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RECONCILIATION OVER THE GRAVES? A GERMAN WAR CEMETERY IN RUSSIA¹ or the German-Russian Reconciliation of Sologubovka

The remains of millions of fallen soldiers still lie in the soil of the former battlefields of World War II in Europe. The soldiers of the Red Army and the Wehrmacht are recovered by Russian and German teams in Kursk, Smolensk, Volgograd (Stalingrad) and Saint Petersburg (Leningrad). The dead are exhumed, identified and reburied on war cemeteries.² One of the war cemeteries is Sologubovka in northern Russia, around 70 km from St. Petersburg.³ 54.247 soldiers,⁴ who fought for the German Wehrmacht, lie on 5 ha, with space for 80.000 graves,⁵ taken care by the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. (German War Graves Commission).⁶

The German war cemetery on Russian territory is not a simple resting place. The dead attacked the Soviet Union, occupied the region of former Leningrad, starved over one million civilians to death and left the land with violence, suffer and pain. 55 years later, in 2000 German official delegations, journalists and the families of the dead arrived in the village of Sologubovka, to celebrate the inauguration of the German war cemetery. The way was paved by signing a war grave agreement between Germany and Russia in 1992. Does the fact, the construction of a cemetery by the Volksbund for the former besieger, in a country of the defenders, such as Russia signify an approach to an understanding between the former enemies? Is a reconciliation possible, if one country celebrates the victory and the defeated country mourns? Does the respect, the humanitarian and dignified treatment of the dead (also of the former “enemy” dead) symbolize a historical dialogue between Russia and Germany?

“Reconciliation over the graves”⁷ is the official slogan of the Volksbund, a non-government-organization, based in Kassel, in the center of Germany. Under this slogan, the Volksbund builds resting places for German war dead, commemorates and acts in educational youth work towards understanding and harmonization after World War II. This essay uses and follows the definition

¹ I would like to thank the following for their support in Germany and Russia: Markus Meckel, Ulla Kux, Stefan Hitzel, Denis Burtajak, Nele Fahnenbruch, Peter Lindau, Peter Päßler, Silvia Börger and Hans-Dieter Heine, Organization of *Ingria*, Father Vyatsheslav, the community in Sologubovka and the church of the Mother in Sphalernaya ulitsa, St. Petersburg. Thank you all for the information, help and the tea! Спасибо!

² The terms *soldier cemetery* or *military cemetery* are used as well. The term *war cemetery* represents the person groups who are buried on these cemeteries: soldiers, female recruits, female military staff, refugees such as elderly people and children.

³ As one of five collective cemeteries in Russia. In total, 813 cemeteries for German war dead, included German POWs are located in the Russian Federation, www.volksbund.de/kriegsgraeberstaetten (accessed August 22, 2016).

⁴ www.volksbund.de/kriegsgraeberstaetten/sologubowka.html (accessed August 22, 2016).

⁵ In Sologubovka rest not only soldiers from Germany, also from Austria, France (Alsace), volunteers from Belgium, Netherlands etc.

⁶ The Volksbund started its work after World War I, in 1919, as so called *Union of the People for the Care of the German War Graves* and as a private organization. A private organization took over the responsibility for a typical state task. During the Third Reich the Volksbund continued its work under the national socialist and patriotic ideology, to build large cemetery for the fallen of World War I. After 1945 the organization started slowly to work on the grave sites of the fallen soldiers of the Wehrmacht.

The Volksbund currently takes care of 832 war cemeteries and graves in 45 countries. The organization were called when at street constructions on the former battlefields corpse being found. The experts exhume the bodies, try to identify the bodies, message the families (if still alive) and bury the soldiers on the German cemeteries. Every year more than 30.00 are still recovered (see *Arbeitsbilanz Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V.*, 2014) Today, several thousand volunteers and 571 salaried employees deal with the organization's various activities. Conferences, seminars and publications on the culture of commemoration in a European context, educational trips and trips for relatives are further central pillars of the Volksbund's reconciliatory work. The Bundeswehr - the German army - support the Volksbund by providing practical help at national and international war cemeteries, during the work camps organized by the Volksbund, at commemorative events and also during the annual door-to-door and public donation campaigns.

⁷ In German “Versöhnung über den Gräbern“.

of *reconciliation* in the meaning of Volksbund's politics in Russia. The idea of this slogan and the purpose of this term will be explained.

Based on the German war cemetery in Sologubovka, this essay focus on the cooperation between Russians and Germans, the Volksbund, the local population and the authorities, on the treatment of the war dead, on the different national historical memories and the approach of two countries more than 50 years after World War II. The research for this essay is based on archival documents⁸, research literature, field studies at the cemetery site, at exhumation and excavations projects, interviews with practitioners and field/exhumation experts and witnesses, analysis of media and personal experiences in educational projects of the author and the analysis of the memory rituals and memory process in both countries. Besides larger studies on France, Poland and Israel concerning the reconciliation politics, this case study shows one of the first efforts of historical dialogue and the approach between Germany and Russia.⁹

The Russian General Alexander Suvorov said in 1799, after beating Napoleon in Italy: "War is only over when the last soldier is buried".¹⁰ So will World War II be finally over when the last soldier of the over 20 million fallen¹¹ will have been found and buried properly? Will the reconciliation than be succeeded, when all dead are buried?

1. From Heroes and Victims - The Politics of War Dead in Russia¹² and Germany

"Nobody is forgotten, nothing is forgotten"¹³ – the Soviet/Russian¹⁴ remembrance slogan shows the will and the necessity of remembrance. Russia did not forget and Russia remembers, commemorates and celebrates its victory over Nazi Germany. On the former territory of the Soviet Union approx. 20 million soldiers and civilians died in battles, were killed, murdered, deported and abused by the German police and Wehrmacht. The *Great Patriotic War*,¹⁵ how World War II is called in Russia and other former Soviet states like Belarus and Ukraine, accompanied the people in every city and town today in the Russian Federation. The memorials, museums, cemeteries and victory parks announce and publicize the *glorious victory* over the fascism. On May 9, the Victory Day the successful suppression of Nazi Germany's aggression and the *glorious* defenders of the Motherland were and are honored and adored. The Soviet Union celebrated itself and the surviving of the idea of socialism – the Great Patriotic War became an important part of the Soviet ideology and propaganda for self-confirmation und self-empowerment.

The Soviet and Russian memory narrative of World War II only knew heroes. The mythology and inflated legends of the protection of the Mother Russia served as a symbol for the Soviet (!) identification.¹⁶ Although the memory under the different decades distinguished from Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, to Gorbachev and Yeltsin – the message (especially after 1965) maintained

⁸ Volksbund Archive in Kassel and the Bundesarchiv in Freiburg.

⁹ The research literature concerning Volksbund in Russia and its reconciliation work is unsatisfactory. The following is to be mentioned: Elfie Siegel, "Versöhnung über den Gräbern. Kriegsgräberfürsorge in Russland", *osteuropa* 58, 6 (2008), 307-316.

¹⁰ Quote in German: "Ein Krieg ist erst dann vorbei, wenn der letzte Soldat beerdigt ist", in: *Krieg ist nicht an einem Tag vorbei: Erlebnisberichte von Mitgliedern, Freunden und Förderern des Volksbundes Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e. V. über das Kriegsende 1945*, edited by Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V (Kassel: ggp media, 2005), 7.

¹¹ *frieden*, Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V., 2 (2015), 7.

¹² A good overview offers Guido Hausmann, "Die unfriedliche Zeit. Der Politische Totenkult im 20. Jahrhundert", in *Gefallenengedenken im globalen Vergleich: Nationale Tradition, politische Legitimation und Individualisierung der Erinnerung*, Manfred Hettling, Jörg Echternkamp (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2013), 413-439.

¹³ In Russian: Никто не забыт, ничто не забыто and part of a poem from the Russian poet Olga Bergholz, a survivor of the siege in Leningrad. Her poem is engraved at the memorial and cemetery for the civilian victims in St. Petersburg, at Piskaryovskoye Memorial Cemetery.

¹⁴ In some aspects *Soviet* and *Russian* cannot be separated in the analysis of the national narrative of the *Great Patriotic War*. The implication of the Soviet time period is still essential in Russian historical memory.

¹⁵ The *Great Patriotic War* encloses the war of Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union, 1941-1945.

¹⁶ Lev Gudkov, "Die Fesseln des Sieges. Rußlands Identität aus der Erinnerung an den Krieg", *osteuropa* 4-6 (2005), 59.

after the end of the Soviet Union and the foundation of the national states, such as Russia. During Gorbachev's *glasnost* and especially after the end of the USSR, critical voices rose against the official version of the war. Nevertheless, the parades of the 9th of May, *Dyem Pobedy* are in Putin's presence even as powerful and prinked like the parades in the 60ies and 80ies, in the bloom of the Soviet Union.¹⁷ Contemporary Russian official narrative has just slightly modified it from Soviet times – traumatic experience has not been lived through and reflected upon – grief work was not undertaken.¹⁸ So on Victory Day, on May 9, the *heroes* of the successful defense of the *Fatherland* are still celebrated on the parade on the Red Square.

The country of the defeated has no comparable parades. Germany was defeated and confronted with the crimes and guilt. The country was occupied, departed into two states and two ideologies. A collective memory or mourning without a common representation was not possible. The memory became part of the family.¹⁹ The dead were mourned but without asking about the reason for their death.²⁰ The German grief did not focus on the Jews killed in the crematoria – the Germans mourned their own losses, such as the people who died in the allied bombing raids, during the deportations from the East and they mourned the five million fallen soldiers.²¹ The Germans changed their private and personal tragedy into a national tragedy.²² German people could not explain or justify the war and the violence, but they mourned. The after war society did not differ between the losses. The dead became victims, the bombing dead, the refugees, the murdered AND the soldiers were called as victims. In Germany, the opinion of a "collective victim" grew.²³ Hitler's Volksgemeinschaft (national community) was replaced by the *Opfergemeinschaft* (victim community) in the after war period and the beginning of the Federal Republic of Germany.²⁴ In German the word *Opfer* means victim and sacrifice. The meaning of the word changed: From the national socialist meaning sacrifice as the active object into victim, the passive object. The war memory in Germany was victimized. The awareness of the own suffering concluded a defense of the own guilt.²⁵ The soldiers as victims: the Germans of the 50ies, 60ies, and even until the 90ies, switched the private tragedy (the death of the father, the loss of house or flight, hunger, uncertain future) into an universal or national tragedy.²⁶ The focus of the national memory lay by the fallen soldiers. The largest group of Germans served in the Wehrmacht (ca. 18 millions)²⁷ and the largest group of war dead – five million German soldiers died or were missed in action, while "just" 400 000 civilians died during the war.²⁸ The responsibility was partially accepted, but the blame was put on Hitler and his elites, like the SS. The Wehrmacht was long regarded as "clean", so all innocent.²⁹ After the dying of the war generations and the famous Wehrmacht exhibition of the *Sozialinstitut für Zeitgeschichte* in Hamburg, the crimes of the Wehrmacht on the Eastern front went public, while in the historical science the crimes were already accepted as a fact. After the shock and the protests

¹⁷ See Nina Tumarkin, *The Living & the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (Michigan: Basic Books, 1994).

¹⁸ Nikita Sokolov, "The Forgotten truth about the beginning of the war", *Intersection*, June 22, 2016. Accessed August 23, 2016. <http://intersectionproject.eu/article/society/forgotten-truth-about-beginning-war>.

¹⁹ Sabine Behrenbeck, "Between Pain and Silence", in, *Life after Death. Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s*, edited by Richard Bessel, Dirk Schuman (Washington, D.C.: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 41.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 4.

²³ Peter Reichel, "Helden und Opfer. Zwischen Pietät und Politik: Die Toten der Kriege und der Gewaltherrschaft in Deutschland im 20. Jahrhundert", in *Der Krieg in der Nachkriegszeit. Der Zweite Weltkrieg in Politik und Gesellschaft der Bundesrepublik*, edited by Michael Greven (Opladen: Leske + Budrich Verlag, 2000), 17.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 176.

²⁵ Gilad Margalit, *Guilt, Suffering, and Memory. Germany Remembers its Dead of World War II* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), p. 53

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁷ Rüdiger Overmans, *Deutsche militärische Verluste im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1999), 215.

²⁸ Margalit, *Guilt, Suffering, and Memory*, p. 5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

by the veterans,³⁰ the crimes and the German responsibility such as the victims of the national socialism and their suffering were recognized. Although, some person groups, such as the Soviet Prisoners of War, are still fighting for consumption.³¹ The German *Aufarbeitung* is still in process and not yet finished, from ministries till companies, the past in the Third Reich has to be unraveled. These two versions of one war shows the differences of the narratives of World War II aka the *Great Patriotic War*. The national memories of Russia and Germany could be entitled as *Hero's* narrative (Russia) and *Victim's* narrative (Germany). These two different messages and interpretations collided over the soil of Sologubovka.

2. The war dead and their graves in Germany and Russia

In this essay, the reconciliation efforts between Germans and Russians is measured by the war graves. The dealing with the war dead (or even the inaction) are a way to handle the dead. To quote Charles de Gaulle: "The culture of people can be recognized how it treats its dead" and to complete the sentence: and how it treats the enemy dead. Word War Two cost more than 55 million people their life. If for every war dead a single grave would be built, whole Europe would be a cemetery. The message, that war cemeteries can send are clear: death and human extinction. Somebody who visited a war cemetery, with 30 000 or 50 00 crosses until the horizon, understands the dull and overwhelming feeling. The names of dead, women, men and children and their life dates (mostly young people) reinforced the senselessness.

The Volksbund's projects under the title *reconciliation over the graves* takes the resting places as fundament for its practice and cooperation with Russia. Why the war graves, why not focus on the living? The burial grounds are attached value in every postwar country. Every former war side, no matter if culprits or mourner, every side suffered a death toll. The slogan "over the graves" allows to a communality for the former opponents and the human will to bury the death and to commemorate them.

The significance about war graves³²

The burial grounds were constructed from the urgent need to bury the dead and to find a place for the corpses, due to our Christian values and of hygienic reasons. Additionally, the cultural aspect is to be considered: the dead get a place in our individual memory. The place of burial ground become site of memory, from religious, political, ideological and personal aspect. The significance of the resting places of the war dead is visible at the categorization of war graves in the Versailles Treaty and the Geneva Conventions. The Geneva Convention protected after World War II the graves of the soldiers, and also of the women and children, killed for example by bombing raids; this convention was 1949 renewed. The signed states in Europe, were obliged to take care of the graves at their territory, also the enemies graves. Countries, of the former German occupation concluded with Germany special agreement concerning the preserving and protection of the German graves abroad, the first was signed in 1954 with France.³³ In Western Europe the Volksbund could start already in 1946 to search for the missing, to register the graves of the fallen

³⁰ Jan Philipp Reemtsma, *Zwei Ausstellungen – eine Bilanz*, redaktionell bearbeitete und gekürzte Fassung eines Vortrags, *Mittelweg* 36, 3 (2004).

³¹ In October 2016 a joint project between Germany (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. and German Historical Institute Moscow) will start to digitalize the archival records of the Soviet Prisoners of War; <http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Infoservice/Presse/Meldungen/2016/160622-DEU-RUS-Archivprojekt-Kriegsgefangene.html> accessed September 10, 2016.

³² Jakob Böttcher, *Zwischen staatlichem Auftrag und zivilgesellschaftlicher Trägerschaft. Eine Geschichte der Kriegsgräberfürsorge in Deutschland im 20. Jahrhundert* (PhD diss., University of Halle, 2016 (not yet published)).

³³ Ibid, 202.

and to notify the families. The access to graves in countries behind the Iron Curtain, such as Poland and the Soviet Union, was neglected.³⁴

In Germany itself, a special law for war graves was released in 1952. It had to protect the resting places of Nazi victims, means Jewish concentration camp prisoners, political persecutes, forced laborer and also soldiers.³⁵ These graves and this person groups were interpreted as “War dead”. The general expression was and still is “Victims of War and Violence”. That means not only the German soldiers, but also of the fallen SS and police men, so perpetrators, supporters or participants of the German crimes and groups such as the murdered people in the concentration camps and by shooting commands, were included in this expression. The dead of the crematoria, who lost their life through forced labor, deportation and exploitation were equalized with the soldiers.³⁶ This equal treatment of the war dead shows the so called “victims memory”, which is typical for the German after war society, which represents the message: Death is no respecter of persons.³⁷ No differences had been made.

The grief concerning the losses, let the graves became a symbol: A symbol as a reminder. A Reminder for peace, a reminder for understanding, a reminder for the future and the next generations. The dead got at least a sense, following the motto: their death was painful, but their graves warn us. A critical reflection the after war society could not and did not want.³⁸

These message *graves as a reminder* connected the Volksbund with the youth work and the aimed intention for the future and *cemeteries as Places of Learning and Reminder* - This message became a label and a symbol for the millions of resting places. The Volksbund uses this message in its word under the invented slogan “Reconciliation over the Graves” at war cemeteries across the whole of Europe.

German-Russian cooperation on the war graves

Since 1950ies, the Volksbund tried yet again to obtain access to the burial grounds, but without success.³⁹ A Soviet diplomat pointed out, that on the territory of the Soviet Union no German graves would exist anymore, but in 1988 the first visit for families of German dead POWs cemetery was achieved, and “one door is open”.⁴⁰ The youth work supported as well the approach between the two countries: In 1988 and 1989 young people from the Soviet Union took part in a youth camp of the Volksbund in Germany.⁴¹ The *door* was opened further and after the Reunification, united Germany signed the a contract about *Good Neighborhood, Partnership and Cooperation* on November 9, 1990 with the Gorbachev government. The contract contained not only details about renounce violence, disarmament and the recognition of the borders, but also about the legally

³⁴ While in the Federal Republic greater cemeteries could be constructed, the former Wehrmacht's graves in the east were neglected. The burial grounds of the soldiers of the Red Army were taken care of instead and were celebrated as liberators and heroes, see Jakob Böttcher, *Heldenkult, Opfermythos und Ausöhnung. Zum Bedeutungswandel deutscher Kriegsgräberfürsorge nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, <http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte/deutschlandarchiv/178572/heldenkult-opfermythos-und-aussoehnung>, accessed September 2015.

³⁵ Behrenbeck, *Between Pain and Silence*, 57.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid, 59.

³⁸ The reactions from abroad concerning the German resting places were various. It depends which experience the country made during the German occupation. France and the Netherlands had strictly requirements concerning the construction of military cemeteries. For example “national and military” symbols were forbidden (Meinhold Lurz, *Kriegerdenkmäler in Deutschland*, vol. 6 (Heidelberg: 1987), 119). The grave yards in these countries are more simple, contain Christian symbols and chapels. But countries like Tunisia and Egypt, where the civilians were not involved into the battles, allowed bigger monuments. The Volksbund could built memorials in the tradition of the Third Reich. The architect Robert Tischler, who was working in the 30ies, and famous for his nationalist designs, could continue his work in Tunisia and Egypt, also after the war. He planned the “Death Castles”, for example in El Alemein in the same design like the monuments of the 1930ies, like in Quero/Italy, a cemetery for the German fallen soldiers of the First World War, finished in 1936.

³⁹ Menschen, die wir lieben, sind niemals tot, edited by Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V (Kassel: 2002), 7.

⁴⁰ Deutsche Kriegsgräber in der Sowjetunion. Eine Dokumentation des Volksbundes Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. (Kassel: 1983).

⁴¹ Volksbund, “Menschen, die wir lieben”, 11

protection of the Soviet memorials in Germany.⁴² The next step was the war grave agreement, as the fundament of German-Russian negotiations in Sologubovka. The document was signed on December 16, 1992 in Moscow and on May 6, 1994 the agreement entered into force.⁴³ This declaration was “led by the desire, to led grant the war dead of both sides a dignified last resting place,⁴⁴ aware that the maintenance of the graves of the war dead on German and Russian soil constitutes a concrete expression of the understanding and reconciliation between the German people and the peoples of the Russian Federation“.⁴⁵ The war grave agreement recognizes the war dead and the human losses on both sides on the international level, a novelty in the relations between Germany and Russia. In the same year, in 1994, the first Volksbund delegation visited a former battlefield of World War II in Volgograd, and laid the first stone for German cemetery and the work began.⁴⁶

Volksbund`s work in Russia

Today the Volksbund supervises 5 large collective cemeteries in Russia, since 1993 the staff exhumed 380.000 dead and reburied again.⁴⁷ In Moscow`s the Volksbund office four Germans, under Peter Lindau, and 18 Russians co-workers direct the work. The relations to Russian authorities, in exhumation and constructing questions is positive and successful. Just a few regions, according to Peter Lindau, refuse to cooperate with the Volksbund. But a hint to the interstate agreement and the conditions of the Soviet war graves helps the Volksbund to continue its work. The official message *Reconciliation over the Graves* continues in the German graves. Even the design guidelines for the war cemeteries in foreign countries of the Volksbund enhance the reminder and warning message.⁴⁸ Furthermore the cemeteries should offer explanations for the history war facts, announce the loss of the civilians and the pain and suffering of the locals had to be considered. But the German war cemeteries are not supported everywhere. There are cases of grave robbery; German graves are opened and the ID (dog tag), personal belongings, such as marriage rings, and weapons, helmets and boots are stolen and sold on black markets. The Volksbund staff is powerless, against this unhuman practice. Controversial voices sound as well from veterans, authorities and locals. For them, the Volksbund does not distinguish from victims and perpetrators. The Volksbund advertise the view, that every dead is equal, no difference is made. The Volksbund accent the humanitarian aspect of their work.⁴⁹ The efforts of the Volksbund are controversial, at home and abroad. Under the president Markus Meckel,⁵⁰ a pastor and the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the GDR, the Volksbund turns into a self-critical discussion about treatment of the German war dead. The new guideline for their work is: recognition of the German responsibility and their guilt and to remember the war dead, without to honor. This guideline sounds simple, but includes much controversial discussions, mostly from the inside.⁵¹

⁴² Federal Law Gazette (BGBl.) 1991, Part II, 702.

⁴³ Federal Law Gazette (BGBl.) 1994, Part II, 598.

⁴⁴ The German side shows the plans and the designs of the cemeteries to the Russian Government and applies for approval.

⁴⁵ Federal Law Gazette (BGBl.) 1994, Part II, 598.

⁴⁶ Volksbund, “Menschen, die wir lieben”, 14.

⁴⁷ Interview with Peter Lindau, Volksbund, Head of the Volksbund office in Moscow, August 2016.

⁴⁸ Guidelines for the constructing of war cemeteries (Richtlinien für die Gestaltung von Kriegsgräberstätten), 1993.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Markus Meckel stepped back as the president of the Volksbund on September 22, 2016.

⁵¹ About the controversial discussions about the new guidelines and the released guidelines, see:

<http://www.volksbund.de/volksbund/leitbild/leitbild-des-volksbundes.html>

German-Russian joint commemoration projects

The agreement contains not only the German graves in Russia, it is both-side declaration and aimed also the Soviet/Russian war graves in Germany. Over 350 – bigger and smaller cemeteries, mostly in East Germany.⁵² People from the Soviet Union, who died during battles (soldiers), underutilization, hunger and illness (slave laborers) or prisoners in concentration camps (POWs, Jews and other persecuted ethnic people) are buried in Germany. These graves are categorized as war graves and fall under the national German law from 1952 and the German-Russian war grave agreement. Although, these graves are protected and saved, there are also critical voices, who see the Soviet graves and memorials (such as the famous memorials in Tiergarten and Treptower Park) as part of the hero's cult of the *Great Patriotic War* in Germany, with its splendid cemeteries, obelisks and sculptures.⁵³ Different as in Russia itself, the graves of the so called forgotten people in Russian national narratives, such as forced laborers and POWs, find a place in the German memory landscape.⁵⁴ In Russia private initiatives show since the 90ies interest in this war dead and victims as well and try to include this groups into the national memory.⁵⁵

There are initiatives and efforts for a joint commemoration of World War II in both countries, from historical commissions, to joint forums, youth work and school book projects.⁵⁶ But still there are still disagreements in the dealing with the past. An example is one of the latest moments: the celebrations for the 70th of the end of World War II and Germany's surrender. President Putin invited state leaders and chancellor Merkel to attend the military parade at the Red Square. The most of the invitations were denied, but Merkel was the only western European leader who travelled to Moscow to commemorate the end of the war. She declined the invitation to attend the military parade in the Red Square, but she arrived one day later and laid of a wreath at the grave of the Unknown Soldier.⁵⁷ Although, the contemporary politics cooled down the relation between the both countries, but in commemoration, both do not want to be the second to none.

Although Merkel tried to show her message towards Russia, in not attending the parade, but in tributing the victims in front of the Unknown Soldier. Seems that both countries, Putin and Merkel could have and will find a joint commemoration and a joint understanding.

⁵² Sebastian Kindler, "Unbekannte Mahnmale in unserer Nachbarschaft. Grabstätten Sowjetischer Kriegsoffer in Deutschland", published by Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste e.V., Deutsch-Russisches Museum Berlin-Karlshorst, Gegen Vergessen – Für Demokratie e.V., Stiftung Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas, Stiftung "Erinnerung, Verantwortung und Zukunft" (EVZ), Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. (Berlin: 2016), 23.

⁵³ Ibid, 11, 12.

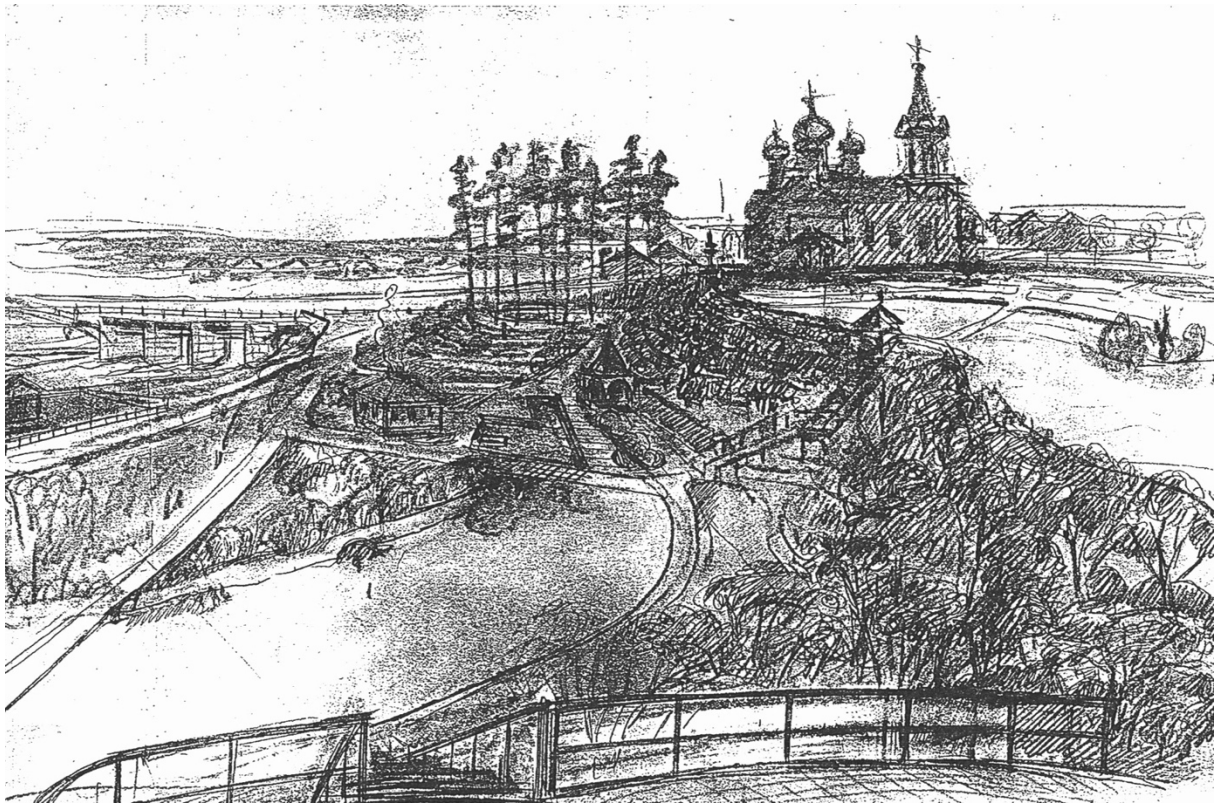
⁵⁴ Ibid, 9.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 12.

⁵⁶ Cooperation like the German-Russian Museum Karlshorst, and German-Russian historian commission, School book, Petersburger Dialog, German-Russian Forum and especially the German-Russian Youth Exchange (Stiftung Deutsch-Russischer Jugendaustausch).

⁵⁷ Press conference President Putin and Chancellor Merkel, May 10, 2015 in Moscow, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Mitschrift/Pressekonferenzen/2015/05/2015-05-10-pk-merkel-putin.html>, accessed August 29, 2016.

3. Sologubovka - A German War Cemetery in Russia



Design draft for the German war cemetery in Sologubovka, by A. Kim (St. Petersburg) and Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V.
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Behind the river Neva, the Soviet memorial places Sinyavino Heights and Nevski Bridgehead, rest soldiers of the German Wehrmacht, who died in World War II, besieging Leningrad, in the village of Sologubovka.⁵⁸ The old Russian-Orthodox church in the village was used during the war by the Wehrmacht as a hospital; the dead, who died of their injuries, were buried next to the church. The contemporary cemetery contained at war times over 3000 soldiers, buried in single graves with their names marked on crosses. In 1994, the cemetery was overbuilt, the name marks removed and the graves barely visible. But the dead soldiers still rested in the Russian soil of Sologubovka. After the German-Russian war grave agreement, Volksbund began the search of the fallen and missing soldiers and the investigation in the region of Leningrad for a suitable site for a larger cemetery. The village of Sologubovka offered enough space, the vicinity to infrastructure for future visitors and the former German military cemetery by the church marked already the starting point to bury another remains.

⁵⁸ The German Army, after the attack of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, occupied the region between Schlüsselburg and Leningrad, today St. Petersburg, to cut off city of three million people from every supply routes. The siege lasted for 900 days; Over one million civilians starved to death (see book David M. Glantz, *The Siege of Leningrad, 1941–1944. 900 Days of Terror* (London: Cassell Military Paperbacks, 2001). The Red Army defended the Wehrmacht on battlefields round the Neva river and the cities of Kirovsk and Mga. During the blockade, the Wehrmacht occupied and used the villages close to the frontline as supply depots, hospitals and cemeteries for their losses, such as the village of Sologubovka. In catacombs of the village's old church the inter alia the 223. Infantry Division installed a hospital; the dead, who died there, were buried right next to the church, in total 3000 German soldiers. After the liberation of Leningrad, on January 27, 1944, the Wehrmacht backed out west.

The constructions and the reburying of exhumed Germans⁵⁹ started right after 1996 according to plans by a Russian architect and the Volksbund, with an amount of 1, 9 millions DM.⁶⁰ Today the soldier lie in single graves, covered by a loan; a few symbolic crosses stand in couples spread. A simple grey cross marks the center of the cemetery, on the main walk grey granite steles stand beside the road with the names of the buried soldiers.⁶¹

Every plan and design the regional authorities in Kirovsk supervised, before even bury the first soldier, Soil and water samples, measurements, markings , planning and designs had be approved by the regional authorities, with the Russian partners in Moscow and the Volksbund in Germany – even views of points from the Orthodox Church, veterans organization, the population and the media had to be respected. After almost five years, in 2000 the complex could be inaugurated.

“Germans, finally. I have waited for them since 56 years”!⁶² – Reactions, Protests and Support by the Russian side

But before the cemetery could be opened for the public, the largest protest group, the veteran organization in St. Petersburg had to be convinced. The former soldiers wont still prejudices towards this project and some of them protested against a German cemetery on Russian territory.⁶³ To win the veterans for the idea of this cemetery, was an important condition on their agenda. But how to win their support, while they experienced death and violence through German hand during the war? The Volksbund tried to reach them on the same level and invited them to visit the graves of their comrades in Germany and to see with own eyes, how they are taken care of. In spring 2000 a group of veterans from St. Petersburg commemorated their soldiers in Germany. This visit is described by many Volksbund staff as the turning point in their support for the German war cemetery in Sologubovka.

The *German War* or *When the war started*

The difficulties and the collision between the sides began already at the entrance of the cemetery. The Volksbund planned to engrave the stone and the plaque at the entrance of the complex like on burial grounds in France, Italy and the Netherlands: Deutscher Soldatenfriedhof (German Soldier Cemetery), the location of the cemetery and 1939-1945. The Germans used the year of 1939 to mark the begin of the violent conflict. The Russians supported labeling the year of 1941, the start of the attack by the Nazis and the begin of the *Great Patriotic War*, the defense of the *Fatherland*.

The start and end date of World War II marks the time period, in which German soldiers fell. But for Russian authorities the war did not start in September 1939, but in summer 1941. The Russians pointed out, that the war started in the region of Leningrad in 1941 and ended 1944. The soldiers who died during these battles, fell in this period. The Volksbund saw in the 1939/1945 dates a general perspective, the classification of the siege of Leningrad in a wider context. The Russian

⁵⁹ Around St. Petersburg hundreds of cemetery were constructed during the war by the Wehrmacht. It is impossible to take care of all single graves due to costs and efforts. According to the German-Russian war grave agreement, the remains of the German soldiers have to be exhumed and reburied on larger collective cemetery in the region, such as Sologubovka for the soldiers, who died in this region.

⁶⁰ Today around 97145.46 Euro. Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V., Board Meeting (Bundesvorstandssitzung), November 20, 1999.

⁶¹ Steles instead of single grave marks due to the high number of losses and costs, Nils Köhler, “Der Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. Versöhnung über den Gräbern: Arbeit für den Frieden”, in *Verständigung und Versöhnung nach dem "Zivilisationsbruch"? Deutschland in Europa nach 1945*, edited by Corine Defrance and Ullrich Pfeil (Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2016), 431.

⁶² *Der Tagesspiegel*/Berlin, August 27, 2000.

⁶³ Interview with Father Vyateslav in Sologubovka, May 2, 2016

perspective puts the emphasis on the region, and does not see the war as a global war, included Africa, the USA and Japan. They see *their* war as unique, a special case for suffering and heroism. The Russian veterans did not connect the violence in Leningrad with other parts of the world, while the Germans do not distinguish war regions, countries, periods and nationalities and ethnics. But for the Nazis there were differences in ideologies and nationalities. The war in France has to be distinguish from the extinction in the Soviet Union. The Volksbund could not succeed and the dates of the *Great Patriotic War* in Leningrad were engraved. The *Great Patriotic War* did not end in 1944, but in 1945 – so the Five was turned into a Four, to emphasis the war in Leningrad. Already the entrance of this burial ground shows the difference between two national war narratives, war histories and interpretations, in which German Volksbund was confronted in Russia, the history of victims and heroes, depending from which side the reader is looking at.



Entrance Stone in Sologubovka *German Soldier Cemetery Sologubovka 1941-1944/45*
© Nina Janz

The inscription at the center of the cemetery was also part of an argue. Originally intended was “In Memory of German soldiers, who fell in World War II and who buried on this cemetery”. But the Russian veterans asked the Volksbund⁶⁴ to change the inscription into: “In Memory of the soldiers, who fell ...”, the additional *German* was erased from the stone and put into a neutral way of dead soldiers. The cemetery was thereby denationalized and generalized. According to this inscription these soldiers did not die for Hitler or Nazi Germany, they could have fell for another reason. This general aspect is on the first look to support. The soldiers in the Wehrmacht were not only from Germany, but also from Austria, Italy (South Tirol), Alsace and Volunteers from Flanders, so Belgian, Dutch, also Danish. So the name of “German Soldier Cemetery” is not representative.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Email from German General Consulate to Volksbund, March 2, 2000.

⁶⁵ See footnote 2.

But this inscription puts the dead into a neutral context, it does not say anything about purpose and the war history. This seems like a humanization of every soldier's death, within the meaning of the Volksbund's memory practice.

But the original intention should be interpreted differently. The Russian veterans requested to erase the *German* addition, whether to disconnect the soldiers from their origin nationality and army or to avoid national memorials for the Nazi *aggressors*. This shows the deep fear and hate against the Nazis and with all *German*, what is connected to the war.

The only hint, that in Sologubovka is a German cemetery, is the plaque at the entrance of complex.



Remembrance stone in the center of the cemetery *In Memory of the soldiers, who rest on this cemetery. Remember them and all the missing.*
© Nina Janz

The “Church of Reconciliation”

The highest point and the dominated part of the cemetery complex is the Russian-Orthodox Church *Assumption of Mary*. The church was built in 1851, but in the 1920ies looted and closed in 1937, after the priest was arrested and murdered by the Stalinists. During World War II, the German Wehrmacht occupied the little village Sologubovka and used the church as a hospital and buried their dead nearby. The church remained undestroyed during the war, the Wehrmacht only removed the church's tower, because the Soviet artillery destination route.⁶⁶ After the war, the church fell into disrepair, it was used as cinema and storage room. The Orthodox community kept using the church in the undestroyed parts for their worships. In receiving the territory in Sologubovka, the Volksbund agreed to the comprise to rebuild the church. Before the Volksbund could built the cemetery, long negotiations with Moscow, Russian partners and the regional authorities and the church (the old Wehrmacht's cemetery was still on the ground of the church), until the Germans got the unlimited license to use the ground in the village. The territory was not in use by nobody, it was marshy and undeveloped. Before the Volksbund could start to bury the soldiers, first of all a road had to be constructed, which connected the main road in the village to the cemetery and so to the church.

First of all, the German side was not willing to rebuild the church. According to their opinion, the Wehrmacht had not destroyed the church in the war, so it not the German's fault, that the building rotten. In first designs the church was not included into the complex, the original idea of the Volksbund was, to preserve the church as ruin as a reminder of war, like the Emperor-William-Memory Church in Berlin.⁶⁷ The main reason could have been the cost of the renovation.⁶⁸ After letters and protest from the Kirovsk region, the church and the veterans organization in St. Petersburg, and internal discussions in Kassel, Volksbund decided to include the church into the slogan *Reconciliation over the graves* and to name the house of God *Church of Reconciliation – Construction for the Future*.⁶⁹ The Reconstruction was financed by the Volksbund and also by donations. The icons in the new church, were painted by a German veteran and decorate today the altar. In 2003 the church was handed over to the Russian-Orthodox community.

The reconstruction of the church was necessary and important, to step into the dialogue with the Russian partners. The renovation led finally the Russian side support the Volksbund and their intentions, among them the priest of the church, Father Vyatsheslav. He persisted and pushed the Volksbund to its decision to rebuild the church, but he promoted as well the idea of the church of reconciliation and the Peace Park. He was an important wheel in convincing the Russian partners and especially the veterans.

The combination of the cemetery and the Orthodox church corroborate the message of the *Peace Park* and reconciliation. The complex was put under the Christian perspective, with the resting places and the House of God on the territory. This message met the approval of the Russian partners. The procedure was a giving and taking: The Volksbund rebuilt the church, the Russians supported the cemetery – an ideal compromise. Even the church itself is used by both sides. The Russian-Orthodox community of the village Sologubovka celebrates their worships in the main hall of the church, and downstairs, in the former catacombs of the Wehrmacht's hospital an exhibition about the Volksbund and their work, a room of remembrance for families of the soldiers

⁶⁶ www.gedenkenundfrieden.de/stiftungsarbeit/projekt-solugobowka.html, accessed August 24, 2016.

⁶⁷ Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V., Main Board Meeting (Bundesvorstandssitzung), March 6, 1999.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V., Main Board Meeting (Bundesvorstandssitzung), November 20, 1999.

and books with names of all missing German soldiers (on Russian territories) are provided. Russians and Germans under one roof.⁷⁰

A Memorial for the “Fascists”? The sculpture of the *Mourning Mother of Nagasaki*



Mourning Mother of Nagasaki by Yrsa von Leistner in the Peace Park, with the Russian-Orthodox Church of Reconciliation
© Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V.

The biggest disagreement between the Russian and the Volksbund contains a sculpture by a German artist. The artist Yrsa von Leistner donated her sculpture *Mourning Mother of Nagasaki* 1994 to the Volksbund for an installation at the war cemetery in Sologubovka.⁷¹ The designers of the cemetery planned to install the sculpture in the center of the cemetery, this evoked the biggest protests from in the region of Leningrad. The Russian partners preferred the installation of a simple cross, instead of the *Mourning Mother*. The Volksbund justified the sculpture with the mourning parents, who lost their sons in the war. The sculpture should show the effects of war and violence and stand as a reminder for future generations. The Volksbund sees the sculpture as gift and gesture for peace, from a German artist to the Russian people. Copies of this figure stand also in Nagasaki and in the U.S. This symbol, the friendship between Japan and USA should there for be transferred to the German-Russian case. So far the Volksbund's opinion and their message about reminding and warning.

⁷⁰ This exhibition, in German, English and Russian, names the tragedy of Leningrad and the number of civilian losses. The priest of the church, Father Vyatcheslav, criticizes the claim of the Volksbund to humanize the soldiers and to put the Wehrmacht's soldiers in a row with the others, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, September 20/21, 2003.

⁷¹ Copies of this sculpture are also installed in Nagasaki/Japan and St. Paul/USA.

The Russians interpreted the sculpture differently. The installation of the *Mourning Mother* would categorize the German soldiers as victims and increase them into innocent objects of the war, or even more, the *Mourning Mother* put the soldiers into a row with the victims of the siege in Leningrad. Many protest letters and articles reached the Volksbund in Kassel. The installation of this sculpture would monumentalize the cemetery, so the opinion of the Russians, and would lift the soldiers and their actions on a platform, to be remembered and admired. Even the name “Nagasaki” connects the helpless victims of the US-American nuclear attack on the Japanese city Nagasaki with the innocent victimhood of the German soldiers. Against this interpretation the Russian partners demonstrated vehemently. A letter from the Center of Reconciliation in St. Petersburg from 1997 remembered the Volksbund to design the cemetery as “modest” complex and warned the Volksbund, the figure would “damage the reconciliation processes between the people”.⁷² Furthermore the sculpture stands in Russian eyes as a “Memorial for the Heroes of the Fascism”.⁷³ “No, dear gentlemen”, writes A. Wermischew in 1997, “this is not some soldier cemetery. It is German soldier cemetery in RUSSIA.”⁷⁴ The church, the city of St. Petersburg and the veterans pushed the Volksbund to install a cross, instead of the *soldier memorial*.⁷⁵ The German General consul in St. Petersburg intervened in this standoff and asked the Volksbund to remove or relocate the *Mourning Mother*. At the end, the partners found a compromise: the sculpture *Mourning Mother of Nagasaki* was installed beside the cemetery in the Peace Park, close to church and was dedicated to all victims of the war. In the center of the cemetery stands now a simple grey cross.

German *Designer-Cemeteries* vs. Russian Mass Graves

The hardest responses were triggered by the decision to construct this cemetery in Sologubovka. While the remains of the soldiers of the Red Army are buried mostly in mass graves or were exhumed as anonym,⁷⁶ and almost every Wehrmacht’s soldiers can be identified,⁷⁷ dissatisfaction and envy generated in the Russian families, who lost a family member in the war. Voices complained about the lack of understanding, to build cemeteries monuments for “occupiers and fascists” and the “designer-cemeteries”⁷⁸ and the shame not to provide the same demand for the own dead. A poll in 2007 from the radio station *Echo Moskvy* shows the variety of expressions concerning German cemeteries in Russia, the war graves as “propaganda of the fascism” up to convictions like “dead have to be buried”.⁷⁹ Russian veterans see the work of the Volksbund with envy and respect⁸⁰ One Russian woman said 2000 in an interview: “Some think it is shame, that the victors must help the vanquished to bury their dead”.⁸¹ Others blame their authorities, not to

⁷² Letter of Center for Reconciliation of the City of St. Petersburg to Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V., August 6, 1997.

⁷³ Irina Golonowa, “The Madonna of Nagasaki – Symbol in War or A Memorial for the “Heroes of the Fascism”?”, August 1997 (not specified). Copy in the document collection at the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V., Kassel.

⁷⁴ Andrej Wermischew, “The dead are not guilty...but it is better, to install no memorials on German Soldier Cemeteries in Russia”, *Newskoje Wremja*, September 23, 1997.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ The majority of the Soviet cannot be identified.

⁷⁷ About war cemeteries and soldier’s burial in Russia in comparison to German war cemeteries, see forthcoming Nina Janz, “Remembering the dead in victory and defeat: The war cemeteries of the Soviet and German soldiers of World War II”, in *Views of Violence. Representing the Second World War in Museums and Memorials*, (Berghahn Press in 2017).

⁷⁸ “The dead do us nothing”, *Der Spiegel*, 43 (1998).

⁷⁹ The poll was about the German war cemetery in Sebes. 65% of the listeners supported the cemetery. Siegel, “Versöhnung über den Gräbern”, 308.

⁸⁰ “The Right for a proper grave”, *TAZ*, February 7, 2004.

⁸¹ *Frankfurter Rundschau*, September 2, 2000.

take care of the own graves, like Andrej Wassijellew: “the soviet state constructed rather grandiose, but anonymous heroes memorials, than to build dignified graves for the Fatherland defenders”⁸² One local elderly from the village of Sologubovka waited for 56 years for the return of the Germans.⁸³ Lida Titarenko, who was enslaved by the Wehrmacht during the occupation claims “The Germans destroyed this place. Now they`re rebuilding it. That`s good!”.⁸⁴ The opinions differ from absolute refusal to support. The positive effects were pointed out as well: the construction of the road, the renovation of the church, jobs in gardening and construction for the locals, as well as tourists and the families. The Bavarian Red Cross invested in Kirovsk, close to the village in nursing of disadvantaged children⁸⁵ and the Volksbund renew some memorials and graves for soviet soldiers.⁸⁶ But it appears, that the attendances from the German side had *paid* the authorities and the organizations for the war cemetery. In the words of Zoya Kornilyeva, deputy head of the World War II veterans in St. Petersburg: “The Germans are always preaching reconciliation, but we`re not prepared for that. They go around paying big money and unfortunately our people fall for that”.⁸⁷ The belief of the *bought* war cemetery in Sologubovka is a serious prejudice and burdened the relationship to the German Volksbund. But the accusation will be in future also unresolved and shows the variable efforts between the two partners, between refusal and support.

4. Ways of Reconciliation – Ways of Dialogue in Sologubovka

In the previous part problems, reactions and the practice with war graves in Russia were discussed. But how to define the work of the Volksbund in Sologubovka under the reconciliation aspect? From the beginning the Volksbund tried to establish the war graves into the aspect of reconciliation, understanding and peace between the countries. The cemetery is embedded into whole memorial complex and contains out of the war cemetery, a *Peace Park* as a “symbol for the growth of peace between the people” and the restoration of the Russian-Orthodox church *Assumption of Mary* as a “reconciliatory gesture”.⁸⁸ The Peace Park is connected with the cemetery; winding paths were constructed around trees, donated from sponsors worldwide.⁸⁹ The efforts of the German War Graves Commission were accompanied by difficulties, compromises and support of its intentions. Volksbund tried to satisfy the Russian partners as best as possible: they built the road, reconstructed the church, renovated the soviet graves, donated for children and invited the Russian veterans to Germany with entertainment programs and with the attempt to convince them. The Volksbund overstretched its arm to reach the Russian hand.

Difficulties

The difficulties in the German-Russian reconciliation process can be described as deferred contact, inequality, infliction of the process by the state war agreement and the aspect of forgiveness. Due to the distance by geographical reasons and the political state conditions,⁹⁰ Germany and Russia

⁸² *Donau Kurier Ingolstadt*, September, 12, 2000.

⁸³ *Tagesspiegel*, Berlin, August 27, 2000.

⁸⁴ Ian Traynor, “A corner of Russia that is forever Germany”, *The Guardian*, September 10, 2000.

⁸⁵ “Schmerzhaft für die russischen Veteranen“, *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 10, 2000.

⁸⁶ *Der Spiegel* (36), September 4, 2000

⁸⁷ Traynor, “A corner of Russia”.

⁸⁸ “Sologubovka”, in *Deutsche Kriegsgräberstätten in der Russischen Föderation, Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V.* and www.volksbund.de/kriegsgraeberstaetten/sologubowka.html, accessed August 22, 2016.

⁸⁹ Around 500 active donators.

⁹⁰ From the West German perspective; the Volksbund was located in Kassel, in West Germany.

could not act, exchange and cooperate together until the 1990ies. Almost 50 years after the war, the veterans, the states and NGOs like the Volksbund dealt under other conditions as the responsible during the politics of approach with France in the 50ies, 40 years earlier. The time of the planning process of Sologubovka, the most of the Russian veterans were not in charge any more, the responsible in the local regional authorities count to the second generation. They experienced the stories of their parents or suffered of the missing or killed father – and were of course influenced by the strong war narrative from the 60ies and 70ies during the Brezhnev era. That does not mean, it would be easier to deal with this generation, but personal hate and prejudices were not the biggest difficulty. The challenge is still the general dealing with the war's memory, the pride (Russia) versus the grief (Germany) dominated narratives. The Volksbund met during the negotiations with the Russian partners, the persuasion about the fight of their fathers as Good and Evil, the *Great Patriotic War* as a just war and the associated categorization of the German war dead as the *evil*. The Volksbund's politics of *death is no respecter of person* aggravated the negotiations. The whole procedure in the case of Sologubovka shows the glaring disparity and asymmetrical relation between the actors. To start with those responsible, after the signing of war grave agreement between the governments, in Sologubovka the regional state authorities, the church cooperated with the Volksbund as non-profit organization. The cooperation between the two countries worked on different levels. Germany came as a penitent and as petitioner. Russia, looked at himself, as it would provide generously the territory and the access to the destroyed and overbuilt German graves. Even the inauguration ceremony in 2000 of the cemetery in Sologubovka showed the unlike importance of the graves in both countries. The participants from the German side were high ranked politicians, like the Mayor of Hamburg, Ortwin Runde, (as the partner city of St. Petersburg), bishop Maria Jepsen, and the Volksbund delegation.⁹¹ Russian guests attended the ceremony, mostly locals, the Metropolitan of St. Petersburg, but no politicians from the city of St. Petersburg or the region attended the ceremony. The conditions of the graves this inequality is also legible. The Soviet Graves in Germany were taken care of, preserved and financed by German authorities, while the German graves in Russia were unprotected until 1992 have to be restored and built by Germany money, or were even irredeemable lost. The interest for Russia and Germany can be measured by the treatment of these resting places, in form of the different categorization of the war dead in Russia and the received opinion, Germans do not a memorial or single graves marks.

The signing of the war graves agreement between the highest levels was an important step and impulse for both countries and their relation. But to sign a document did not lead automatically to an open dialogue and a way of understanding. The content of this agreement seemed not to be valid in every district in Russia. The Volksbund staff had to deal with invincible Governors during negotiations about exhumations and construction permissions. The representatives of the Oblasts seemed not to know or not willing to know or follow the instructions and the content of the war graves agreement in the far Moscow. The Volksbund had sometimes to ask Moscow government's office to mediate and to convince the local authorities.⁹² The cooperation in the war graves has to be imposed by the state, to make efforts to step into a dialogue with the descendants of the war dead. The top to down method dumps the reconciliation process by the involuntarily concession by the Russian partners.

⁹¹ FAZ, September 11, 2000.

⁹² Interview with Peter Lindau.

The most controversial aspect and difficulty is the question of forgiveness. "I ask for forgiveness for the cruel crimes of the German people...."⁹³ Wrote a German visitor into the guest book in the church. The Germans came in the purpose of achieve the access to their war dead and to start into a dialogue with the former enemy and at the end to fulfill the forgiveness between each other. According to the Russian memory motto "nothing is forgotten, nobody is forgotten" is the process handicapped. For the Russians is it one thing to give the Germans territory to bury their dead and one other thing to *forgive* the crimes. The war dead are still for some local Nazis and fascists and will remain that. But the fact, that the Russian partners allowed to build the cemetery in Sologubovka is to pardon the war dead, or to accept them. But the step of forgiveness will never be fulfilled.

Achievements

The achievements and successful steps in the way of the process of the reconciliation is inherent in the following factors, the signing the German-Russian war grave agreement, the Volksbund as protagonist and achiever, its slogan "Reconciliation over the graves", practice and projects, such as youth work and commemoration.

The German-Russian war grave agreement from 1992 (and earlier the Good-Neighbor-Contract 1990) built the basis for the further work on cemeteries in both countries, legally and politically. Within its frame, the Volksbund is able to achieve the permission to exhume and to construct cemeteries on Russian soil. On the other hand, the Russian graves are preserved and accessible on German territory. The agreement guarantees the eternal right for the war dead to rest in their graves, which is maybe the most important achievement between Germany and Russia and within the recognition for its war dead.

The Volksbund understand itself not only as grave service or cemetery gardening organization, but feels also responsible for the remembrance of the war casualties. Based on this duty the graves not only symbolize the last resting place for the dead, no, the meaning of these places changed: The grief and self-claimed victimhood let the war graves upraise as symbols as reminder. A Reminder for peace, a reminder for understanding, a reminder for the future and the next generations. This attitude helped on the way to cooperate and to negotiate with the Russian partners. The Volksbund does not represents officially the German state, although, the Volksbund is partly state financed and works in charge of the state. But the Volksbund works as a private organization, dependent by donations by families, who lost their members in the war. Due to this background could achieve more, than officials from the German consulate. Although, discussions about the treatment of war criminals and others are not excluded and will be continued.

Since almost 100 years, since 1919 the Volksbund's logo are five crosses. The need to bury the dead, to mourn and to remember are not only infused by Christianity, but also by pure human nature. The idea of "reconciliation" and to extend this idea to the organization's slogan came from a Jesuit Father, Theobald Rieth, and his organization *The Initiative Christians for Europe*.⁹⁴ IN 1951, he began a work camp on war cemeteries with the slogan *Reconciliation over the Graves* and developed the basis of European youth work.⁹⁵ On the Belgian war cemetery Lommel, he and 430 participants

⁹³ Guest book, in the church; Entry from a German visitor.

⁹⁴ Initiative Christen für Europa e.V.

⁹⁵ Geert K.M.C. Demarest, "Die Arbeit des Volksbundes Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge: Ein Beispiel für die Praxis der deutsch-französischen Aussöhnung 1945-1975", (PhD diss., Free University Berlin, 1977).

from over 13 countries worked together, gardened and constructed new parts of the complex. The Volksbund adopted this slogan and continued working under this message.⁹⁶

Developed from Father Rieth, influenced by the idea of Christian reconciliation, the slogan sends the symbol of understanding, approach and forgiveness.

This Volksbund's attitude to be forgiven got many negative reactions in Russia. For the Russians, the crimes which were committed by the Germans, could never be forgiven. But under the aspect, the dead had to be buried, every dead, the Volksbund could achieve to build the war cemetery in Sologubovka.

The idea⁹⁷ to graves as preachers of peace⁹⁸ supported the educational and youth projects. The peace education⁹⁹ and the slogan combined with the youth camps *Work for Peace* is still today guidelines for the camps. The starting shot for the work camps was the already mentioned exchange in Lommel in 1951. Every year in Western Europe and Germany so called work camps were organized and teenagers from all over Europe worked together in the preservation of war cemeteries and memorials. Due to the Berlin Wall, young people did not take part, until 1988. In that year and the following, teenagers from the Soviet Union participated in a Volksbund work camp in Herleshausen/Germany and cared for the graves of Soviet POWs. One teenager, Katja said during that time: "it is good to take care of the soviet graves for the first time, because it is first step to avoid wars".¹⁰⁰ Since the 90ies work camps are organized as well in Poland, Belarus, the Ukraine and Russia. In Sologubovka the first took part in 1999, before the official inauguration of the complex. The youth exchange, between German and local teenagers got many positive echoes in the region and the Media.¹⁰¹ Nearly each year young people from both countries met in Sologubovka. The organizers focused on the cultural exchange, but also on the historical-political education topics like human rights, democracy and anti-racism. The work on the cemeteries try to help the young people to value peace and freedom, like no history lesson can provide. The camps activate the awareness of these Europeans against extremist ideas, to respect the dignity of every human and teach them responsibility for their deeds.¹⁰²

The Volksbund's youth reaped already positive recognition at home and abroad. The organization won prices like the *Westphalia Peace*¹⁰³ in 2014 and gold medal of the *Luxemburg Foundation du Mérite Européen*. According to the price donors the Volksbund builds bridges of friendship between former war enemies.¹⁰⁴ Since the 50ies almost one half million people took part in the projects of the Volksbund.¹⁰⁵ The projects are mostly co-financed by the German Federal Ministry Family and Youth and by youth exchange foundations, such as the Stiftung Deutsch-Russischer Jugendaustausch or Russian regional partners.

Besides of the idealistic aim of these youth camps, difficulties are not being avoided. It starts with funding (mostly the Russian partners could not find enough resources) and the different understanding of the war history. Like in the introductions in the text above about the national narratives, the meaning of World War II and/or the *Great Patriotic War* and its family histories,

⁹⁶ Interview with Hans-Dieter Heine, Head of the Youth Work Department at the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V., Kassel, July 26, 2016.

⁹⁷ The History of the Volksbund and its work see Köhler, "Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge", 425-442.

⁹⁸ Nils Köhler, Hans-Dieter Heine, "Gedanken über Gedenken: Internationale Jugendarbeit in Verbindung mit Kriegsgräbern, in *Der Golem und die Tragödie von Swinemunde*, edited by Marthe Burfeind, Nils Köhler and Bernd Aischmann (2011), 447.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 449

¹⁰⁰ Volksbund, "Menschen, die wir lieben", 11.

¹⁰¹ Main Board Meeting Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. (Bundesvorstandssitzung), November 20, 1999.

¹⁰² Every year more than 20.000 young people come together in these work camps, in educational and school projects and in the youth and educational center.

¹⁰³ Internationaler Preis des Westfälischen Friedens. The Volksbund and its youth work was winner in 2014.

¹⁰⁴ Siegel, "Versöhnung über den Gräbern, 309.

¹⁰⁵ Köhler, "Der Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge", 436.

school books contents etc. distinguish substantially. The projects should try to accept the differences and to find communalities. The Volksbund's method is to work with biographies of the soldiers and to break down war history to the level of personal stories of the men and woman of that time. The idea is to humanize and to focus on the single person, as on the Wehrmacht and SS such as the Red Army. However, the danger is to equalize victims and perpetrators (not based on nationalities), and not to differ between the acts and decision of these people.

The Volksbund evokes critic voices about this *humanization* and the motto *death is no respecter of persons*.¹⁰⁶ But this message belongs to the reconciliation politics and slogan of the Volksbund and marks its work. The organization tries to reply to the criticism and plans projects as well like on the Soviet cemeteries and concentration camp memorials.¹⁰⁷

Although, the focus lies on the preservation and on youth projects, the Volksbund organizes from time to time joint field work. For the first time in 2007, the German Army (Bundeswehr) and the Russian Federal Army worked together the exhumation, burying and preservation of war cemeteries. The Russian soldiers helped burying Wehrmacht's and Red Army soldiers in Lebus, Germany and took part at the German national remembrance/veterans and mourning day (Volkstrauertag) in the Bundestag.¹⁰⁸ In 2015 Bundeswehr soldiers came to St. Petersburg and recovered together with their Russian colleagues remains of the war dead.¹⁰⁹ After the exhumations, they buried the 38 founded German in Sologubovka. The former enemies exhume the dead and bury them together. Does that mean reconciliation?

5. Reconciliation *over the graves*? Conclusion

The slogan *Reconciliation over the graves* applies to a state of understanding, dialogue and even forgiveness. The case study of Sologubovka showed though, that a reconciliation could not be achieved as planned. The slogan of the Volksbund and its intention to reconcile with the former enemy might be idealistic, but unsolved. The meaning of reconciliation, to reconcile with opponents is not applicable in politics of memory and the postwar relation between two countries. This term stands for than the dictionary tells. It stands for approach, dialogue and understanding or to quote the Latin origin: to become friends again or to improve a relation, to speak again after a conflict or argue. This term does not mean a fix point, then two parties are reconciled, it means a process, where every step follows the other. This not mutually process is applicable to the case study in Sologubovka. These steps the Volksbund made were influenced by their interpretation of reconciliation, by the theological perspective. This perspective¹¹⁰ and motifs by Volksbund supported the finishing of the cemetery complex. These motifs continued in the cemetery's dedication to peace and reconciliation, within the Peace Park and the church of Reconciliation. The Russian partners could be reached with the renovation of the church and one of oldest of human's tradition: the burying of the dead. Without the encouragement of the priest, the community and villagers the cemetery complex could not be completed. The togetherness of these partners showed dialogue, an understanding, a *reconciliation process*. The Volksbund, the gardeners

¹⁰⁶ President of the Volksbund, Reinhard Führer said: "We are today not the judges of the dead", see Siegel, "Versöhnung über den Gräbern.", 310.

¹⁰⁷ The participants of the work camp in Sologubovka in 2012 worked also on the Soviet/Russian cemetery nearby, Nevski Pataschok, report of the camp, Department Organization of the Volksbund in Hamburg.

¹⁰⁸ *Materialien zur Friedenserziehung: Beispiele Praxis. Pädagogische Handreichung: Arbeit für den Frieden, Deutsche und Russen. Wege zur Versöhnung*, edited by Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, 60.

¹⁰⁹ "Versöhnung über den Gräbern", *Deutschland-Radio*, August 27, 2015.

¹¹⁰ Based on Andrew Rigby, *Justice and Reconciliation: After the Violence* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001); John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Countries* (Washington, D.C: U.S. Institute of Peace, 1998).

and the villagers in Sologubovka and even German and Russian veterans¹¹¹ acts daily with each other: the application for exhumations at the local authorities, the visiting families and tourists. Between these personal relation, it is possible to speak about a reconciliation, an understanding or the attempts for an approach. Between the states, it looks more difficult. The contemporary sanctions and the political misunderstanding does not support obviously the historical dialogue. Germany should accept Russia's urge of power, and better integrate the biggest country in the world in the European and global politics. Concerning the historical narratives about the war, western European should also accept Russia's special way and understanding, let them celebrate the heroes and accept their trauma, which has been burned into the national memory. The war graves could be described as mediators between Germany and Russia.

For the future hopes and expectations have to be placed. Germany should accept the different narrative, the hero perspective of Russia's war memory and their need for its national identity and pride. The German partners should be aware the trauma of the Russian people, that World War II evoked and show more sensibility to the victim groups such as the Soviet POWs. On the other hand, Russia has to overlook its own national narrative and to look also behind their interpretation. The trauma and the grief should be allowed and topics like the Big Terror, the Stalinism, as well as Soviets in concentration camps, the fate of the Soviet POWs and the slave laborers have to be finally processed. The state monopoly in the war memory will hopefully break and be transferred into the civil society, civil and private foundations and independent media.

On the press conference after the commemoration ceremony in 2015 at the grave the *Unknown Soldier* in Moscow, President Putin spoke about a "rocky path ...between Germany and Russia, the path of tremors and insults to reconciliation".¹¹² Truly, the case study shows the *rocky path* to build a cemetery for German soldiers, a place of memory of these men, attacked the Soviet Union and who besieged the city of Leningrad. But this *rocky path* led into the construction of the Peace Park and the church of Reconciliation and in the end of the finished and still running German complex. Through all, the complex is built, with changes and in Putin's word with tremors and even insults, according to the fascists memorial. But still completed. But the reconciliation is so far not completed. The term does not have a starting and an ending point, but a fluid process.

The biggest gesture of the Russians was, to permit the Volksbund to build the cemetery in front of the of former Leningrad, the city, which stands for the highest losses and the most tragic suffering of Soviet population.

The headstone is laid and Sologubovka the first step for a joint understanding. This joint headstone could be extended in the future to joint memory place, for Germans and Russians. Sologubovka offers therefor the perfect the conditions, close to the city of Leningrad, as symbol for senseless suffering of civilians, the battlefields around the city, as meaning for a war of ideologies, racism and ignorance. Around the village are mass graves and memorials and grave stones. The Peace Park could be added also the names and the remains of the fallen and missing of the Red Army. A model for this idea is "The Ring of Remembrance" in Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, France. At this elliptical war memorial the names of 580.000 are engraved, who died during World War One.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Before the Volksbund started working in the countries of the former Soviet Union, German and Russian veterans had already contact, based on private initiatives. Horst Gurlitt, a German veteran (former soldier in the 170. Infantry Division) had private contacts to Russia. He lied with his division nearby St. Petersburg. In memory of this fallen comrades, he wanted to dedicate a memorial stone (text: Here lie German soldiers. We remember them and every in Russia missing person and in POW camp dead") in Duderhof Nord (Можайский), but a group of civilians demonstrated against it. Instead of this stone, he organized another, smaller sign and engraved "Postamente loquuntur" in 1994, see Bundesarchiv (BArch) MSG 2/6537, "Über den Soldatengräbern wachsen die Bäume", article by Horst Gurlitt, 1994 and his report "Alte Kameraden", 1993, BArch MSG 2/6537).

¹¹² Press conference President Putin and Chancellor Merkel, May 10, 2015 in Moscow.

¹¹³ Jonathan Glancey, "The Ring of Remembrance, Notre Dame de Lorette", *The Telegraph*, September 4, 2016 (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/architecture/11220393/The-Ring-of-Remembrance-Notre-Dame-de-Lorette.html>).

Alphabetically and not separated by army, nationality, religion or ideology. This idea can maybe, one day, transferred to Sologubovka, to remember together World War II and its war dead, beyond all ideologies and nationalities.