

National symbols under German occupation during World War II: White Russia, North Caucasus and Greece

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Abstract

White Russia: Local politicians prepared an order about White Russian national symbols and on July 27th 1942 the chief commander (*Generalkommissar*) signed this order. However, he did not publish it. The White Russian newspaper *Ranica* (Morning) published this order. The new symbols were the White Russian knight and the white-red-white flag. The attempt to introduce the cornflower as national symbol was not successful. In 1944, insignia for *Ostarbeiter* were introduced. These consisted of an ear of corn and cogwheel surrounded by sunflowers. Northern Caucasus: After the German occupation, the old flag came into use. This old flag was red with green canton, white crescent and seven white stars. Later the canton was changed and the Caucasian sun symbol was placed in it. Greece: In 1943 Greek ships had to hoist the Greek flag and an additional pennant in depending on occupation zone.

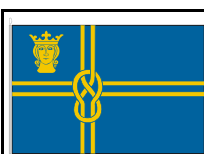
White Russia

Some time ago, I saw the German documentary film “Collaborators under swastika.” There I saw the White Russian white-red-white flag over Minsk in 1943 for just a few seconds. A few weeks later, I found a file in the Federal Archives about the introduction of White Russian national symbols.

In August 1941, White Russia became part of the newly founded *Reichskommissariat Ostland*. The leader of the White Russian relief (*weißruthenisches Hilfswerk*) Dr. Ermachenko prepared an order for White Russian national symbols. On July 27th 1942 the chief commander (*Generalkommissar*) signed this order, but he did not published it, because the head of administration, Hemmann, was against it. Instead he sent the order to the *Reichskommissar* in Riga.

Unexpectedly, the White Russian newspaper *Ranica* (Morning) published this order about the introduction of White Russian national symbols on September 6th 1942. Probably, Ermachenko played that order into the paper’s hands. The new symbols were:

- state sign — white knight (*Pahonia*) on red (Fig. 1),
- national flag — white-red-white (Fig. 2),
- armband of White Russian relief — white-red-white (Fig. 3).



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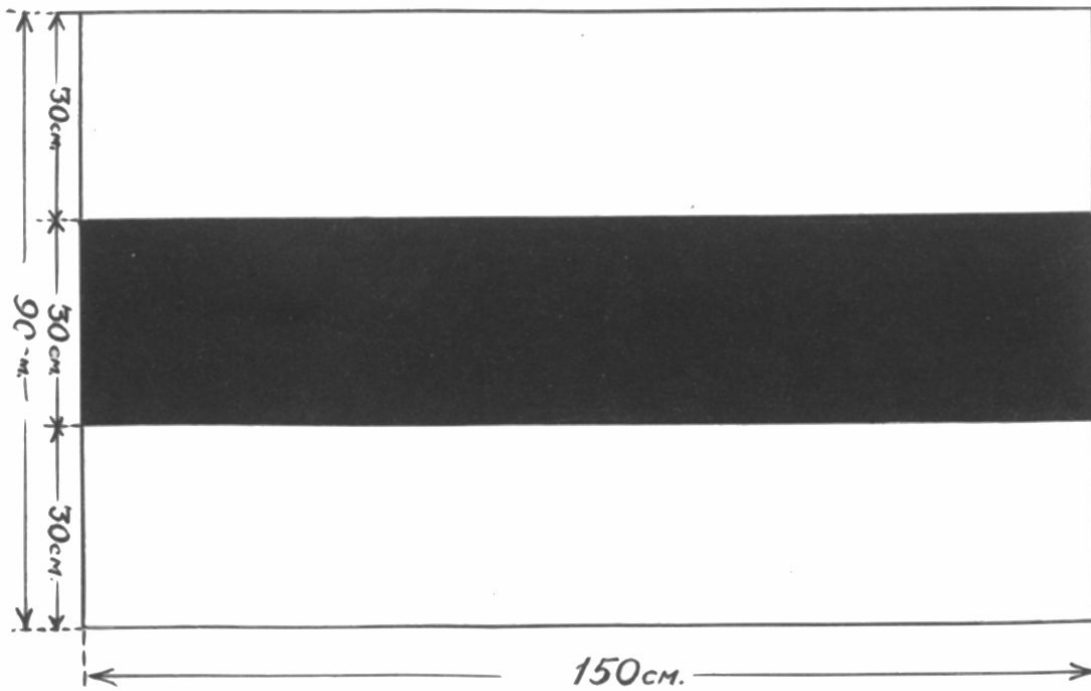
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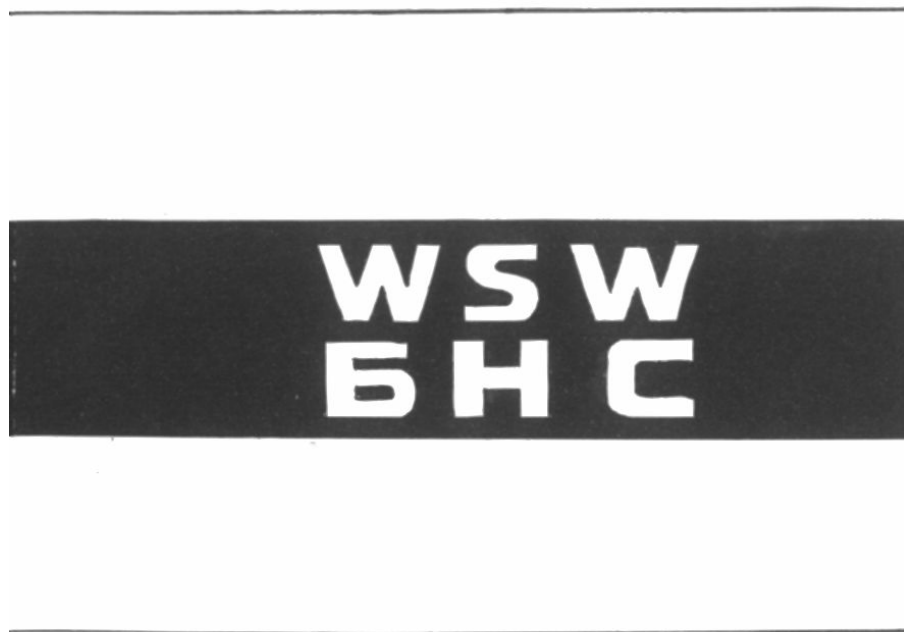
*Figure 1 Project for White Russian state sign, 1942
(Bundesarchiv, R6 326).*

In October 1942, the White Russian section of the Ukrainian civilian government in Lublin asked the government of *Generalgouvernement* for permission to use the White Russian symbols for official letters, stamps, uniforms and other purposes. The government was overtaxed with this inquiry and sent it to Berlin. After that a report was ordered. This report informed Berlin that the national symbols in question were already in use.

The Chief commander of White Russia was working on new coats of arms and armbands, and sent his project to Berlin on August 27th 1943 (Figs. 4-6). For the first time the cornflower was introduced as a national symbol. He wrote in his report: “The cornflower is the symbol of White Russia. People sing of the cornflower. The sky and the eyes of White Russian boys and girls are as light blue as a cornflower. The White Russian soul is as light blue, soft, and pure as a cornflower. The belts of *Sluzk* have the cornflower on them. And even the well known lyric poet Bogdanovich meant that the cornflower is the White Russian symbol.”



*Figure 2 Project for White Russian flag, 1942
(Bundesarchiv, R6 326).*



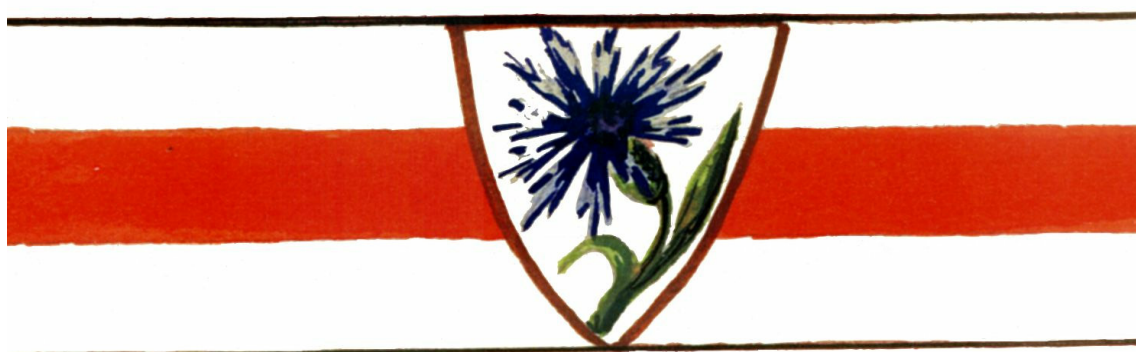
*Figure 3 Project for White Russian armband, 1942
(Bundesarchiv, R6 326).*



*Figure 4 Project for state sign with cornflower, 1943
(Bundesarchiv, R6 326).*



*Figure 5 Project for state sign with cornflower, variant, 1943
(Bundesarchiv, R6 326).*



*Figure 6 Project for armband with cornflower, 1943
(Bundesarchiv, R6 326).*

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Figure 7 Symbol of cornflower for Volksdeutsche.



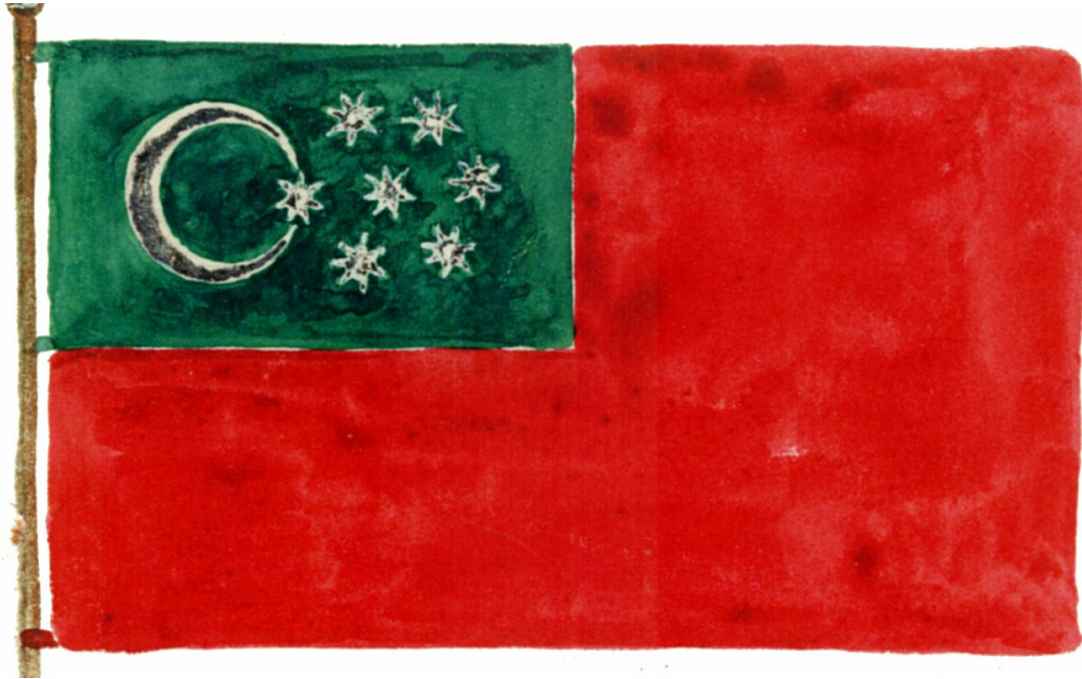
Figure 8 Collar patch with cornflower for the 22nd volunteer cavalry SS-division "Maria Theresia".



Figure 9 Photo of original arm insignia for White Russian as Ostarbeiter.



Figure 10 National shield for White Russians in Waffen-SS.



*Figure 11 Northern Caucasus flag, 1919
(Bundesarchiv, R6 65).*

The minister of the Eastern territories agreed to use the cornflower as a White Russian symbol. But this agreement was repealed after a few days before it was published, because the command of the SS was against it. The reason for this decision was that shortly before, Hitler awarded national Germans (*Volksdeutsche*), who were not fit to bear arms, the cornflower as their symbol (Fig. 7). Later on, the cornflower was used on collar patches of the 22nd volunteer cavalry SS-division “Maria Theresia” (Fig. 8).

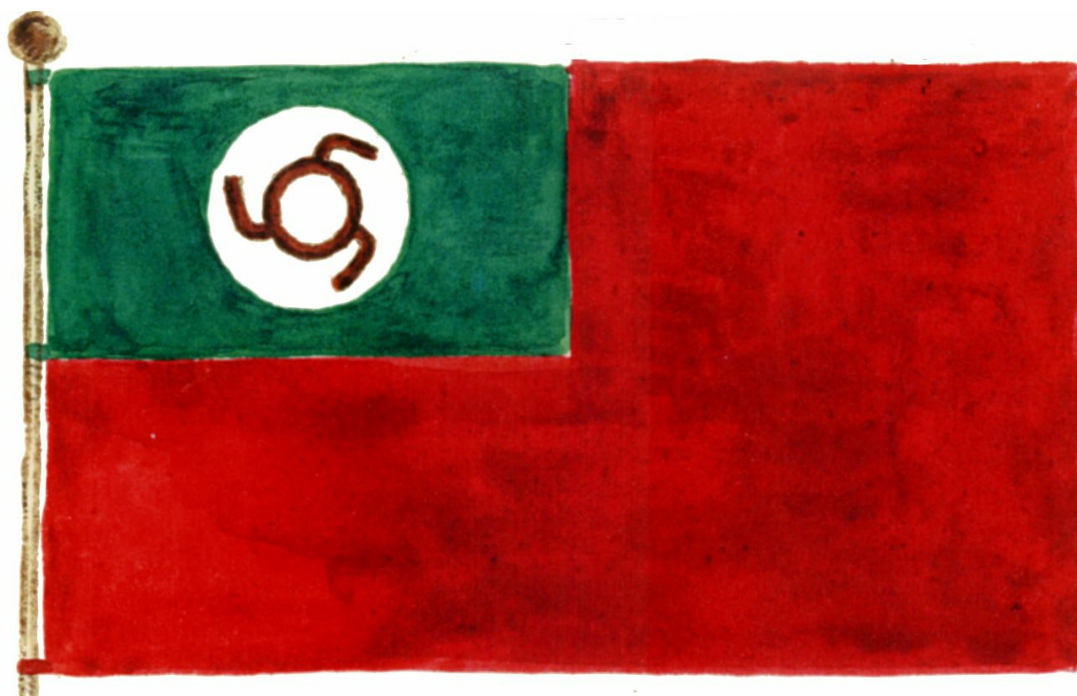
Hauptsturmbannführer Brandenburg declared that he was working on new arm insignia for Eastern workers (*Ostarbeiter*). The White Russian emblem consisted of an ear of corn and cogwheel surrounded by sunflowers (Fig. 9). White Russian Volunteers in the SS used the White Russian colours and a yellow double cross (Fig. 10).

The White Russian national symbols never had an official status during World War II, but the White Russian people liked to use them.

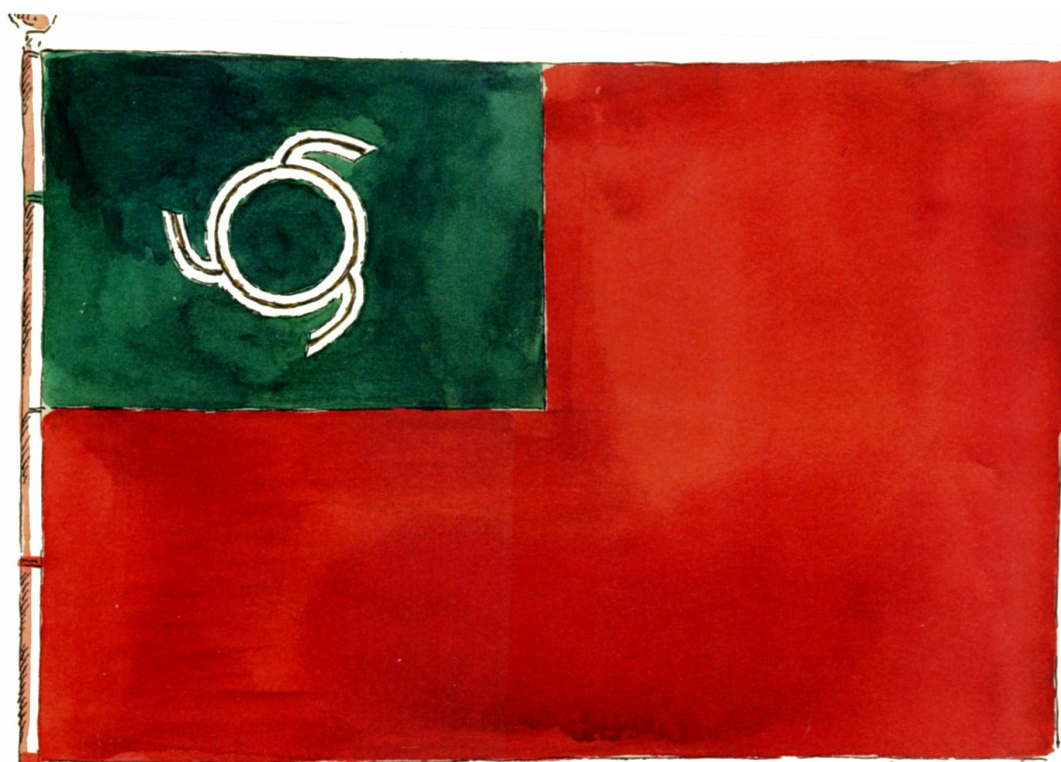
North Caucasus

From 1942 to 1943 the Germans occupied the region of Northern Caucasus. And the question was posed: What to do with the national symbols and flags? In German federal archives, I found a short file about Caucasian national symbols.

In 1919, while fighting against Denikin and Bolsheviks the people of North Caucasus used the well-known red flag (Fig. 11) with the green canton, the white crescent and the seven white stars. The crescent is the symbol of Islamic faith, the seven stars symbolise the seven north Caucasian peoples and territories. Later, in the early 1940s, the flag was changed (Figs. 12, 13). Instead of the crescent and the stars, the 1500



*Figure 12 New flag for Northern Caucasasia with sun symbol
(Bundesarchiv, R6 65).*



*Figure 13 New flag for Northern Caucasasia with sun symbol, variant drawing
(Bundesarchiv, R6 65).*



Figure 14 Some variants of the sun symbol of Northern Caucasus (Bundesarchiv, R6 65).



Figure 15 National shield of Caucasian soldiers in the Waffen-SS from 1943.



Figure 16 National shield of Caucasian soldiers in the Waffen-SS from 1944.



Figure 17 Occupation zones of Greece.

years old sun symbol was placed in the canton. Through the years it was present on weapons and religious items (Fig. 14). Over the centuries, the hooks of the sun symbol were transformed into horse heads, which symbolise the speed of Cherkessian horses. They are supposed to move in a circle around the sun. The sun symbol is part of *Tavro* (brand mark identifying ownership of horses) for the pure-breed *Schauloch* horses. Its use obliges noble-mindedness and gallantry.

Caucasian soldiers in the German army and *Waffen-SS* used two different national shields: From 1943 on the design of the national flag of 1919 (Fig. 15), and from 1944 on the stylised sun symbol with the horse heads (Fig. 16).

Greece

The German occupation of Greece began right after the Italian disaster in 1941. The same year, Greece was completely occupied (Fig. 17). Bulgaria received Thrace; Italy controlled the Greek mainland and Germany the region of Saloniki, Athens, Crete and some islands.

An order dated April 10th 1943 declared that every civilian ship needed a license and a registration number. In the same order was indicated, which ships were required

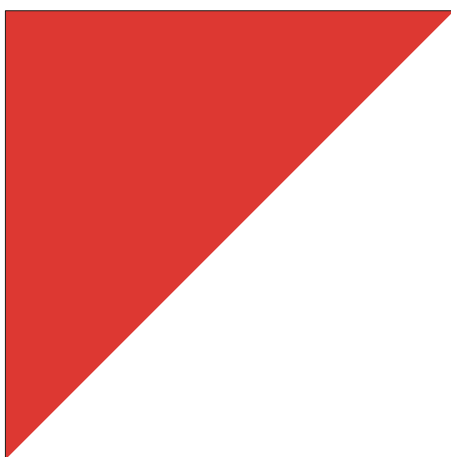


Figure 18 Pennant for Greek ships with German license, to be flown directly under the Greek flag.

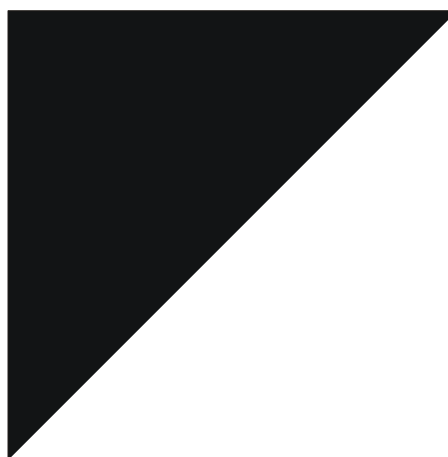


Figure 19 Pennant for Greek ships with Italian license, to be flown directly under the Greek flag.

to hoist which flag: Ships with German crew *or* with German accompanying command and Greek crew were required to hoist the German merchant flag. Ships with Italian crew *or* with Italian accompanying command and Greek crew were required to hoist the Italian merchant flag. Greek ships were to hoist the Greek flag and additionally a pennant indicating to which occupation zone they belonged. The pennants were to be flown directly under the Greek flag. Ships with a German license were to use a pennant which was diagonally divided red over white (Fig. 18); those with Italian license were to use a diagonally divided pennant black over white (Fig. 19). Ships from neutral countries were to hoist their own flags. After Italian capitulation, this order was modified on February 3rd 1944. The paragraph about Italian flags was then deleted.

Sources

White Russia: Bundesarchiv, R6 326.

Caucasus: Bundesarchiv, R6 65.

Greece: *Verordnungsblatt für das besetzte griechische Gebiet*, 1943, No. 14, p. 1ff.

About the author



Andreas Herzfeld from Germany was born in 1958, studied medicine 1977-1983 in the former Soviet Union. Herzfeld is a M.D. and a specialist in internal medicine. In 1995 Herzfeld became co-founder and the Vice-president of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Flaggenkunde. Since 1997 he has served as the DGF's president, and also as the chief editor of the society's journal *Der Flaggenkurier*. Herzfeld has written several publications for *Der Flaggenkurier*, and is responsible for two books: *Flags and logos of international sports federations, associations and organizations*, published in English in 2000, and *Die Geschichte der deutschen Kfz-Kennzeichen*, published in German in 2002 and dealing with the history of German license plates. Herzfeld's main interest is in the German flag history of the 20th century. He participated with papers in the 1997, 1999, 2001 and 2003 ICVs.

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