBNOR-a ZO Rijeka i SUBNOR-a općina sa susjednim zemljama – Materijal za sjednicu Komisije za međunarodnu suradnju RO SUBNOR Hrvatske, 27 January 1983; *Deveti kongres Saveza udruženja boraca narodnooslobodilačkog rata Jugoslavije, Beograd, 19–20 jun 1982* (Beograd: Četvrti jul, 1982), 43–50; HR-HDA, 1241, 265, Operativni plan rada za 1976, February 1976; Razmjena boraca i invalida između Jugoslavije i Alžira, 8 July 1977.

21 Đureinović, 4–5.

the Rijeka train station due to the absence of a pre-arranged recognition sign, the visit ultimately proceeded smoothly and was filled with engaging activities. SUBNOR members observed that Austrian, Hungarian, French, Polish and Italian veterans were eager to engage in deeper discussions about Yugoslavia's social order and politics. French veterans eagerly sought out locals who spoke French in the town of Crikvenica; a Polish veteran enthusiastically connected with the families of his hosts, and one group even shortened their seaside vacation to embark on a three-day tour of Slovenia to round it off with conversations about self-management with locals from Velenje.²² Beyond the experiences of more prominent mobile groups, such as politicians, experts, students or the military, grassroots socialist internationalism fostered small-scale but widespread international interactions, involving citizen participation and private gatherings, as well as the exchange of ideas and experiences. It could also lead to the creation of new institutions and publications.²³ Yugoslav veterans thus participated in the creation of a new bilateral friendship society that had its offices, personnel, programs, culture and even buildings, as explained in the next section. SUBNOR's international collaboration not only generated a diverse range of publications but also fostered cultural and student exchanges, involving various groups of actors in building transnational connections. Studies on citizen engagement in the development and daily management of local communities have already emphasized the transformative power of voluntary practices in shaping new social relations.²⁴

SUBNOR's international practices offered a valuable platform to showcase the history of the National Liberation Struggle on a global stage, while actively promoting anti-fascist values and the achievements of Yugoslavia's path to socialism. Veterans considered it to be crucial for elevating Yugoslavia's reputation globally and for counteracting the influence of anti-state activities by certain Yugoslav émigrés. The exchange of knowledge and experience in veterans' welfare led to new ideas and practices aimed at enhancing rehabilitation and reintegration programmes at home. Key discussions also addressed the legal definitions and recognition of privileges for different categories of war participants and victims. Topics such as general disarmament, peace-building and collective security were frequently central to action programmes, influencing both bilateral and multilateral veterans' relations. SUBNOR actively contributed to international affairs by supporting anti-colonial movements in Africa and Indonesia, issuing public statements against military junta regimes in Latin America, opposing Franco's dictatorship in Spain, denouncing the rise of neo-fascist parties in Italy and criticizing global bloc divisions and superpower political and military interference in the

internal affairs of other nations.²⁵ In certain instances, SUBNOR's international cooperation resembled public diplomacy, especially in its collaboration with the ANPI, by diffusing ideas and values through international interactions to safeguard the position of the Slovenian national minority in Italy and thus influence both states' interests.²⁶ Collaborative trips and tours often promoted memorial tourism, and, in many cases, veteran cooperation paved the way for the establishment of town twinning.²⁷

From veterans' cooperation to a friendship society

An unusual avenue of international cooperation emerged through the cultivation of mutual friendship rooted in shared memories of wartime suffering, exemplified by the collaboration between SUBNOR and the Norwegian veterans of the resistance movement. Much like the strong bond between SUBNOR and ANPI, this partnership had a meaningful impact at the local level and opened the door to diverse forms of international engagement. Notably, the initial post-liberation efforts to strengthen the bond between the two nations quickly evolved into the creation of friendship societies in both countries, city twinning initiatives and numerous joint cultural, artistic and educational projects, including scholarships for Yugoslav students in Norway. This cooperation originated from a shared historical narrative of Yugoslavia and Norway's experiences under Nazi and fascist occupation, highlighting the different forms of collaboration with occupation regimes in both countries during the Second World War. Central to this memory was the solidarity shown by Norwegian locals and resistance fighters toward Yugoslav prisoners interned in Nazi concentration camps in Norway between 1942 and 1945. The Norwegian resistance activists and local population provided crucial aid to Yugoslav internees, helping them survive or escape. They smuggled food along work routes, brought newspapers and frontline information into the camps and delivered essential supplies like medicine, accessories and cigarettes. Most importantly, they helped prisoners escape to freedom across the Swedish border, fostering a positive image of Norway and its people.²⁸

22 HR-HDA, 1241, 264, 0805-821/6 Glavnom odboru Saveza boraca NR Hrvatske, 26 April 1961.

23 George Bodie, "Introduction to Everyday Internationalism: Socialist-South Connections and Mass Culture during the Cold War," *International Review of Social History* 69 (April 2024): 3–10.

24 Ana Kladnik, "Local Self-Governance, Voluntary Practices, and the Sinnwelt of Socialist Velenje," in *Making Sense of Dictatorship. Domination and Everyday Life in East Central Europe after 1945*, edited by Celia Donert et al. (Budapest: Central University Press, 2022), 83–109; Ana Kladnik, "A Nation of Joiners, Volunteer Firefighters and Slovenian Nation- and State-Building from Below," *Südosteuropa. Journal of Politics and Society* 68, no. 2 (August 2020): 148–175; Igor Duda, *Socijalizam na kućnom pragu. Mjesna zajednica i svakodnevnica društvenog samoupravljanja u Jugoslaviji* (Zagreb – Pula: Srednja Europa – Sveučilište Jurja Dobrile u Puli, 2023).

25 HR-HDA, 1241, 264, Savezni odbor SUBNOR – Komisija za međunarodnu saradnju i veze: Saradnja SUBNOR-a sa nacionalnim boračkim organizacijama, 31 May 1968; HR-HDA, 1241, 11, Zapisnik Četvrte skupštine SUBNOR Hrvatske, 26 December 1972.

26 Kadir Jun Ayhan, "The Boundaries of Public Diplomacy and Nonstate Actors: A Taxonomy of Perspectives," *International Studies Perspectives* 20, no. 1 (February 2019): 65–66.

27 Borut Klabjan, "Twinning across the Adriatic: history, memory and municipal co-operation between Italy and Yugoslavia during the Cold War," *Urban History*, published online (October 2023): 9–10.

28 Andrija Karafilipović-Redić, ed., *Sjećanja* (Zagreb: Jugoslavensko-norveško društvo, 1983), 30–34; Ljubo Mladenović, editor-in-chief, *Norge – Jugoslavija / Jugoslavija – Norveška* (Bigz – Beograd: Norveško-jugoslavensko društvo – Jugoslavensko-norveško društvo – Beogradski izdavačko-grafički zavod, 1974), 299; Tomislav Dulić, "Among the Hyperboreans: Yugoslav prisoners in Norway 1942–1945," in *Forced Labour in Serbia: Producers, Consumers and Consequences of Forced Labour 1941–1944*, edited by Sanela Schmid, and Milovan Pisarri (Beograd: Centar za istraživanje i edukaciju o holokaustu, 2019), 119–126; HR-HDA, 1241, 263, Izvještaj o međunarodnoj suradnji SUBNOR-a Hrvatske u 1975, 26 December 1975.

After Germany's surrender and until the repatriation of internees in August 1945, approximately 1,500 surviving Yugoslav internees formed strong bonds and friendships with Norwegians. The Norwegian people provided them with clothing, food and other necessities, while the Norwegian government organized various events, including celebrations, rallies, plays, sports matches and concerts with Yugoslav internees as guests. Before their return home, several meetings between the Yugoslav internees and Norwegian activists led to the creation of the Norwegian-Yugoslav Society (NYS) in July 1945. The NYS aimed to foster cultural and scientific exchange, as well as facilitate student and sports exchanges. In the 1950s, personal visits between former internees, SUBNOR members, and Norwegians further strengthened cooperation between SUBNOR and the NYS. Contributing factors to this growing collaboration were the involvement of the Yugoslav embassy in Norway, the lifting of the visa regime for Yugoslavia, the strong diplomatic relations between Tito and King Olav V and the development of the non-aligned policy in Yugoslavia. The renewed NYS held its founding assembly in Trondheim in October 1966, marking the start of its organized work and the establishment of branches in several Norwegian cities.²⁹

In the late 1960s, similar shifts took place in Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav-Norwegian Society (YNS) was founded in 1969 in Niš, Serbia, with the goal of promoting friendship, connections and cooperation between the citizens of Yugoslavia and Norway. By 1982, the Society had expanded to 32 branches across Yugoslavia, with over 6,000 individual members and 44 collective members from schools and workplaces. Many of these members were former internees and their families, many of whom were also affiliated with SUBNOR. The YNS hosted traditional celebrations, gatherings, and cultural and artistic events, often held at the memorial place called *Brdo mira* (Peace Hill) in Gornji Milanovac, Serbia, near the monument honouring fallen Yugoslav internees. By the end of the 1970s, the cornerstone for the modern multifunctional facility, the House of Friendship, was laid at *Brdo mira*. The house stylistically symbolized the fusion of Norwegian and Yugoslav architectural traditions and culture and was used for memorial and commercial purposes, as well as for the needs of the YNS's work.³⁰

These relationships also contributed positively to local communities. Through the efforts of Antun Žuk, a survivor of the Norwegian concentration camps from Sisak in central Croatia, and with the backing of journalist Željko Takač from the daily newspaper *Vjesnik*, who advocated for Yugoslav-Norwegian cultural cooperation, Sisak was twinned with the Norwegian city of Mo-i-Rana in the late 1960s. This partnership, supported by the YNS's initiatives, was rooted in their shared industrial city profiles. To celebrate this

partnership, an exhibition called "Literature of Scandinavia" (*Literatura Skandinavije*) was held at the National Library and Reading Room in Sisak, featuring displays that highlighted Norwegian life, work and literature. Local newspapers in both cities regularly exchanged news and reports about their sister city, with journalist Thor Jacobsen reporting on Sisak. Mo-i-Rana honoured Sisak by naming a street Sisakvegen, and efforts were made to promote Sisak as a graduation trip destination for Norwegian high school students from Mo-i-Rana, offering an alternative to tried-and-tested Swedish or Finnish locations.³¹

During their four-day trip to Mo-i-Rana, the Sisak municipality representatives visited local companies, schools, the city museum, the library and the cemeteries of the internees who had died in the region. The delegation attended the premiere of the Yugoslav film *Valley of Peace* (*Dolina miru*, 1956, France Štiglic) and the opening of an exhibition on Yugoslav literature and souvenirs, which received extensive coverage from local journalists. They also met with Arne Langvik Harsen, a key figure in the Norwegian resistance movement, who played Yugoslav Partisan songs from records and even sang for the guests. Žuk spoke of his deep affection for Norway, which he considered his second homeland, and expressed how emotionally challenging it was to visit the cemetery near Botno, where over 1,500 of his fellow internees were buried. He reaffirmed the "sincere friendship of the Norwegian people toward us Yugoslavs", emphasizing the exceptional hospitality and warmth they experienced during their stay in Mo-i-Rana.³²

The deep friendship among Yugoslav internees who had endured suffering in Nazi camps in Norway was further solidified through Partisan marches held in both Norway and Yugoslavia, as well as through student exchanges. Newspaper articles highlighting Yugoslav-Norwegian cooperation and the visits of Sisak's residents to Norway illustrate the realization of veterans' aspirations for international collaboration, internationalism and mutual friendship. These reports also show that the memory of wartime suffering, closely tied to SUBNOR's ideology, could take on various, less formal and traditional expressions, transcending political and cultural differences between countries. This successful partnership was facilitated by a shared political will that acknowledged the advantages of such a relationship. Moreover, the contributions of individual activists, mainly members of the friendship society on both sides of the continent, in fostering mutual friendship and cooperation that produced long-lasting effects should not be overlooked in future research.

29 Mladenović, 367–369.

30 HR-HDA, Republican Commission of the Socialist Alliance of the Working People (1228), 400, Statut Jugoslavensko-norveškog društva, 8 August 1984; HR-HDA, 1228, 400, Prilog istorijatu jugoslavensko-norveškog prijateljstva, 8 July 1984; Izveštaj o radu od oktobra 1978. do septembra 1982, 1982.

31 "Sisak se bratimi s norveškim gradom Mo-i-Rana," *Jedinstvo* (Sisak), 30 January 1969, 1; "Izložba o Skandinaviji u čast bratimljenja," *Jedinstvo*, 13 February 1969, 10; "Sisačka ulica u Mo-i-Rani," *Jedinstvo*, 6 March 1969, 1; "Kronika Mo-i-Rane – norveškog grada prijatelja," *Jedinstvo*, 6 March 1969, 8.

32 "Bliski prijatelji s dalekog sjevera," *Jedinstvo*, 2 October 1969, 3.

Firefighters' peace competitions and the role of Central European neutral and non-aligned countries

By focusing on firefighters' cooperation, from the transregional to the international level, especially the organization of the Firefighters' Olympics or Peace Competition, organized by the International Firefighting Organization (CTIF), the second section of this chapter investigates the possibilities of neutral and non-aligned states, Austria and Yugoslavia, in bridging the Cold War divide.

Volunteer fire brigades are one of the oldest and most popular volunteer associations in Central Europe. Since their origins in the mid-19th century, they have played an important role in nation- and state-building.³³ While the first firefighting brigades were established in towns, their activities became popular in the rural environment as well, quickly becoming the central point of village life. In the Habsburg Empire, fire brigades were part of provincial firefighting associations, which organized firefighting meetings in towns around the province, also inviting firefighters from around the Monarchy. These kinds of meetings were of utmost importance for the volunteer firefighters as they served as a place for socializing and exchanging new practices and ideas. Even after the collapse of the Monarchy and the establishment of new nation-states, the memory of Habsburg connectedness continued with the cross-border cooperation of voluntary fire brigades. Firefighting associations connected with each other through jubilees, used mainly for socializing, thereby strengthening the ties between residents and firefighters in towns and villages across the new borders.

During and after the Second World War, cooperation among the firefighters was interrupted. After the war, the established ideological boundary between the East and the West was confirmed in a note from the Austrian district firefighting chief to his comrade in Slovenia, reporting that in 1952, during a catastrophic fire in Porabje (a Slovenian-minority province in the westernmost part of Hungary), the Hungarian border authorities had not allowed firefighters to use the hoses that the Austrian firefighters had thrown to them over the barbed wire.³⁴

By the early 1960s, contact between the firefighters along the Austrian-Yugoslav border had grown more vibrant, with their respective associations agreeing on wider cooperation, driven by the desire to help each other in case of accidents and organise joint competitions and firefighting celebrations. In the following years, firefighting newspapers featured titles such as: "Exemplary Friendship between Burgenland and Yugoslav

Firefighters" and "Real Community of Helpers Across Borders".³⁵ One Austrian firefighter wrote, "We build strong bridges from person to person, from country to country, in comradely encounters, in testing strength in competitions, but above all in always helping in the event of an emergency".³⁶ As these new bridges were built between the firefighters themselves, new political bridges followed suit. In 1969, the Austrian and Yugoslavian presidents Franz Jonas and Josip Broz-Tito opened the Friendship Bridge on the Mura River at Bad Radkersburg/Gornja Radgona. By looking at border cooperation from the bottom-up perspective, this chapter suggests that not only national diplomacy and border policy played a role in establishing and maintaining contacts, but also, to the same extent, individuals such as volunteer firefighters.³⁷

The role of non-aligned and neutral countries in the Cold War divide

Pascal Lottaz, one of the leading scholars of neutrality studies, has pointed out that in the first post-Second World War years, neutrality was an unwanted idea, and legal scholars argued that neutrals could not become members of the United Nations.³⁸ However, by the mid-1950s, the concept evolved into three interrelated yet distinct concepts: classic neutrality in the sense of permanent peacetime neutrals that would not join military alliances but might have clear ideological preferences; neutralism as a political inclination to oppose not only alliance-making but also refusing the ideological and morally connotated dichotomy between Western capitalism and Eastern communism; and non-alignment as a term preferred by the recently decolonised states of Asia and Africa plus Yugoslavia to distance themselves from both terms while not committing to the dichotomy either.³⁹

The US attitude toward neutrals and neutralism was at first ambivalent. Some discussed the benefits of a neutral buffer between NATO (established in 1949) and the Soviet sphere, which would include neutralized Germany. The others claimed that the success of neutrality in Europe would indicate that the Soviet Union's talk of peaceful

33 Ana Kladnik, "A Nation of Joiners, Volunteer Firefighters and Slovenian Nation- and State-Building from Below," *Südosteuropa. Journal of Politics and Society* 68, no. 2 (2020): 148–175.

34 Franc Gomboc, *Gasilstvo v Prekmurju: 1873–2003* (Murska Sobota: samozaložba F. Gomboc, 2009), 636.

35 *Gasilski vestnik* 24, 3 (1970), 101; *Die Wehr* 38, 11–12 (1970), 152.

36 *Die Wehr* 37, 7–8 (1969), 81.

37 Ana Kladnik and Čarna Brković, "Peace as a Dynamic Process: Yugoslav Local Practices and International Humanitarian Debates," in *La Croix et l'étoile rouge: humanitaire et communisme au XX^e siècle*, eds. Jean-François Fayet, Marie-Luce Desgrandchamps, Marie Cugnet and Donia Hasler. Genève: Éditeur Georg, 2025, 226–245; Tina Filipović, *Antifascism, Disarmament and Non-Alignment: Yugoslav Partisan Veterans as Agents for Peace*, talk at the Peace History Society international conference (Gwynedd: Gwynedd Mercy University, 26–28 October 2023).

38 Pascal Lottaz, "Neutrality, Neutralism, and Nonalignment in the Early Cold War," in *Neutral Europe and the Creation of the Nonproliferation Regime 1958–1968*, eds. Pascal Lottaz and Yoko Iwama (London: Routledge, 2023), 13–35.

39 Lottaz, "Neutrality," 18.

coexistence was genuine.⁴⁰ 1955 was an important point in international relations. In April 1955, the Bandung Conference was held in Indonesia, promoting neutralism, anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism. In May 1955, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) became a NATO member, and the Warsaw Pact was established in response to its re-militarization. The Austrian State Treaty was also signed, which restored Austria as a sovereign, independent, democratic and neutral state. During the Cold War, Austrian neutrality had different phases; some called it “lukewarm”, while others emphasized the active neutrality policy of the Austrian chancellor Bruno Kreisky (1970–1983) and its importance in building Austrian national identity.⁴¹ By 1985, when Austria hosted the eighth Firefighting Olympics, Austrians were introduced as “the bridge-builders between the East and West”. ... “We Austrians do not feel as members of an eastern country, but as a link from the west to the east and from the east to the west, from the north to the south and vice versa. To put it more bluntly: we are situated right at the intersection of several cultures”.⁴²

While the pro-neutralist forces had limited success in Europe, the Bandung Conference was the first major multilateral conference on economic and, to some extent, security issues outside and without the Euro-American colonial powers.⁴³ Thomas Fischer has pointed out that whereas neutrality was an institution of specifically European origin, non-alignment emerged in African, Asian and Latin American countries. In Europe, the movement was originally represented by Yugoslavia and Cyprus (followed by Malta in 1982).⁴⁴ After the Tito-Stalin split in 1948, the new orientation of Yugoslav foreign policy soon became evident at the level of civic organisations. At the opening of the CTIF Congress in Zagreb in 1955, the president of the Yugoslav Firefighting Organization expressed happiness that “the tension of the Cold War has been easing. ... The perspective of constructive peaceful coexistence has opened up, a principle that the government of our country has persistently advocated and continues to advocate for”.⁴⁵

Firefighters also engaged internationally within the International Firefighting Association (CTIF), which was established in 1900 in Paris. After the Second World War, CTIF started operating again. In 1955, its members were the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, Israel, Japan, the Netherlands, Finland, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, Luxemburg, FRG and, as the only communist countries, Poland and

Yugoslavia. The Czechoslovak Firefighting Association was invited to participate in the CTIF Congress in Zagreb in 1955, and a year later, the Czechoslovak Association was able to renew its membership in CTIF.⁴⁶ In the following years, even more firefighting associations from Eastern Bloc countries and the Soviet Union became members of CTIF. At the congress in Poland in 1957, the socialist countries proposed a peace resolution and the establishment of an international firefighting competition.⁴⁷

In 1960, the CTIF meeting took place in France, where it was decided that in 1961, the Association would organize an International Firefighting Competition in West Germany, in Bad Godesberg near Bonn, the FRG’s capital. The French president of CTIF and the president of the FRG Firefighting Association invited the Czechoslovak firefighting association by saying: “The purpose of this competition is not high performance but rather a manifestation of peaceful cooperation between firefighters of all countries. We would appreciate it if your state sent at least one team to Bad Godesberg. This would primarily emphasize the peaceful efforts of firefighters, whose mission in life is to help in times of need. Looking forward to you joining this peace competition”.⁴⁸ Despite the invitation, the Czechoslovak government was against the participation of the country’s firefighters at the CTIF competition due to possible attacks.⁴⁹ The only socialist country that attended the Peace Competition in the FRG in 1961 was Yugoslavia.

At the second Firefighting Olympics, which took place in the French city of Mulhouse in Alsace in 1963, Yugoslav firefighters were the only participants from a socialist country.⁵⁰ In 1966, the third peace competition took place in the socialist but non-aligned Yugoslavia (city of Karlovac). Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia were the participating socialist countries, each with five teams, while two teams from the Soviet Union participated outside the competition. In Yugoslavia, it was decided that the next CTIF Congress would take place in the Soviet Union and the next Firefighting Olympics in Austria.

In 1969, therefore, the fourth Firefighting Olympics took place in Krems, a town in northern Austria near the Czechoslovak border, which was between 1945–1955 part of the Soviet occupational zone. During the Firefighting Olympics in Krems, the Austrian Interior Minister pointed out that “the volunteer firefighters make a special contribution to working together across borders and views”,⁵¹ underlining their “unifying task in the service of peace, which the volunteer firefighters in the East and West had to fulfil in

40 Jussi M. Hanhimäki, “Non-aligned to what? European neutrality and the Cold war,” in *Neutrality and Neutralism in the Global Cold War: Between or Within the Blocs*, eds. Sandra Bott et al. (London: Routledge, 2016), 21.

41 Erwin A. Schmidl, “Lukewarm Neutrality in a Cold War?,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 18, no. 4 (2016): 36–50.

42 Archives of the Centre for Firefighting Movement (Centrum hasičského hnutí) in Příbrav (CHH Archive), 8. MNZ soutěže CTIF Vocklabruck Rakousko 1985, 21/8/1.

43 Lottaz, “Neutrality,” 20.

44 Thomas Fischer et al., “Neutrality and Nonalignment in World Politics during the Cold War,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 18, no. 4 (2016): 4–11, 9.

45 *Narodno vatrogastvo*, 5–6 (1955), 4.

46 CHH Archive, CTIF 1955–60.

47 CHH Archive, CTIF 1965–1969.

48 CHH Archive, Prehled soutěží CTIF do 1989, 21/A.

49 CHH Archive, CTIF 1955–1969.

50 The first two CTIF peace competitions could also be seen in the light of the postwar dispute resolution between the FRG and France (the Franco-German Treaty of Friendship was signed in January 1963).

51 *Wiener Zeitung*, 3 July 1969.

addition to their day-to-day work of fighting fires and disasters”.⁵² A newspaper article titled “Soldiers of Peace Fighting for Gold Medals” reported that “the Firefighting Olympics in Krems were attended by 14 nations and 104 groups (Karlovac had hosted 13 nations and 83 groups); a total of 1200 firefighters. The highest visitor frequency was recorded on Sunday afternoon when around 30,000 people came to see the firefighting parades on the streets of Krems”.⁵³ Another newspaper reported: “Competitions carry the great idea of international understanding, which knows no borders. ... The days in Krems will be a milestone on the road to peace”.⁵⁴ Austrian President Franz Jonas emphasized the importance of the Firefighting Olympics, “where not only fair competitions were held, but also valuable contacts were made”. Jonas further welcomed Austria’s active role in the international firefighting competition and addressed all participants with greetings from neutral Austria, “which looks forward to people from all nations in the East and West meeting here”.⁵⁵

The role of non-aligned and neutral countries proved to be successful. Following the successful participation of Eastern Bloc countries and the Soviet Union at the Firefighting Olympics in Yugoslavia and Austria, the next event was organized in Brno, Czechoslovakia, in 1973. These competitions were major international events. For example, this was the first time Austrian radio reported, alongside a television team, from an event in Czechoslovakia. Border controls and crossings, as well as customs, were carefully planned. Peace between firefighters from all around the world was the central theme of the competition.

Conclusion

The international arena served as a crucial platform for peace-building and fostering less biased inter-bloc cooperation, offering engaged non-state actors, such as veterans and firefighters, the chance to voice their messages on a global scale. SUBNOR, for instance, played a prominent unifying role within one of the leading international veteran organizations of the time – the World Veterans Federation. Promoting peace within the international community provided an opportunity to draw public attention to specific veteran concerns, such as social inequalities, the dangers of bloc political divisions and armament and the threat posed by neo-fascist ideologies. As illustrated by the example of the Yugoslav-Norwegian Friendship Society, new organizations, cultural expressions and commemorative practices grounded in shared wartime experiences reflect a form of civic resistance to exclusivist narratives and tensions in international relations. In doing

so, voluntary organizations emerged as meaningful agents in articulating and sustaining a language of peace. What is more, on the regional and international levels, firefighters cultivated mutual friendship and cooperation. In these endeavours, as this chapter has shown, firefighting associations from non-aligned and neutral countries played a significant role in bridging the political divide and contributed to the triumph of détente in the 1970s.

The involvement of actors beyond formal political and diplomatic spheres – whether rooted in traditions of cross-border cooperation or transnational partisan solidarity – significantly enhanced the effectiveness of international peace initiatives and broadened public awareness of peacebuilding efforts. These grassroots engagements enabled diverse generations and social groups to actively participate in initiatives where peaceful coexistence and collaboration were not only promoted but practised, helping to embed peace as a lived and shared societal value.

Summary

This chapter explores how veterans and firefighters contributed to peacebuilding and efforts to transcend Cold War bloc divisions in Europe through their distinctive grassroots practices. It centres on the work of the Federation of Associations of Veterans of the National Liberation Struggle in Yugoslavia (SUBNOR) and the International Firefighting Association (CTIF), highlighting their efforts to promote cross-border and international cooperation within a less overtly politicized context. Their unique role is examined in both bilateral and international settings, with particular attention to the collaborations between Yugoslav members and their Austrian and Norwegian counterparts, which underscore the significance of citizen-driven engagement with peace ideals within non-aligned and neutral policies. These initiatives are interpreted as forms of bottom-up diplomacy, grounded in a commitment to peaceful coexistence, mutual understanding and transnational solidarity. Their efforts resulted in new platforms for engagement – such as the Firefighting Olympics and the Yugoslav-Norwegian Friendship Society – which contributed meaningfully to broader processes of détente.

⁵² *Volksblatt*, 3 July 1969.

⁵³ *Landzeitung*, 10 July 1969, 1.

⁵⁴ *Noe. Landzeitung*, 3 July 1969.

⁵⁵ *Landzeitung*, 10 July 1969; *Der Oesterreichische Bauernbündler*, 12 July 1969.

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