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Press release

Platform achieves double legal breakthrough: Bavarian state criminal investigation office Munich starts investigating killings of German refugees on the Iron Curtain in former Czechoslovakia!

Prague, 13 December 2017. The Bavarian state criminal investigation office Munich (LKA München) is starting the investigation of the killings of German citizens on the Iron Curtain in former Czechoslovakia. The respective criminal complaint was filed by the Platform of European Memory and Conscience in August 2016 with the German Federal Prosecutor General. The responsible persons include the last living members of the politburo of the Communist party of Czechoslovakia Milouš Jakeš, Lubomír Štrougal and Peter Colotka. The victims include eighteen-year-old Hartmut Tautz who was killed outside Bratislava in August 1986. This is the first time that Germany is investigating the killings of its citizens abroad during Communism, as well as the first time that high-ranking Communist officials are being investigated by a third country.

In August 2016, the Platform of European Memory and Conscience filed a criminal complaint with the Federal Prosecutor General in five signal cases of killings of German citizens on the borders of Czechoslovakia with the Federal Republic of Germany and Austria during Communism. The German Federal Court has since decided that the cases will be handled by the authorities of Bavaria. In the latest development, the Bavarian state criminal investigation office in Munich (Landeskriminalamt in München) will lead the investigations.

The Platform had researched at least 67 persons responsible for the deaths of the refugees who might still be alive. On the top of the chain of command are the last living members of the politburo of the Communist party of Czechoslovakia Milouš Jakeš, Lubomír Štrougal and Peter Colotka. One of the cases is that of eighteen-year-old Hartmut Tautz who was mauled by Border guard dogs on the border with Austria and left to die without medical help in August 1986.

"We are excited that the Platform is writing legal history", says Dr. Neela Winkelmann, Managing Director of the Platform. "Since 1989, Germany has never investigated the killings of GDR-refugees on the Iron Curtain in the Eastern bloc. Equally, no country has ever prosecuted Communist perpetrators from another country. This means that finally, the invisible borders of the former Eastern bloc are being torn down and justice is becoming more and more a universal value."

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The Platform of European Memory and Conscience brings together 57 public and private institutions and organisations from 14 EU Member States, Ukraine, Moldova, Albania, Iceland, Canada and the USA working in the field of coming to terms with the legacy of totalitarianism on European soil. We represent about 200,000 Europeans and over 1,100,000 North American citizens with European roots.

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The Platform of European Memory and Conscience is an interest association of legal persons founded according to the Civil Code of the Czech Republic and registered by the Municipal Court of Prague under section L, insert 58675. Id.-No.: 72559071

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