

# National Fund

*of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism*  
*Development, function, impact*



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Fifteen years ago, the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism was established at the Parliament. Since 1995, it has stood for an Austria which, 50 years after the establishment of the Second Republic, was finally taking responsibility for all victims of National Socialism.

For far too long, Austria did not do enough to face the dark side of its history. In creating the National Fund, a change in Austrian attitudes towards its own history manifested itself – from the imperfect identity as the “first victim” of Hitler to the adoption of a shared responsibility for the terrible injustices inflicted upon people of this country.

From the outset, the main task of the National Fund was to give people from all groups of victims the often long-denied recognition to which they were entitled and to assist them as quickly and as unbureaucratically as possible.

Until then, some groups of victims had never been recognized or supported. For example, in 1998, during the time when the chairmanship of the National Fund Committee was incumbent upon me as the President of the National Council, the story of the Spiegelgrund children became public for the first time. Recognition of the few surviving victims by the National Fund could of course not repair their terrible suffering – but the fate of these children could finally be acknowledged and anchored in Austria’s collective memory.

For as long as just one person must live with the memories of persecution, it is the duty of present-day Austria, of its citizens, to show him or her respect and to provide whatever help is possible to the survivors.

The National Fund also makes an important contribution to the culture of remembrance with its project sponsorship. The National Socialist era has shown us where an indecisive and reticent approach to issues of right-extremism can lead. Today, over six decades after the end of National Socialist rule in Austria, we are in danger of letting the mistakes of the past, and that which we can learn from them, be forgotten: incidents such as the one at the concentration camp memorial site Ebensee in 2009 once again clearly demonstrate the importance of passing on the experiences of the past to the next generation. Keeping the memories alive will therefore also be an important task of the National Fund in the future.

Every society must be founded on unifying symbols which embody common values. The National Fund was and is the expression of a clear Austrian stance towards its National Socialist past and at the same time a decisive positioning against racist and extremist tendencies in the present and the future.

This demonstration of responsibility will also be important in the future – for the victims, for the international community but above all for the citizens of Austria.

*Dr. Heinz Fischer*  
*Federal President*



In 1995, the Federal Law on the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism stipulated the establishment of the first centralized institution for carrying out payments to Austrian victims of National Socialism.

In addition to the fundamental task of disbursing a lump-sum gesture payment to the victims and the payment of compensation for seized tenancy rights, the National Fund also fulfills a further, central role: it serves as an expression of Austria's special responsibility towards the victims of National Socialism. The manifestation of this special responsibility towards all those who were persecuted for whichever reason is explicitly stated in the law. For the first time, the law cited groups of victims which had previously only been taken into limited account or which had not been considered at all, for example those who had been persecuted on grounds of asociality or those with mental or physical handicaps. Further to this, by law, the National Fund is able to sponsor projects which benefit the victims of National Socialism, which involve research into National Socialism or the fates of its victims, which remember National Socialist injustice or which safeguard the memory of the victims.

In the 15 years since its establishment, the National Fund has contributed towards an active and multi-faceted examination of our country's recent past. Previously unknown stories of persecution were able to be documented, subsequently allowing the gesture payments to be extended to further groups of victims. This occurred through exchanges with historical researchers and, above all, through constant personal contact with the survivors. The staff of the National Fund are often the first people from an official department to have made contact with the victims. The staff are particularly distinguished by their sensitive and respectful approach and high level of dedication.

It was also important to me to express this respect – for this reason, I have personally invited many applicants to Parliament in order to speak to them, to hear their stories and to take their concerns on board.

In 2008, we were able to send a particularly moving message with the Remembrance Day against violence and racism in memory of the victims of National Socialism: the memories of persecuted children were read out in both a matinee and in a memorial session in Parliament.

The National Fund will also have an important role to play in the future. For example, in 2009, the National Fund assumed the coordination of the redesign of the Austrian memorial site at the former concentration camp and present-day Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Without knowledge of our own past, we will not be able to understand our present or shape our future. In this light, I am proud of the contribution that the National Fund has so far made towards assuming the responsibility of the Republic and of the contribution that it will make in the future.

*President of the National Council Mag. Barbara Prammer  
Chairperson of the National Fund*



It all began with the Republic's belated acknowledgement of its shared responsibility for the suffering inflicted on people in Austria under National Socialism – an acknowledgement which found its expression in the establishment of the National Fund in 1995.

Today the National Fund can look back on 15 years of intense activity, during which its role has evolved and new tasks have been taken on. We would like to take this anniversary as an opportunity to look back and take stock – of what has been achieved and of what still remains to be done.

These two volumes present the fields of activity of the National Fund and reflect its work; they outline the developments of recent years and provide an impression of how the understanding of National Socialism has evolved over the years – an evolution to which the National Fund was able to contribute. Above all, these pages are intended to give people a voice.

We want to let those people speak, who, as victims, stand at the center of the work of the National Fund – it is they who made the most important contributions to this publication, in that they were willing to share their memories with the readers, in the form of life stories and diary entries. My first and very special thanks are therefore owed to these people and their families, for each life story is an invaluable gift to future generations that enables us to overcome the borders of time and experience history at first hand.

One of these memories was also very moving for me on a personal level – it enabled me to retrieve a fragment of my own family history. In one of the diary entries in Volume Two a survivor describes, in the carefree style of a young girl, her school days in Vienna prior to her emigration. At one point she mentions in passing one of her former classmates, E. Lessing – my father, who emigrated himself shortly afterwards.

People who in various ways shaped or accompanied the National Fund on its journey are also given a voice – people from the fields of politics and science, victims' representatives and members of the Committee and Board of Trustees of the National Fund. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to them for their contributions; many of their multi-faceted appraisals express great appreciation for the work of the National Fund.

These volumes also introduce the National Fund's staff for the first time. In their personal contributions they give insights into their work and impressions of the meaning that the work with the past and with the survivors of the Holocaust can have. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them and my two valued deputies, Dr. Renate S. Meissner, MSc, and Mag. Christine Schwab. It is owing to the dedication of the staff that the frequently difficult work of the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund can be done in the first place.

Finally, I would like to thank the chairpersons of the Board of Trustees over the last fifteen years, who have performed their functions with the highest levels of personal involvement and sensitivity – our current Federal President, Dr. Heinz Fischer, the former President of the National Council, Dr. Andreas Khol, and particularly the current chairperson, the President of the National Council, Mag. Barbara Prammer. Last but not least, I would like to thank all the members of the Board of Trustees and the Committee for the years of excellent cooperation.

I hope that the memories of the survivors will touch the readers' hearts and that these two volumes may deepen and enrich the understanding of Austria's past.

*Secretary General Mag. Hannah M. Lessing*

## **The National Fund: The first sign of a change in attitude**

On 9<sup>th</sup> May 1995, parliamentary group coordinator Dr. Peter Kostelka and I submitted a joint notice of motion to the National Council – it was resolved by the National and Federal Councils: effective as of 27<sup>th</sup> April 1995, the Republic established the National Fund. Fifty years to the day after the reestablishment of Austria, this was the first sign of a turnaround of attitudes. It had taken 50 years for Austria to become aware of its unique responsibility for the crimes of National Socialism and to take action. The Republic of Austria had, of course, been the first victim of National Socialism, a victim not a perpetrator – but that was not the whole truth. A shockingly large number of Austrians participated in the atrocities of the National Socialist regime to various extents. Austrians were victims and perpetrators.

In 1991, the Grand Coalition between the SPÖ (Socialist Party Austria) and the ÖVP (Austrian People's Party) initiated the rethink when, with the approval of Erhard Busek, Federal Chancellor Franz Vranitzky submitted a fundamental declaration in this regard on the government bench in the National Council. However, inter-party disputes threatened the realization of this change. The Green Party demanded the maximum, the coalition offered the minimum. In November 1993, Peter Kostelka and I assumed the leadership of our parliamentary group and a series of uncracked hard nuts. The establishment of the National Fund for the payment of gestures recognizing inflicted injustices through symbolic monetary payments proved most difficult. The negotiations fell into the trap of the question of Austrian collective guilt and remained stuck there. We cut through the Gordian knot and brought the present law through the Parliament, only the Green Party voted against it – it was not enough for them. The beaten path was correct; the National Fund, shrewdly managed by Hannah Lessing and her staff, was not the capstone originally intended, but became the basis for fundamental new and comprehensive provisions. In addition to the gesture payments to the victims, comprehensive and important research work also became one of the activities of the National Fund. Many hundreds of research projects were made possible, at home and abroad, and remembrance work was carried out. The General Settlement Fund was created alongside the National Fund, under Federal Chancellor

Wolfgang Schüssel; both Funds were jointly administrated. This change was rounded off by the exemplary provisions governing compensation for forced laborers and equally exemplary legislation on the restitution of looted and extorted art, and now responsibility is finally even being taken for the maintenance of the Jewish cemeteries in Austria, which I have repeatedly called for.

When I was officially welcomed as the President of the National Council by the President of the Israeli parliament in the Knesset, their President rightly stated: Austria has finally managed to come to a good arrangement, a little late however...

In my years of top-level responsibility for the activities of the Federal Government – from 1993 to 2002 as the parliamentary group coordinator, first in a SPÖ-ÖVP coalition, then in an ÖVP-FPÖ coalition, and from 2002 to 2006 as President of the National Council – the work in this field was among the most important and most enjoyable work. The Funds did not become bureaucratic departments hindering compensation, but service establishments for the victims. Hundreds of young Austrians worked in the service of the Fund, helping the victims to present their case plausibly, even if evidence was missing; had to be missing. Another small miracle: of the hundreds of letters and mails received from our fellow citizens throughout the entire time of my responsibility for this legislation and the Funds, there was not a single letter criticizing these, even when we restituted important Klimt paintings in a highly disputed case.

I would still like to express one hope – that the comprehensive files of both Funds and of its numerous organs in the basement of the Palais Epstein and the Parliament building will be stored and made available for comprehensive academic analysis. They reveal the variety of Jewish life in Austria before the Shoah as much as the terrible, horrific, bureaucratic precision of the National Socialist machinery of annihilation and looting in our homeland.

**Univ.-Prof. Dr. Andreas Khol**

Retired President of the National Council

# Public Negotiations on the History of the Holocaust

Univ.-Prof. DDr. Oliver Rathkolb

There is in Austria's post-1945 round of reparations and restitutions only one case that is to be interpreted as an unequivocal admission of political co-responsibility for the behaviour of Austrians in the National Socialist era: the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism, which was set up in 1995 on a voluntary basis by the SPÖe-OeVP grand coalition under Social Democratic Federal Chancellor Franz Vranitzky. The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II was marked by a historic first: each claimant was paid 70,000 Austrian shillings, without having to waive any other entitlement he or she may have had. In addition to this, the traditional definition of the term "victim", which had been quite narrow up until then, was successively widened to include other groups, such as the Roma and Sinti. In another significant overhaul of existing practice, the secretary general of the fund, Hannah Lessing, and her staff made sure that claim-related correspondence and public debates were attuned to the needs and traumas of the surviving victims. This was a major step towards integrating the narratives of the victims and their hitherto unacknowledged and marginalized biographies into the societal discourse.

The political debate, including the parliamentary one on the legislation required for approving this symbolic payment to Holocaust victims, was designed to put self-critical statements on the role of Austrians in World War II and in the Shoah, which had previously been made by such leading politicians as Federal Chancellor Franz Vranitzky and Federal President Thomas Klestil, on a broader basis and to anchor them in public perception as the majority opinion. The American cultural anthropologist and historian Elazar Barkan has demonstrated conclusively<sup>1</sup> that political negotiations and material reparations to compensate victims for massive violations of human rights and for acts of genocide are capable of bringing about a change in the perception of past crimes against humanity in terms of the politics of history.

“Politics of history” is an analytical model that both broadens and refines the debate on “politics of the past”<sup>2</sup>, which was focused to a very large extent on the post-war situation in West Germany and was partly fraught with moralizing overtones. Politics of history is seen as an arena of action and political initiative in which elites and individual actors compete for interpretive authority in socio-political matters through their different perceptions and interpretations of history.

What is at stake in most cases in terms of the concrete, everyday context in which different perceptions of history compete with one another in Austria is the interpretation of myths, symbols and national “master narratives” connected with the biographical, ideological and material legacies of a dictatorial system.

## **National Socialism and the Holocaust as a topical arena of politics (of history)**

At first sight, topical debates on National Socialism and on the share Austrians contributed to this system of terror and extermination seem to suggest a significantly greater engagement with history. This is in fact not the case. These debates are simply recurrent features and include the Denazification controversies in the wake of 1945, the amnesties of the 1950s, the acquittals of the 1960s, the Wiesenthal-Kreisky-Peter debate in 1975 and the Waldheim Affair in 1986.

In 1995 – 50 years after the end of World War II – Federal Chancellor Franz Vranitzky’s principled and critical approach to these topics seemed to indicate an underlying radical shift. This impression was contradicted three years later, when the global issue of the ownerless Swiss bank accounts of Holocaust victims and the issue of compensation payments to former forced labourers in Germany triggered a new round of international discussions.<sup>3</sup> The history of the Nazi era is by no means a closed chapter in Austria, the historians’ jury is still out, the debate is still ongoing.

<sup>1</sup>Elazar Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices*, New York 2000 (W. W. Norton & Co).

<sup>2</sup>Norbert Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik. Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit*, München 1996 (C.H. Beck).

<sup>3</sup>See also Oliver Rathkolb (ed.), *Revisiting the National Socialist Legacy: Coming to Terms with Forced Labor, Expropriation, Compensation and Restitution*, Innsbruck-Vienna-Bolzano-Munich 2002 (StudienVerlag), 2nd edition New Brunswick, 2004 (Transaction Publishers).

I am very pleased that after many years, Austria has brought itself to provide compensation, even if only to a modest extent, for its guilt towards the victims of the National Socialist atrocities – not only through non-binding verbal statements but also through material allocations. Above all, for the people who were themselves victims, beyond the frequently small compensation amounts, this was a sign that the Republic of Austria was thinking of them.

**Hon.-Prof. Dr. Udo Jesionek**  
President of the “White Ring Austria”  
Member of the Board of Trustees of the National Fund  
and of the General Settlement Fund

In this sense the National Fund has assumed a crucial role both in the intra-Austrian debate and on the international stage by supporting projects and advancing its own agenda to raise awareness of Nazi crimes. The very fact that the so-called war generation only ever confronted this whole area in a cursory manner, which was additionally weighed down by complex suppression strategies, makes it appear doubly important for post-war generations to be allowed unrestricted access to information.

The National Fund has not only succeeded in drawing additional attention to the groups of victims that have been traditionally recognized as targets of the Nazi regime on the basis of their race, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, physical or mental handicaps or the charge of "antisociality", but also in validating the compensation claims of Austria's "*SpanienkämpferInnen*", the men and women who took part in the armed struggle against Franco. In 1997 the claims of surviving partners and children of individuals who were condemned to death and executed by the Nazi judicial system and of those who died in concentration camps or in prison were recognized as legitimate as well as the claims of parents of victims of the Nazi euthanasia policy.

The controversies triggered by the belated attempts to assign responsibility for the systematic murder of children at the "*Heil- und Pflegeanstalt am Spiegelgrund*" and by the recognition of the Roma and Sinti as victims of the Nazi regime demonstrate the extent to which a redefinition of the "victim" category is still capable of fanning public debate.

The National Fund also played a pioneering role when it recognized conscientious objectors and soldiers who went AWOL from the *Deutsche Wehrmacht* as victims of the Nazi regime long before their official recognition in 2009.

In addition to this, the National Fund's significance as one of the repositories of Austria's memory is growing all the time. Behind the 30,000 claims to the payment of roughly 5,000 euros – which constitutes no more than a symbolic gesture of compensation – that have been processed to date, 30,000 life stories come into view that will no doubt continue to play an important role in the context of Political Education and Holocaust Education in future.

Far from detracting from the critical reflection on the perpetrators, accomplices and abettors of Nazi crimes, addressing the plight of the victims should also focus attention in that direction and turn the victims' biographies into a tangible reality – without falling into the trap of creating new myths. Austria's collective memory, which primarily laid claim to the status of collective victimhood after 1945 – a claim that was indeed justified for parts of the political elites on the basis of their persecution and maltreatment as individuals by the Nazi regime –, has begun since the 1980s to unravel into several distinct strands of memory, which may end up presenting conflicting claims to the public. It is only now that Austria's society is gradually beginning to acknowledge that National Socialism did not "descend" on the country out of the

During my predecessor's, President Hofrat Paul Grosz, term of office, many decisive events occurred: in 1991, the speech of the Federal Chancellor Franz Vranitzky in Parliament, in which Austrian guilt with regard to the Shoah was mentioned for the first time; the Mauerbach auction; the amendment of the Prohibition Laws and finally, very importantly, the establishment of the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism.

In my twelve years as President of the Jewish Community Vienna, the Historical Commission, the Reconciliation Fund, the Washington Agreement and the agreements of the Jewish Community with the Federation and provinces have all changed the Austrian position on the Nazi era and all of the dramatic events before and after World War II, with the result that there is a solid basis for describing a "new and changed Austria".

The cooperation between the National Fund and the Jewish Community has not always run smoothly, indeed we often had competing and sometimes opposing agendas, as the National Fund is an institution of the Republic and the Jewish Community a representative of the victims and their descendants. However, when one takes a step back to consider the whole, there is good reason to be pleased with everything that we have accomplished together in the past 15 years. Although a "*Wiedergutmachung*" of the crimes of the Nazis and their aiders and abettors is not possible, many moves have been made to help the victims and to build bridges for the future generations. Here it must also be mentioned that during the Washington Negotiations,

the Jewish Community rejected the compensation of assets and, above all, the procedure of the General Settlement Fund as insufficient, overly-complicated and completely unsatisfactory for the victims. However, after 2001, it is thanks to the Presidents of the National Council (Federal President Dr. Heinz Fischer, Dr. Andreas Khol and President Mag. Barbara Prammer) that, through close cooperation, we have found ways to change the basis of the General Settlement Fund to the effect that its work is not entirely finished (here, I am thinking of, among other things, the advance payment provisions and the decision to deal with 200 unresolved cases separately from the Fund).

Therefore, I would like to thank all members of the Board of Trustees and all staff, above all Mag. Hannah Lessing, for the fact that after 15 years we can take stock and be thoroughly proud. I hope that this is not an obituary and that many of the tasks which still lie ahead can be completed together (closure of the General Settlement Fund, *in rem* restitution of the remaining properties, art restitution, extended benefit payments for needy Holocaust survivors through annual payments etc.). However, it is also of utmost importance that the future work of the National Fund, with regard to its projects, is redefined and institutionalized so that the work already commenced may be continued and safeguarded, and so that the conveyance, research and teaching of the Shoah in Austria may be continued accordingly.

**Dr. Ariel Muzicant**

President of the Federal Association of Jewish Communities Austria

blue, in the manner of a *force majeure*, but met with broad societal acceptance and a minimum of resistance even as World War II wore on.

In the context of public negotiations on the history of National Socialism and of the Holocaust, the National Fund has been playing for many years an indispensable role as the initiator of both scholarly and pedagogic projects. It also succeeds again and again in retrieving the details of lives lost in the dark recesses of our history and in making sure these lives are remembered in a way that befits a democracy.

**Oliver Rathkolb, born 1955, Dr. iur., Dr. phil., Univ.-Prof. and Head of the Department for Contemporary History at the University of Vienna, editor of the academic journal "Zeitgeschichte" since 2004. Publications incl.: six monographs (one in English), editor of six anthologies (two of which in English), co-editor of 22 collected editions (two of which in English, one in Czech), over 100 scientific articles.**

# Some Comments on the Holocaust

Prof. Yehuda Bauer

The National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism is a major partner in Austria's efforts to teach about and commemorate the Holocaust. In 2008, Austria was the Chair of the International Task Force for Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (ITF), an intergovernmental body of (today) twenty-seven governments providing a political umbrella for efforts at Holocaust commemoration in different ways. Under the very effective leadership of Ambassador Dr. Ferdinand Trauttmansdorff, and with the help of Ambassador Dr. Thomas-Michael Baier, Mag. Hannah Lessing of the National Fund and their team, Austria made a great contribution to the work of the ITF. There is a general, and an Austrian, background to these efforts. As far as Austria is concerned, ever since the notion that saw in Austria the first victim of Nazi Germany and ignored the disproportionate contribution of Austrian supporters of the Nazi regime to the crimes committed by Nazi Germany was abandoned by a large part of Austrian society, Austrian teachers, as well as public servants, came to be heavily involved in efforts such as that of the ITF. As we all know, Mauthausen, Ebensee, Gusen, Gunskirchen, and other sites in Austria are a reminder of the atrocities committed by probably the most evil regime that has ever disgraced the face of the earth, and the National Fund has played and is playing an important part in the preservation of these sites and the memory that they evoke. The Fund does not deal only with the victims of the Holocaust, but with all those who were persecuted by the Nazi regime in Austria. However, the genocide of the Jews plays a very important part in its work.

There is an estimate that whereas there are some 20,000 or so titles of books and major articles dealing with World War II, there are about 47,000 such titles dealing with the Holocaust, that is with the genocide of the Jews during the war. Why? Why has the genocide of the Jews become the paradigm for genocides and extreme cases of mass murder globally

and universally? What is the difference, if any, between that genocide and all the other genocides that have occurred in human history, probably from the beginning of humanity (and possibly before that)? Where are the parallels, and what can one learn from all of this?

The Holocaust was not unique. If we said it was, we might just as well forget about it, because uniqueness means that something happens just once, and will never recur, and thus we would be saying that as the Holocaust or something akin to it will never happen again, we need not bother with it, beyond possibly remembering it as a past tragedy which is of no significance for the present. However, the Holocaust was done not by a God or by a Satan, but by humans, for human reasons, and anything done by humans can be repeated, never in exactly the same way, to be sure, but yes, in approximately the same or a similar way. The Holocaust was not unique, but it was unprecedented. If we consider other genocides, we will find that there is no element in any of them that is not repeated in yet some other genocides – including the Holocaust. Thus, if we take Rwanda as an example, we find that one element was the real threat to the Hutu dictatorship in Rwanda posed by the invasion of the very largely Tutsi Army from Uganda into Rwanda in 1990. The response of the Hutu Power rulers was to kill all the Tutsi in Rwanda. This is paralleled, for instance, in the Armenian genocide in World War I, when the then rulers of Ottoman Turkey feared, in a way rightly, that the Armenian minority, persecuted by the Ottoman regime, might join the Russian Army threatening Turkish Anatolia. The response was to annihilate the Armenian population by death marches, killings, and starvation in the desert. Another element in Rwanda was the use of a well-developed bureaucratic structure: the Belgian colonialists had introduced identity cards that identified every person as either a Tutsi or a Hutu (or a Twa, a small aboriginal minority). At road blocks, people with a Tutsi identity card were killed. There are many parallels to the intelligent use of bureaucratic machinery in other genocides – in the Holocaust, for instance.

However, in the Holocaust there were elements that had no precedent in any other genocide that happened before it. One such element was the fact that Nazi Germany wanted to physically annihilate every single person they defined as being Jewish, not only in Germany or Europe; their intent was to do that everywhere in the world. There is no precedent for that in human history. Another, central, element is the ideology. All genocides are rationalized by an ideology, because people have to be persuaded to kill. But all these ideologies are rationalizations of very obvious pragmatic considerations. Thus, the reasons for the genocide of North, Mezzo and South American Indians were economic – the desire of the Whites to gain access to land and resources. Parallel motivations can be shown for all genocidal events. But not for the Holocaust. The Jews had no territory, they did not – contrary to legend – control the German or the European economy, they had no army, and did not even have an organization representing all of them politically. Thus, for instance, in Austria the IKG (Israelitische Kultusgemeinde) of Vienna never represented all Viennese, never mind all Austrian, Jews. The Jews were either members of communities that re-

presented different and mutually opposing trends in Jewish life, or did not belong to any Jewish community, though they often, though not always, identified as being Jews. The Nazis invented a non-existing Jewish political presence (the first attempt at organizing a world Jewish political organization occurred in 1936, when the World Jewish Congress was founded as a response to the Nazi threat, and represented a number of communities and Jewish organizations – never all of them). They repeated the accusation that had found its best-known expression in the Tsarist forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* of a supposed world Jewish conspiracy. There was indeed a conspiracy, but it was that of the National Socialists, who wanted to control the world. All this was a totally unpragmatic ideology based on nightmarish delusions. The result was that the murder of the Jews was pursued although it was clearly in contravention to the interests of the Germans themselves: they killed Jews while they were working as forced laborers for German war industries, and they destroyed ghettos that had been forced to produce goods for the Germans. There are hundreds of examples of this sort. Again, the murder of millions in the name of an ideology based on delusions is unprecedented in history.

There is nothing new in killing people because of supposed racial reasons. But the Nazis went beyond that: they wanted to create a new world based on the rule of the Nordic peoples of the Aryan race, with the Germans as its core, and with all the other groups in an hierarchical order below them – no Jews, of course, because they all would have been killed. Again, this is unprecedented. However, when we talk of unprecedentedness, we imply that the Holocaust was, or could be, a precedent, and that other tragedies of this sort could recur. The purpose of Holocaust education and development of awareness regarding that genocide must therefore be to try and prevent such a recurrence.

A central issue in all this derives from the fact that the Holocaust developed from one of the main centers of contemporary civilization, not on its margins. Germany was a liberal country, with tremendous cultural achievements, and during the short Weimar period between the end of World War I and the rise of Hitler to power was a democratic country. So was Austria, until the establishment of the Dollfuß authoritarian regime. The world should have learned – and it is not quite sure that it did – that mass murder and genocide can arise from the center of a liberal civilization.

Many readers will be aware of the different schools of thought trying to explain the genocide of the Jews. "Functionalists" tried to explain it by emphasizing the internal stresses and contradictions of German social and economic structures that, in their view, led to the genocide; "intentionalists" argued that Hitler and his ideology led to the planning of the murder. Today, both these explanations are no longer accepted by most historians. It is clear that the Holocaust was not pre-planned. Until 1941, there was no planning of the mass murder, and Hitler alone is not the answer to the reasons why it happened. On the other hand, structures do not kill; people kill, and they kill because of a motivation that

The Holocaust – the systematic extermination of millions of Jews and the persecution and murder of so many people due to racism and ideology is a crime against humanity, a rupture in civilization, in the face of which we still stand in disbelief today.

It is not possible to repair the pain and the suffering of the past. We can only recognize it and ensure that it is not forgotten.

The National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism is one of the most important institutions in Austria, promoting remembrance of the National Socialist era and the Holocaust.

Through its financial support of school projects, it is making an important contribution towards Austrian society actively coming to terms with this part of its history. It also provides enduring support to the work of the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture, and the association which it founded, [\\_erinnern.at\\_](http://www.erinnern.at).

The National Fund deserves great thanks and appreciation. It is a privilege to work with the staff of the National Fund and to make a contribution towards keeping the memory of the victims alive.

**Mag. Martina Maschke**

Director for International Bilateral Affairs  
Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture  
Chairperson of the Holocaust Education Institute [\\_erinnern.at\\_](http://www.erinnern.at)

persuades them to do so. It would seem that the Holocaust was caused, basically, because of a radical form of antisemitism that itself was the result of a combination of historical development with social stresses in a crisis-ridden German society. Austria was one of the main breeding-grounds for that. There were, to be sure, countervailing forces – liberals, social-democrats, democratic conservatives, and others, but they were neither united nor powerful enough to stop the march towards the abyss.

We need to teach all of this, and more, because it is only through educating the population that we can arrive at a reasonable democratic balance of views and opinions that will, hopefully, prevent the Holocaust precedent to be followed in the future.

**Yehuda Bauer, Emeritus Professor for Holocaust Research at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, scientific advisor to the Israeli Holocaust Memorial Site Yad Vashem, member of the Israeli Academy of Sciences and Honorary Chairman of the ITF (Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research). He has published 14 books on the Holocaust, including "Jews for Sale" and "Re-thinking the Holocaust". His most recent publication "The Death of the Shtetl" (Yale University Press) was published in early 2010.**

“ ... until they are all dead ... ”

# The Special Responsibility Towards the Victims of National Socialism

Dr. Susanne Janistyn

On 1<sup>st</sup> June 1995, the eight-paragraph National Fund Law was adopted by majority. In order that it could be symbolically linked to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Austria, it was retroactively enacted on the 27<sup>th</sup> April. Idealistically, the Law is to serve as a remainder of the immeasurable suffering inflicted on millions of people under National Socialism and of the fact that Austrians also perpetrated these crimes. From a material point of view, the Law provided for monetary payments to support the victims of National Socialism. The Fund itself was established at the National Council; the Board of Trustees, the Committee and the Secretary General are its organs. The Board of Trustees was to commence its work within three months of the publication of the Law and make the first monetary payments. This was the intention of the Constitutional Committee of the National Council, in which the National Fund Law was negotiated.

I have learned what the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism, created in 1995 by the Vranitzky government and unanimously resolved, actually means in practice during conversations with Austrians who had to leave their homeland after March 1938. Most of them greatly appreciated that the Republic of Austria was no longer hiding behind its "status as victim" but was instead making a contribution towards sharing the responsibility for injustices suffered in the form of a symbolic financial payment.

But also the prison and concentration camp survivors who were persecuted on political grounds, for example, who had been served from the outset by the Victims' Welfare Act, received with satisfaction the symbolic gesture of the National Fund as an additional sign of recognition from the Republic.

The fact that a series of publications such as victims' biographies and informative pamphlets on the crimes of the National Socialist regime were able to be published through the National Fund is particularly welcomed. A series of activities, such as trips to concentration camp memorial sites by camp communities, victims' associations, youth and school groups, were also enabled through the support of the National Fund. It is important that this task also be continued in terms of future initiatives for young people.

Those members of staff of the National Fund who provide this wide range of care to the victims are to be thanked for their broad knowledge and commitment.

**Ing. Ernst Nedwed**

Chairman of the Federation of Social Democratic Freedom Fighters  
and Victims of Fascism  
Member of the National Council emeritus

It is difficult, particularly for the survivors of the Shoah in Israel, to follow the path back to the darkest years of their lives, to traipse through the cold memories of their last days and hours as children in Vienna, Graz, Linz, Eisenstadt and many other Austrian towns. For a long time, they have tried to forget, have rebuilt their lives here and looked to the future. Until they gave in to their deeply buried longing for their forever-lost homeland and took the hand, which, although late and imperfect, had reached out to them after all, and in this way found a little more inner peace. Israel will remain a homeland and place of rest for these people. The National Fund has given back to them a piece of their Austrian heart which they had believed to be gone forever.

**Mag. Michael Rendi**  
Austrian Ambassador to Israel

The preparations were therefore carried out under great time constraints. Firstly, the question of what form these payments to the victims of National Socialism should take was to be resolved. The Law did not contain any specific instructions in this regard, but referred to guidelines which were still to be developed. On 6<sup>th</sup> July 1995, the inaugural session of the Board of Trustees took place, in which this question played a fundamental role. In order that the Fund could transfer money to the victims as quickly and as un-bureaucratically as possible, in October, it was ultimately decided to make lump-sum payments of 70,000 Schilling (5,087.10 Euro) as a moral gesture. The Committee was authorized to decide on the applications. The average age of the victims of National Socialism introduced another subject to the agenda which had not been taken into consideration by the Law: what was to happen to the applications, where the applicants had passed away prior to the formal decision by the Committee? After lengthy discussions, the Board of Trustees decided that, from the date of the written decision, the payments are heritable, thus countering the public accusation "they're waiting until they are all dead".

The former President of the National Council, Dr. Heinz Fischer, asked me to pave the way for the first administrative steps until a Secretary General was appointed. Consequently, I have been a member of the Committee of the National Fund ever since. In summer 1995, Dr. Renate Meissner, the present Deputy Secretary General, and I held discussions with contemporary witnesses. I will never forget the first time that I saw the prisoner number of an Auschwitz survivor tattooed on her lower arm. It was Mrs. Marianne Marty, the daughter of a Viennese photographer, with whom I was subsequently in contact for many years. The first meetings with the victims of National Socialism already gave an idea of how difficult the task of the National Fund would be. The pressure on those at the Fund responsible for dealing with the applications rendered necessary the continuous expansion of the team to include, among others, Mag. Christine Schwab, who is today responsible for overseeing the General Settlement Fund. The first address at which the Secretary General Mag. Hannah Lessing assumed the management of the Fund, in early September 1995, was Doblhoffgasse 3. The sheer volume of letters and applications which were delivered by the post office in sacks more than illustrated that great hope which had been pinned on the Fund. By mid-October, 14,000 applicants had already been registered. The moving letters told of the terrible persecution to which their writers had been subjected; what it had meant to them to lose their homeland. But they also told of the pain caused by their rejection from establishments of the state over the last decades. To describe the Fund's early days in more detail would require more space than I have here. The conversations with contemporary witnesses and Holocaust survivors have not only given me insight into the workings of a dictatorial regime but also into their ramifications for people whose plans for the future were brutally destroyed. In my opinion, it is already for this reason that the processing of this chapter of European history cannot be easily completed.

The support provided to the applicants far exceeded that which was stipulated by law. Contact was made with social security agencies, family members were traced, medical care was enabled and financially secured, the first returns to Austrian soil since 1945 were arranged, assistance was provided in regaining Austrian citizenship, to name but a few. Some of these concerns led to amendments to the Law with the aim of better catering to the needs of the elderly victims of National Socialism.

These efforts were an attempt to find an adequate answer to the question of how to express *the special responsibility towards the victims of National Socialism*. Some applicants broke down when describing their unimaginable experiences for the first time at the National Fund. For them, and for their children, the National Fund was and is a point of contact, preventing the pain suffered from being forgotten. The staff of the National Fund have also taken it upon themselves to build bridges to the victims of National Socialism. Those who had to leave Austria are supported when revisiting their memories from that time.

The tasks of the National Fund and the contact with the contemporary witnesses have given rise to a team which is defined by expert knowledge and great sensitivity. Each visitor to the National Fund is convinced of this atmosphere. At the same time, in cooperation with historians and victims' representatives, the eight paragraphs of the law have been fittingly applied to the historical events and, where necessary, the definition of the term 'victim' was refined and expanded.

The further relocations of the National Fund, first to Schottengasse and finally to Kirchberggasse, belie the expansion of its range of activities – be it through the Art Restitution Law, the compensation of losses of assets or the link-up with the General Settlement Fund.

Since then, several tasks have reached their conclusion, for example the compensation of losses of assets (compensation of seized tenancy rights pursuant to Sec. 2b of the National Fund Law); the closing payments of the General Settlement Fund are currently being carried out. The role to be played by the National Fund in the future must now be defined.

In 2009, the theme "Commemoration is more than remembrance – from the burial of human dignity to the indivisibility of human rights" was the focus of the Remembrance Day against violence and racism in memory of the victims of National Socialism, which is marked annually in Parliament on 5<sup>th</sup> May. In the invitation to this ceremony, the importance of knowledge of the emergence and nature of National Socialism is stressed in order to be able to learn lessons from the past. The National Fund will have to define its role in this context. The 30,000 life stories which have been collected during

the course of the application process and which have been incorporated into its archives seem to be an assignment in this regard. In my opinion, the continuation of this task is of great importance, as in the foreseeable future, we will no longer have access to these contemporary witnesses. For this reason, some victims' associations have already handed symbolic files or declarations over to the next generation(s). The National Fund must take on this task so that the reports of the contemporary witnesses do not become history of the Republic of Austria which is simply lying "on file" in archives. The National Fund will not be able to avoid continuing the tasks assumed from the contemporary witnesses in a different form. Moreover – as stipulated by the National Fund Law – projects are to be supported which have their foundation in scientific research into National Socialism and the fates of its victims. Finally, in the National Fund, an organization exists which lends itself to the processing of further aspects of National Socialism, such as the maintenance of the Jewish cemeteries and which, due to its many years of experience, is a sought after partner in such matters.

**Susanne Janistyn, Dr. jur., Committee Member of the National Fund since 1995. Parliamentary Deputy Secretary General for Legislation since November 2008. Director of the Margaretha Lupac Foundation for Parliamentarism and Democracy.**

I was very pleased to be given the chance to describe my memories and experiences to mark the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism.

For many surviving Jewish victims, Austria was always very remote and maintained its distance from them. The establishment of the National Fund and its activities marked the starting point for the construction of a bridge to the forgotten Austrians who had been driven from their homeland.

The modest financial support of the victims and the projects supported by the National Fund had certain psychological effects and the reaction of some people was "we haven't been completely forgotten after all...". The compassion of the chairperson of the Board of Trustees, the Secretary General and the entire staff of the National Funds provided a little illumination in the darkness of abandonment.

**Moshe Hans Jahoda, M.P.A.**

Associate Executive Vice-President/Representative in Austria  
Claims Conference, Committee for Jewish Claims on Austria

The National Fund as an Expression  
of the Change in Austria's Policies  
of Coming to Terms with the Past

# Reflections on the Work of the Early Years

Dr. Renate S. Meissner, MSc

On 30<sup>th</sup> June 2010, the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism celebrates the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its establishment by legislative fiat.<sup>1</sup> While the establishment of the National Fund as such signals a change of attitude on the part of official Austria with regard to its policies of dealing with the past, the Fund must no doubt also be seen as an agent of change in the same direction, particularly in the light of the development of the Committee's case law regarding the recognition of various groups of victims.

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<sup>1</sup>Federal Law Gazette no. 432/1995 of 30<sup>th</sup> June 1995.



Secretary General Mag. Hannah M. Lessing (center) with the Deputy Secretary General of the National Fund Dr. Renate S. Meissner, MSc (left) and the Deputy Secretary General of the General Settlement Fund Mag. Christine Schwab (right)

The National Fund's anniversary itself is enough of an occasion to present this summary of its activities to an interested readership, to reflect, review and draw attention to its development – and to outline thoughts for the future and formulate new goals. Our fifteen years of activity have also rendered it legitimate and interesting to provide this “view from inside” side by side with an “view from outside”, in the form of external contributions and statements, to document how the work of the National Fund is perceived at home and abroad by persons and institutions in the spheres of politics, academia and culture as well as by various victims' organizations and their representatives.

When, in July 1995, during the first organizational preparations for the National Fund to go on stream, I received the first applicants in Parliament together with Dr. Susanne Janistyn, who was nominated for that function by the former President of the National Council, Dr. Heinz Fischer, no one would have thought that the National Fund, in addition to its task of awarding a symbolic payment to victims, would develop into an enduring institution, with many additional tasks relating to the subjects of the Holocaust, coming to terms with the past and the culture of remembrance and commemoration.

The importance and legitimacy of the National Fund as a signal of – belated – recognition of these victims by the Republic of Austria was never in doubt. What could not be foreseen however was its development into one of the most important points of contact for thousands of affected persons and that in 2001 – six years after its foundation – it would be entrusted with the administration of compensation measures stipulated in the “Washington Agreement” and, on the basis of the expertise it had acquired in the meantime, with administrative support for the newly established General Settlement Fund.

## **The organizational development phase**

The widespread satisfaction at the establishment of the National Fund cannot, however, hide the fact that it came decades too late and that the majority of survivors were therefore already likely to be elderly or very elderly. From the outset, this meant that the Fund's staff were confronted with great pressure, both emotionally and with regard to time constraints.

First, an organizational infrastructure had to be created to complement the existing statutory basis. Adequate office space had to be found, staff had to be hired and both application forms and a database that matched the specific requirements had to be developed.

The challenge faced by the National Fund at the beginning was, with the option of an adequately long organizational lead time being barred, the necessity to immediately process all incoming applications and, while doing so, to get in touch with the institutions that held in their archives the documents necessary to substantiate the legal requi-

Many, shamefully many, Austrians were helpers, perpetrators and participants in crimes perpetrated during the occupation by Nazi Germany. But many fellow countrymen were, however, also victims of National Socialist persecution. There is, I quote the former Federal Chancellor Franz Vranitzky, a "shared responsibility for the suffering which was brought upon other people and peoples, not by Austria as a state – which no longer existed – but by the citizens of this country." "It is undisputed", I continue to quote Vranitzky, as this observation seems essential to me, "that in March 1938, Austria became the victim of military aggression with terrible consequences." The Republic Austria has a clear moral responsibility to help those persecuted in our country.

Due to the fact that the measures for the benefit of the victims implemented immediately after the liberation in 1945 were insufficient, the establishment of the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism in 1995 was therefore an overdue and necessary initiative which should have taken place much earlier. The monetary payments disbursed can represent little more than a gesture. A true "*Wiedergutmachung*" of the pain and losses suffered is no longer possible. To me, the psychological aspect seems important – recognition of the victims, addressing their problems, showing understanding and sympathy towards them. As a member of the Committee since the creation of the National Fund, I know that this responsibility is being addressed in by the Secretary General Mag. Hannah Lessing and her staff in an exceptional way.

A personal concern of mine is the recognition of the deserters from the German Armed Forces as victims, above all those who fought on the allies' side for Austria.

The National Fund can also play a useful part in the future, above all through its support of projects, in order to keep the memory of the foul deeds of the National Socialist regime alive, so preventing a repeat of these terrible times, which I actively experienced myself.

**Dr. Wolfgang Schallenberg**  
Retired Ambassador  
Committee Member of the National Fund

rements for a claim. To make matters worse, these institutions were in no way prepared in terms of staff for the processing of thousands upon thousands of research requests in a very short time.

It was thanks to the personal commitment and dedication of the staff of the National Fund and of the institutions cooperating with the National Fund that the applications for gesture payments could be processed as quickly and unbureaucratically as possible.

### **The worldwide search for survivors**

A key element of the National Fund's work in the initial phases and beyond was the search for people eligible to file claims. During her *tour d'horizon* and with support of the Austrian Embassies and various victims' organizations, the Fund's Secretary General, Mag. Hannah Lessing, was able to contact persecutees of the National Socialist regime living abroad and give them detailed information on filing an application. She even brought back several applications on her return to the office of the National Fund in Vienna.

In contrast with the practice of the announcement or, rather, the "non-announcement" of compensation measures employed by the Republic of Austria until this time – how is a survivor living, for example, in a tiny village in Chile, supposed to hear of an announcement in the *Wiener Zeitung* about compensation measures put in place by Austria – the National Fund took it upon itself to locate those who had survived National Socialist persecution, were driven out of Austria and are now scattered all over the world.

The 8,000 addresses of affected persons living in Austria or abroad provided by the Office for the Concerns of Ex-Austrians, established by the former Federal Chancellor Dr. Franz Vranitzky, formed the starting point for the National Fund's current collection of data.

Despite intensive efforts the National Fund has been unable to date to contact all persons who are entitled to a compensation payment. Today the National Fund has in its files the data of over 30,000 applicants. That there is still a pool of potential applicants who have not yet got in touch with the Fund is illustrated by the fact that we are still receiving applications on an ongoing basis, from Austria, from European countries e.g. from Germany, Switzerland, France, Belgium, Great Britain, from Israel and from overseas countries, such as the US, Canada, Australia, Brazil, Uruguay and Kenya.

Interestingly, for a long time the National Fund was far less well-known in Austria, even among the victims' groups, than abroad. Many Austrian victims hesitated to get in touch or came to hear of the National Fund and the opportunity to file an application for

From the outset, the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance (DÖW) was very sympathetic to the establishment and the activities of the National Fund. Indeed, championing the victims of National Socialism is also a fundamental concern of the DÖW. In the 15 years since its establishment, the National Fund has rendered an outstanding service to the interests of the victims of National Socialism, who had previously – as Brigitte Bailer critically determined in her works – for a long time been treated like poor relations by the “official” Austria. Particularly worthy of credit, in my opinion, is the fact that all victims of National Socialist persecution are taken into account, which is in no way as much as a certainty as it sounds. For the first time, groups of victims of National Socialism which, for a long time, had not been considered victims at all, were also recognized, including, for example, young people persecuted for “asociality”, deserters and homosexuals. As someone who has supported the concerns of such people many times, I know how important recognition – far in excess of material recognition – by an official establishment of the Republic of Austria is for the persons affected. In this way, the children from “Spiegelgrund”, who have been discriminated against their whole lives, have *quasi* had their human dignity returned to them. The National Fund, and above all its Secretary General Mag. Hannah Lessing and her dedicated staff, deserve our thanks.

**Hon.-Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Neugebauer**

Former Scientific Director of the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance (DÖW)

a symbolic gesture payment only indirectly, often through relatives and acquaintances living abroad who visited Austria again (often for the first time) during the course of filing their own applications.

Among other things, this can be attributed to the fact that many of those affected who are living in Austria are members of victims' groups which until that time had only been covered partially or not at all by the compensation measures.

### **The groups of victims covered by the National Fund Law**

Persons who were persecuted on political grounds and/or on grounds of origin and religion; who were subjected to National Socialist persecution on grounds of their nationality, their sexual orientation, on grounds of a physical or mental handicap or on grounds of the accusation of so called "asociality"; who were subjected to other typically National Socialist acts of persecution; or who left the country to escape such persecution are eligible to be taken into account for the compensation payment administered by the National Fund (Sec. 2 (1) of the National Fund Law).

Those **persecuted on political grounds**, who were either active in the resistance against the National Socialist regime or who were arrested or sent to court by the National Socialists for making statements criticizing the regime or for carrying out acts of sabotage due to their anti-National Socialist stance, count among the group of victims which had already been accounted for by the Victims' Welfare Act. Those recognized as political persecutees by the National Fund include both civilians and members of the German Armed Forces who were victims of National Socialist military justice.<sup>2</sup>

The large majority of people persecuted by the Nazis because of their **origins** were **Jewish**. This group of victims also constitutes the largest group of victims represented at the National Fund. In the immediate wake of the *Anschluss* in 1938, which was accompanied by the introduction of the Nuremberg Race Laws, acts of persecution were carried out. These manifested themselves both in violent attacks on individuals, discriminatory charges, bans on school attendance, occupational bans and "wild" and organized "aryanizations". Finally, during the Night of Broken Glass Jewish-owned shops were damaged, vandalized and looted and there was a first great wave of arrests of Jewish citizens.

These acts of terrorism and property seizure were followed by systematic deportations to concentration and extermination camps. Those who succeeded in fleeing Austria, often under hazardous conditions, all too often found themselves threatened with deportation to a camp or with internment as enemy aliens in a country that they had

<sup>2</sup>The latter – this predominantly applies to deserters from the German Armed Forces – were originally rejected by the Committee of the National Fund or were only granted recognition on a case-by-case basis.

initially considered safe. In most cases, emigration meant having to start again from the bottom rungs in one's profession or opting for a new profession altogether. It also meant forgoing educational opportunities, the loss of one's mother tongue, the necessity to master a new language, the loss of one's home and, in many cases, the loss of loved ones, which was further exacerbated by feelings of guilt at having survived, often as one of the few members of an entire family.

It soon became evident during the course of the National Fund's work that many people from this group of victims who had succeeded in emigrating, at first thought that only those who had been imprisoned in a (concentration) camp were entitled to claim a gesture payment from the National Fund.

One of the groups of victims for whom strong uncertainty prevailed as to their eligibility for filing an application with the National Fund are those who were referred to as "**first grade half-castes**" in Nazi parlance. Many people with only one Jewish parent were able to survive due to a certain amount of protection that was afforded them on the basis of at least one of their parents being "aryan". However, their lives continued to be in danger due to their origin and in most cases they were subjected to harassment and to concrete acts of persecution such as relegation from school or the loss of their job or the loss of their apartment. After 1942, they were also at increased risk of deportation to a concentration camp. For these reasons, in October 1997, the Committee of the National Fund decided to recognize the applications from people who were generally endangered.<sup>3</sup>

Many of those designated as "first grade half-castes" by the National Socialists have told us that until the time of their application they had barely spoken about the threats they had faced and their experiences or had even deliberately kept quiet in order not to be subjected to further hostility in post-war Austria. We know from people among our applicants that their "outing" themselves as of Jewish descent has had lasting repercussions on their private and professional lives even today.

Another group of victims for whom it was difficult after the war to receive recognition as victims of National Socialism are the **Roma** and **Sinti**. While in the 1960s the opinion was still held that internment at the Lackenbach detention camp, the largest "gypsy camp" on Austrian territory, which also dispatched groups of inmates to concentration camps, could not be classified as a loss of freedom pursuant to the Victims' Welfare Act, they were granted unreserved recognition by the National Fund. This also applies to the small group of the **Yeniche**, who were mostly traveling merchants. Roma, Sinti and the Yeniche were charged with "asociality" and subjected to systematic persecution un-

<sup>3</sup>"Second grade half-castes" - according to National Socialist racial theory those with one Jewish grandparent - were not subjected to systematic persecution and general endangerment. Only those who could prove personal persecution received an allocation from the National Fund.

When the National Fund of the Republic of Austria was established fifteen years ago, I was not yet a member of the Board of Trustees. In 1999, I was nominated by the President of the National Council at that time, Dr. Heinz Fischer, as the representative for the Roma victims group. I was able to shape and support the concerns of the Roma. I believe that I am one of the few members of the Board of Trustees that is themselves a victim – I was born in the internment camp Lackenbach, as it was called. In fact, it was the forecourt of the extermination camps Auschwitz and Lodz.

For the Roma and Sinti victims, the payments from the National Fund improved their living circumstances. A greater than average number of members of the Roma community relies on the victims' welfare pension for their only income. I know that this amount was a gesture by the Republic of Austria. The elderly men and women were pleased that they hadn't been forgotten.

Personally, I am very pleased that I am able to be involved in the Board of Trustees of the National Fund. The cooperation with the former Presidents of the National Council, Dr. Heinz Fischer and Dr. Andreas Khol, with the current President of the National Council Mag. Barbara Prammer and with the Secretary General of the National Fund, Mag. Hannah Lessing, was and is excellent.

Without the support of the National Fund, the research project by the Cultural Association of Austrian Roma, "List of Names of all Roma and Sinti Murdered under National Socialism", and many other projects, interesting and valuable books and film documentaries, projects and events, would not have been possible.

I hope that the National Fund continues to exist for a very long time and that I, as a member of the Board of Trustees, can contribute to ensuring that people from the various groups of victims receive payments from the Fund for the rest of their lives.

**Prof. Rudolf Sarközi**

Chairman of the Cultural Association of Austrian Roma  
Chairman of the Roma Ethnic Advisory Board

der National Socialism as "gypsies". Their children were not permitted to attend school, many families were deported to concentration or extermination camps and their houses were destroyed. Of 11,000 Austrian Roma and Sinti, only between 1,500 and 2,000 survived National Socialist persecution. For this group of persecutees, the majority of whom today suffer from very bad health, the symbolic payment of the National Fund – which can be paid out repeatedly in cases of social need (Sec. 2 (4) of the National Fund law) – represents not only an act of recognition but also desperately needed financial assistance.

The "**children of the Spiegelgrund**" are among the groups who had never before been classified as victims of National Socialism. From 1940, they were (ab)used for medical experiments at Am Spiegelgrund, a complex of wards formerly given that name at the Am Steinhof sanatorium. The change brought about by political recognition in terms of the social perception and the self-perception of factual victims, who are transformed into victims in a political sense, is best illustrated by these children, the majority of whom – to the extent they survived at all – were severely traumatized during the National Socialist era. I remember the first meetings with these applicants well. In long conversations, they told me of the suffering that had been inflicted on them and of the humiliations that they had been subjected to at Am Spiegelgrund, which many of them did not survive. Many did not initially consider themselves victims of National Socialism, above all for the reason that they had been denied this status for so many decades. The recognition of these victims by the National Fund was therefore of great importance.

Those persons who were persecuted during the National socialist era due to their **sexual orientation** were also recognized as victims for the first time. For homosexuality, which was illegal in Austria both before, during and also, for a long time, after the war, had, in fact, been completely outlawed until 1971, the criminal law of the German Reich stipulated up to ten years' imprisonment. Homosexuals were generally incarcerated in a concentration camp. The fact that this is the most weakly represented group at the National Fund leads us to suppose that many homosexuals met their death in the machinery of National Socialism and that the few aged survivors, in the light of their experiences in post-war Austria, were loth to declare themselves to an Austrian authority.

In addition to those persecuted due to their Mosaic religion – in principle, everyone who can prove that they were persecuted on grounds of their respective religion during National Socialism is considered a victim pursuant to the National Fund Law – **Jehovah's Witnesses** ("bible scholars") also belong to the recognized groups of victims. As they refused to perform the "Hitler salute" due to their religious convictions and to take the oath of allegiance and participate in state organizations, they were deemed enemies of the state and persecuted by the National Socialists. Of the

In carrying out its task – recognition by the official Austria of peoples´ suffering under National Socialism – the National Fund turned for the first time to victims´ groups who had still received barely any or insufficient recognition. These included the Jehovah´s Witnesses, long described as the forgotten victims. Thus, not only was the suffering of this victims´ group recognized but the social rehabilitation of an entire religious community was effectuated.

It was also an important step towards reconciliation for the relatives of victims who are now of different faiths. They frequently had to experience their parents and relatives being described by the National Socialists as "enemies of the state", "fanatical bible scholars" or as having "succumbed to false teachings" and, in innumerable cases, falling victim to a terrible death. These children remained with the feeling that they had been left alone due to the religious convictions of their families and relatives. For a long time, people felt ambivalent towards their parents and their religion. Through the process of filing applications, they frequently confronted the past of their parents and relatives for the first time. They became aware of the brave and heroic behavior of their parents and of the fact that they, as the applicants themselves, had been victims of a regime which was contemptuous of humanity. As a result, many found inner peace and reconciliation.

We are grateful for the ever-competent, unbureaucratic and highly esteemed cooperation.

**Heidi Gsell**

Jehovah´s Witness

Historical research on Jehovah´s Witnesses

Former Director of the Historical Archives of the Jehovah´s Witnesses

Employee of the former Jehovah´s Witness Information Service

For many years, it seemed that the victims of National Socialism in Austria would remain without public recognition for their courage in the resistance and their victims in the resettlement camps. For this reason, we welcome the establishment of the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism all the more, from a psychological and a political view. As Carinthian partisans, we understood and accepted this support as a belated and favorable assessment of our fight against National Socialism. Particularly those who left the German Armed Forces and joined the resistance and were denigrated for this for decades after the war as deserters and comrade murderers.

The Association of Carinthian Partisans and Friends of the Anti-Fascist Resistance thank the entire staff and management of the National Fund, all political powers that enabled the establishment of the National Fund and the President of the Austrian Parliament, Mrs. Barbara Prammer for their tireless efforts in the culture of remembrance. Through this, many people who suffered immeasurably during the war received compensation, which must be judged as recognition.

**Ing. Peter Kuchar**

Chairman of the Association of Carinthian Partisans  
and Friends of the Anti-Fascist Resistance

500 Jehovah's Witnesses in Austria at the time, around one quarter did not survive. The recognition of this group of victims by the National Fund possibly also contributed to the Jehovah's Witnesses gaining official recognition as a religious community in Austria in 2009.

The **Carinthian Slovenes** form the biggest group of victims persecuted on grounds of nationality or ethnicity during National Socialism. Around one thousand people were evacuated from their homes and deported to German camps; their farms were confiscated and allocated to German settlers. Many of them joined the **partisans** and were supported in this by the Slovene population in Carinthia, predominantly through the provision of food and a place to hide. The recognition of this group was an unexpected and, for some people, unbelievable occurrence. The fact that the members of this group of victims, many of whom still live in out-of-the-way farms in Carinthia, even came to hear of the opportunity of applying is owed to the great dedication of the Chairman of the Carinthian Partisans<sup>4</sup>, who tirelessly traveled from farm to farm, sometimes also accompanied by a member of the staff of the National Fund. The mere fact that a member of the staff of the National Fund paid them a visit was appreciated very much by those concerned. Many told the story of their lives for the first time, which, as a by-product, elicited questions from their children and grandchildren. Politicians and representatives of the National Fund visited the various memorial sites of the Carinthian Slovenes and partisans, including Perschmannhof<sup>5</sup>, and in recent years Carinthian Slovenes and partisans have begun to write their life stories and get them published. The President of the National Council, Mag. Barbara Prammer, was instrumental in organizing a book presentation and an exhibition in Palais Epstein on the lives and the persecution of Carinthian Slovenes and partisans.

Another group of victims taken into consideration by the National Fund Law are those who were persecuted on grounds of a **physical or mental** disability, most notably in connection with the National Socialist euthanasia programs.

People classified as "**asocial**" by the National Socialists also formed a distinct group of victims. The umbrella term "asocial" enabled the National Socialist regime to persecute people who were considered undesirable for the most diverse reasons, for example for refusing to work or not complying with the social norms of the time or due to making prohibited contact with forced laborers or prisoners of war. Roma and Sinti were also persecuted under that charge.

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<sup>4</sup>In this regard, we would like to thank Ing. Peter Kuchar and Urška Brumnik, as well as all other victims' representatives whom it is not possible to name here. The fact that many affected persons who would not have been in a position to learn of the National Fund or to file an application themselves were able to receive this belated recognition by the Republic of Austria in the form of a gesture payment is owed to the tireless dedication of these people.

<sup>5</sup>Perschmannhof/Peršmanhof near Bad Eisenkappel/Železna Kapla was an important partisan base. At the end of the war it was the scene for a massacre of eleven Carinthian Slovenes, including seven children, by SS and police units. Today, the farmhouse is a museum and a place of remembrance.

The Documentation Center Hartheim has been a support and information point for relatives of victims of National Socialist euthanasia for many years. Since the establishment of the National Fund, we have been in close collaboration. With the support of the National Fund, around 23,000 names of an estimated 30,000 victims murdered in Hartheim have been able to be determined.

As those who were murdered within the scope of National Socialist euthanasia programs were for decades not recognized as victims of National Socialism, their surviving families were also not included when it came to victims' welfare. Often, these people did not receive confirmation of the terrible fates of their relatives until they contacted the information point. In many cases, they are unaware of the existence of the National Fund and the opportunity to apply for a gesture payment.

Although an extinguished human life cannot be replaced by money, the gesture payment created by the National Fund is of particular significance. For the descendants of this long-forgotten group of victims, it symbolizes official recognition by the Republic which was so long denied.

**Mag. Peter Eigelsberger, Mag. Florian Schwanninger**  
Documentation Center Hartheim

Another group of people who became victims of typical National Socialist acts of persecution by other means are the group of **Döllersheimer**, farmers who were resettled from the so called Döllersheimer Ländchen after 1938 to free the area for the construction of the Military Training Area Allentsteig in Lower Austria. A special application form, tailor-made for their special type of persecution, was developed for these victims.

### **The extended case law of the Committee for recognizing further groups of victims**

In the course of its work it became increasingly clear to the National Fund that a number of historical aspects, including groups of victims, had not been taken into consideration by the National Fund Law. The staff collected details pertaining to the stories of persecution of these people or groups and passed them on to the Committee. This made it possible for groups of victims or for certain individuals that had previously been ignored by the law could be taken into account. This extended case law developed parallel to the new research results that kept emerging over the years.

To take these developments into account the National Fund re-examined previously rejected applications to check them for aspects that had newly come to light and to subject them to a renewed assessment by the Committee. Consequently, both individuals and certain groups of victims received the hoped-for recognition by the Republic of Austria after all.

During the development of the above mentioned case law, recognition by the National Fund was extended to persons who had **left Austria for political or racial reasons** after the 12<sup>th</sup> July 1936, as the 11<sup>th</sup> July 1936 – the date of the so called July Agreement between Austria and the German Reich – was now deemed to be the historical date from which possible further developments in Austria were foreseeable for people who were careful observers of the political situation. The related decision by the Committee of the National Fund occurred in May 1998.

Almost one and a half years previously – in February 1996 – the **Spanienkämpfer** (“Spanish fighters”) were also recognized as victims pursuant to the National Fund Law – persons who were unable to provide proof of residence in Austria in 1938 but had been incarcerated in French camps and subsequently extradited to the German Reich and deported to concentration camps due to their involvement in the Spanish Civil War.

In addition to the recognition of the Carinthian partisans in October 1997, the extended case law of the Committee, in analogy to the so called **Surviving Dependents Ruling**, was also made to apply to the **children of fallen partisans** from January 1999. This ruling states that **widows, widowers and children of the victims of military justice or of those who died in prison or in concentration camps** were to be classified as victims

in line with the National Fund Law by decision of the Committee of March 1997 and April 1998 – insofar as they experienced no direct persecution or were unable to prove such – due to the social and political repercussions to which they had been subjected.

Equally, **parents whose children were murdered** in National Socialist  **euthanasia programs** – for example within the scope of “Operation T4”<sup>6</sup> – were recognized as victims in accordance with the National Fund Law by decision of the Committee of April and June 1997.

This also applies to **children** who were born while their persecuted parents were on the run in an **initially safe third country** but who were subsequently subjected to National Socialist persecution as a result of the occupation of this country by the German Reich.

This outline of the successive extensions of the case law of the Committee during the early years of the National Fund is also being continued in the present.<sup>7</sup>

### **Dealing sensitively with the victims of National Socialism**

The differing reactions of the applicants demonstrate how important it was that the Republic of Austria had, with the National Fund, created an official department which symbolically recognized the suffering of many thousand people who had been persecuted by the National Socialist regime in Austria or whose persecution began in Austria or who had to leave Austria to escape persecution. More so than the financial gesture – the material expression of the political recognition which provided important assistance for many people, for example for urgently needed and otherwise unaffordable medication – the recognition of each story of persecution and suffering by official Austria was of importance to the affected persons.

Listening and demonstrating empathy were key aspects that governed the work of National Fund staff when dealing with the affected persons. People who fell short of one or more statutory requirements for a claim and did not (initially) belong to the group of eligible persons of the National Fund Law were likewise attentively listened to by the staff. Despite the rejection of their applications – an event which was incomprehensible and emotionally upsetting for many – it was still important for them that they had found sympathetic listeners and had not simply been sent away. At last they had been able to tell their story to an official Austrian department, which afforded them visible relief. Moreover, stories of persecution of a type that the legislative authority had not been taken into account to begin with resulted in many cases in an extension of the case law, as has already been mentioned.

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<sup>6</sup>“Operation T4” was the term for the systematic murder of physically and mentally disabled persons in the years 1940 and 1941. “T4” stands for the address from which those in charge of the operation acted – Tiergartenstraße 4 in Berlin.

<sup>7</sup>See also the article by Maria Luise Lanzrath in this volume, in which the extended case law of the Committee from 2001 to present is outlined.

I have always felt the National Fund to be something "special". Special in the way it came into being, which was closely associated with Austria's change in attitude towards its past. Special due to its legal configuration – an aspect which is of particular interest to me as a lawyer – and, probably most importantly, special in its treatment of the applicants.

The work at the National Fund was also special for me. I was able to meet so many people – face-to-face when they sought out the office of the Fund, by telephone and through the portrayal of their life stories in the application forms – people who have experienced the unimaginable. It was of utmost importance to me to afford them and their fates the respect that they had been denied in the years following 1938, through consciously dealing with that which they have experienced and described. I have always seen this as my contribution towards Austria's acceptance of its responsibility. In doing so, I have had some overwhelming experiences. And the friendliness and the warmth with which I was met by many of those affected, although I was just doing my "job", was often abashing considering these people's terrible experiences.

**Mag. Christine Schwab**

Deputy Secretary General of the General Settlement Fund

I have been providing support and advice to the applicants for over eight years. Personal contact with the affected persons has been a source of great pleasure to me although it was often emotionally very draining. The applicants have experienced and described too many ordeals. As caseworkers, we have often felt the impact of the cumulative weight of terrible experiences. For this reason, positive reactions to our work from the applicants have become very important to us. A friendly telephone call in which an applicant thanks us for a payment, often even effusively and warmly, allows us to forget many unpleasant calls. For many people, it was not the payment that was decisive but the fact that they were recognized as victims by the National Fund. It is depressing to see how many applicants are suffering from illness and poverty in their old age. It is always a great pleasure when a person in need is able to be helped with their financial difficulties with a payment from the National Fund.

**A member of the Legal Case-Processing Department of the National Fund**

The recognition of the victims of National Socialism by Austria expressed through the symbolic gesture payment from the Republic was – and this was repeatedly stressed by the majority of those affected – not only an important token but for many ex-Austrians living in exile it also brought about an unexpected renewal of their relationship with Austria. In this way, the payments succeeded in building a bridge to their former homeland that had no longer been expected.

In this regard, contact by telephone, by letter and in person is of great importance and not to be underestimated. Through this contact it was often possible to enter into an – often very moving – exchange with the affected persons that was of great value to both the victims of National Socialism and their heirs and to a generation of young Austrians. Within the scope of the far more complex proceedings of the General Settlement Fund, this personal contact was of particular importance and it demonstrated to the victims that, despite the long wait for a payment from the General Settlement Fund, they had not been forgotten by Austria.

The aforementioned possibility of receiving a second or third gesture payment in cases of social need pursuant to Sec. 2 (4) of the National Fund Law provided survivors both in Austria and abroad with enough money to pay for crucial orthopedic aids such as wheelchairs and stair lifts; to pay for expensive medication or home care; or to adapt their apartments so that they are handicapped accessible. The retroactive purchase of insurance months in order to receive a pension was also rendered possible by these payments. One case in which the payment enabled two sisters who had been persecuted as so called children of the Spiegelgrund and who live today in different countries to be reunited and hug each other again after so many years, was particularly moving for the staff of the National Fund.

The nicest thing about this job for me and for many on the staff of the National Fund and of the General Settlement Fund has been supporting the applicants through our work and being able to play a part in processing partially unknown Austrian history. What has also played a significant role for us is being able to counter the feelings of banishment of those expelled or persecuted with a belated but all the more important welcome back to their (former) homeland.

The encounters in which victims share their memories with members of a young generation of Austrians and which often get very emotional on both sides, have rendered history tangible and given rise to new knowledge and understanding.

The statements by the staff of the National Fund and of the General Settlement Fund collected in this volume provide an insight into their experiences gathered from the contact with the applicants and into the intensive way in which they deal with the National Socialist era as part of their job as well as into what their work in this sensitive area means to them as individuals.

When I think back to the early days of the National Fund, I firstly think of my deep sadness, also today, at the experiences of the applicants, of which they have told us in letters, applications and telephone conversations. Secondly, to me the National Fund also means a great deal of work – from the electronic compilation of the applications and making telephone calls to disbursing the payments. In my opinion, the National Fund is an important institution for the victims of National Socialism, as the staff provide the affected persons with the opportunity to talk about their experiences. My work at the National Fund means a great deal to me, as I like working with and for people.

**A member of staff from the Finance Department  
of the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund**



The staff of the Finance Department of the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund: (from left to right) Judith Pfeffer, Manuela Dorr (Head of Department), Gabriele Dötzl, Julia Meszaros

### **The wide range of additional tasks as an indication of the National Fund's future direction**

As a result of this work with the survivors and the expertise acquired in the course of its work, the National Fund was entrusted with implementing further restitution and compensation measures in 2001. In the almost ten years which have since passed, the National Fund has not only carried out **payments for seized tenancy rights**, including an additional payment, but has also been able to fulfill and extend its **educational mandate** by **supporting many important projects**.

In addition to this, new developments have evolved in the various original fields of activity of the National Fund and entirely new areas of responsibility have been taken on. With regard to the future utilization of heirless art objects, for example, the proceeds from which are to be used for victims of National Socialism, an art database was set up, which is designed to make it easier for potential heirs to come forward and claim the artworks before they are auctioned off or otherwise sold. Moreover, the National Fund was recently entrusted with the **coordination of the redesign** of the Austrian memorial in the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Beside the recognition of the victims through a symbolic payment in the light of a new Austrian culture of remembrance and commemoration, an important task of the National Fund is the publication of life story testimonials of the victims. In order to preserve the victims' experiences for Austria's collective memory, they must be documented. The publication of autobiographical memories as lasting evidence of their persecution is also important for the victims and indicates the belated and therefore the even more important interest of society in the personal stories of persecution. The publication of these life story testimonials therefore remains an important part of the work of the National Fund, in addition to its numerous other tasks.

In addition to enabling us to outline the National Fund's various fields of activities, to indicate priorities and portray the outward perception of the Fund, the anniversary of the National Fund also offers us the opportunity to give a wide range of victims of National Socialist persecution a voice. For this reason, the second volume of our anniversary publication is devoted entirely to the life stories of our applicants.

Since its founding fifteen years ago, the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism has been highly instrumental in reaching out to former Austrian émigrés who after having witnessed the atrocities of NS persecution have found a new home here in the United States. In the process of its initial goal of providing payments promptly and in the least bureaucratic manner possible to all known Holocaust survivors, it grew to become an effective network offering continued support and assistance as well as updated information on restitution legislation and social programs.

In the years following the National Fund's team was entrusted with several additional programs that extended beyond its original mandate, providing invaluable assistance to the Embassy's efforts of outreach: today it continues its support of needy Holocaust survivors throughout the world within its programs, addresses questions regarding restitution of looted art, and helps create awareness of the NS period and its consequences by supporting research and remembrance projects on contemporary history.

Following a recent presentation in Miami by Secretary General Hannah Lessing – one of many given in the U.S. over the course of the last fifteen years – survivors expressed their strong recognition of the work of the National Fund: not only did they appreciate justice met through restitution and compensations but also valued the various outreach programs, along with Austria's efforts to face the darkest chapters of its history. Moreover, as the Embassy staff learned

through conversations with surviving victims of the NS regime when implementing the Fund's payments, it was especially meaningful to the elder survivors to also be able to talk about what happened. The interest in each individual tragedy shown by staff members was particularly valued and viewed as a sign of recognition.

The creation of the Fund occurred at a time of active discussion on Austria's moral responsibility for crimes committed during the NS regime. Since then, Austria has taken many additional steps to financially alleviate the pain and suffering of numerous victims of the NS regime. Within the framework of the Washington Agreement of January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2001, a series of new programs was introduced to address open questions of restitution. More importantly, many young Austrians themselves expressed the wish to learn more about what happened during that era, with some of them taking initiative to serve in Holocaust Museums and remembrance institutions in the United States instead of military service (this was made possible under Austrian law).

The last few years have been marked by Austria's efforts toward making gestures of reconciliation, with the creation of the National Fund serving as an invaluable milestone along the way.

**Dr. Christian Prosl**

Austrian Ambassador to the United States of America



Division Head of the National Fund Dr. Renate S. Meissner, MSc (seated) with the staff of the Legal Case-Processing Department of the National Fund: (standing from left to right) Mag. Maria Luise Lanzrath (Head of Department), Mag. Gernot Niedermann, Mag. Katrin Bieberle

Because much  
remains unresolved ...

# Victim Recognition and the New Tasks Assumed by the National Fund since 2001

Mag. Maria Luise Lanzrath

2001 marked a significant turning point for the National Fund. The implementation of the "Washington Agreement" assigned new tasks to it that demanded additional resources, staff and office space.

## **The Washington Agreement**

In the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the crimes of National Socialism and questions of shortcomings in the restitution of seized property increasingly became the subject of international debates. Due to class action suits filed in the US against the Republic of Austria and Austrian companies, negotiations took place from May 2000 between representatives of Austria, the United States, the Conference of Jewish Material Claims, the Jewish Community in Austria, Austrian companies and lawyers of claimants. On 17<sup>th</sup> January 2001, an agreement was signed in Washington – the Washington Agreement.

This Agreement stipulated various measures for the benefit of victims of National Socialism: the establishment of the General Settlement Fund for the “comprehensive solution to all unresolved issues of compensation for the victims of National Socialism” and – as an immediate measure for survivors – the so called compensation for seized tenancy rights and social welfare measures.

The National Fund was commissioned with both the implementation of the compensation for seized tenancy rights and the administration of the General Settlement Fund, for which 210 million US dollars were made available.

### **The new tasks**

In order to be able to carry out these new tasks with maximum efficiency, it was necessary to hire additional staff and to move the Fund to larger premises.

Therefore, in early 2001, the offices were relocated from Doblhoffgasse to Schottengasse and more staff were hired – primarily lawyers, historians and administrative assistants. By the end of 2001, the National Fund’s original staff of six had increased to 33, many of whom were also working for the newly-established General Settlement Fund.

The legal framework for the compensation of seized tenancy rights allowed for relatively swift implementation and payment. From the outset, the National Fund was able to dispose of the means provided for this measure and could therefore disburse payments in parallel to the processing of applications received. By contrast, the General Settlement Fund was only able to commence its payments after the discontinuation of the pending class action suits against Austria and Austrian companies and the entry of legal closure in 2005. In 2004, the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund relocated to Kirchberggasse 33, where both Funds are based today.

### **Compensation of seized tenancy rights**

The compensation of seized tenancy rights is a measure which was provided for all victims of National Socialism. In the majority of cases, it relates to the seizure of Jewish property that began immediately after the *Anschluss* in 1938. Particularly in the initial weeks, many “wild aryanizations” were carried out: Jewish tenants were driven from their apartments by armed National Socialist Party members or by their own neighbors and their possessions were looted. “Aryan” employees, often formerly illegal National Socialists, used violence to take over the businesses of their Jewish employers. Numerous Jewish companies were put under provisional administration, often after their rightful owners had been ousted without receiving any compensation. From 1939, it was legal to evict Jewish tenants for the simple reason that they were “non-aryans”. The displaced tenants were forced to emigrate, generally leaving all of their possessions behind. Those unable to emigrate were



The staff of the Secretariat of the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund:  
(seated from left to right) Susanne Sehorz (personal assistant to the Secretary General),  
Carina Fürst (Head of Department), (standing from left to right) Mag. Mirjam Saueregger,  
Cornelia Mötz, Marion Maly, Stephanie Mayerhofer, Isabel Fröschl, Mag. Stefanie Ober-  
meir, Eveline Fuchs; absent: Erik Gerstel

transferred to smaller quarters or collective apartments. Many were subsequently taken to assembly camps to be deported and murdered in concentration camps. By April 1945, over 59,000 rented apartments had been aryanized. Only very few survivors were successful in claiming back their houses and apartments after the war.<sup>1</sup>

Despite being announced in the Third Restitution Act of 1947, the restitution of tenancy rights and leases was never accomplished. This affected around 70,000 apartments, business premises, allotments and comparable objects. As early as 1948, the Head of the Jewish Community had already appealed to the Austrian Federal Government "one last time" to "establish legal equality, above all with regard to apartments"<sup>2</sup>. It was to take until 2001 for this appeal to be complied with.

Pursuant to the first part of the Washington Agreement, the Federal Law on the National Fund was amended on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2001. The new Sec. 2b of the National Fund Law<sup>3</sup> stipulated the final compensation of the following losses:

- apartment and small business leases
- household property
- and personal valuables

The Federal Government allocated an amount of 150 million US dollars to the National Fund for this purpose, which was to be distributed to the surviving victims of National Socialism.

The National Fund proceeded to implement the amendment immediately: a questionnaire was developed for the application process, a worldwide announcement was put out and all victims already known to the National Fund were contacted. As the group of eligible persons essentially comprised those persons previously recognized by the National Fund, many of those eligible could be quickly informed by letter of the new opportunity.

The compensation for seized tenancy rights was conceived as an immediate measure for survivors. That meant that payments were to be carried out as quickly as possible and with the least amount of historical research possible.

For this reason, it was resolved that the compensation would take the form of a lump sum payment of 7,000 US dollars/7,630 euros for each eligible person. Even though the

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<sup>1</sup>See Brigitte Bailer-Galanda, Eva Blimlinger, Susanne Kowarc, "Arisierung" und Rückstellung von Wohnungen in Wien. Die Vertreibung der jüdischen Mieter und Mieterinnen aus ihren Wohnungen und das verhinderte Wohnungsrückstellungsgesetz, in: Österreichische Historikerkommission (ed.), "Arisierung" und Rückstellung von Wohnungen in Wien. With contributions by Georg Graf, Brigitte Bailer-Galanda, Eva Blimlinger and Susanne Kowarc, Vienna-Munich 2004 (= publications of the Austrian Historical Commission, vol. 14).

<sup>2</sup>Quoted from Robert Knight (ed.), *Ich bin dafür, die Sache in die Länge zu ziehen. Wortprotokolle der österreichischen Bundesregierung von 1945–52 über die Entschädigung der Juden*, Frankfurt am Main 1988, p. 200.

<sup>3</sup>Federal Law Gazette I no. 11/2001.

amount of the individual losses could not be taken into account, this made it possible for the money to be disbursed more swiftly: if the leaving of their apartment was plausible, no further proof was required and the sum total of the loss suffered with regard to household effects and personal valuables did not need to be ascertained. In many cases, it would have been impossible for applicants to produce such proof: more than 60 years after their expulsion, there were barely any documents left and many, especially those who had been children at the time, could not recall in detail the value of what had been left behind. It is also stands to reason that the circumstances of a generally hasty departure made it extremely unlikely for people to have taken all their household effects with them into exile. As with the gesture payments, the National Fund also undertook the historical research required for the compensation of seized tenancy rights if survivors did not have any documentation pertaining to the loss of the apartment.

### **The response to the compensation for seized tenancy rights**

There was a huge response – many people came to the offices of the National Fund in person to fill out their application with the help of the staff and to tell their story. For many this meant painfully reliving their expulsion and losses.

In the questionnaire for the compensation of seized tenancy rights, there were questions regarding the seized apartment, the loss of household effects and personal valuables. On these occasions, it was not unusual to see a window being opened to the past: people returning in their thoughts to the places of their childhood, in their mind going through the rooms which had once been their family home. They described objects that had once meant a lot to them or to their parents and they described the emotions evoked by the loss of these everyday objects. At these times, the victims' memory of the loss of one single object might take on the dimensions of the loss of their homeland, family and childhood.

The sheer number of applications for compensation payments graphically conveys how many people were driven from their homes and robbed of their possessions between 1938 and 1945. Most of them were unable to take more than a suitcase with them – and some not even that.

### **Extension of the deadline**

The law originally stipulated a one year filing period for applications, ending on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2002. However, it soon became clear that this period was not going to be long enough. The number of responses rendered repeated extensions of the deadline necessary. An amendment<sup>4</sup> authorized the Board of Trustees to extend the deadline: consequently, it was extended initially to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2003, then to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2004 and finally to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2004.

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<sup>4</sup>Federal Law Gazette I no. 19/2003.

Working for the National Fund since 2001 (first for the secretariat and then as a member of the legal staff) has given me the opportunity to be part of a unique project and to experience things which would be uncommon in any other job. From the outset, our aim was to communicate with our applicants in a more sensitive manner than the other public authorities. This resulted in a very different approach being developed. It wasn't always easy to provide the time necessary to listen while at the same time maintaining a functioning administration for the disbursement of the payments. And even if it seems at times that these efforts are not appreciated, at the end of each day, I am always proud of having made a contribution to something I consider to be a just cause.

**Mag. Gernot Niedermann**

Member of the Legal Case-Processing Department of the National Fund

In total, around 20,400 people worldwide have received the compensation payment of 7,000 US dollars/7,630 euros for the loss of their apartment or small business lease, household property and personal valuables.

### **Additional payments**

Pursuant to Sec. 2b of the National Fund Law, the amount remaining from the 150 million US dollars after processing all the applications was to be distributed equally among all eligible persons, i.e. all people who had received compensation for seized tenancy rights or their heirs. This additional payment amounted to 1,000 euros for each eligible person.

### **The personal dimension: What does this task mean to the National Fund's staff?**

Thousands of applications were filled out with the support of the staff in the offices of the Fund. The National Fund has enlisted a staff consisting almost entirely of young people born decades after the war. Working with the survivors compels them to intensely confront Austria's guilty past.

Focusing on the dark side of a past they were not themselves part of, whose effects, however, they had to deal with over a prolonged period, sometimes over many years, can be emotionally draining for these young people. At the same time, it can also result in them calling their understanding of history into question and enable new opinions to be formed on Austrian history and society.

The compensation for seized tenancy rights documents the history of the spoliation and expropriation of Austrian citizens in a particularly tangible way. Many expulsions occurred in Vienna, and some in the hometowns of Fund employees. The knowledge that many of the houses we pass every day on our way to work were affected by these "aryanizations" has a lasting effect on many of us as regards the picture that we have of our city, of Austria and of this particular chapter of Austrian history. At the same time, the personal encounters with survivors from this period are often valuable and enriching experiences. To be able to work with people who share their life stories with us is a privilege: they impart to us first-hand historical knowledge and make history tangible.

Personal involvement is therefore a crucial aspect to our work. Although most of the staff of the National Fund, as has already been said, were born long after the end of National Socialist rule and the question of personal guilt therefore does not arise, it is nevertheless important for them to share in the responsibility of the Republic. Our task is to do at least what is still possible today – to be there emotionally for the survivors and expose ourselves to the expressions of grief, resentment and even an-



The staff of the Personnel Department of the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund: (from left to right) Mag. Katrin Bieberle (Deputy Head), Dr. Renate S. Meissner, MSc (Head of Department), Dr. Markus Gstettner, LL.M. (Deputy Head), Mag. Maria Luise Lanzrath, Dr. Katrin Gloyer

ger – that this compensation from the Republic has come too late and that there are so many things for which it is impossible to make amends.

### **Administrative support of the work of the National Fund**

The General Settlement Fund Law stipulates that the National Fund provide support to the General Settlement Fund: "Sec. 4 (5) The National Fund shall provide technical support to the Claims Committee, making use to the greatest extent possible of its administrative infrastructure."<sup>5</sup>

The National Fund and the General Settlement Fund have worked closely together from the outset. The fact that the two Funds share office space; that they are dealing largely with the same applicants; that they use shared databases; and, last but not least, that they work with the same documents and similar questions and issues produces synergies that both Funds benefit from: on the one hand, the work of the General Settlement Fund made use to a significant extent of the results and expertise of the National Fund, while, on the other, the National Fund benefited in many cases from the comprehensive research of the General Settlement Fund, which had access to a wider range of archives. As a result, many survivors' applications to the National Fund were approved thanks to documents provided by the General Settlement Fund.

In contrast to the National Fund, the focus of the General Settlement Fund is not on the symbolic recognition of survivors as victims; its work solely encompasses the compensation of material losses. Nor does the General Settlement Fund have the option of making swift compensation payments in the form of lump sums.

The General Settlement Fund has since been able to commence with the closing payments. As soon as it has completed its task, the remaining monies will pass to the National Fund, as stipulated in Sec. 5 (4) of the General Settlement Fund Law, in order that they may be used for the benefit of the victims of National Socialism.

### **Victim recognition: Definition of the term "victim" – case closed?**

The so called gesture payment, which is supposed to provide a symbolic compensation payment for injustices suffered, was the first benefit provided by the National Fund. It continues to be relevant today. It is worth noting that even after 15 years, applications to be recognized as a victim of National Socialism are still regularly submitted. We know from experience that for many people it takes years before they are able to come to terms with their painful memories and talk about their suffering.

Each and every application for recognition received by the Fund raises again the question, "Who is a victim?" By trying to provide an answer to this question whenever it arises,

<sup>5</sup>Federal Law Gazette I no. 12/2001.

the extent to which socio-political developments and learning processes influence the understanding of National Socialist political injustice and persecution becomes clearer.

Since the end of the war and particularly over the last two decades the definition of the term “victim” has evolved: compared with the early stages of the Second Republic, when narrow definitions were the rule regarding victims of the National Socialist regime, research undertaken more recently has resulted in a wealth of new knowledge which was – and still is – highly relevant to the National Fund’s awarding the status of victim.

Sec. 2 (1) Item 1 of the National Fund Law cites the grounds on which persecution may have occurred. The provision was so broadly defined by the legislator that the term “victim” is left open to interpretation, and new historical findings can be taken into account:

*“Sec. 2. (1) The Fund shall render benefits to persons*

*1. who were persecuted by the National Socialist regime on political grounds, on grounds of origin, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, on grounds of physical or mental disability or on grounds of accusations of so called asociality or who otherwise were victims of typical National Socialist injustice or left the country in order to escape such persecution [...].”*

When the National Fund came on stream in 1995, the first victims to be recognized were those whose persecution had already been researched and documented by historians, such as victims of politically motivated persecution and victims of racially motivated persecution such as the Jews or the Roma and Sinti.

However, in the first years of its work, a more sophisticated picture of the individual groups of victims and the diverse forms of persecution emerged – the developments up to the year 2001 are traced in the article by Dr. Renate S. Meissner, MSc in this volume:

Some – generally smaller – groups of victims had to wait many years before they were finally acknowledged as victims by official Austria and subsequently by the public. It was only through the intensive examination of National Socialism, which is certainly in part a result of the emergence of new generations in Austrian society, that stories of persecution have emerged that are less well known, but no less worthy of acknowledgement.

## **Developments in case law from 2001**

Further development and refinement of the decision-making process was not limited to the first few years. The definition of the term “victim” continued to evolve even in the following years, after the compensation for seized tenancy rights had commenced in 2001.

In the light of the diversity of the stories of persecution described in the applications it became increasingly clear that persecution came in many guises. Persecution on grounds of origin pertained not only to people of Jewish origin or to Roma and Sinti, and persecution on grounds of nationality did not only affect Carinthian Slovenes. Some stories were unique, bringing new cases of persecution to light that had not previously been the subject of in-depth research.

It transpired, as was described in a 2004 application for example, that a child was deemed “racially inferior” for having a Russian parent and was therefore subjected to humiliation and attacks from both neighbors and the authorities – a different form of persecution on grounds of origin.

There is even the odd case that has been documented where British nationals had been discriminated against. In a case that was decided in 2005 a British family, who had been resident in Lower Austria since World War I, had been robbed of their possessions and forced to leave the country.

In 2009, an application was submitted to the Committee in which a rare case of persecution on the grounds of origin was documented – a child who was referred to as a *Negermischling* (“black half-caste”) was subjected to sterilization by National Socialist doctors. Non-white children were systematically registered by the Nazis and, to some extent, also persecuted.

It can only be assumed that these special cases of persecution were not the only ones of their kind and that there were indeed other similar cases that have not yet come to light or that were forgotten, along with the victims.

### **Extension of the definition of the term “victim”**

The progress that was made in historical research was also applied to known groups of victims and the definition of the term “victim” was extended: this extension is particularly evident in the interpretation of the phrase “persecution on political grounds”.

When the National Fund commenced its work, the main group of victims understood to have been persecuted on political grounds were resistance fighters, who were generally categorized, in line with their political allegiance, as active Social Democrats or Communists, as well as persons who expressed their anti-Nazi views by making critical comments or carrying out acts of protest against the regime. Persons persecuted due to their “undermining military morale” or for “acts preparatory to high treason” or for being “in breach of the Law Against Acts of Subversion” were recognized as political persecutees from the outset.

In line with the developments in historical research, it was recognized that political persecution could also affect people whose activities were not grounded in political views but in apolitical, individual motives. Awareness grew that cases where the state authorities had reacted to a perceived endangerment of the prevailing criminal ideology with undue force also merited inclusion under the definition of persecution on political grounds.

### **Deserters from the German Armed Forces and victims of National Socialist military courts**

The evolution of the National Fund's case law is particularly evident with regard to the group of army deserters and victims of National Socialist military courts.

Deserters were still being viewed as cowards, traitors and even murderers of their comrades in many cases long after the war and were maligned and ostracized. Many of those who told their story to the National Fund had concealed the fact that they had deserted from the army for decades – even from those closest to them, their families and neighbors – and often for good reason. Only recently have a historical reassessment and gradual rehabilitation of deserters and other victims of National Socialist military courts taken place.

This development is also reflected in the case law of the National Fund. Until 2002, desertion was not considered an act of resistance *per se*. As it was a rule for deserters to be punished severely regardless of the army they had served in, the act of punishing desertion was not considered a specifically National Socialist injustice. Deserters were only recognized if they were able to prove a religious or political motivation for their desertion – most people were unable to provide such evidence. This led to deserters being recognized as persecutees only in exceptional cases: in the case of Slovenes who deserted from the army and subsequently joined the partisans and of people who were conscientious objectors due to their Catholic faith or due to being Jehovah's Witnesses, a religious or political motivation was accepted.

By contrast, army deserters and other victims of Nazi military courts with no discernible religious or political motivation were not recognized as victims of National Socialism, even in cases where deserters had been sentenced to death or to long terms of imprisonment: of 25 or so applications received by 2002, only two were positively decided by the Committee, on the grounds of exceptional circumstances.

This basic situation did not change until many decades after the war. At long last deserters and their assessment became the subject of a lively public debate in Austria. In early 2002, an interim report on a research project of the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture, *Österreichische Opfer der nationalsozialistischen Militärgerichtsbarkeit* ("Austrian Victims of the National Socialist Military Courts") was presented. At that

The National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism, established in 1995, has evolved into an establishment which not only functions as an executive organ for, above all, the disbursement of „gesture payments“ but has, on its own initiative, innovatively seized on the results of scientific research and extended the group of victims entitled to claim accordingly.

For example, in 2002, on the basis of a research project led by the author, conscientious objectors and deserters from the armed forces were recognized as victims of National Socialism for the first time. And this at a time when there were still no statutory provisions for the claims of this group of victims under social law. It was only with the “Recognition Act” of 2005 that this omission was remedied, before the Parliament resolved a comprehensive rehabilitation of the victims of National Socialist military justice with the “Annulment and Rehabilitation Act” in 2009.

In recognizing this group of victims in 2002, the National Fund made a fundamental contribution to the political debate on deserters thus also rendering a remarkable contribution to the collective rehabilitation of the victims of National Socialist military justice.

**Ao.Univ.-Prof. Dr. Walter Manoschek**

Political Scientist at the Department of Government at the University of Vienna

Project leader “Austrian Victims of the National Socialist Military Courts”

(Research project of the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture)

The outcome of the project is published in: Walter Manoschek (ed.), *Opfer der NS-Militärjustiz. Urteilspraxis – Strafvollzug – Entschädigungspolitik in Österreich*, Vienna: Mandelbaum-Verlag 2003.

time, only around 100 people were still alive of the group of victims of National Socialist military justice, including those sentenced for conscientious objection, avoidance of military service, the undermining of military morale and other offences.

In the same year the National Fund began to work with a group of historians around ao.Univ.-Prof. Dr. Walter Manoschek doing research on the victims of National Socialist military courts. This cooperation resulted in the successive extension of the definition of the term "victim" to include deserters and conscientious objectors and led to a gradual reassessment of these groups by the National Fund. Whatever form refusal of military service had taken, it was recognized inherently as an act of resistance, and defecting at least required courage whatever the circumstances – deserters were sentenced to death *in absentia* and if they were captured by their own side, they were not dealt with as prisoners of war in accordance with the Geneva Convention but summarily executed.

*"At the front you may die, as a deserter you have to die."*  
Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Munich 1934

In 2006, the Committee of the National Fund took a further step and decided to recognize also people as victims who had been motivated by personal, apolitical grounds rather than by political or religious ones. The first applicant who had gone AWOL and been sentenced to death without a fair trial, without legal representation and without the right of appeal, was recognized as a victim in February 2006. The basis for the Committee's decision was an expert opinion by Dr. Walter Manoschek commissioned by the National Fund:

*"Accordingly, all sentences imposed by the German military and SS courts for military offenses (including police courts) are, in connection with the disproportion of the sentence imposed, to be considered unjust National Socialist rulings. Hence, all those affected – irrespective of whether they were persecuted on political or other grounds – are to be classified as victims of these unjust rulings."<sup>6</sup>*

The sentences imposed in accordance with National Socialist judicial practice were often so harsh that they bore no relation to the offense committed. This excessively harsh punishment alone was therefore to be assessed as an act of typical National Socialist injustice and became the basis in individual cases for former deserters to be accorded victim status, regardless of their original motivation. In the light of this new case law, the National Fund subsequently re-examined applications of conscientious objectors, deserters and victims of National Socialist military courts which had previously been rejected.

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<sup>6</sup>Ao.Univ.-Prof. Dr. Walter Manoschek, *Gutachten für den Nationalfonds der Republik Österreich für Opfer des Nationalsozialismus: Zur Unverhältnismäßigkeit der Strafe im Rahmen der NS-Militärjustiz – Todesstrafe für Desertion aus der Wehrmacht als typisch nationalsozialistisches Unrecht*, Vienna 2005, p. 10.

### “Career criminals”

A further example of persecution on political grounds are the often harsh sentences imposed on those classified as “career criminals”. These were generally social misfits who were deported to concentration camps as a result of a string of minor offenses. Although these people were in no way politically active, the Committee of the National Fund decided in 2005 that disproportionate punishments imposed against the backdrop of National Socialist ideology constituted persecution in the sense of the National Fund Law. With regard to the persecution of those persons classified as “career criminals” by the Nazis, the Committee of the National Fund noted that “fundamentally, the fact that these persons were persecuted due to their classification as ‘career criminals’ does not stand in the way of an approval”. As with the recognition of the deserters and conscientious objectors, the disproportion of the penalty to the crime committed was decisive for the acknowledgment of the persecution of so called career criminals.

### Viennese Czechs

The Viennese Czechs are a case in point of the boundaries between the groups of victims occasionally getting blurred. Members of the community of Viennese Czechs were often persecuted for political reasons, but there were also some who were persecuted solely on the basis of their ethnicity.

The history of the Czech minority in Vienna stretches back to the Middle Ages and there were several waves of immigration during the course of the last two centuries. In 1939 as many as 52,000 Czechs were living in Vienna.

In 1938, the majority of Czechs were in favor of the Anschluss, in the hope of avoiding persecution. Nevertheless, it was not long before acts of aggression were carried out against the Czechs. The final report of the Austrian Historical Commission describes, for example, violent public attacks, people being spat on, insults and clashes in the street and trespasses against Czech schools and institutions. Czech employees were dismissed, Czech restaurants and businesses were vandalized. Czech newspapers were banned from publication and in 1942 the last Czech schools and associations were dissolved.

Even though there was never a general wave of persecution of Viennese Czechs due to their ethnicity, they were viewed by the Nazis as a “foreign element” and were increasingly subjected to reprisals. The aim was “Germanization” or resettlement on the grounds of “foreign ethnicity”.

*Parteikanzleileiter* Martin Bormann informed *Gauleiter* and *Reichsstatthalter* of Vienna Baldur von Schirach of Hitler’s orders for Vienna in a letter dated 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1941:

*“The Führer stressed that you should not see your task in Vienna in terms of the creation of new residential quarters but in improving existing circumstances. Firstly, in cooperation with Reichsführer-SS Himmler, all Jews are to be deported, then all Czechs and all other aliens [Fremdvölkische] whose presence prevents a unified political direction and opinion from emerging in the Viennese population.”*<sup>7</sup>

A disproportionately large number of Czechs were active in the resistance. One group called “the Czech faction of the Austrian Communist Party” by the Gestapo, carried out attacks on various Nazi institutions. Many were persecuted because of their political activities. Between 1940 and 1945, 69 Viennese Czechs were executed as enemies of the state.<sup>8</sup>

The scope of the reprisals and the persecution individual Czechs were subjected to ranged from their being denied education through the closure of Czech schools to interrogations, imprisonment and sentences to spells of forced labor, most frequently in the context of the *Technische Nothilfe*<sup>9</sup>, where many were abused, and the deportation to concentration camps. In light of all this, the Committee of the National Fund also recognized Viennese Czechs as victims in individual cases, depending on the extent of the repression or persecution.

### **“Persecution by extension” – persecution of children in the light of the National Fund Law**

The issue of persecution by extension predominantly concerned children. While children of political persecutees were generally only recognized as victims pursuant to the National Fund Law if at least one parent had been executed or had died in incarceration, there were also cases in which the families of political persecutees were, by virtue of their relationship to them, subjected to hostility by the population and the authorities, had to leave their homes and experienced a radical deterioration of their living circumstances.

In some cases the political persecution of the parents had particularly grave repercussions for their children, even if these were not part of the Nazis’ explicit intentions. This “collateral damage” could be so serious that it was comparable to persecution directed at the children themselves. For this reason, from 2004, the Committee often recognized individual cases of persecution by extension.

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<sup>7</sup>Quoted from Gerhard Botz, *Wohnungspolitik und Judendeportation in Wien 1938 bis 1945. Zur Funktion des Antisemitismus als Ersatz nationalsozialistischer Sozialpolitik*, Vienna/Salzburg 1975, p. 112.

<sup>8</sup>Re the Viennese Czechs see Eduard Kubu, Gudrun Exner, *Tschechen und Tschechinnen, Vermögensentzug und Restitution*, Vienna-Munich 2004 (= publications of the Austrian Historical Commission, vol. 23/3).

<sup>9</sup>The *Technische Nothilfe* (“Emergency Assistance”) formed a part of the uniformed police of the National Socialist machinery of power. Their main tasks were, among others, the repair of public utilities after air raids, fire fighting, clean-up work, air defense etc. They were also sometimes used for work at the front. From 1941, all who were physically and technically suited to this work were obligated to join the emergency assistance service.

As a founding member and, for many years, secretary of the Austrian Camp Community Ravensbrück and of the International Ravensbrück Committee, it has always been a concern of mine that the National Socialist atrocities remain in the memories of later generations as much as the acts of the resistance fighters who fought for a free Austria. I experienced the National Socialist terror as a politically active person and as a member of the Czech minority, with the consequence that I was incarcerated in solitary confinement in the police prison on Rossauerlande for almost a year and subsequently also in the Ravensbrück Womens' Concentration Camp (from October 1942 to the end of April 1945).

Shortly after the establishment of the National Fund, Renate Meissner invited me to meet with her. This first encounter already showed me that an establishment had been created which wanted to energetically support the concerns of the victims of National Socialism. Since then, the National Fund has supported many of the activities of the Austrian Camp Community Ravensbrück both financially and morally. Through the National Fund and its staff, we gained the recognition as resistance fighters and persecutees that the 'official' Austria often only granted us reluctantly. Many thanks for all of this!

**Irma Trksak**

Former secretary of the Austrian Camp Community Ravensbrück  
Applicant to the National Fund

## **Children of Carinthian Slovenes**

This persecution affected the children of the Slovenian minority to a particularly great extent. Although children of partisans who had died in battle had been recognized as victims of National Socialist persecution as early as 1998, this did not include children who had not themselves been incarcerated, resettled or the target of persecution but who had been subjected to massive discrimination and traumatization as members of the Slovenian minority.

The staff of the National Fund has heard and read a vast number of life stories by Carinthian Slovenes – moving stories which often illustrate the particular nature of the persecution of the Slovenes under National Socialism. These experiences often had lifelong physical and mental consequences, especially when inflicted on children.

Growing up in a situation characterized by constant anxiety was enough for many people to induce lifelong post-traumatic stress disorders, as is documented by the many neuropsychiatric reports submitted, citing symptoms such as anxiety disorders, nightmares, insomnia, depression and phobias. The mere sight of uniforms, military vehicles, etc. can trigger panic attacks even in people now advanced in years.

It is especially difficult for people who were traumatized in their early childhood to talk about their experiences. This is probably why it took so long for the first applications to be filed with the National Fund. When they did start to arrive in 2007, it was also thanks to support from dedicated members of the Slovenian victims' organizations in Carinthia, who have encouraged people to apply. The Committee of the National Fund has been paying increased attention to the circumstances of each individual case and today special consideration is given to the long-term effects persecution has had on the applicants.

## **Members of Catholic religious orders**

In exceptional cases, persecution by extension may also affect adults. In 2008 the Committee had to decide for the first time on applications from members of Catholic religious orders who had been affected by the persecution directed at the order. The seizure of the order's assets, for example, potentially had direct effects on individual members of the order. Even if they themselves were not arrested or interrogated, they often lost their livelihoods due to the ban on teaching and the confiscation of the order's headquarters potentially deprived them of their home and forced them to leave the religious community, which had been like a family to them.

The Committee recognized three nuns as victims of National Socialism, who were considered particularly worthy of recognition on the basis of their expulsion from their Mother House.

The National Fund has made a substantial contribution towards a deeper understanding of persecution and resistance in Carinthia. It also gave the Slovene minority the impetus to consider and research their history during Nazi rule in more detail and from new angles. Where previously, the perception of history was predominantly shaped by Slovenian families' tales of deportation and the active resistance – the latter also largely shaped by men – now, the experiences of those people who witnessed the bitter war against the resistance movement are also being taken into account, women and men, who sometimes – of-ten children and young people at the time – had to watch as their families or neighbors were humiliated, threatened, slain or shot. Many have now spoken of these things for the first time. It is, in many cases, thanks to the National Fund that this silence has been overcome – as if people had been waiting for a sign from the Republic that they need not be ashamed of their history.

**Urška Brumnik**

*Zveza slovenskih organizacij/Central Association of Slovenian Organizations*

## Effects of the *Anschluss* on the Catholic Church in Austria<sup>10</sup>

After the *Anschluss*, the Catholic Church in Austria did not file an official protest. In the "Solemn Declaration" of 18<sup>th</sup> March 1938, which was signed by the six highest ranking Church dignitaries, the Catholic Church in Austria consented to the submission to the National Socialist regime and appealed to Austria's Catholics to vote for the *Anschluss*. Secularization measures were soon implemented nevertheless, which particularly affected the school system. In fall of 1938, all denominational schools were closed or handed over to the state. Many religious institutions were expropriated. In total, 26 large and 188 smaller Austrian monasteries and convents and other religious buildings in their hundreds were confiscated.

Rather than opting for a course of open confrontation, the Church adopted an officially non-political stance. Cardinal Innitzer tried to fit in with the new rulers. However, even though resistance was not the Church's official policy, there were individual priests, members of religious orders and lay people who resisted on the grounds of conscience. Many were arrested for their acts of resistance. The Catholic resistance movement includes as its best known members Franz Jägerstätter, who was executed for being a conscientious objector, Sister Maria Restituta, and the Franciscans Father Kapistran Pieller and Father Angelus Steinwender, who were sentenced to death for joining the *Antifaschistische Freiheitsbewegung Österreichs* ("Austrian Anti-Fascist Freedom Movement"), which strove for a constitutional monarchy. However, this religiously motivated resistance was carried out without the endorsement of the official Austrian Church.

## The National Fund in 2010 – an interim review

From its commencement until today, the gesture payment has always been well received. Between 1995 and 2010, over 150 million euros have been disbursed to around 30,000 people. As the law does not stipulate a deadline for the submission of applications, it will also be possible to file applications in the future.

The true value of the gesture payment does not lie in material compensation. In our work, we are constantly aware that nothing can make amends for the suffering inflicted. This symbolic gesture is designed to signal that Austria is now prepared to assume responsibility for each and every victim. It is therefore necessary that it remains possible to receive this recognition in the future – no victim shall ever be turned away, regardless of when he/she decides to submit an application.

It is, of course, a source of great regret that the Republic's recognition of certain groups of victims was only achieved very late, with the result that many people didn't live to ex-

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<sup>10</sup>Sources: incl. Walter Sauer, *Loyalität, Konkurrenz oder Widerstand? Nationalsozialistische Kultuspolitik und kirchliche Reaktionen in Österreich 1938–1945*, in: Emmerich Tálos et al. (eds.), *NS-Herrschaft in Österreich. Ein Handbuch*, Vienna 2000, p. 159–186; Herbert Dachs, *Schule in der "Ostmark"*, in: *ibid.*, p. 446–466; Ernst Hanisch, Hans Spatzenegger, *Die katholische Kirche*, in: Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes (ed.), *Widerstand und Verfolgung in Salzburg 1934–1945. Eine Dokumentation*. 2 volumes, Vienna 1991, vol. 2, p. 134–322.

perience this recognition. This gives the National Fund all the more reason to continue to extend its activities beyond the processing of applications to providing special care and support to the applicants. We are a trusted point of contact that offers advice and support in all matters such as victims' welfare and nursing allowance and that may be contacted for general inquiries.

A particular focus is on needy Holocaust survivors. They have the opportunity to receive further payments from the National Fund, which become all the more important the older and frailer the survivors become. This extra payment has already proved crucial in a number of cases, particularly for people living in difficult circumstances in countries with poor health care.

In addition to its existing tasks, including project sponsorship, the utilization of "heirless" looted art for the benefit of the victims of National Socialism and its work within the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research, the National Fund has recently been entrusted with further duties. By coordinating the redesign of the Austrian Memorial at the former concentration camp and present State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau, the National Fund is also participating in Austria's contribution to processing National Socialism on an international level.

However, what has been most important over the last 15 years is the National Fund's remembrance work, which does not only involve safeguarding the memories of contemporary witnesses. It also means passing on the extensive knowledge of Austrian contemporary history, integrating it into Austria's national identity, and handing it down to subsequent generations. History is a continuum, the past continues to influence the present. The knowledge of the many diverse forms of persecution and resistance which we have gained through our work at the National Fund must be made accessible to everyone who is willing to learn from history.

The life stories of the victims of National Socialism that are presented in Volume Two of this publication are intended to make a contribution to the understanding of our history by opening, at least slightly, the door to the past.



As a former prisoner, I have been in close contact with the National Fund since its foundation and all the more so because my late husband was the chairman of the Concentration Camp Association for 27 years. I was pleasantly surprised when I saw with how much understanding and sympathy the victims who approach you are treated, and how you try to do the best for every single one. For this reason, to all who have worked at the Fund since then, some of whom continue to work there, I would like to say a big thank you. Due to old age, the victims of the Nazi era are becoming fewer and fewer and our need of help is becoming greater. So please, please remain as you are for us and stand by us in our twilight years with help and humanity as well.

With warm wishes,

**Käthe Sasso**

Applicant to the National Fund



The staff of the Historical Research Department of the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund: (from left to right) Dr. Wolfgang Gasser, Albena Zlatanova, Mag. Iris Petrinja (Head of Department), Dr. Joseph Klement, Mag. Michael Doujak

# The Historical Research of the National Fund

Dr. Joseph Klement, Alben Zlatanova  
with contributions from Mag. Iris Petrinja and Mag. Michael Doujak

The necessity for research to be carried out by the National Fund results from the National Fund Law (Federal Law Gazette no. 432/1995). It provides for the disbursement of gesture payments to persons who were victims of and survived the national Socialist regime and who, in 1995, the year in which the Fund was established, or in subsequent years, have submitted an application. Pursuant to the National Fund Law, the requirements for an application comprise persecution suffered at the hands of the National Socialist regime up to May 1945 and Austrian citizenship and residency in Austria in 1938 or ten years of Austrian residency in the run up to the National Socialist assumption of power. These circumstances serve as starting points for the activities of the historical research department.

For me, the National Fund is shaped by the people who work there, whom I was able to meet. Whether the amount paid out to the victims was low, too low or shamefully low remains to be seen. But I have met people who were in desperate need of this sum, as they were living in a terrible financial predicament.

From the outset it was a race against time, as the victims were already elderly. We as historians also knew this. Thanks to the National Fund, to a cooperation with the Austrian Holocaust Memorial Service Association and to the Leo Baeck Institute, it was possible to develop the Austrian Heritage Collection project. Survivors in the USA were contacted and asked for their life stories. The response was overwhelming and some of these stories were able to be presented in an exhibition at the Jewish Museum Vienna and at the Leo Baeck Institute in New York.

The stories of the survivors of National Socialism are important, for they tell us the story of Austria, the story of the Shoah, of desperation, but also of survival. The National Fund made this and many other projects possible. This is extraordinary, because it was not only a question of material help. The people whom I met at the National Fund were aware of this and, beyond this, also took social responsibility for the personal contact with the victims. The way in which the National Fund has become an emotionally important point of contact for many victims of National Socialism as a result of these people impresses me. They helped in the resumption of direct relations with the country whose citizens mostly failed them, threatened them, stole from them or even delivered them to their deaths. On numerous occasions, I witnessed this special relationship with the victims at the National Fund; the way in which the staff listened to the victims and empathized with them. This sense of responsibility towards the victims commands my greatest respect.

The effort that is made to enter into an empathetic dialogue with these people "besides" the formalities and bureaucratic procedural mechanisms is invaluable. Apart from the new scientific knowledge which was enabled by the National Fund through project sponsorship, it is this sensitivity and sense of responsibility that I appreciate. I would have liked to see much more of that in this country.

In processing applications at the National Fund, the fact must be faced that more than 50 years after the end of National Socialist rule, the overwhelming majority of the applicants have reached old age. While, in some cases, the subjective capacity to remember long-ago events is imprecise or limited, the ability to prove injustice or persecution suffered is also hampered by having their places of residence abroad, by the death of possible contemporary witnesses or the loss of personal documents during the flight, persecution or emigration. The destruction of documentation purposely carried out by National Socialist authorities in the last months of the war and the disposal of files after 1945 must also be considered in this regard.

### **The development of the historical research**

The mentioned circumstances surrounding the process of filing applications have strengthened the resolve of the National Fund, firstly to process the applications as quickly and as unbureaucratically as possible and secondly, to make concessions for the applicants as far as it is possible. As the eligibility to file applications must be proven and, although the submission of written documents is desirable it is not a strict requirement and, moreover, the applicants themselves often do not possess any documentation, the Fund carries out comprehensive research on its own initiative. Within the scope of processing the individual cases, the task of documenting and supplementing individual life stories and stories of persecution using available archive material falls to the historical research department.

However, the research is in no way able to follow a particular pattern due to the fact that the applicants belong to different groups of victims. There is different documentation and source material for Jews, for persons persecuted under National Socialism as "gypsies" (Roma, Sinti and Yeniche), Carinthian Slovenes, partisans, Jehovah's witnesses, homosexuals, victims of National Socialist military justice, victims of National Socialist euthanasia and all those who were inconvenient to the National Socialist regime or were classified as opponents. Accounting for all of these given facts requires the acquisition of a broad spectrum of specialized knowledge and the use of diverse primary and secondary sources.

Further to this, in the early days of the National Fund, the research department was obliged to collect a basis of fundamental knowledge which exceeded the individual examination of applications. An overview of possible archive holdings, not only in Austria and Germany, but also in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland was also to be acquired. Taking into account the results of ongoing historical research, particularly the reports of the Historical Commission, current publications and documentaries, online databases and newly accessible primary sources, forms an essential basis for the serious work of the historical research department.

## **Reflections on my research in the Austrian State Archives**

It was and is an invaluable advantage to have direct access to the finding aids (e.g. card indexes) which are not usually available to the interested public for the research into files of the Austrian State Archives which is required during the course of processing applications. Due to the uninterrupted presence and obliging manner of the staff of the State Archives, a solid basis for discussion and a foundation of trust were able to be created which, through information and assistance, helped us move forward with research which seemed to have reached a dead end.

The task of searching through files for relevant information has provided me with a deep insight into the wide variety of the Second Republic's restitution and compensation efforts. From this the lesson can be taken that, on the one hand, every single "intention to draw a final line" under restitution and compensation measures had only a delaying but not a conclusive effect and, on the other hand, (and in comparison to the files already researched by similar funds in the past) the actively and passively collected wealth of information of the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund demonstrates an actuality and complexity which renders it necessary to call into question the act of "locking it away" in archives from researchers of contemporary history for decades to come.

**Dr. Joseph Klement**

Member of the Historical Research Department  
of the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund

The necessity of strengthening the professional competencies of the National Fund also arose from its ongoing efforts to extend the circle of recognized groups of victims. From 2002, conscientious objectors and deserters from the German Armed Forces and in 2007, the children of Carinthian Slovenes who suffered under the National Socialist regime were also gradually recognized as victims' groups.

The Research Department of the National Fund was also able to accumulate valuable experience through the transfer to the National Fund of the application processing for the compensation of seized tenancy rights to apartments and business premises and household objects and personal valuables (Federal Law Gazette I no. 11/2001, Sec. 2b of the National Fund Law).

In addition to the knowledge and experience acquired of this kind, the contact maintained with the relevant research institutions, researchers, victims' representatives and memorials of former concentration camps at home and abroad, as well as with National Socialist extermination institutions (e.g. "Schloss Hartheim" near Linz) greatly facilitates the processing of applications. This is supplemented by cooperation and intensive correspondence with authorities and strengthened by the opportunity to work on location in the archives (e.g. the Austrian State Archives), thus further broadening the range of available sources.

The establishment of the General Settlement Fund for Victims of National Socialism in 2001 (Federal Law Gazette I no. 12/2002) brought mutual benefit to both Funds. Firstly, the experiences in the National Fund were a good starting basis for the research of the General Settlement Fund and secondly, the National Fund benefited from the creation of an independent research department.

While the National Fund can concentrate on researching a limited number of circumstances, the comprehensive compensation of assets sought by the General Settlement Fund requires a broad range of sources. In addition to the existence of persecution between 1938 and 1945, the seizure, but also the possible restitution or compensation of an asset after 1945, are to be documented. Depending on with which organ of the General Settlement Fund an application has been filed (the Claims Committee or the Arbitration Panel), a large number of archives and authorities must be contacted during the course of the application processing – from the Austrian State Archives to the land registers of the District Courts and the archives of the insurance companies.

It is to be noted that over the last 15 years, the digitalization of various archive sources and electronic mediums has experienced a rapid development. In this regard, the research database established in and overseen by the Historical Research Department of the General Settlement Fund is to be mentioned as a valuable instrument for searching

and locating. In addition to the manifold results of the research of both Funds, this database contains important holdings of the Austrian State Archives, the Municipal and Provincial Archives of Vienna and several provincial archives, where documents can be searched through submitting queries by name. The integration of data from archive holdings with information collected during the application processing in this form constitutes a unique resource. There is hardly any other Austrian institution which possesses information on National Socialist property seizure, compensation payments and restitution procedures after 1945 and the related stories of human fates which is “pooled” on this scale.

### **The range of research methods**

Standard inquiries from the research department of the National Fund are made with the archives of the Jewish Community in Vienna and Graz; with the Documentation Center of Austrian Resistance; with the victims’ welfare offices of the provinces; with the tracing service of the Red Cross in Bad Arolsen in Germany; with the Vienna Citizenship Department (municipal department 35) and with the municipal offices.

Moreover, combined research is carried out in various databases and sources which have been provided to the National Fund internally over recent years: the extended version of the Documentation Center of Austrian Resistance database of persecuted persons of Jewish origin<sup>1</sup>, with Viennese address books “Lehman” for the years 1938–1942, the address books of other Austrian cities from 1938, the central database of victims of the Shoah established by Yad Vashem (Israel)<sup>2</sup> or the list of surviving “children of Spiegelgrund” from the Municipal and Provincial Archives of Vienna. Further valuable sources are genealogical websites such as [www.jewishgen.org](http://www.jewishgen.org), [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) and the Ellis Island Foundation<sup>3</sup> which contain, among other things, important information on the genealogy and migration of Jewish persons.

### **Examples of practical research**

While the proof of citizenship during the examination of applications generally poses no problems, proof of residence often presents a challenge. The Research Department of the National Fund then strives to obtain the necessary documents, indications or other written evidence – if need be through months of investigation – in order to positively complete the application. The gaps in the available documentation and archive holdings outlined above means that creative and sometimes unconventional approaches are required.

For Roma and Sinti, for example, there is only partially complete and partially reliable registration data available. Individual municipal archives of registrations concerning this group of victims became lost after 1945 and are no longer available. This is possibly

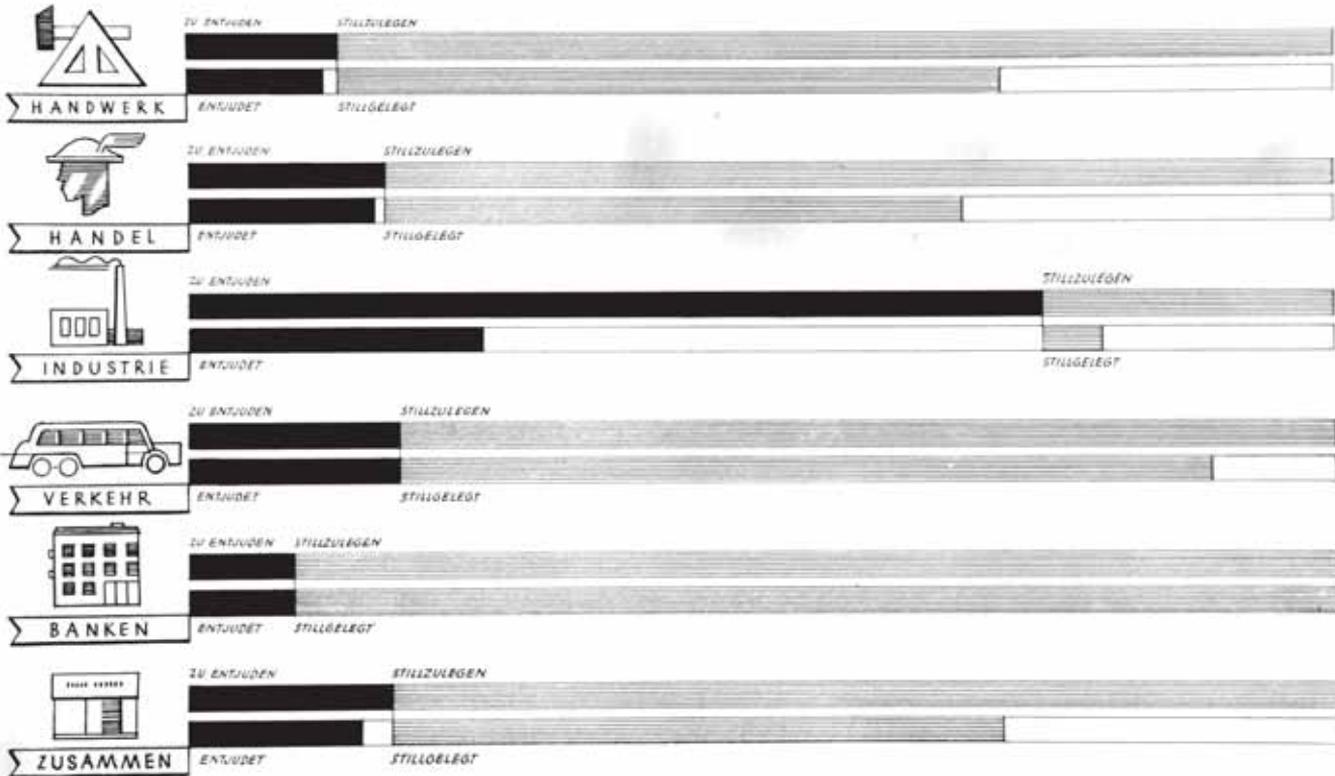
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<sup>1</sup>[www.doew.at](http://www.doew.at): List of Names of the Austrian Holocaust victims.

<sup>2</sup>[www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org): Yad Vashem database of victims of the Shoah.

<sup>3</sup>[www.ellisland.org](http://www.ellisland.org).

# BISHER DURCHFÜHRTE ENTJUDUNG NACH ZAHL DER BETRIEBE



Graphic statistics from the report of the "de-Jewification" of the Ostmark, April 1939, from the holdings of the "Buerckel-Materie" in the Austrian State Archives

Im Na

**Vermögensverehrungsstelle**  
im Ministerium für Wirtschaft und Arbeit  
Wien I.  
Steingasse 1.

Der (die) Darlehensnehmer(in)

bedürftig ist, mit dem heutigen Tage die Rückzahlung im Sinne der Rückzahlung des Darlehens fortzusetzen in Österreich bis zum 31. März 1939 zur vollständigen Tilgung des Darlehens

erhalten zu lassen.

Zu der Befolgung der Rückzahlung sind bei dem (den) Darlehensnehmer zu erwarten. Durch abgelaufene Darlehensperiode sind nicht möglich ist, sodass die Darlehensnehmer mit hoher Wahrscheinlichkeit per Darlehen, bei für die Befolgung des Rückzahlens und Darlehens nicht folgende Möglichkeit geben:

1.) Rückzahlung:  
Der Darlehensnehmer wird verpflichtet im Sinne des Darlehensnehmer großen Kasse und Rückzahlens beizubehalten, mit der Rückzahlung, bei der zu jedem Zeitpunkt des Darlehens der Darlehensnehmer beizubehalten bei der Darlehensnehmer Darlehensnehmer nicht überfällig.

Wenn Darlehen einer Darlehensnehmer in der Summe des Darlehens oder Darlehensnehmer möglich im Sinne eines Darlehens, innerhalb und dem Darlehen, bei dem am Tage der Darlehensnehmer gefordert zu werden.

Siehe zum Darlehen im Sinne dieser Tabelle gefordert:  
a) (Stelle des (s) B. (Darlehensnehmer),  
b) Name, Vorname, Nachname, Geburtsdatum u. d.

Wenn die Darlehen sind bei unvollständiger oder legal vollständiger Darlehensnehmer Rückzahlung zu erwarten, die es dem Darlehensnehmer ermöglicht, das gesamte Darlehen bei Rückzahlung zu gewährleisten. Diese Rückzahlung umfasst auch jenseit des Darlehens, die es nicht eine vollständige Befriedigung der Darlehensnehmer bedeutet.

2.) Darlehensnehmer:  
a) Bei Darlehensnehmer mit dem EW 10000 Betrag ist eine Rückzahlungsbefreiung zu erwarten.  
Der Kasse hat die Darlehensnehmer folgende Rechte zu erwarten:  
a) Der Darlehensnehmer großen Darlehen und vollständigen Rückzahlens per Kasse,  
b) Wenn auch vollständigen Befriedigung der Darlehensnehmer Darlehen bei dem Darlehen der Darlehensnehmer übertragene Darlehen.

Confirmation of receipt of the approval for the "aryanization" of a Jewish business from the holdings of the "Buerckel-Materie" in the Austrian State Archives

PHOTOS: GEORG SCHENK

*Transport* XXXII

*17.7.1942 über Theresienstadt Auschwitz*

due to their special socialization and cultural identity on the one hand and the murder of 80 to 90 % of this ethnic group on the other. In such cases, the victims' welfare files are particularly helpful as they often contain witness reports of survivors who are often no longer alive at the time of application. With their help, details on the residency of the applicants in 1938 and their persecution can often be acquired.

In order to establish proof of residency for members of the Jewish group of victims, besides historical registration documents at the municipal department 8, the filmed questionnaires of those members of the Jewish Community Vienna wishing to emigrate are also available. This very interesting holding from 1938 contains information on families – the people living in a household, their family relationships, all dates and places of birth, citizenship and professions.

In some cases, after fruitless research, proof of residence is only obtained indirectly through unusual documentary finds: the submission of an applicant that she was a member of an ice-skating club where she had had a locker led to investigation into the surviving documents of the club which confirmed these facts. Another applicant sent a postcard to his parents in Vienna from an event hosted by the Hakoah Sport Club and was able to use it to affirm his residency. Once a trivial object, a preserved tram pass from 1938 or a pedigree tree issued in 1938 by the Austrian Kennel Club for the applicant's dog, can become important circumstantial evidence.

For the victims' group of so called "Jewish half-castes"<sup>4</sup>, complicated and elaborate genealogical research is often needed to prove their Jewish origin, for example in the registry offices of other denominations (Catholic parishes, Evangelical Superior Church Council), in the cemetery records of the Jewish Community Vienna, in cemetery databases and in the obituaries of contemporary newspapers (e.g. in the "*Neue Freie Presse*").

The poor availability of sources on the victims of National Socialist euthanasia presents a particular challenge: at the beginning of the research work, the files of the inmates of the children's institution on the grounds of the Sanatorium am Spiegelgrund in Vienna and the medical files of the victims of the extermination institution in Schloss Hartheim near Linz were considered to have been incomplete or destroyed. It was only discovered during the course of the research that lists of surviving "Spiegelgrund children" exist and that now and then medical histories and doctor's reports can be found in the files of the Vienna child collection point<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup>First Decree to the Reich Citizenship Law of 14<sup>th</sup> November 1935 (Reich Law Gazette I p. 1333) differentiated between "Jews" and "half-Jews" which was later supplemented by the designations "first degree half-caste" and "second degree half-caste". See Raul Hilberg, *Die Vernichtung der europäischen Juden*. Vol. 1, extended edition, 25.-28. thou., Frankfurt am Main 1994, p. 69–84.

<sup>5</sup>The "Register of the Dead of Spiegelgrund 1938–1945" available for viewing in the Municipal and Provincial Archives of Vienna since 2002 ([www.gedenkstaettestein.hof.at](http://www.gedenkstaettestein.hof.at)). Using secondary sources, the list of victims of the extermination institution was compiled during the course of the project "Memorial Book Hartheim" ([www.schloss-hartheim.at](http://www.schloss-hartheim.at)).



In the archives of the National Fund

## Concluding remarks

In addition to the Reconciliation Fund, established in 2000 and the Art Restitution Law (Federal Law Gazette no. 181/1998), the establishment of the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund can be viewed as an example of a tendency, which first became evident in the late 1980s, towards a reorientation of Austrian political policies on dealing with the past. On a micro-political level, these changes can be definitively traced back to foreign political impulses since the election campaign for the Federal Presidency in 1986.

The Funds – the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund – established on political-legal grounds, demonstrate a change in attitude in dealing with the applicants on a micro-political level, which can be substantiated using historical comparisons: the files of the Compensation Fund<sup>6</sup>, investigated during the course of the application processing of the General Settlement Fund and of the Collection Agencies A and B<sup>7</sup> give an impression of institutions dealing with victims of National Socialism using formal and administrative criteria, which can be gathered from their internal documentation of application processing and the language used in their correspondence with the applicants. In contrast to this, it can generally be said of the National Fund that, going beyond the legal requirements, the applicants are dealt with respectfully. That means the individual concerns of the applicants are dealt with and special information requested is provided. An attitude which is also perpetuated in the work of the General Settlement Fund.

Particularly, with regard to the dedication of the staff of the research department of the National Fund and of the General Settlement Fund, the following factors are to be considered: firstly, the research staff are a young generation of historians, who, as a result of their education and temporal distance from the consequences of the National Socialist regime, are not prejudiced by the notion of Austria as the “first victim” of National Socialism. Secondly, both Funds employ staff of various nationalities. In all probability, the international variety also contributes to the fact that the perpetuation of Austrian historical perceptions has no foundation.

The development of the historical research at the National Fund was and is marked by its efforts to constantly extend its foundation of historical knowledge, the establishment and increased intensity of contact with authorities, archives, victims’ representatives and to the authoritative social scientists.

<sup>6</sup>Fund for the Compensation of Property Losses of Political Persecutees, Federal Law Gazette no. 100/1961. The files are housed at the Austrian State Archives, Archives of the Republic.

<sup>7</sup>Receiving Organizations Act, Federal Law Gazette no. 73/1957. The files of the collection agencies are also housed at the Austrian State Archives, Archives of the Republic.

The ever improving connections to information points provide many of the applicants with the opportunity, beyond the filing of applications, to learn about their family history and the fates of family members, thus gaining back a piece of their memory. In the future, the Historical Research Department of the National Fund could also use its knowledge to work in the field of establishing contact between the victims of National Socialism and/or their descendants with the Austrian institutions.

Upon commencement of its activities, the historical research department of the National Fund had to compile a complete overview of all available historical sources in Austria. This overview and the research itself were made easier through a multitude of contacts and intensive interchange with various institutions. Our thanks for the years of cooperation goes particularly to the registry office (Heidrun Weiss and Mag. Wolf-Erich Eckstein) and the former Information and Support Center of the Jewish Community Vienna (DSA Irma Wulz, DI Karl Nessmann, Mag. Lothar Hölbling and Mag. Susanne Uslu-Pauer); to the Victims' Welfare Vienna (OAR Ilse Maier, Renate Knöfel, Susanne Vesely) and to the Pension Insurance Institution of Workers and Employees (Michael Kordina, Dieter Schwarz); to the staff of the Citizenship Evidence Office municipal department 35; to the Municipal and Provincial Archives of Vienna (AR Herbert Koch, Erich Denk, historical registry archive; Dr. Michaela Laichmann and OArchivR Dr. Brigitte Riegele); to the Austrian State Archives (HR Dr. Christoph Tepperberg, War Archives, OR Dr. Rudolf Jerabek and HR Dr. Hubert Steiner, Archives of the Republic); to the Documentation Center Hartheim (Mag. Florian Schwanninger); the Association of Carinthian Partisans and Friends of the Anti-Fascist Resistance (Ing. Peter Kuchar, Ursula Brumnik) and to the victims' representatives of the Roma and Sinti in Austria (Eduard Karolyi) and of the Jehovah's Witnesses (Heide Gsell).

We are also grateful to many more who we are unable to mention by name here, as well as to the staff of the National Fund who participated in setting up the historical research department.



Mag. Evelina Merhaut (center), who is responsible for the projects at the National Fund and her staff: Dr. Anika Schilling (left) and Mag. Miriam Karner (right)

# If not now then when? If not here then where?

## The Development of the National Fund's Project Sponsorship

Mag. Evelina Merhaut

During the 15 years since its foundation, the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism has sponsored around 830 projects. From 1996 until the end of 2009, project sponsorship money of 17,844,240 Euros has been disbursed, both from the means of the National Fund and from the so called Looted Gold Fund<sup>1</sup>.

From the commencement of the National Fund's sponsorship activities, it was evident that within Austrian society there was a great demand for project funding; for projects dealing with the Holocaust, with the victims of National Socialism, with resistance, euthanasia and with the participation of the Austrian population in National Socialist injustices.

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<sup>1</sup>Since 1998, the National Fund has also administered the Austrian share of the International Fund for Victims of National Socialism ("Looted Gold Fund").

When the National Fund of the Republic of Austria was called into being in 1995, it was late, but hopefully not too late. For many of those persecuted under National Socialism and their descendants, it was not the financial compensation which had priority, it was rather about receiving official recognition as victims. Today, the National Fund is an indispensable organization, providing sustained support exclusively for the victims and ensuring the remembrance of the Holocaust for the future.

In the future, a very important task of the National Fund of the Republic of Austria will be to inform the future generations and to convey to them the nature of National Socialism and Fascism, that caution is necessary and that Fascism, racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism no longer have a place in our country.

The upkeep of memorial sites and the support of commemorative journey will also remain an important task of the National Fund.

**Albert Dlabaja**  
Deputy Chairman  
Federal Association of Austrian Anti-Fascists and Resistance Fighters  
and Victims of Fascism (Concentration Camp Association)

Through the National Fund, for the first time in Austria an institution was established which disposed of funds that were earmarked specifically for supporting these kinds of projects. Those at the National Fund responsible for projects have, through intensive contact, advice and extensive discussions, established a basis of trust with those carrying out the projects. The National Fund endeavors to devote the same level of attention to small and large projects alike and to ensure their equal treatment. Consequently, all seeking sponsorship are guaranteed the same chances of success, and the sponsorship money can be distributed equally around the country. The role of the National Fund has developed from that of mere provider of funds to one of an important participant in many projects. In choosing which projects to sponsor, the variety of subjects is as important as accounting for all groups of victims recognized by the National Fund.<sup>2</sup>

During the course of the last 15 years, the National Fund was able to support many interesting and important projects. The wide range of subject-matter of the projects submitted for consideration covers social, socio-medical and psychotherapeutical areas as well as scientific works, publications, documentaries, exhibitions, cultural and memorial events, commemoration and remembrance of the victims and school and outreach projects. Associations, schools and communities also went on location to “play detective” regarding subjects such as looting, persecution, humiliation, expulsion, the murder of victims of National Socialism and their repercussions; repercussions which can still be felt strongly today.

Remembrance and commemoration of the victims of National Socialism is particularly close to the heart of the National Fund. With the help by the National Fund, memorial plaques are unveiled, memorial stones erected, “stones of remembrance” placed and the work of various associations is supported, such as, for example, the project by the association “**Stones of Remembrance for Jewish Holocaust victims**”. In the five years since this association was founded, 140 “stations of remembrance” have been placed in eight districts of Vienna along the “**Path of Remembrance**”, which comprises 330 plaques. These plaques are predominantly dedicated to former Jewish residents and are placed in front of their former apartment buildings. The plaques bear up to four names and also serve as reminders of Jewish life and Jewish history. The association has so far mounted memorial plaques for 600 people and created six brochures accompanying the stations. They are intended to contribute towards circulating information on Jewish history and gaining sympathy for the fate of the persecutees. Tours of the “Path of Remembrance” are also offered for school and other groups.

The culture of remembrance in Austria is reflected in a wide variety of projects. Books are published, documentaries filmed and interviews with contemporary witnesses are conducted and published.

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<sup>2</sup>Special thanks are also extended to Mag. Miriam Karner for her support in the production of this article.



Stones of remembrance for Jewish victims of the Holocaust  
"Stone of remembrance" at Kandlgasse 44 in the 7<sup>th</sup> district of Vienna



Stones of remembrance for Jewish victims of the Holocaust  
Vienna, Kandlgasse 44, October 2009  
Leo Fiderer makes a speech at the opening of the station. School students from the BRG Kandlgasse also contributed and prepared flowers



Stones of remembrance for Jewish victims of the Holocaust  
Vienna, Volkertplatz, November 2005  
Mrs. Pollak from Israel dedicates the station to her parents. She is laying holy Earth on it as her nephew recites the Kaddish



Photographs from the project "Mri Historija"

Left: Rudolf Sarközi aged 14

Above right: Roma from Gritsch, Burgenland, prior to 1938

Below right: In the Lackenbach camp, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1940



Above: Johann Baranyai as a German soldier, 1943  
Right: School photo of Margarethe Baranyai

PHOTOS: VEREIN ROMA SERVICE

From left to right: "Mri Historija", interview booklet by János Horváth, interview booklet by Anton Papai, brochure accompanying the DVD



My involvement in the Austrian Camp Community Ravensbrück commenced in 1995, fifteen years ago – fifteen years which also connect me and the Austrian Camp Community Ravensbrück (and Friends, as we have been called since 2005) to the National Fund. A large part of our work was only possible with the support – moral and financial – of the National Fund. Despite the increasingly difficult financial situation, we have always found a willing ear to listen to our main concerns in the form of the Secretary General and her staff: keeping alive the memory of the Austrians who were imprisoned, tortured and murdered in the women's concentration camp Ravensbrück; informing people of the National Socialist crimes; fighting for a peaceful, just world, and finally: drawing attention to current discrimination and tendencies which show no respect for human life and taking action against them. I would like to express my deepest thanks, also on behalf of my colleagues at the Camp Community, for the accompaniment on our way so far and I look forward to a continued good cooperation!

**Dr. Brigitte Halbmayr**

Chairwoman of the Austrian Camp Community Ravensbrück and Friends

In the contemporary witness interview project "**Mri Historija**", carried out by the association "**Roma Service**", fifteen interviews were conducted with survivors from Bergen-Belsen, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Mauthausen and Lackenbach. In accordance with the wishes of the interviewees, eleven of the interviews were conducted in German and four in Romany, the language of the Burgenland Roma. The life story interviews lasted on average 75 minutes and were published on DVD with accompanying booklets.

Among others, a further interview project could also be carried out. The "**Austrian Camp Community Ravensbrück and Friends**" published the ten-DVD series "Visible" – ten stories of women who had been imprisoned in the concentration camp Ravensbrück. During the study "Living and Survival – paths to Ravensbrück. The women's concentration camp in remembrance", over 200 hours of testimonies were collected for the video archive Ravensbrück, parts of which were made accessible to interested persons on these ten DVDs. These videos can be meaningfully used in schools and other educational institutions and were also used in the compilation of short series, each with three to five portraits, for showing in art house cinemas.

Another important project, undertaken by the association **Persons' Committee "Justice for the Victims of National Socialist Military Law"**, the touring exhibition "**What was legal then...**" by the Berlin foundation "Memorial for the murdered Jews of Europe", was welcomed and supported by the National Fund. The exhibition, which was on show and well-received in numerous German cities from June 2007, was displayed in Vienna in 2009. The legal rehabilitation of the deserters from the armed forces and other victims of National Socialist military justice required broad social recognition. The deserters were and still are considered cowards and traitors, if not "comrade murderers", by sections of Austrian society. The organizers of this exhibition made particular efforts to reach out to a young audience. Furthermore, a comprehensive accompanying program was developed including, among other things, symposiums, discussions with contemporary witnesses, film showings and memorial events involving contemporary witnesses.

In 2008, the Year of Remembrance marking the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Anschluss*, the Carinthian Slovene Cultural Society "**Zarja**" in Carinthia staged a two-part **Exhibition on the Partisan Resistance and Persecution of the Carinthian Slovenes in Eisenkappel**, the center of Carinthian Slovene resistance.

The first part of this exhibition was devoted to the expulsion of the only Jewish family in Eisenkappel, the Scharfborgs, and reached an unexpectedly emotional climax. During the course of the research, descendants of the family were able to be found in Israel and the USA, which was a huge stroke of luck, not only for the reconstruction of the story of their expulsion and for the organization of the exhibition. Initially extremely skeptical about a project in Carinthia, the family Shenhar, previously Scharfberg, decided to take



Photographs from the project "Visible"  
Clockwise from left to right: Ida Huttary, in conversation with Dr. Brigitte Halbmayr, Friederike Furch, Irma Trksak, Anna Kupper



Right from top to bottom: Dagmar Ostermann,  
Dagmar Ostermann in younger years,  
Katharina Thaller,  
Katharina Thaller in younger years



Clockwise from left to right: Ceija Stojka, Irma Trksak (left) in Ravensbrück, Friederike Furch and Irma Trksak (left) in Ravensbrück, Anna Kupper in Ravensbrück, Lotte Brainin, Josefina Oswald



Left and above right: "What was legal then..." – Soldiers and Civilians before the Courts of the German Armed Forces", exhibition opening on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2009, Theater Nestroyhof Hamakom

Below: President of the National Council Mag. Barbara Prammer and contemporary witness Richard Wadani



Above: The Shenhar family, descendants of the Scharfberg family, in front of the Forum Zarja, Bad Eisenkappel/Železna Kapla, 28<sup>th</sup> March 2008

Right: Gabriel Shenhar (USA) during his speech marking the exhibition opening, Bad Eisenkappel/Železna Kapla, 28<sup>th</sup> March 2008



Left from top to bottom: Festivities marking the opening of the bilingual exhibition *Tu smo bili doma. O judovski družini Scharfberg v Železni Kapli / We belonged here ...* The Jewish family Scharfberg in Eisenkappel, 28<sup>th</sup> March 2008 Galerie Forum Zarja, Bad Eisenkappel/Železna Kapla

From left to right: Willi Ošina (Chairman of the cultural association Zarja, event organizer), Michelle Bassin (USA, wife of Gabriel Shenhar), Gabriel Shenhar (USA, son of the late Arie Scharfberg), Michal Shenhar (Israel, daughter of Arie Scharfberg)

Josef and Marianne Scharfberg with their son Kurt, Eisenkappel, ca. 1935

Zarja Chairman Willi Ošina presenting an exhibition catalogue to the widow of Arie Scharfberg, Ruth Shenhar, during the exhibition opening festivities, 28<sup>th</sup> March 2008

Carinthia can justifiably be described as a disaster area when it comes to supporting the subject matter National Socialism. While millions of Euros from Carinthia's budget for culture annually go towards supporting customs and traditions, events and projects dealing with the resistance and persecution generally only take place with no, or extremely little, financial involvement by the province of Carinthia. The fact that the only large scale event on the subject of 1938 was initiated by a minority, the Carinthian Slovenes of the Carinthian Slovene Cultural Association "Zarja" from Bad Eisenkappel, is equally indicative. A two-part exhibition series focusing on the years 1908–1938–2008 was envisaged to mark the association's 100th anniversary; Werner Koroschitz and I were commissioned with its conception. The fact that this idea was also able to be realized is largely thanks to the sponsorship money from the National Fund, which, not only in this context, plays a central role in the implementation of projects related to National Socialism and generally enables research projects to be carried out which lay entirely beyond the province of Carinthia's hegemonic understanding of history.

Projects of this kind clearly demonstrate how important for the present the biographically-oriented reprocessing of individual life stories is for the reconciliation of affected families and their descendants with their traumatic historical experiences. It can only be hoped that sponsorship for projects of this kind will also be available in the future – sponsorship from the Austrian "East", without which Carinthia would likely become completely immersed in its self-image as the "Province of the Defence Fighters".

**Mag. Dr. Lisa Rettl**

Freelance historian and exhibition curator

part in the exhibition opening. Thirteen people traveled from Israel and America to Eisenkappel. It had become clear during the course of the research that what at first sight looked like a “forgotten” story, was, although buried, still very present. It emerged that a Carinthian Slovene employee of the Scharfberg business, Agnes Jerič, had helped the family to flee and conversely, that the family had supported the girl at that time and virtually integrated her into the family. Completely unexpectedly, the project developed into an intercultural dialogue of reconciliation and became a big emotional event for both the Shenhar family and the German and Slovenian speaking communities of Eisenkappel. The high point was a meeting between the Shenhars and a former friend of the family and a descendant of Agnes Jerič, Josef Novak, who, during the exhibition opening, presented the Shenhars with an original table cloth from the Scharfberg’s shop, which the Scharfbergs had given to their employee as a part of her trousseau. “It will stay with us forever”, wrote Gabriel Shenhar of his journey to Austria in an email upon his return to the USA.

The scientific processing of National Socialism in the most varying of areas resulted in previously unknown historical facts about the National Socialist regime being able to be presented to the public. As commemoration of the victims of genocide and research into this time is a main concern of the National Fund, many archive-related projects are also sponsored.

The foundation “**Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance**” (**DÖW**) has undertaken several projects with the help of the National Fund since 2001, with the aim of listing the names of the victims of political persecution in Austria 1938–1945 and listing the names of Austrian Holocaust victims. These research projects listed the names and details relevant to the persecution of Austrians who were murdered for being Jewish or on political grounds between 11<sup>th</sup> March 1938 and 8<sup>th</sup> May 1945 by the National Socialist regime. To this end, the relevant source holdings at home and abroad were worked through, the data processed with the help of electronic data processing and, taking into account the legal provisions governing data protection, were made available to the public as a book, a CD-ROM and on the internet at [www.doew.at](http://www.doew.at). Beyond this, the source material and data collected serve further scientific evaluation.

The “**Cultural Association of Austrian Roma**” pursued the aim of **listing the names of all Roma and Sinti murdered during National Socialism**. During the first stage of the project, the first requirement was to establish which serial sources concerning the murdered Roma and Sinti still existed and what correct information they contained. These sources were scattered across several European countries – Austria, Germany and Poland – and during the course of the research they were examined, copied and collected. During the second stage, the collected sources were recorded and interpreted using a database. Depending on the source, the given name, surname, and alias, date and place of birth, last place of residence, place and date of death were established. Where possible, the

path through the various concentration camps was researched. As many Roma and Sinti families possess no photos of their families, during the project, photos were collected for a photo database and made available to the families on request.

At the same time as compiling lists of the Austrian Holocaust victims and victims of political persecution and carrying out other research work, in 2008, the **"Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance"** also opened the redesigned exhibition **"The war against the 'inferiors' – the history of National Socialist medicine in Vienna between 1938 and 1945"**. The exhibition has its roots in a communal initiative of the Otto Wagner Hospital, the Vienna Department of Health and the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance in the year 2000. In cooperation with survivors of the National Socialist euthanasia program, the City of Vienna, the Otto Wagner Hospital and the Institute for the History of Medicine created an exhibition in the so called V-building of the Otto Wagner Hospital. On the large grounds of the hospital, clear and understandable information boards and banners were required to assist with orientation, as well as signposts to the exhibition. In addition, the requests of survivors, their families and visitors to show original objects in display cases and to present contemporary witness interviews at computer terminals were complied with. As the exhibition was supplemented with the most recent research findings, documents and artifacts, the information folders and posters also had to be re-printed and the accompanying website [www.gedenkstaettensteinhof.at](http://www.gedenkstaettensteinhof.at) had to be updated. Since then, the exhibition has been visited by many groups and many tours have been conducted. Conversations with contemporary witnesses, discussion events, workshops and book presentations accompany the permanent exhibition.

The **"Association Schloss Hartheim"** is working continuously on the **"further development of the Educational and Memorial Site Schloss Hartheim as a permanent institution for the development of the educational work on the history of the victims of National Socialist euthanasia and murder of prisoners and for the care and support of victims' families"**. In a project running parallel to this, the association is carrying out **"Research into the history of National Socialist euthanasia in Austria with a particular focus on the biographies of victims and perpetrators in Schloss Hartheim and the further development of the memorial site with regards to biographical presentation"**. As a member of and in cooperation with the teachers' network [\\_erinnern.at\\_](http://_erinnern.at_), the association is also seeking to increase and further develop its available educational and learning opportunities. Here, the support and supervision of schools, educational institutions, establishments for professional and further education and institutions from the healthcare and social sectors form the main focus.

The National Fund views projects in the field of the education, both school and adult education, as a fundamental building block in raising and educating future generations and, in this regard, works very closely with the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture.

The National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism is accomplishing its task in many different ways. It helps the surviving victims, it also lends substantial support to academic research, which time and again yields new knowledge about National Socialist terror, apparatus of persecution and, above all, about the fates of the victims of this persecution. In two large projects, both spanning a number of years, the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance researched the names of the Austrian Holocaust victims and those of the victims of political persecution, thus returning to each person who was murdered or lost their life during the course of their persecution their identity and their biography. Finding sponsorship for the academics participating in these projects is becoming increasingly difficult. For this reason, institutions such as the National Fund are all the more important as key reliable partners. Through this sponsorship, the National Fund has an essential function for Austrian science and, above all, for research into the National Socialist era. There remains much to be done in this field of historiology. Last but not least, the National Fund is making an indispensable contribution to Austrian civil society with the research it sponsors.

**HR Univ.-Doz. Dr. Brigitte Bailer-Galanda**

Scientific Director

Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance (DÖW)



View of the permanent exhibition of the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance, Altes Rathaus, Vienna





The permanent exhibition of the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance "The war against the 'inferiors'. The story of National Socialist medicine in Vienna" in the Otto-Wagner-Hospital (Vienna)

Since its establishment, the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism has assumed the core responsibility of Austria towards the victims of National Socialism, also with regard to investigating, safeguarding and circulating knowledge of the events which occurred during the National Socialist era for future generations. Since its opening in 2003, the Educational and Memorial Site Schloss Hartheim has been able to realize essential projects for the establishment and further development of the Educational and Memorial Site as a permanent institution – above all with regard to the development of the educational work – with the support of the National Fund. The establishment of the biographical station “traces of life” is one example: the aim is to illustrate the personal stories and lives of those people behind the anonymous numbers of those murdered in Hartheim and to bring them closer to the visitors. Scientific investigation and research into the history of National Socialist euthanasia in Austria and, above all, in Hartheim forms the basis for projects of this kind. These projects are also only made possible through the generous support of the National Fund.

**Mag. Irene Leitner**

Director of the Educational and Memorial Site Schloss Hartheim



Right: Glass panels containing the names of those murdered at Hartheim  
Above left: Further education program for the guides/educational staff of the Educational and Memorial Site Schloss Hartheim  
Below left: School students at the Educational and Memorial Site Schloss Hartheim

Students often take up the search for the displaced and missing ex-students of their respective schools. The National Fund also provides support in establishing contact with the victims of National Socialism now living scattered across the world. In most cases it is even possible to arrange a meeting between the present and former students. In doing so, a bridge is created between the old and the young, between then and now. The stories of the contemporary witnesses also remain in the memories of the students for a long time after. In many schools, books are published and memorial plaques for those driven out or murdered are unveiled as a result of this "search for traces".

The National Fund is very interested in supporting and encouraging the work of dedicated school students and teachers as they come to terms with the multi-faceted aspects of subjects such as tolerance, human rights, democracy and the situation of minorities. Rendering remembrance of the victims of National Socialism accessible, above all to young people, is a very important task, precisely because the alternative to this is "forgetting". Only when, in addition to general historical knowledge of the National Socialist era, the experiences of the victims have been successfully imparted, can it be possible to safeguard a living memory of the National Socialist era in Austria and its consequences. The promotion of new and innovative teaching and learning methods and materials also plays an important role here.

*"Many years, yet not so many years ago, Austrian school history textbooks, although containing general information on National Socialism, contained only very little on the National Socialist crimes against those people who fell victim to them. Many teachers were from the wartime generation and told either their personal story or preferred not to say anything. But also the younger among them had learned only little about National Socialism at university and nothing at all about the Holocaust.*

*Today at least, the curriculum requires that the Holocaust be thematized and studied in detail and it is therefore covered by the textbooks, meaning that teachers have to teach it. Yet still the memories of the survivors and the faces and voices of the victims are all too seldom found in these books. Accounts of history based on sources left behind by the perpetrators largely still dominate.*

*Indeed, young people learn at least as much from the media, for example films, as from their school text books. Yet which images stay in their minds? How do these images shape young people's view of their present?*

*School is a good place to speak about public conceptions of National Socialism and teachers can function as good moderators of such discussions. Here it is important that they have already had the opportunity to reflect on their own perception of history.*

For NGOs like us, which are active in the field of anti-racism and anti-fascism, the answer to the question: "What does the National Fund mean to you?" is actually very simple.

A multitude of projects which we carry out in the field of remembrance and memorial work are only possible in the first place with the support of the National Fund. Not only the fact that many of our ideas could not have been realized without the support of the Fund – this support also enables us to contemplate innovative projects which would otherwise not have been possible. When we are developing new ideas and new approaches, the question is often asked: "Will we even be able to find somebody who has the courage to support this new approach?" Alone the knowledge that there is the possibility of support from the National Fund motivates us to try new and creative things.

For this and for much more: thank you.

**Willi Mernyi**

Chairman of the Mauthausen Committee Austria

*In a great number of schools, students and teachers engage themselves with their regional history and the fates of specific people from their environs. Many explore the history of former students who were persecuted; others investigate a local memorial site and others deal with a specific event, such as a 'death march' which passed through their area. Many of these projects would not have come about without the sponsorship of the National Fund.*

*The reports of the persecutees can move and provoke thought in young people – the stories told by contemporary witnesses can be a source of great enrichment for school classes. As the number of contemporary witnesses who can visit schools is always decreasing and because so many Jewish persecutees never returned to Austria, prepared video interviews are needed for classes”<sup>3</sup>*

For this reason, the National Fund sponsors many projects by the association *\_erinnern.at\_* which are aimed at school students and teachers. **“National Socialism and the Holocaust: Memory and the Present – *\_erinnern.at\_*”** was founded in 2000 and works in close cooperation with the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture and the state institutions for teacher training and advanced training when carrying out teacher training seminars in Yad Vashem, the central Israeli Holocaust Memorial and Research Site and when developing and circulating teaching and learning materials in Austria (*www.erinnern.at*) The networks of *\_erinnern.at\_* in the provinces encourage cooperation between teachers, including those who have participated in the seminars in Israel commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture.

Apart from these outreach programs for Austrian teachers, the most important task of the Israeli Memorial and Research Site **“Yad Vashem – The Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority”** is the extensive collection and processing of documents on the Holocaust. Over several years, the National Fund has supported two projects, **“Austrian Holocaust Documentation – Collection and Cataloging Acquisitions of Austrian Holocaust Documentation”** and **“Filming and Cataloging Documentation of the Confiscation of Jewish Property in Austria”**. The establishment of Yad Vashem was resolved in the Knesset, the Israeli Parliament, in 1953, in order to commemorate the six million murdered Jews and the lost Jewish communities in Europe and to honor brave helpers and rescuers of Jews during National Socialist rule. In addition to a huge archive and museum, the center also stands on extensive grounds on which an impressive memorial to the victims of genocide of the Nazi era can be viewed. Annually, between 25,000 and 30,000 people visit the archive, which collects and catalogs Holocaust documents from almost every country on earth.

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<sup>3</sup>Dr. Werner Dreier, teacher, historian, school inspector, Director of the association “National Socialism and the Holocaust: Memory and the Present – *\_erinnern.at\_*”, also a leading participant in the development of innovative teaching and learning materials, among others the DVD project “The Legacy”.

Without the project sponsorship of the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism, there would be much lacking in Austria, or at least lacking in quality – for example, interviews with survivors, processed and prepared for lessons and many projects in schools. There would also be less opportunities for teachers to deal with the challenging history of National Socialism and the Holocaust.

**Dr. Werner Dreier**

Teacher, historian, school inspector

Director of the association "National Socialism and the Holocaust:

Memory and the Present – [\\_erinnern.at\\_](http://erinnern.at)"

In Yad Vashem, the intensive Austrian outreach program by *\_erinnern.at\_* is considered exemplary. The annual “**Central Seminar**” held by *\_erinnern.at\_* plays a fundamental role in networking and further educating these dedicated teachers. The seminars are held each year in a different Austrian province and are attended by around 100 participants, mainly Austrian teachers, but also scientists and academics and intermediaries working at memorial sites. Eight “Central Seminars” have taken place since fall 2001. The general theme of these three day events is different each year. In fall 2009 it was “Perpetrators – Victims. Positions on the National Socialist policies of power, taking Styria as an example.”

An important project, which stretched over several years, was the production of a DVD with teaching and learning materials for use in Austrian schools entitled “**The Legacy – Holocaust Survivors Tell their Stories**”. On this DVD, seniors, who were just children at the time, speak of their memories of the time the National Socialists came to power, first robbing them of their rights and then of their possessions and, finally, of their parents, siblings and relatives. Their families and friends had been taken from them, but their memories remained.

*“If my parents and my siblings had survived, we would have been able to say:  
those were terrible times, but they are over. But that, I can't forget!”*  
Oskar Schiller, 1998

Oskar Schiller from Eisenstadt is no longer alive, but his story was recorded in a video interview and preserved for future generations. Schiller was one of over 50,000 Holocaust survivors who were interviewed by the “Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education”, founded by Steven Spielberg. Almost 2,000 of these interviews are related to Austria – the interviewees grew up here, lived here temporarily or were deported to camps here. The DVD “The Legacy” contains excerpts from some of these interviews with 13 selected contemporary witnesses. The expert team from *\_erinnern.at\_*, comprised of historians, media experts, teachers and education experts, worked for almost four years to produce a concept, with which the “treasure” which is stored in the archives of the “Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education” in Los Angeles was prepared for use in Austrian schools. The DVD was supplemented with extensive accompanying material, planned teaching modules and additional information. Teachers were familiarized with ways of employing the DVD in their lessons during seminars. 13 school classes from various types of school throughout Austria were included in a comprehensive trial program. The feedback from the teachers and students was then used for both its didactic development and the development and design of its contents. A very clear picture emerged. The reports of the survivors can provide the students with important and moving insights and promote far-reaching discussions. This would not have been possible, had the contemporary witnesses not been willing to be interviewed. A team of media design students from the University of Applied Sciences

Vorarlberg designed the DVD. The menu navigation was also developed and the programming of the DVD carried out by this team.

The “Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education” and the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture supported this project together with the National Fund. So far, several thousand DVDs have been distributed in Austria, mainly through personal contacts and seminars by [\\_erinnern.at\\_](#). Feedback from the teachers has been very positive. This form of processing and distributing contemporary witness interviews has also achieved a considerable response internationally. With “The Legacy”, [\\_erinnern.at\\_](#) has succeeded in creating a teaching and learning resource which not only aids in the teaching of history but also appeals to the students emotionally and intellectually.

Another of the many projects of [\\_erinnern.at\\_](#) sponsored by the National Fund is “**Naftali Fürst. A Buchenwald survivor**”, an educational and historical project by Joachim Wiesner in the form of an illustrated folder for use in class. Taking a famous Buchenwald photo of liberated prisoners as a starting point, which showed the then twelve year old Naftali Fürst alongside the future Nobel Prize winner Elie Wiesel, in this teaching aid his life and fate before, during and after the Holocaust were prepared for Austrian school classes.

Learning on location at the memorial sites themselves has also become an increasingly important part of Austrian education. Almost 100,000 students in Austria visit memorial sites annually, predominantly Mauthausen, but also Ebensee and Hartheim and some travel abroad to places such as Dachau, Auschwitz or other memorial sites. The National Fund has been supporting seminars for teachers at the memorial site Mauthausen since 2005, which serve to prepare the teachers for school trips to memorial sites. An **Austria-wide memorial site seminar** is for the first time in planning for fall 2010, which aims to create a network and increase the professionalism of people involved in the outreach work of the Austrian memorial sites, be it full-time, part-time or voluntarily. In order to improve the quality of the outreach work, new teaching materials, books and workbooks are being developed.

The “Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights” of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), together with the “Anne Frank House” in Amsterdam and international experts, have developed a teaching and learning resource on anti-Semitism and racism, which has already been published in many countries. It consists of three **workbooks against anti-Semitism and racism** for students and a teachers’ book. With the support of the National Fund and the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture, [\\_erinnern.at\\_](#) produced an Austrian edition.

In 2008, Horst Schreiber published his book “**National Socialism and Fascism in Tirol. Victims. Perpetrators. Opponents.**”, which, using 48 biographies, tells the stories of victims, perpetrators and those complicit in the National Socialist regime in a way that is



Left: The \_erinnern.at\_ network, contemporary witness K. Smole speaking to the school students in Auschwitz  
Right: The \_erinnern.at\_ network, BG/BRG Bad Ischl in Auschwitz



Above left: Yad Vashem, exit area  
Below left: Presentation of the Austrian archive project at Yad Vashem  
Above right: The entrance at Yad Vashem  
Below right: Yad Vashem, entrance hallway



Teachers' seminar \_erinnern.at\_



Above: Naftali Fürst  
Below: Remembrance project in Gleisdorf

Above: Federal Minister Dr. Claudia Schmied with the contemporary witnesses Dr. Helga Feldner-Busztin and Elisabeth Scheiderbauer (from right to left) at the presentation of the DVD "The Legacy" at the Parliament, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2008

Below: President of the National Council Mag. Barbara Prammer with the contemporary witnesses Dr. Helga Feldner-Busztin, Sophie Haber and Elisabeth Scheiderbauer (from left to right) at the presentation of the DVD "The Legacy" at the Parliament, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2008

aimed especially at young people. As a result of the book's great success, \_erinnern.at\_ will now edit and publish books of this kind for all provinces in its series for young people "National Socialism".

Within the framework of the provincial networks of \_erinnern.at\_, numerous projects have been carried out with the support of the National Fund, of which only a selection can be listed here: in Carinthia, for example, Nadja Danglmaier and Helge Stromberger edited the book "**Crime scenes. Locales. Memorial work at the sites of National Socialist tyranny in Klagenfurt**".

A very special **memorial project** was realized in **Gleisdorf** by teacher Wolfgang Seereiter with the help of many students. Following his participation at a seminar in Yad Vashem, in 2003 he made the decision to carry out a memorial project on the victims of the death march of Hungarian Jews through East Styria in spring 1945. The project consisted of a variety of events and initiatives, always involving different students. In 2008 it was concluded for the time being with the erection of a memorial in the center of Gleisdorf, based on the design of a student.

A further aspect of the National Fund's project research is devoted to the lives of people who were driven out of Austria; people who were able to flee, who had to try and put down new roots in another country, who could never, or only with difficulty, forget their connection to their homeland and who spent the rest of their lives in exile. They included many famous Jewish artists, many famous Austrian musicians. In order to do justice to this broad subject, the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, Department of Music Analysis, Theory and History, founded the association "**exil.arte – Austrian Coordination Point for Exiled Music**". Under the leadership of Univ.-Prof. Dr. Gerald Gruber, numerous concerts and events have been held and foundation work on musicians and their work in exile carried out. In 2009, "exil.arte" won the Golden Stars Award in Brussels, in the program "Europe for Citizens" with the project "Ostracized Music", carried out in cooperation with the forum "*Voix Étouffées Paris*" and the center "Ostracized Music Schwerin/Rostock".

The association "exil.arte" considers itself to be a contact point for the coordination of all institutions, organizations and people that deal with the subject of exile. It is based in Austria and its activities extend to the coordination and organization of artistic and scientific projects and events and cover all areas of artistic expression of people exiled, ostracized and murdered during National Socialism, particularly music, musical theater and film. In various concert series, the works and the personalities driven out by National Socialism are highlighted in a variety of ways. This theme is poignantly and effectively publicized when presented at both scientific conventions and artistic events. The development of an international forum and the publication of various literature serve to pro-

pagate knowledge of the National Socialist era and the persons affected by it. Young musicians of today play and interpret the works of those who were exiled in the past. Works by Kálmán, Jurmann, Benatzky and Kreisler are performed, as are those by Zemlinsky, Eisler and Korngold, Hertzka, Zeisl-Schönberg and Zeisl.

The National Fund also sponsored the **performance of scenes from an incomplete opera** by Erich Zeisel, based on the novel "Hiob" by Joseph Roth, realized by "exil.arte" and the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna.

In addition to the projects already mentioned, the National Fund also supports many socio-medical and psychotherapeutical projects. As the affected persons and their descendants still carry the pain of the war and the genocide with them today, it is particularly important to provide support to these mentally and physically damaged people, above all in their old age and last years. Since 2001, with the help of the National Fund "**ESRA – Center for psycho-social, socio-therapeutical and socio-cultural integration in Vienna**", has been intensively seeking to gain contact with those victims of National Socialism who have so far not been able to accept any help, as they are either unaware of the service provided by ESRA or live outside of Vienna. Many of those approached for the first time subsequently remain under the care and supervision of ESRA for a long time afterwards. It has become evident from the work of ESRA during the last years, that there is still a great demand for information, advice, care and therapy and that many survivors require urgent help and support. One of the target groups of ESRA are the Carinthian Slovenes persecuted by the National Socialist regime. With the help of project sponsorship by the National Fund, ESRA is able to also offer psychotherapeutical services in Carinthia.

The National Fund also supports international projects in the field of social medicine and psychotherapy, including the association "**The Central Committee of Jews from Austria in Israel**". For many years, and with great personal dedication, Mr. Gideon Eckhaus, with a number of staff and volunteers, such as Mr. Leo Luster, has been leading this central office in Tel Aviv for all Jews originating from Austria and living in Israel who were able to escape National Socialist persecution. The National Fund has been providing support for many of the association's projects since 1999. These efforts and the assistance provided have been able to reach many affected people throughout Israel. Over time, the association was able to successfully extend its activities beyond Tel Aviv to also include Jerusalem and Haifa. Those affected are now elderly and often suffer from illness and loneliness. The association organizes services for these people, providing food, company, the opportunity to exercise and home visits by doctors etc. A German speaking social worker is available for those people who require assistance at home or by telephone. These social services have become a part of these people's lives; people who once had to leave Austria and have never gotten over it, who have since found a connection to their homeland through this association. Consequently, it is more important than ever for the



Concerts staged by "exil.arte"  
Below left: President of the National Council Mag. Barbara Prammer with the composer Walter Arlen  
at a Youth Orchestra rehearsal in Gmunden, 15<sup>th</sup> March 2008  
Below right: Composer Walter Arlen at a Youth Orchestra rehearsal in Gmunden, 15<sup>th</sup> March 2008

The establishment of the National Fund was of extremely great importance for the survivors in many ways. Firstly, they were able to experience belated social recognition of the injustice suffered and secondly, as a result of the professional and empathetic work of the staff of the National Fund, they were shown a way in which they could come to terms with their terrible past in a secure way. As, however, confrontation with their own stories of persecution carries the risk of re-traumatization, the National Fund worked in close cooperation with ESRA from the outset.

In contrast to the other offices and authorities, for the first time these people encountered understanding and historical knowledge of the events from the staff of the National Fund, so that their individual stories were not called into question.

The fact that many of the survivors began to tell their stories for the first time in their lives during the course of filing their applications often resulted in them being overwhelmed by the flood of memories. At ESRA, they found the opportunity to process their memories with medical and psychotherapeutical support.

The cooperation between the National Fund and ESRA was particularly successful in the case of the Slovenian partisans in Carinthia, who until then had neither registered their claims to a victims' pension nor had they had the chance to receive adequate social support. With this cooperation, this group experienced recognition of their status as victims, probably for the first time.

Finally, I would like to mention a very positive personal experience. During various trips to South and North America (Argentina, Chile, New York), I was often in contact with one-time Austrians, for whom the National Fund is a symbol of recognition by the Republic of Austria, for which they had been waiting for decades.

**Prim. Dr. David Vyssoki**

Medical Director of the Outpatients' Department  
Psycho-Social Center ESRA

National Fund to continue to support these activities. The Fund must ensure that for as long as there are Holocaust survivors from Austria living in Israel, there is also an office in Israel to which people can turn.

In addition to social activities, the association also offers medical and health care. For example, a trained gym teacher helps people to remain mobile and healthy. Due to great demand, gym for seniors is now offered twice a week in Tel Aviv. For age-related or post-operative complaints and mental or physical restrictions, support is offered in the form of care assistants or home helps. Medical aids such as orthopedic shoes, walkers, electric wheelchairs, bed underlays, special beds etc. are all provided. Moreover, therapy such as "Sznuselen (Snoezelen)" therapy is on offer – a treatment which stimulates the patient's senses and leads to relaxation and increased activity. With the help of the National Fund, many former Austrians suffering from dementia, Alzheimer's disease or similar illnesses were able to make use of this treatment.

All projects sponsored by the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism are first processed before being submitted to the Committee for approval. The projects which are approved by the Committee are then presented to the Board of Trustees that they may make their decision. The Board of Trustees convenes twice annually. Once the decision has been reached, the sponsorship monies are disbursed. Upon completion of the projects, the project organizers send both a statement of account with regards to the sponsorship money received, as well as reports, photos, specimen copies and other materials.

The National Fund of the Republic of Austria was founded during the term of office of Federal Chancellor Dr. Franz Vranitzky in June 1995. Prior to this, at his instigation an office had already been set up which was to serve as a first point of contact to the surviving victims of National Socialism. The National Fund received the first materials concerning surviving Austrian Holocaust victims from the former appointees of the Federal Chancellor and the director of this office, which served as the first basis for the work of the staff of the National Fund. I am full of admiration for their self-sacrificing activities, which often stretch into the late evening, in order that the surviving Holocaust victims may be helped as swiftly as possible.

In 2001, the General Settlement Fund was established as an institution for the compensation of seized property and affiliated with the National Fund. Many property losses, previously unknown even to the applicants, were discovered by the staff of the General Settlement Fund and the persons owed compensation were traced. Unfortunately, the processing and payment of this compensation became more and more protracted. However, the cause for this did not lie with the General Settlement Fund itself, but with the procedure selected by the Austrian legislator.

Even today, in 2010, the National Fund has not concluded its task of supporting the surviving Holocaust victims from Austria, in addition to the gesture and restitution payments already made. This support is necessary for as long as there are surviving victims from Austria, and therefore it is also important that the National Fund continues to exist!

We, the Central Committee of Jews from Austria in Israel, have much to thank the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for. With its help, we have been and are able to help many needy persons and to continue to run our clubs, offering the elderly a little happiness in their dull daily lives.

We are looking forward to a continued good cooperation with the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund and thank each and every member of staff from the bottom of our hearts for their conscientious work.

**Gideon Eckhaus**

Chairman of the Central Committee of Jews from Austria in Israel



The Central Committee of Jews from Austria in Israel  
Gideon Eckhaus (front left) during an excursion of the Club of Austrian Pensioners in Israel



Above: The Central Committee of Jews from Austria in Israel  
Excursion of the Club of Austrian Pensioners in Israel  
Below right: Leo Luster (left) during a meeting with teachers  
Below left: Gideon Eckhaus (left) during a meeting with teachers

In 1996, when the sponsorship of projects commenced, the National Fund supported two applications. Over the years, the number of project applications and approvals has dramatically increased and in the Year of Remembrance 2008, the considerable figure of 135 approved projects was achieved, for which around 1.5 million Euros was provided. The budget available to the National Fund for project sponsorship in 2009 and 2010 has been reduced by the Austrian Federal government by 20 to 30 percent. These dramatic budget cuts mean that the sponsorship opportunities of the National Fund have also been greatly reduced, with regrettable consequences for those seeking to realize projects.

As a result of its many years of experience, the National Fund can maintain that its sponsorship has encouraged many people in Austria and abroad to initiate and carry out projects. It can only be hoped that the bridge, which the National Fund hopes to have built between the generations and between the Republic of Austria and those affected and their descendants through its sponsorship of projects, small and large alike, remains strong enough to weather the times of financial crisis.

Fifteen years ago, the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism was founded. Financial compensation was paid to the victims and various projects helping the victims were supported.

The Concentration Camp Association has only had good experiences regarding the accommodation and friendliness of the case workers of the National Fund, be it in person or by telephone, for which I would like to express my deepest thanks, also on behalf of the Concentration Camp Association.

May this good cooperation continue to exist in the future.

**Friederike Krenn**

Secretary General of the Federal Association  
of Austrian Anti-Fascists and Resistance Fighters  
and Victims of Fascism (Concentration Camp Association)



The staff of the National Fund's Work Group "Art Restitution": (from left to right) Mag. Claire Fritsch, E.MA, Mag. Julia Lenz, Mag. Michael R. Seidinger (Head of Work Group), Mag. Stefanie Obermeir, Janis Lena Meißner, BA

# The Search for Seized Art

## The Art Database of the National Fund as an Additional Tool for Provenance Research and the Search for Heirs

Mag. Michael R. Seidinger

with contributions from Mag. Claire Fritsch, E.MA and Mag. Julia Lenz

In early 1998, during an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (New York), two works of Egon Schiele, "Wally" and "Tote Stadt III", were impounded. Descendants of Jewish families from Vienna had laid claim to the pictures, both of which formed part of the Leopold Collection<sup>1</sup> which had been purchased by the Republic of Austria. In December 1998, these developments resulted in the Art Restitution Law<sup>2</sup>, which was resolved with the consensus of all parties. Since then, the Art Restitution Law has served as the legal basis for the Federal Minister of Finance to gratuitously transfer objects, which had come to be owned by Federal museums and collections during the course of or as a result of the National Socialist regime, to the original owners or their legal successors<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>This collection was converted into a private foundation.

<sup>2</sup>Federal Law on the Restitution of Art Objects from the Austrian Federal Museums and Collections, Federal Law Gazette I no. 181/1998.

<sup>3</sup>Sec. 1 of the Art Restitution Law.

In December 1998, during the course of the creation of this law, the National Fund Law was also amended<sup>4</sup>. This amendment gave the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism the task of processing heirless *objets d'art* (in accordance with Sec. 2 (1) item 2 of the Art Restitution Law) and allocating the proceeds to the victims of National Socialism. One year later, the City of Vienna also decided to transfer to the National Fund questionable art from its museums and collections, which is unable to be returned to their owners or their heirs, in order to be utilized<sup>5</sup>. In subsequent years, similar legislation was introduced in the provinces. Representatives of both the National Fund and the Jewish Community were invited as observers to the Commission for Provenance Research and the Vienna Restitution Commission.

The proceeds from the utilization of the heirless art are to be used pursuant to Sec. 2a of the National Fund Law. According to this provision, the recipients of these payments are persons who have suffered damages or losses as a direct consequence of persecution by the National Socialist regime, as long as it had occurred in Austria. Furthermore, the proceeds from the utilization can be used to fund projects concerned with providing help and support to victims of National Socialist persecution, particularly projects which serve to help communities deeply affected by persecution.

In accordance with the statutory provisions, the *in rem* restitution of the art objects to their former owners or their heirs is given much greater priority than a monetary payment to the persecutees of the National Socialist regime from the proceeds from the sale of these objects, although it must be remembered that the individual payments from these proceeds (pursuant to Sec. 2a (1) item 2 of the National Fund Law) can only be made to people directly affected by National Socialism and this group is becoming smaller by the day.

Due to the circumstance that no statutory deadline for the conclusion of provenance research has been stipulated and no particular date was determined for the heirless objects to be conveyed to the National Fund, the National Fund took the initiative to prepare the legal mandate for utilization as soon as and as best possible. In this regard, in 2005, a further contribution to interconnection and transparency in the field of art restitution was resolved: through the conception and realization of an art database which rendered the art object accessible on the internet, the National Fund is seeking to bridge the gap between the results of provenance research thus far and possible recipients of the objects to be restituted. This is to avoid the former owner or their heirs only coming to hear of

<sup>4</sup>Federal Law with which the Federal Law on the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism is amended, Federal Law Gazette I no. 183/1998.

<sup>5</sup>Art. II item 2 of the Vienna Municipal Council decision on Art Restitution 1999. Decision of the Municipal Council of the Federal Capital City of Vienna of 29 April 1999, Official Gazette of the City of Vienna no. 30/1999 on the Restitution of Art and Cultural Objects from Museums, Libraries, Archives, Collections and other Holdings of the City of Vienna.

Since its establishment, the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism has carried out its tasks circumspectly, calmly and, despite all difficulties, with great dedication and success. In its dealings with individual fates, it has made a fundamental contribution towards showing the members of the post-war generation how people were treated between 1938 and 1945. In the past, the National Fund has always promoted and supported the work of the Vienna Restitution Commission unbureaucratically and effectively, for example through the establishment of an art database. On my own behalf and on behalf of the members of the Vienna Restitution Commission, I would like to wish the National Fund all the best and continued unflagging dedication in its future activities, which render an indispensable contribution towards processing of Austria's post war history.

**Mag. Walter Hellmich**

Chairman of the Vienna Restitution Commission

these heirless art objects during or after they have been utilized. The artworks are to be publicized for as long as possible, while, at the same time, their utilization is not to be postponed for longer than is necessary. In cooperation with the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture<sup>6</sup>; the Federal Museums<sup>7</sup> and museums of the City of Vienna<sup>8</sup>; the Commission for Provenance Research; the Vienna Restitution Commission and the Information and Support Center of the Jewish Community Vienna, the Art Restitution Work Group, installed at the National Fund, developed an online register for the publication of publicly-owned art of questionable origin.

### The art database

Since October 2006, the National Fund, in collaboration with the cooperating museums, has been running the self-developed and realized art database at [www.kunstrestitution.at](http://www.kunstrestitution.at). Its purpose is to enable victims of National Socialist art theft throughout the world to search for specific artworks which were seized and are suitable for restitution. The art database contains a catalogue of several thousand art and cultural objects which today can be found in museums and collections of the Republic of Austria or the City of Vienna. Since July 2007, after the translation of the entries for the meanwhile 9,000 objects, the English version has been available at [www.artrestitution.at](http://www.artrestitution.at).

The objects contained in the database are arranged according to categories such as prints, photographs, arts and crafts, clothing and paintings and also such things as weapons, technical instruments and palaeontological finds. They are predominantly arts and crafts and fine collection and utility articles, as well as reproductions. For approximately 700 objects, there are photographs available in addition to descriptions. The location, condition and provenance is given for each object, as is the status of the art restitution proceedings. This information is predominantly gathered from the research which is carried out by the provenance researchers of the individual museums and conveyed to the National Fund. Thanks to the cooperation with the mentioned establishments which deal with art restitution, the contents of the database are able to be continually extended and updated in line with the newest research. Through this, each object can be updated as to whether the committees entrusted with the restitution have reached a decision, what the contents of the decision are if applicable and whether the objects have already been re-conveyed.

For some of the objects, provenance research was able to determine that they had been seized between 1938 and 1945. The former owners or their legal successors are still being traced however. With regard to other objects in the database, it remains to be re-

<sup>6</sup>Named the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture until February 2007.

<sup>7</sup>Albertina, Museum of Military History, Museum of Art History (with the Museum for Ethnology and the Austrian Theater Museum), Natural History Museum Vienna, Austrian National Library, MAA – Austrian Museum of Applied Arts / Contemporary Art, Belvedere, Technical Museum Vienna, University of Vienna (library).

<sup>8</sup>Museums of the City of Vienna and the Vienna Library at the Town Hall.



Competent City Counselor for Culture and Science Mag. Dr. Andreas Mailath-Pokorny (right), Secretary General Mag. Hannah M. Lessing and the provenance researcher of the Vienna Museum, MMag. Dr. Michael Wladika upon the return of a painting from the Vienna Museum



Above right: The art database of the National Fund, online since October 2006 at [www.artrestitution.at](http://www.artrestitution.at)

Below right: Identified by the descendants of the original owner: "Kaisers Dank" by Ludwig Koch

The 15 year anniversary of the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism is a welcome opportunity for me to offer my heartfelt thanks for the excellent cooperation. An initiative of the National Fund enabled thousands of looted objects – including books, manuscripts and writings from the Austrian National Library – to be published in an online database in order to give the descendants of persecutees the opportunity to claim their property. I believe that in the last 15 years Austria has taken great – and long overdue – steps towards honestly and transparently dealing with its National Socialist past. This change in the intellectual climate of our Republic has also led to a willingness, which we should have actually been able to take for granted but has until now often proved to be lacking, to give those persecuted under the National Socialist regime compensation for injustices suffered.

The National Fund has also positively shaped public opinion, not only through its actual task, the disbursement of gesture payments, but also through the sum of its exemplary projects, events and initiatives and so has made an important contribution to coming to terms with a dark chapter in the history of Austria.

**Dr. Johanna Rachinger**  
General Director of the Austrian National Library

solved whether they are questionable pursuant to the Art Restitution Law or the Vienna Municipal Council decision. The publication on the internet and the users' feedback are also to contribute to the resolution of these questions.

In addition to the object data of the holdings of the Federal museums and collections of the City of Vienna, records have also been made available by the *Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum* and the *Styrian Universalmuseum Joanneum*. Information from the Vienna University Library is currently being prepared. The aim is to publish a list of objects seized in connection with National Socialism and now in public collections and museums which is as comprehensive as possible and to trace the original owners and their heirs<sup>9</sup>.

Users can submit their inquiries to the competent provenance researchers directly. In addition to these inquiries, requests for information are received by the National Fund on a regular basis, which are then also dealt with by the National Fund. Those interested in a restitution are often the children or grandchildren of the persons from whom the objects were seized. For the most part, they can only give fragmentary information regarding the family heirlooms, particularly regarding the ownership statuses and circumstances surrounding the seizure. In each case, with the help of its files and in compliance with data protection laws, the National Fund tries to contribute to the investigations.

Moreover, the art database is conceived as a central information point for those interested in restitution and, in addition to specific information on the objects, also contains an overview of the restitution opportunities provided by the Austrian federal provinces. There is also a brief outline of the mechanisms of National Socialist art theft in Austria and of the restitution proceedings after 1945.

## Summary and most recent developments

In practice, the art database is also used for the investigations of the provenance researchers, even though it was not originally conceived as a research tool but as an intermediary between the possible owners and the institutions entrusted with restitution.

It is encouraging that in several cases, works have already been able to be restituted. A painting by Adrian von Ostade, "*In der Bauernstube* (heute: *Bauernbesuch*)" was also able to be restituted to the legal successors in this way. This painting had been considered questionable for years, however, its previous owners were unknown. As a result of its publication in the art database, it was able to be attributed to the former collection Bruno Jelinek by the staff of the Commission for Looted Art in Europe. In September

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<sup>9</sup>This constitutes a step towards realizing the demands which were formulated during the course of the Washington Conference on Holocaust Era Assets 1998. At the time, the participating government representatives agreed to undertake efforts to establish and publish a central register for information pertaining to artworks looted during National Socialism.

2007, the Advisory Board, established on the basis of the Art Restitution Law, decided on the restitution of the painting. This was able to be restituted in early 2008. A painting by Ludwig Koch ("*Kaisers Dank*") from the Vienna Museum was able to be restituted in 2009 as a result of a clear attribution by the descendants of the original owner. Furthermore, at the end of 2009, the Advisory Board recommended that more than 8,000 "unclaimed" publications from the Austrian National Library, which had come to be there through the Gestapo ("Secret State Police"), be transferred to the National Fund for processing and utilization.

During recent years, the National Fund has given momentum to the provenance research in several museums. The art database also gave rise to renewed research into individual collections being carried out by the Museum of Art History. Moreover, the scope of application of the Art Restitution Act was widened with an amendment<sup>10</sup>: in addition to art objects, other movable objects of cultural value are now also included. The amendment covers not only objects from federal museums and collections but also those otherwise directly owned by the Federation. Additionally, objects which were seized between 1938 and 1945 on the entire territory of the German Reich can also be restituted.

It cannot be expected that substantial numbers of restitutions will be carried out as a result of the publication of the heirless objects on the internet; nevertheless, the art database of the National Fund is an additional forum and a further step towards the transparent presentation and interconnection of information in the field of art restitution in Austria.

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<sup>10</sup>Federal Law Gazette I no. 117/2009. Federal Law with which the Federal Law on the Restitution of Art Objects from the Austrian Federal Museums and Collection is amended. Enacted in November 2009.

It's a pity that the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism was not established earlier. But when it was finally resolved, its staff worked against time with élan. I imagine that the staff experienced repeated disappointment in specific cases which concerned the claims of the very aged.

From the Vienna Museum's point of view, it was above all the cooperation in the field of art and cultural objects restitution which resulted in the most positive experiences. This is particularly true of the dedicated work of Hannah Lessing, Michael R. Seidinger and Claire Fritsch in the sessions of the Restitution Commission Vienna – despite the fact that they are not official members. I remember them making many valuable contributions to the discussions. The Vienna Municipal Council resolution of 29<sup>th</sup> April 1999 contains very clear regulations, which have led to the restitution of thousands of expropriated objects. It has also always been important to us to actively seek out the heirs and communities of heirs which are scattered across the globe and are entitled to claim as quickly as possible. We also worked well with the National Fund in this regard and often provided joint support of the aggrieved persons and their heirs.

**Dr. Wolfgang Kos**

Director of the Vienna Museum



Mag. Hannah M. Lessing, Head of the Austrian Delegation to the ITF, with Ambassador Dr. Ferdinand Trauttmansdorff, the former Chairman of the ITF

**“...to plant the  
seeds of a better  
future amidst  
the soil of a  
bitter past...”**

The National Fund and the Task  
Force for International Cooperation  
on Holocaust Education,  
Remembrance and Research

Mag. Hannah M. Lessing

Since its establishment in 1995, the first and foremost task of the National Fund has been recognition of the victims of National Socialism.

“Not forgetting” is of at least equal importance – dealing reflectively and responsibly with the past. In recent years, remembrance work – and the related research and imparting of knowledge about National Socialism and the Holocaust – has become increasingly important. In Sec. 1 (2) of the National Fund Law, the general aim of the Fund is stated: “to express the special responsibility towards the victims of National Socialism”. In addition to the compensation payments, remembrance work is also an expression of this special responsibility.

The National Fund makes a meaningful contribution to remembrance and commemoration in Austria through preserving the life stories of the victims, participating in memorial events and sponsoring projects which serve the scientific investigation of National Socialism and the fates of its victims, remember National Socialist injustices or preserve the memories of the victims. At the same time, it is also active internationally as the Austrian coordination office of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research.

Just as it has on a European and international level, the conviction has also prevailed in Austria that remembrance work is not only a moral obligation towards the victims – above and beyond this, research into the Holocaust is also a valuable foundation for the development and safeguarding of a democratic society. Particularly the political education and upbringing of the young is *sine qua non* for a strong democracy: knowledge of historical contexts, of the causes and mechanisms of National Socialism, enables them to recognize racist and antidemocratic developments in the present and the potential dangers for the future, and enhances their appreciation for a free society.

Against this backdrop, in 1998 in Stockholm, the foundation of a Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (Task Force; ITF) was resolved within the scope of the first meeting of a work group, in which Sweden, Great Britain and the USA participated. Its aim was international cooperation on issues of the Holocaust.

In January 2000, the Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson issued an invite to the “Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust”, a conference in which representatives of over 45 countries were already participating, including politicians, educationalists, scientists, memorial site staff and survivors.

One outcome of this conference was the Stockholm Declaration, in which the government representatives of the participating states committed themselves to communal efforts in the fields of remembrance, commemoration, research and education with regard to National Socialism and the Holocaust:

## Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust

*The members of the Task Force are committed to the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, which reads as follows:*

- 1. The Holocaust (Shoah) fundamentally challenged the foundations of civilization. The unprecedented character of the Holocaust will always hold universal meaning. After half a century, it remains an event close enough in time that survivors can still bear witness to the horrors that engulfed the Jewish people. The terrible suffering of the many millions of other victims of the Nazis has left an indelible scar across Europe as well.*
- 2. The magnitude of the Holocaust, planned and carried out by the Nazis, must be forever seared in our collective memory. The selfless sacrifices of those who defied the Nazis, and sometimes gave their own lives to protect or rescue the Holocaust's victims, must also be inscribed in our hearts. The depths of that horror, and the heights of their heroism, can be touchstones in our understanding of the human capacity for evil and for good.*
- 3. With humanity still scarred by genocide, ethnic cleansing, racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia, the international community shares a solemn responsibility to fight those evils. Together we must uphold the terrible truth of the Holocaust against those who deny it. We must strengthen the moral commitment of our peoples, and the political commitment of our governments, to ensure that future generations can understand the causes of the Holocaust and reflect upon its consequences.*
- 4. We pledge to strengthen our efforts to promote education, remembrance and research about the Holocaust, both in those of our countries that have already done much and those that choose to join this effort.*
- 5. We share a commitment to encourage the study of the Holocaust in all its dimensions. We will promote education about the Holocaust in our schools and universities, in our communities and encourage it in other institutions.*
- 6. We share a commitment to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust and to honor those who stood against it. We will encourage appropriate forms of Holocaust remembrance, including an annual Day of Holocaust Remembrance, in our countries.*
- 7. We share a commitment to throw light on the still obscured shadows of the Holocaust. We will take all necessary steps to facilitate the opening of archives in order to ensure that all documents bearing on the Holocaust are available to researchers.*
- 8. It is appropriate that this, the first major international conference of the new millennium, declares its commitment to plant the seeds of a better future amidst the soil of a bitter past. We empathize with the victims' suffering and draw inspiration from their struggle. Our commitment must be to remember the victims who perished, respect the survivors still with us, and reaffirm humanity's common aspiration for mutual understanding and justice.*

In implementation of this declaration, it is the aim of the Task Force to promote education and research in the field of the Holocaust and commemoration on a national and international level. Through activities such as supporting the development of national programs on Holocaust education and research and the sponsorship of projects, the Task Force is making a fundamental contribution towards raising international awareness. Placing the focus on a local level is particularly important in both the projects and in Holocaust education.

ITF membership is open to all nations, state and non-state organizations which commit themselves to the principles of the Stockholm Declaration.

Today, the ITF comprises 27 member states: Argentina, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, France, Greece, Great Britain, Israel, Italy, Canada, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Austria, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and the USA.

Austria applied for membership in 1999 and has been an active member of the ITF since 2001; the National Fund acts as a coordination office. Together with the Director of the International Law Office of the Foreign Ministry, I, as Secretary General of the National Fund have been in charge of leading the Austrian delegation to the Task Force ever since.

On 12<sup>th</sup> March 2008, Austria assumed the chairmanship of the Task Force from the Czech Republic for twelve months – a very meaningful year for Austria. Exactly 70 years before, the German troops had marched into Austria. During Austria's chairmanship, focus was placed on "not forgetting" and passing on knowledge.

Austria is also a member of the Education Working Group, founded in 2001, which deals with questions relating to teaching the Holocaust. It is important that the teachers are aware that the transmission of knowledge about the Holocaust is vital and that they know which methods they can use to adequately convey this knowledge. For this purpose, guidelines are developed, recommendations and suggestions for the structure of the lessons are conveyed and teachers are informed of the latest status and outcomes of Holocaust research.

At the National Fund, it is the work with the survivors which continually illustrates the value of their memories for the present and for the future. The National Fund itself sponsors large numbers of projects which serve to commemorate and remember the victims as well as to research and come to terms with National Socialism.

Today, Austria and Europe find themselves at a turning point: since the years of World War II, the dictatorship and persecution, 70 years have passed – a lifetime. The voices

Austrian society and the official Austria required far too long before they were able to begin to take steps towards facing their responsibility towards the victims – especially towards the Jewish victims – of the National Socialist rule, also in a moral sense. This responsibility also means meeting the need for concrete material financial action. I have had plenty of opportunities to realize this but also to see how difficult it is to attain funds from the public budget to take this action. For this reason, from the outset I belonged to the group of people who placed great hope on the establishment of the National Fund. These hopes were not only fulfilled but exceeded! The National Fund became an absolutely essential, flexible financial tool. But its efficacy was not limited to the gesture payments to the victims, project sponsorship and the masterful execution of the tasks stipulated in the Washington Agreement and the General Settlement Fund Law. Moreover, under the dedicated leadership of Hannah Lessing and with the complete support of the Presidents of the National Council, Heinz Fischer, Andreas Khol and Barbara Prammer, it has become a unique center of action and competence in questions of dealing with our responsibility towards victims of National Socialism. The best thing about this success story, however, is that it was written with the help of young, dedicated and enthusiastic Austrians who have been exerting themselves with heart and mind for many years at the National Fund. They will remain forever the ambassadors for Austria's reconciliation with one of the saddest chapters of its history and with its victims. Even if these tasks carried out on a material level should have an end: Austria will only be fit to face the future if coming to terms with all chapters of its past remains an unremitting process of awareness within this process. The National Fund can remain a central source of vigor.

**Dr. Ferdinand Trauttmansdorff**

Ambassador

Ex-Chairman of the Task Force for International Cooperation  
on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research

of those who lived through this time are growing fainter. Soon, they will no longer be able to answer our questions. It is surely not a coincidence that the number of projects for the recording and safeguarding of the life stories of contemporary witnesses – be it through books, films, studies or documentaries – has noticeably risen in recent years. The memories have become a rare commodity which we have only learned to value late in the day. Experiences which are not recorded now will soon be lost forever – and with them, everything we can learn from them.

At the same time, the growing temporal distance from the National Socialist era also provides an opportunity: a new generation of researchers, themselves not burdened with personal guilt and free from prejudices now has the chance to investigate, openly and without bias, the mechanisms and consequences of this dictatorship.

In recent years, a lively culture of remembrance and commemoration has been able to develop, throughout Austria and internationally – not least due to the numerous processing and commemoration initiatives. It has become evident how important it is for a critical civil society to consciously come to terms with the past.

The implementation of the guidelines of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research and the resolute continuation of the international cooperation shall therefore remain key agendas of the National Fund in the coming years.

The focus of the remembrance work of both the National Fund and the Task Force is therefore increasingly placed on the future and on the hope that future generations will not be “sentenced to relive the same”.

While the focus of the victims’ recognition through gesture and restitution payments was on the surviving victims, remembrance work is primarily of importance for the future generations – for those who did not experience history themselves. They have the opportunity to learn from the mistakes of the past – this opportunity has to be taken today.

The National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism is the commitment of our homeland Austria, enshrined in law, to openly, honestly and truthfully come to terms with the recent past during the occupation of Austria by the National Socialist German Reich. In doing so, all victims of the National Socialist regime of all political or religious affinities and of all origins and dispositions are to receive the appropriate respect and official gratitude.

This commendable task was fulfilled to the highest degree by the staff of the General Secretariat, with the necessary tact and due attention to all personal sensibilities.

That which is of importance in the future, is the awareness of the succeeding generations and the certainty of never again succumbing to such a catastrophe.

My maxim is: "forgetting – no, forgiving – yes!"

**KomR. Dr. Gerhard Kastelic**

Federal Chairman

ÖVP Fellowship of Political Persecutees and Confessors for Austria



The staff of the National Fund Project Group "Redesign of the Austrian Memorial in the State Museum in Auschwitz-Birkenau": (from left to right) Mag. Michaela Niklas, Mag. Michael Doujak, Mag. Claire Fritsch, E.MA (Head of Project Group), Mag. Evelina Merhaut, Mag. Michael R. Seidinger

“Austria in Auschwitz”

# **The Coordination of the Redesign of the Austrian Memorial Site in the Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau by the National Fund**

Mag. Claire Fritsch, E.MA, Mag. Michael Doujak

In July 2009, a further task was assigned to the National Fund: in implementation of its government program, chapter “Art and Culture”, point 17 “Responsibility towards the Victims of National Socialism”, the Austrian Federal Government resolved the introduction of the redesign of the Austrian national exhibition in the former concentration camp and present museum Auschwitz-Birkenau. It commissioned the National Fund with the coordination of the planning and realization of the project as a whole.

A part of the funds for financing the project has already been secured and is being provided by the Ministry of Science, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry for European and International Affairs and by the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism and the Future Fund of the Republic of Austria. However, further funds will be required to see the project through to its completion.

## **Criticism of the present exhibition – Austria banner as a temporary solution**

On the grounds of the memorial site, in addition to the permanent exhibition of the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau, are the exhibitions of the countries and ethnic communities whose members were deported to Auschwitz. The national exhibition of the Republic of Austria is also found among these, in block 17 of the memorial site. It was opened on 19<sup>th</sup> March 1978. Since then, it has remained unchanged.

The renewal of the Austrian exhibition in the light of the knowledge of an appropriate culture of remembrance in keeping with the times has been demanded for years. Particularly the theory propagated in the exhibition “Austria – First Victim of National Socialism” and the glossing over of questions of complicity and perpetration is no longer the view held by the official Austria, particularly after Federal Chancellor Vranitzky declared in 1991 his belief in the “shared responsibility for the suffering which was brought upon other people and peoples, not by Austria as a state but by the citizens of this country”.

For the Year of Remembrance 2005, a temporary solution was resolved for the outdated Austrian exhibition. The result was the erection of the “Austria banner in Auschwitz”, financed by the National Fund and with a text approved by the Foreign Ministry:

*“The Austrian memorial site in the former concentration camp Auschwitz was opened in March 1978, 40 years after the Anschluss of Austria to the German Reich. From a modern perspective, its portrayal of the years 1938 to 1945 demonstrates a one-sided view which shows Austria only as ‘the first victim’ of the violent policies of expansion of the National Socialist regime, omitting the participation of many Austrians in National Socialist atrocities and particularly in the Holocaust.*

*This portrayal of history no longer complies with the historical identity of present-day Austria. The declaration of belief in a shared moral responsibility for the participation of so many Austrians in so many National Socialist atrocities has led to a much more refined view of historical events. This is also demonstrated by the recent increased efforts of the Republic of Austria to make serious attempts at dealing with the dark sides of its history.*

*This altered view of Austria’s National Socialist past ties in with a new culture of remembrance, the focus of which is remembrance of the victims of the Holocaust – remembrance and the victims of the National Socialist regime and particularly the victims of the Holocaust, as well as other victims of National Socialism.*

*This altered perspective in dealing with the National Socialist past is to be expressed through the redesign of the Austrian memorial, which is currently in planning.”*

Other countries were also confronted with the necessity of updating their memorials in line with the historical picture emerging from the research findings. As a result, within the last seven years, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia have all redesigned their exhibitions, housed in the prisoners' barracks designated "pavilions".

### **Scientific baseline study for the redesign**

In order to be able to undertake a redesign, the existing exhibition had to be scientifically recorded and analyzed. This scientific analysis was carried out in 2006 by Univ.-Doz. HR Dr. Brigitte Bailer, Dr. Heidemarie Uhl and Univ.-Doz. Dr. Bertrand Perz in the form of a study which was sponsored by the National Fund and concluded in 2008.

The closing report<sup>1</sup> served many functions. Firstly, an account was given of the comprehensive history of the development of the national exhibitions and specifically the Austrian exhibition. The description of the exhibition is accompanied by a detailed examination. The "Victim's Theory" portrayed in the exhibition is analyzed and explained through the reception of Auschwitz and the Holocaust in post-war Austria. Finally, the historians drew up a list of the main areas to be researched for the planned redesign and suggested options for subjects covered in the exhibition and their realization. This particularly included the examination of Austrian complicity and perpetration in National Socialist atrocities.

### **Development of a rough concept for the new exhibition**

In 2009, in its role as coordination office, the National Fund commissioned the development of a rough concept covering the main topic areas of the new exhibition. This concept, drawn up by Dr. Bailer, Dr. Uhl and Dr. Perz has already been completed and is being examined by two committees established especially for the purpose – a scientific advisory board and a societal advisory board (composed of interest groups).

In November 2009, the Scientific Advisory Board was constituted, which will discuss and further develop the submitted concepts with the authors. The eleven-member committee is composed of experts from the relevant fields of, among others, Holocaust research, memorial work and the culture of remembrance. The members elected Hon.-Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Neugebauer, ex-Director of the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance, as their chairperson and Dr. Brigitte Halbmayer from the Institute for Conflict Research as deputy chairperson.

In addition to the Scientific Advisory Board, in January 2010, the Societal Advisory Board was constituted. It is composed of representatives from victims' associations, reli-

<sup>1</sup>See the project report of June 2008 at: [www.doew.at/information/endberichtgedenkstaetteauschwitz.pdf](http://www.doew.at/information/endberichtgedenkstaetteauschwitz.pdf).



Exterior view of block 17, in which the exhibition is located



Left: View of the foyer

Center: View of the first two sections of the exhibition

Right: Foyer with the installation "Austria – First Victim of National Socialism"

The National Fund of the Republic of Austria and the Camp Community Auschwitz have been in contact for a long time. Members of the camp community applying for the unlimited gesture payment, were, if they desired, offered help quickly and efficiently. Support in the application process, which can often be demanding for older people, was provided in a helpful and sensitive manner. Those affected always had the feeling that the National Fund was on the victims' side. Yet the cooperation with the Camp Community also goes beyond the professional dimension: only with the accompaniment of a witness to the Langbein symposium was her appearance made possible. The Camp Community's magazine, "Auschwitz Information" was also supported by the National Fund. Finally, this bond with the National Fund is also illustrated by the fact that the Secretary General of the National Fund has now been voted on to the managing committee of the Camp Community.

**Univ.-Prof. Dr. Michael John**  
Chairman of the Austrian Camp Community Auschwitz

gious communities and representatives of the parliamentary fractions. The broad spectrum of its composition is to ensure that the concept for the new exhibition is met with a general social consensus. The work of the Societal Advisory Board is to particularly ensure that the interests and concerns voiced by the victims' groups are heard. The chairperson is Univ.-Doz. Dr. Herta Neiß, secretary of the Camp Community Auschwitz. She is represented in this function by Prof. Rudolf Sarközi, Chairman of the Cultural Association of Austrian Roma and Albert Dlabaja from the Concentration Camp Association – Federal Association of Austrian Resistance Fighters and Victims of Fascism.

## **Outlook**

Over 30 years after the opening of the Austrian exhibition in Auschwitz, the first practical steps have been taken towards the redesign in the form of the establishment of expert committees and the production of a rough concept. The work ahead, such as the development of a detailed concept and the creative realization, will demand much diligence and care. Ultimately, the Republic of Austria should be represented at the memorial site Auschwitz-Birkenau – the most important memorial for those persecuted and murdered under National Socialism – with an appropriate exhibition that complies with modern historical knowledge. In addition to the related discourse on Austria dealing responsibly with its past through the involvement of the advisory boards in the redesign process, the National Fund, as the coordination office, is working with a contractual partner, the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau, which is very aware of its vital role as a memorial and accordingly requires a precise and correct approach. The National Fund shall be coordinating this domestic and bilateral process in the coming years.

## **Men, women, qualities**

In this country, miracles generally only happen when no one believes in them any longer. The National Fund is such a miracle.

In a country with a history that is beautiful and difficult, impressive and contradictory, it is a surprise.

It is uncomfortable.

And it is Austrian, in a deeper sense.

In the spirit of Robert Musil, of the "*Monsieur le vivisecteur*" of the Austrian soul.  
"The world can only be improved by those who stand in opposition to it",  
is written in "*The Man without Qualities*".

This sentence could be the motto of the National Fund.

But Musil also writes: "All feelings, all passions in the world are nothing in the face of the huge, yet fully unconscious attempts made by humanity at all times to maintain its peace of mind", and "Misfortune is when we stand still at our second-to-last step!"

These sentences could apply to broad areas of our post-war history.

The staff of the Austrian National Fund work against comfortably forgetting. They are not afraid of the next step – towards remembrance, justice and many necessary gestures. They are courageous.

At some point a plaque should be erected for all who have worked for this establishment.

It would honor this country.

**Dr. Kurt Scholz**

Retired Director of Restitution Affairs of the City of Vienna  
Co-founder of the Political Education Department of the Ministry of Education

# “... as if we had known each other forever”

## The National Fund's Support in the Search for Friends and Relatives

Mag. Martin Niklas, Mag. Christine Schwab

As the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism has become increasingly well known, it has not only collected growing amounts of data concerning affected persons – there are currently around 115,000 names of applicants and their relatives in the database of the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund – but for many people, the awareness has grown that among this great number of names, people are included with whom their contact was cruelly and abruptly broken as a result of persecution and expulsion. When these people, often applicants themselves, approach the National Fund, most see it as a last opportunity to successfully conclude their search for missing relatives, friends and acquaintances, which has often spanned many years. Since 1995, hundreds of people from the most diverse of countries have approached the National Fund with such requests.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The outcomes of the family and friend reunions have previously been presented twice to the public: in 2000, during an exhibition in Parliament marking five years of the National Fund, examples of successful reunions were presented; in 2005, two brochures were published marking the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fund, which contained, among others, an article on the subject: Helmut Wartlik, Martin Niklas, “*What has become of you?*” *Reuniting Families and Friends*, in: Renate S. Meissner, National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism (ed.), *10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of The National Fund. A Closer Look and Future Prospects*, Vienna 2005, p. 160–172.

When a request of this kind is received by the National Fund, research is conducted in the National Fund database in order to identify the person sought. Due to the great amount of time that has passed between the last time the seeker and the sought were in contact and the time of the inquiry, to the generally only vague details or to common surnames and changes of name as a result of, for example, marriage or application for a new citizenship, this research often proves difficult. In the case that it is not successful, the National Fund again approaches the person in order to gather as many details as possible regarding the person for whom they are looking.

Should a person be found in the database – the National Fund does not pass on data to third parties due to data protection laws – a letter is sent to this person with the contact details of the person seeking them and the request to contact them directly. The person who originally approached the National Fund with the inquiry is also informed that somebody may have been found and that they will possibly receive a letter or a phone call.

The responses received in the case of a successful reunion count among the most rewarding aspects of the work at the National Fund. Those who have been found, who were former neighbors or lived in the same district, attended the same school and saw each other on a daily basis and are now scattered throughout the world, write or telephone and meetings take place – in the respective places of residence or during a joint visit to Austria.

When the advance payments to the applicants from the General Settlement Fund, established with the National Fund, commenced in late 2005, an increase in the number of inquiries after family members and friends was also evident. This can be traced back to the decisions of the Claims Committee of the General Settlement Fund, received by the applicants prior to the transfer of their money. In addition to information on the payments by the General Settlement Fund, these decisions also contain details of any co-heirs of the aggrieved person and of other relatives. As a result, many applicants discover for the first time that they still have relatives of whom they were unaware, with whom they had lost contact or who they had assumed were no longer alive. In these cases, people often approach the National Fund with the request to make contact.

The range of options available for tracing people has also grown in recent years. The database of the National Fund and General Settlement Fund is growing constantly, with a vast number of details on the applicants and their relatives, and consequently the chances of a person being found in the database have risen dramatically. An internal research database, which was set up by the historians of both Funds during the course of their research into property seizures and prior restitution and compensation measures, containing around 220,000 entries to person-related files and documents also provides assistance in the search for people not found in the database of the National Fund and General

Settlement Fund. With the aid of databases of other institutions and using various internet resources, a search for a person is usually successful.

As the General Settlement Fund not only makes payments to the people directly affected by National Socialism but also to their heirs, in the past few years more and more "reunions" have taken place between people from the second and third generations.

Yet the search for relatives or friends is not always successful; sometimes people can only be informed that the person whom they are seeking could not be found despite intensive research or has already passed away. It is particularly painful for people who are searching when, during the course of the search for friends who have been lost since 1938, it can only be determined that a classmate or school friend was murdered in a concentration camp.

Besides these family and friend reunions in a narrower sense, applicants repeatedly approach the National Fund with other requests; for example, to learn at which cemetery their grandparents are buried or to obtain more information on the fates of their relatives through contact with other applicants.

Moreover, the National Fund also supports institutions or individuals in their search for persons for various projects or scientific investigations dealing with the National Socialist era and its consequences.

## **Examples of successful reunions of families and friends**

### **Elfriede Stern and Elfi Hahn: "A little star went up for me."**

In October 2007, Mrs. Elfriede Stern from Vienna contacted the National Fund. She had learned from the decision of the Claims Committee that she had relatives of whom she was unaware and whom she would very much like to meet. One of these relatives was her cousin, Mrs. Elfi Hahn from Berlin.

The paternal grandparents of Elfriede Stern and Elfi Hahn, Helene and Jakob Grünwald, were Jewish. They had three sons – Otto, Felix and Friedrich. Otto Grünwald, the father of Elfriede Stern, fled to England after the *Anschluss*. Elfriede was herself subjected to much discrimination in Austria; among other things, she was expelled from her academic high school and had to attend the regular high school.

Friedrich Grünwald, the father of Elfi Hahn, was deported by the National Socialists during the course of the November pogroms of 1938 and later murdered, as was her grandmother Helene. Elfi and her non-Jewish mother had to vacate their apartment and moved to Berlin to live with relatives.

Although Elfriede Stern had known that her father Otto had had a brother named Friedrich, she had not known that he had had children. Elfi Hahn was subsequently informed by the National Fund that she was being searched for by her cousin Elfriede Stern, who would like to get in touch. Elfi Hahn had also known nothing of her cousin and was very happy to receive the message from the National Fund. They successfully got in touch and a short time later, they were able to meet in person.

Mrs. Stern thanked the National Fund for the successful reunion in a letter:

*"The connection with the children of my Uncle Friedrich is really a source of great joy to us in Vienna and to the family in Germany. Thank you again for the help of the National Fund!"*

*"My parents separated when I was still a baby and I didn't meet my father until 1956. We stayed in touch until his death and in 1977 his widow, who still lived in London at the time, came and visited us in Vienna for two weeks. But neither my father Otto, his brother Felix nor Gusti, my father's widow, told me about their brother, although they were in regular contact with his three children. It was only through Elfi Hahn that I realized what difficulties and fears my mother had experienced during the Nazi era. She told me how it was for her own mother. They were two women who, in their fear for their children, often didn't know how they could protect them – this went on for seven years."*

Mrs. Hahn also described to the National Fund the story of the unexpected contact:

*"In October 2007, I learned from the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism that there was a paternal cousin in Vienna who had asked after me. At first I couldn't believe it, as I didn't know that my father's two brothers had had children. It was an indescribable feeling to read, after years of suffering and uncertainty, that there is another relative, cousin Elfriede Stern in Vienna. In the city in which I lost my beloved father and grandmother in the Holocaust. Thanks to the address and telephone number of my cousin provided by the National Fund, I was able to call Vienna immediately. As unbelievable as it sounds, right from the first moment, it seemed as if we had known each other forever. A little star went up for me. We soon established that we had many things in common, not least because our families suffered the same fate.*

*In the meantime we have visited one another several times in Vienna and Berlin. [...] Our children have also met already."*

### **Eva Gertrud Weissman: Former school friends**

Mrs. Eva Gertrud Weissman, née Brössler, from Ohio, USA, also approached the National



Above left: Meeting at the wedding of Elfi Hahn's son in Berlin, 4<sup>th</sup> July 2009. Elfriede Stern (right) with her husband Walter Stern and Elfi Hahn

Above right: "Children's ball with the naughty boys", 1906  
One of the photos sent by Randol Schoenberg to his relative: Mr. Schoenberg's great grandparents (seated), Hermann and Ilona Jellinek; 2<sup>nd</sup> from right: Josef K., cousin of Hermann Jellinek and father of Randol Schoenberg's relative



Principal Mag. Ursula Madl and Prof. Horst Prentler from the Billroth Academic High School with Eva Weissman (right)



Hilda Dowsett today  
Right: Hilda Dowsett and her 6-year-old son in Yorkshire, Great Britain

PHOTOS: ELFI HAHN, BILLROTHGYMNASIUM, RANDOL SCHOENBERG, DANIELA TORSH, HILDA DOWSETT

Fund in early 2005 as she wanted to get in touch with former school friends. She had been a student at the Academic High School Billrothstraße in the 19<sup>th</sup> district of Vienna until 1938 and had had to leave the school because she was Jewish. She was able to flee to Holland on a *Kindertransport* with her sister, where she lived in hiding from the Nazis until the end of the war and worked for the Dutch resistance movement. After the war, she emigrated to the USA; here, she was finally able to meet up with her parents, who were also able to escape Vienna.<sup>2</sup>

In 2005, Mrs. Weissman got in touch with her former school and with the National Fund. With the assistance of the Director and a teacher at the Billroth Academic High School, Mrs. Mag. Ursula Madl and Prof. Horst Prentler, and with the support of the National Fund, Mrs. Weissman was able to make contact with some of her former classmates.<sup>3</sup> Through the National Fund, contact was then able to be made with a school friend who now lives in Australia.

### **Mrs. W. and Peter Gayward: "After so many decades!"**

In December 2008, the National Fund received a request from the daughter of the applicant, Mrs. W. from Germany, who had been helping her mother in her search for a missing cousin. Mrs. W., who was persecuted by the National Socialists as a Jew in Vienna, went into hiding with her mother and survived the Nazi era as a so called "*U-boot*". Her grandmother was deported to Riga and murdered. As a result of the events in 1938, Mrs. W. lost contact with all other relatives and was searching for her cousin Peter Gayward, the son of her maternal uncle, Erich G. All she knew of him was that he had supposedly survived the war.

Peter Gayward was expelled from school after the *Anschluss* and was later able to flee to Great Britain; his father Erich G. was murdered by the National Socialists.

The National Fund was able to trace Mr. Gayward and informed him of Mrs. W.'s inquiry, whereupon he got in touch with her. Mrs. W. later told the National Fund of the successful family reunion:

*"My daughter had tried for a long time to make contact in order to resolve the story of our family, for which I am also very grateful. I was then able to approach the National Fund.*

<sup>2</sup>The autobiography of Mrs. Weissman was published recently: Eva Broessler Weissman, Gregory Moore, *The War Came to Me. A Story of Endurance and Survival*, Lanham/MD: University Press of America 2009. See also the writings on Mrs. Weissman's life story by Juliane Lepsius, *Schicksal und Chance*, in: *Annual report 2007/2008 Billrothgymnasium*, published by GRG19/BI26 (Billrothstraße 26–30, 1190 Wien), p. 168–191, and by Eva G. Weissman, *Auch ich war einst ein Wienerkind. Ode an das Billrothgymnasium*, in: *ibid.*, p. 164–166. Thanks to Mrs. Mag. Ursula Madl for providing the annual reports.

<sup>3</sup>Since then, Mrs. Weissman has visited Vienna and her former high school several times and is also an honorary member of the Association of Friends of the Billroth Academic High School.

Actually, it is sad that the National Fund of the Republic of Austria exists. It would be better if Austria had never established this Fund to compensate victims of National Socialism, because no Jews or other victims had ever been persecuted, expelled or murdered. But because this circumstance is part of European, Austrian and Viennese history, the activities of the National Fund can only be welcomed, and we hope that more years of tireless and precise work by the staff of the National Fund may follow.

The City of Vienna is inseparably bound to its Jewish heritage and owes an exceeding amount to its Jewish community – this remains unchanged by the barbaric regime and its perpetrators, many of them Austrians. On the contrary! Jewish life is flourishing and thriving again in Vienna today, Vienna and its Jewish community are inseparably bound with one another and, in the final analysis, the National Socialists did not achieve their goal of eliminating the European Jews. The pursuit of financially compensating suffering and injustice, the pursuit of symbolic recognition of persecution and imprisonment and the pursuit of an honest and truthful Austrian position towards the victims of National Socialism must be fought for every day as if for the first time. Not least, the work of the National Fund also serves this purpose, the management and staff of which I would like to expressly thank here.

**Dr. Andreas Mailath-Pokorny**

Competent City Counselor for Culture and Science in Vienna

*After such a long time, the Fund then helped me to learn something of the fates of my relatives, who had died during the National Socialist regime or had disappeared. I found my cousin Peter Gayward (G[...] ) again!*

*I couldn't remember him, as I was only three years old when contact was broken off as a result of the events of the time. I only knew of him through the stories told by my mother. He is eleven years older than me and was brought to safety in England in 1939. We had no idea of this, also of the fact that his father, my mother's brother, was killed in Hartheim.*

*The National Fund was able to make contact with my cousin and I received a letter from him! I was very excited and moved when I read it and learned his story. We exchanged information, wrote letters and emails and sent photos of our families.*

*Unfortunately, we have so far been unable to meet. I hope to still be able to arrange a meeting though. I would so like to meet him and his family. That would be a great pleasure. – After so many decades! –*

*I am very grateful that the National Fund went through such effort for me."*

Peter Gayward also expressed his thanks to the National Fund. Although he could remember Mrs. W.'s parents, he could no longer remember Mrs. W., who had been three at the time:

*"So it came as a complete surprise to receive your original letter telling me about her. I got in touch with her and we exchanged letters telling each other what had happened to us since 1939 and in particular the problems she had with the Nazis, which were considerable and which I managed to avoid. We have not been able to meet and it is unlikely, given my age, that we will do so. I have also been in touch with her daughter who was able to give me many details of my father in 1939/40, his incarceration in Steinhof when he had dementia and his removal there from and murder by the Nazis which I believe my mother, who continued to live in Austria, never knew as I have letters she received at the time. I am therefore very grateful for your action in bringing us together." (English original)*

### **Alfons Rosenthal: "Life story in a nutshell"**

An applicant from Switzerland was searching for a friend. In October 2004, he asked the National Fund whether we were in touch with his childhood friend from Vienna, Mr. Alfons Rosenthal, as he would like to make contact with him.

Alfons Rosenthal, who now lives in Israel, was happy to receive the message from his friend, which had been passed on to him by the National Fund:

*"I can only remember a small, podgy boy from the neighboring building. Mr. [...] probably looks completely different today. So do I. Of course, I wrote to him immediately and enclose herewith a copy of my letter.*

*You are in the interesting position of being able to follow the paths taken by many former Austrians. By this I don't necessarily mean my parents' generation and their traumatic experiences. I mean the next generation [...] which enjoyed the fruits of their parents' difficult beginnings and who were able to lead interesting and creative lives. Whether the Nazis are aware what volume of potential creativity was lost to the German Reich.*

*I was at all events very pleased to receive your [...] letter and would like to once again express my heartfelt thanks."*

In a letter, which he also provided to the National Fund, Alfons Rosenthal described to his friend the story of his flight and the path his life has since taken:

*"Via the friendly conveyance of Dr. Meissner of the National Fund, your letter of the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month reached me yesterday. I was truly happy, even though I must admit, that I can barely remember our childhood pranks. I completed my four years of elementary school at the Schotten School and then I was in the Wasa Academic High School. You too? I'm amazed at your memory. My French governess hailed from your current Geneva and my stern Papa sent me to learn to ride at the Theresianum, where I stood before the huge beasts in panic. However, I learned to ride which was of use to me years later as a soldier in the Jewish Settlement Police.*

*We got out in February '39, after my brave mother managed to get my father out of the transport to Dachau on 10<sup>th</sup> Nov. '38. She was an attractive blond woman and was able to bewitch the SA criminal.*

*We went straight to Tel Aviv. I was 13 1/2 and was promptly sent to the Balfour Academic High School, where everyone spoke only Hebrew. Not an easy language and not an easy beginning. Nevertheless lots of pretty girls. So I learned quickly. After the high school certificate on my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday I went into the military, as per the call up from the Jewish Agency. But not into the Jewish brigade of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, but into the JSP – Jewish Settlement Police – as the Jewish authorities wanted to keep a larger educated workforce in the country.*

*After the war, I worked in my father's office, where I had actually been working every spare second since our arrival in Tel Aviv. Representatives for textile raw materials (cotton, wool) and textile machinery.*

*29<sup>th</sup> Nov. '47 – United Nations partition plan. At the time I was in Prague on business, in the company of lots of young Israelis, when we heard on the radio and read in the newspaper that the newly formed Israel was being attacked on all fronts by the Arab armies. We hurried back home, for we were all Hagana or Etzel [two Jewish underground organizations in Palestine during the time of the British mandate] and into the military, where I was active in the war or the reserve for the next 33 years. I was never an enthusiastic soldier, but it was part of our daily life, being called up for one month a year [...].*

*After the War of Independence, after 2 1/2 years in the military, I had had enough and left for London with no specific plans. It was a good year which ended with me meeting a pretty and very nice girl at a Purim Ball of the Israeli British Soc. Three weeks later I married her, and Ditta from Mährisch-Ostrau has now been my incomparably true and tolerant wife for 54 years. She worked with me for many years and was also responsible for the fact that I accepted the offer of HOECHST Corporation to manage their Israeli branch. [...] I managed the office for 25 years, which counted up to 50 employees in my last years there. Those were also good times [...].*

*But when you reach 65, it is over for the Germans. I was celebrated and honored but definitively pensioned off. In order to fill the void, I did a tourist guide course, received an official certificate in four languages and intended to use my contacts to introduce me to VIP visitors to Israel.*

*This never materialized, as a few days after leaving 'CHEMIPHARM' the president of the German-Israeli Chamber of Commerce offered me the position as director of the Chamber. For eight years, this was my new career, which ended with being awarded the German Federal Order of Merit, First Class. [...]*

*So now you have my life story in a nutshell, and I would very much like to hear some details from you."*

Alfons Rosenthal later informed the National Fund that he and his friend from his youth had managed to meet in person.

### **Irving Koppel and Edith Lewis: "I had been looking for him for 30 years ..."**

A family reunion is not always successful in the narrowest sense; nevertheless, acquaintances can also be made through seemingly failed attempts to seek relatives and new knowledge can be gained. In April 2007, Mr. Irving Koppel from North Carolina, USA requested the support of the National Fund. Mr. Koppel had been searching for some of his relatives for many years – for Peter Koppel, born 1937 in Vienna and his father Walter Koppel, a factory owner and shoe manufacturer. In 1938, Walter Koppel had tried to emigrate to the USA

and asked Irving Koppel's father, whose family were living in Milwaukee, Wisconsin at the time, for assistance. Unfortunately, due to the strict immigration laws at the time, it was no longer possible to obtain an immigration permit for Walter Koppel. Subsequently, Walter Koppel fled to Shanghai and after the war returned to Vienna. Despite searching for years, Mr. Irving Koppel was unable to find anyone from Walter Koppel's family.

Although the National Fund was unable to find anyone by the name of Peter or Walter Koppel, an applicant named Edith Lewis, whose father was also called Walter Koppel and was a shoe manufacturer, was able to be found. Mrs. Edith Lewis, who was able to flee to Great Britain on a *Kindertransport* in 1939, answered the National Fund:

*"Thank you very much for putting me in touch with Mr. Irving Koppel [...]. It was very interesting and we are already in contact, although I don't believe that we are related."*

Despite the fact that Edith Lewis and Irving Koppel were not related, Mr. Koppel was happy to have got in touch and wrote:

*"Please accept my heartfelt thanks for having connected me with Edith Lewis, daughter of Walter Koppel. I had been looking for him for 30 years, and it was a pleasure to learn that he had returned to Austria after the war and had been able to resume his previous career. Without your help, I'd never have found the family."*

*"As it turned out, we were not from the same Koppel family. Nevertheless, I discovered that Walter had returned to Austria after World War II and had re-established his shoe manufacturing business."*

*Again, let me express my thanks for all the effort you put forth on my behalf." (English original)*

### **Daniela Torsh and Hilda Dowsett: "I am often homesick ..."**

In 2007, Daniela Torsh from Australia informed the National Fund that she wanted to write a family history for her children and was searching for relatives of her father.

Among other people, the National Fund was able to locate a great-cousin of Daniela Torsh, Hilda Dowsett, who was then requested to get in touch with Mrs. Torsh.

Hilda Dowsett, née Stössel, was a tailor and was fired in 1938 because – despite her Evangelical faith – she was considered a Jew according to National Socialist legislation. She was able to flee to England in the same year. Her parents Emil and Rosa, née Lichtblau, were murdered in National Socialist concentration camps.

Daniela Torsh's father, Paul Thorsch, was a cousin of Hilda Dowsett. He survived the Nazi era and later emigrated to Australia.

In a letter to the National Fund, dated August 2008, Mrs. Torsh wrote that she was now in contact with Hilda Dowsett and was very grateful to the National Fund for enabling this.

Mrs. Dowsett, who continues to live in Great Britain, was pleased to get in touch and told the National Fund of her life story in a letter:

*"Our grandparents were Jews, also my father's. That made us Non Aryans. [...] When Hitler overran Austria, my cousin Alice Lichtblau and I decided we [had] better queue [for] many nights in the Vienna streets for papers to emigrate as refugees to England. Having obtained a servants job in Hampshire, England, Alice became cook, I was the parlour maid. We both earned £ 1 per week plus our keeps. She spoke perfect English, but I only had 6 weeks of lessons. However, after 10 months, I was able to answer the telephone. My sister was taken on by her shoe firm BATA in C.S.R. [...] She flew on the last plane before Hitler took C.S. Republic. [...] Years later she married a Czechoslovakian Dr. of chemistry and I after my cousin got married to an English man, Christopher Dowsett. We had a son [who] is now a retired architect and marathon runner, after having completed 16 London marathons and others incl. in Paris. He got married and had 3 daughters. [...] After having been happily married 52 1/2 years, my husband died of cancer. I had a severe fall and went to live here in a retirement home, now at 90 and after a broken hip and other complaints in a rented 1-bedroom flat. I am often homesick, can hardly walk but cannot grumble at 90. Both my parents finished in separate concentration camps, Theresienstadt and I think [Bergen-] Belsen. We had a few 20 words letters from mother. When Americans overran [the] camps, they were NOT on the list of survivors. Gas chambers were the answer to that." (English original)*

**Mrs. C. and Charles R.: "... that I was able to meet my uncle in time"**

Mrs. C. from Klagenfurt was not very optimistic when she requested assistance from the National Fund in summer 2008:

*"Dear Sir of Madam,*

*While trying to shed a little light on our family history, I stumbled upon a brother of my father. Although my father had tried after the war to find out what had become of his brother, his investigations were fruitless. By coincidence, I have now discovered that Mr. Karl R[...] apparently filed an application for restitution prior to 2003. Furthermore, I am aware that he probably lived in Australia (or perhaps still lives there). I would be very grateful if you – if at all possible – could forward my letter. I would like to know if my uncle is still alive or if there are other relatives who would be prepared to get in touch with me."*

Mrs. C.'s uncle, Charles R., had had a Jewish mother but was raised by foster parents. After the *Anschluss*, he was taken away from his foster mother at the age of nine due to *Konfessionsverschiedenheit* (they belonged to different denominations) and, until 1945, he spent his life in various children's homes, including the children's home of the Jewish Community Vienna. After the war, he left Austria and became a British citizen. His birth mother was deported to Maly Trostinec near Minsk in 1942 and murdered.

After the National Fund had passed on the request of Mrs. C. to Charles R., Charles R. contacted Mrs. C. by telephone. Later, she described her happiness about the successful search to the National Fund but also passed on the sad news that Mr. Charles R. had died shortly after their first meeting:

*"I would like to take this opportunity to thank you very warmly for your support. [...]"*

*After writing to the National Fund, I had no longer expected to be 'successful' in my search. I was therefore fairly speechless when one morning the telephone rang and it was my Uncle Charles R[...] calling from Spain. We obviously found one another pleasant from the outset, and were subsequently in further contact by telephone and Skype.*

*Charles not only endeavored to pass on to me all information that he had collected 20 years previously during a visit to Vienna. He also tried to answer my questions about his life as a child in Vienna and his later life in as much detail as possible. Charles R[...] was a fascinating person and had also been very successful professionally. After his emigration to Australia he had spent the majority of his life until his retirement in England, but also several years in Gabon, Persia, Vietnam etc.*

*We agreed that I would spend my holiday in September 2009 in Spain, so that we would finally have the opportunity to meet in person. In July, Charles fell gravely ill and in late August, I dropped everything and flew to Spain. There were only a few hours in which he was still in a position to hold a conversation – it was as if he had gathered all of his strength. In the following days it was only possible to talk to him with difficulty. A few days later, during the night of 31.8./1.9., Charles died at the age of 80.*

*After his death, his son sent me an A4 envelope from his estate. Contents: three sheets with notes about Charles' family and their location, to the extent he was able to find out during his investigations in Vienna. These included two copies of notes from the Central Children's Home, in which my uncle and his then 5-year-old sister had stayed for a while. Carefully written on the envelope were just two words: 'my past' ...*

*I am eternally grateful that I was able to meet this man, my uncle, in time. My joy is only diminished by his death ..."*

**Randol Schoenberg: "Thank you so much!"**

In order to send a distant relative photos of her parents and grandparents, Mr. Randol Schoenberg from California, USA, the nephew of the famous musician and composer Arnold Schönberg, approached the National Fund in April 2008. The person for whom he was looking, who had fled to Great Britain in 1939, was very pleased to receive the message from the National Fund, all the more because – as she later informed Mr. Schoenberg – she had lost all of her family photographs. In February 2009, Mr. Schoenberg wrote to the National Fund:

*"Last year you helped me find a cousin of my mother [...] in England and now we have corresponded and I am in contact also with her grandchildren. Thank you so much!"* (English original)

## **The Future of Remembrance**

The National Fund is a symbol of the Republic of Austria's late recognition of the victims of National Socialism. The commitment of its staff has also made it, above all else, into a place where the gap is bridged between the victims who were persecuted and expelled, and a new Austria. In doing so, it is also painfully apparent that we are living at a decisive generational threshold – the contemporary witnesses of the National Socialist policies of persecution and extermination will not be around for much longer.

What we must do now, is safeguard the legacies of these people for future generations. It concerns their life testimonials – innumerable people have faithfully entrusted them to the National Fund, enabling the National Fund to play an active role in securing and safeguarding these legacies.

In order to pass on these legacies of the victims of National Socialism, however, they must be enduringly anchored in the memory of a society. The Remembrance Day on 5<sup>th</sup> May would have this potential, yet it is hardly acknowledged by the Austrian public. This is also because there is no organizational platform which bundles the existing initiatives together and encourages further activities. In other European countries, institutions of this kind have succeeded in filling the Holocaust memorial days with life. In Great Britain, for example, there is the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust; in the Netherlands the National Committee 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> May; in Denmark, the "Auschwitz Day" is coordinated by the Danish Institute for International Studies.

The National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism could constitute a forward-looking institutional framework for enduringly anchoring the Remembrance Day for Victims of National Socialism on 5<sup>th</sup> May in the collective historical consciousness.

### **Univ.-Doz. Mag. Dr. Heidemarie Uhl**

Historian at the Austrian Academy of Sciences  
Institute of Culture Studies and History of Theatre  
Lecturer at the Universities of Vienna and Graz



The Scientific Director of the National Fund Dr. Renate S. Meissner, MSc (center) with the staff of the Life Story Documentation Team: Mag. Mirjam Langer (left) and Mag. Michaela Niklas (right)

# Memory Narration Commemoration

The National Fund's Contribution  
Towards the Documentation of  
Autobiographical Testimonials,  
Scholarly Inquiries and  
Commemorative Events

Dr. Renate S. Meissner, MSc, Mag. Mirjam Langer, Mag. Michaela Niklas

In recent years, the remembrance work of the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism has increasingly gained in importance.

In addition to project sponsorship, which has existed since the beginning, the participation in the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research and the coordination of the redesign of the Austrian exhibition in the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau, the range of these activities carried out by the National Fund also includes the publication of life stories, the participation in and (co-)production of commemorative and other subject-related events, the processing of scholarly inquiries and establishment of contact with survivors of the National Socialist regime as contemporary witnesses for various projects.

This article shall provide information on this increasingly important and extensive field of activity of the National Fund.

### **The publication of autobiographical testimonials as contribution to a new understanding of history and the importance for the applicants**

One of the basic assumptions that the National Fund has based its activities on holds that the careful documentation of what is remembered and described as part of their application for a symbolic gesture payment by the victims of Nazi persecution is a crucial contribution to the politics of history and to social politics in Austria.

For reasons that are beyond the scope of this publication, public interest in the fates of the victims of the National Socialist regime took a long time to surface in Austria. It is therefore all the more important to secure and document this body of knowledge now, as the number of people with first-hand experience is rapidly becoming fewer and fewer. Memory plays a key role in self-perception and in forming and maintaining a sense of identity, both for the individual, whether directly affected or as a member of the next generation, and for society as a whole. Memory is also a crucial factor for the shaping of our future.

In the 15 years since its establishment, many thousands of people have entrusted the story of their lives to the National Fund. The need to outline their persecution in the course of filing their application often served as the starting point.

Not only was it important for applicants to be able to tell "official" Austria the details of what happened to them at this critical juncture in their lives and, in many cases, to break the silence they had observed on the subject for decades, but in recent years a significant number of them also expressed an interest in seeing their stories published so that they would be accessible to the public.

Since I have been working at the National Fund, my walks through Vienna have taken on a different dimension – in my head there is a map of aryanized buildings. There are streets and squares which have lost their innocence, because I know: this has happened here and that has happened there. Some buildings appear different with the knowledge of the applicants' life stories. My relationship to the city has changed, as has my relationship to Austria. I have also learned a lot about the period after 1945 – above all, how victims were treated after the war; the fact that after 1945 everything wasn't suddenly good again, no new era had begun. I think that my perception has become a little livelier. I have heard so many life stories, often from the beginning of a life to near the end, and I feel that I have been able to learn a lot about people: the life stories have allowed me to form an impression of what life can do to people, how they are molded by their fates and how differently people deal with their experiences. All of these experiences and also the knowledge of what humans are capable of, in good times or in bad, must be passed on – not least to prevent something similar happening again. And this cannot be done with facts alone, for facts alone do not move people. People can only be reached when a human dimension is given to the facts, for this dimension is emotionally comprehensible and timeless for everyone.

**Mag. Maria Luise Lanzrath**

Head of the Legal Case-Processing Department of the National Fund

One word which characterizes my work here at the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund is “affliction”. I have been working here for over seven years, starting in the data compilation department. I had to digitalize hundreds of lives – one after the other, like an assembly line, and all of them so incredibly sad. Yet there was no time to dwell on things, there was barely time to mentally process that which had been read except for during occasional discussions with colleagues. I have been working with the life stories of our applicants for a while now, and have finally been able to meet some of the people behind all the documents and papers. And I have come to realize how important it is for these people that they are recognized that they are able to tell their stories – often because, after many years of silence, they finally have the feeling that someone is listening.

For me, the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund are establishments where many committed people try to get the best from the statutory provisions for the affected persons; where the staff demonstrate great personal dedication but, at the same time, resignation – because much has come too late, because what is given back is far too little and because there can be no “*Wiedergutmachung*”. Yet when our applicants, who have experienced persecution, flight, deportation, concentration camps and murder, thank us and encourage us in letters, phone calls or in person, and are glad of this small gesture of reconciliation, then I feel humbled and think that what we are doing here is important and right.

**Mag. Michaela Niklas**

Member of the Data Compilation and Processing Department of the General Settlement Fund  
and of the Life Story Documentation Team of the National Fund

For many individuals in this situation, the fact that their life story was selected for publication was seen both as an official acknowledgement of their status as victims of National Socialism by the Republic of Austria and as a recognition of their personal story of persecution by the Austrian society.

This documentation of suffering is, however, valuable not only in terms of the individuals at its centre but also as source material for historical research. In addition to this, it is also an essential contribution towards the formation of a critical awareness of subsequent generations.

On the basis of this knowledge, the National Fund has made use of all opportunities available to it to present these autobiographical testimonials to an interested public whenever the occasion arises. The 5<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and the present 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the National Fund have been marked by large-scale publications of autobiographical testimonials. In view of the importance of imparting personal testimonials from all victims of National Socialism, in the Year of Remembrance 2008, the National Fund also began to publish life stories on its homepage.

So far, 20 German and four English life stories have been published on our **website**<sup>1</sup> as a first installment of a work in progress. The texts are supplemented by numerous photographs and documents provided by applicants and are being collected by the National Fund as part of a still growing photographic archive.

### **Participation in (commemorative) events**

The autobiographical testimonials and materials collected during the application process and stored in the archives of the National Fund are not only published in written form but presented to the public at events. It goes without saying that whatever form the publication of these autobiographical testimonials and materials takes, the consent of the victims or their descendants is a precondition that is adhered to without exception.

In 2008 the National Fund was invited by the Parliament to provide life stories of victims of National Socialism for a series of readings as part of the annual **Memorial Ceremony against Violence and Racism in Remembrance of the Victims of National Socialism**. To mark the special nature of the Year of Remembrance 2008, two events – rather than one, as is traditional – were held, a matinee and the actual commemorative ceremony, both organized by the National Fund in cooperation with the Austrian Literary Society. The events took place in Parliament on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> May 2008, under the title *War nie Kind ...* ("Was never a child ..."). In keeping with this title, there were readings of life stories written by victims of National Socialism from different groups, who had been children at the time of the National Socialist regime – Jewish victims, "Spiegelgrund

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<sup>1</sup>[www.nationalfonds.org](http://www.nationalfonds.org).



President of the National Council Mag. Barbara Prammer at the matinee *War nie Kind...* on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2008 in the Budget Hall of the Parliament



Above left: The Viennese violinist Annelie Gahl provides musical accompaniment  
Above right: The audience at the matinee  
Below: The actors from the *Volkstheater*: (from left to right) Peter Wolsdorff, Katharina Stemberger, Hilde Sochor, Jakob Seeböck; host Sandra Kreisler



Above and opposite page left: Commemorative event against violence and racism on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2008 in the historic assembly hall of the Parliament



Above right: President of the National Council Mag. Barbara Prammer  
Below right: Actors from the *Volkstheater* read excerpts from applicants' life stories

so eine schöne neue Uniform haben kam  
und singend durch die Straßen marschieren  
kam. Sogar das Zeichnen von Haken-  
kreuzen ist ihm verboten. Er hat ein  
Hakenkreuz gezeichnet und 4 Blumen-  
Töpfe hineingezeichnet und mich gefragt  
ob ich ihm erlaube das Hakenkreuz in  
der Weise zu machen. Ich versuche ihm  
einfach die Situation zu erklären,  
doch glaube ich kaum, dass ich Erfolg habe.  
Ich hoffe nur dass wir bald heraus kommen  
und das er Alles vergeben kann!

Im Juli haben wir durch Vaddis  
Anstrengungen ein Affidavit aus  
Californien bekommen. Wir haben uns  
Fontana wie ein Paradies ausgewählt  
und Dicky hat es auf der Karte gefunden.  
Leider hat die Freude nicht lange gedauert,  
Herr Kopp hat nicht genug Einkommen

Defekte haben, was mich zurecht  
 hat die die Afters (Jugend-  
 Platte Prof. Gizat) bin  
 ich zu alt, und hat die Punkte  
 unvollständige Verbindung zu  
 jung. Mein größtes Wunsch  
 wäre natürlich Defensiv  
 zu werden, aber das wird  
 nicht. Ich will also ist  
 mich mein Verstand, aber ich  
 habe noch Zeit genug.  
 Die Defensiv hat für den  
 Defensiv und gelassen sind.

nun habe ich keine Gelegenheit  
 (D. S. ich nicht auf mich  
 meine gefühlvollen sind  
 Kommissar von Kämpfer sind  
 zu sein. Ich sollte aber für  
 nicht und letztes ein  
 gute Lösung zu finden.  
 Das Punkt ist in der letzten  
 Mal der, Kommissar sind  
 Defensiv, das sind  
 fast gut gefühl.  
 Nichtlich bezeugt bei  
 ich von Lada Lefanov

children”, Carinthian Slovenes and Roma and Sinti, to name only the largest groups. The stories were interspersed with musical acts and presented together with literary autobiographical offerings by *Volkstheater* actresses and actors. The commemoration ceremony on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2008 was broadcast live on Austrian television and the life stories were published in a parliamentary publication accompanied by a recording of the events on DVD.<sup>2</sup>

To mark the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Night of Broken Glass in November 2008, the Austrian Literary Society invited the National Fund to join it in arranging the Austria-wide **Day of the Diary** as a token of remembrance of the events of 1938 to 1945. The idea was to give a voice to the memories of people whose lives had been enduringly affected by the experiences of this time. During the filing of applications with the National Fund, some victims wrote down memories or talked about them in their conversations with National Fund staff. Diary entries – incomplete, fragmentary, as is to be expected considering the circumstances of their genesis and the peculiarities of the genre – also form part of the holdings of the National Fund. The National Fund made a point of asking applicants whether they still had any diaries or letters from the time of persecution and, if this was the case, asked for permission to use this material for the readings. In addition to giving their consent, many applicants were pleased at the opportunity of making their stories accessible to a wider public. Some made the effort to seek out the original diaries and send further excerpts.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2008, a very moving reading by the actors Silvia Meisterle and Peter Moucka from altogether eight diaries took place at the Austrian Literary Society under the title *Lebenssplitter – das Tagebuch als Zeugnis von Verfolgung, Flucht und Exil während des Nationalsozialismus* (“Fragments of life – the diary as a testimonial of persecution, flight and exile during National Socialism”). Some of the texts had been written by our applicants – they described the events of the time from a child’s perspective: a twelve-year-old girl writing about her experiences in Theresienstadt; a young man aged 18 talking about how he had just begun to keep a diary in Paris after his emigration from Austria. What the diary excerpts also served to illustrate was how some persons were using their diary as a tool to enable them to cope with their terrible experiences or to record them for the subsequent generation.

We are especially pleased to be able to present many of these moving documents to a wider public in the second volume of this publication.

A few days after this event, we received the original diary and a great number of photographs and documents from the daughter of a deceased applicant. The sender of this

<sup>2</sup>Parlamentsdirektion (ed.), *War nie Kind. Beiträge zu den Gedenkveranstaltungen gegen Gewalt und Rassismus im Gedenken an die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus*. (=Parlament Transparent, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, no. 1-2/2008.)

I have been working for the National Fund since 1996 and am pleased that I have been able to send a signal to and for the applicants and make an important contribution towards a *Wiedergutmachung*. Over the years, I have read countless life stories and had many telephone calls and moving conversations. Some terrible fates and tragic stories will stay in my memory forever but so will a great number of pleasant and pleasurable encounters with the applicants.

**A member of the Secretariat of the National Fund**

consignment wanted these mementoes of her mother, which were extremely precious to her, to be kept safe in the archives of the National Fund and presented to the public when the opportunity arose. The **archives of the National Fund** are thus increasingly perceived as a place to which to submit documents, letters, photographs, autobiographical writings, bequests of deceased applicants related to National Socialism and to the topic of restitution. What the donors of these items expect in return is to subject the items to close analysis, be it on a scientific or museological level.

### **Establishing contact with applicants in response to scholarly inquiries**

In addition to the publication and presentation of life stories of Holocaust survivors, the National Fund receives from various people and institutions requests to be put in touch with a person representing a specified type of victim of National Socialism and/or survivor of the Holocaust. The increasing number of such requests has added an additional dimension to the National Fund's task of publishing the life stories of victims or making them accessible to a broader audience in some other way.

Once such a request has been received, the National Fund's database is first consulted to identify an applicant or applicants who could conceivably be suitable for the project in question. In compliance with data protection laws the National Fund has not put its applicants into predetermined categories when recording them electronically, e.g. according to the groups, ethnic or otherwise, that these victims belong to. This means that this search is likely to be complicated and time consuming. As a rule, searches are successful only if it is possible to simultaneously view the files that look most promising.

Sometimes such a search leads nowhere, firstly, because not all survivors and Holocaust victims are represented in the National Fund database and, secondly, the database is structured in a way that best serves the purpose of processing gesture and compensation payments, which means that only searches according to a limited number of criteria can be carried out.

If potential candidates for the project in question have been found, they are contacted. They then have the opportunity to get in touch with the National Fund or directly with the persons or organizations the inquiry came from in the first place. Although the National Fund is happy to pass on information and requests to its applicants, it operates in strict compliance with the provisions governing data protection; applicants' details are never given to third parties without the applicant's explicit consent. The people to whom the request is directed then have the opportunity to decide on the basis of the letter received from the National Fund whether they would like to participate in the project. When an applicant is interested in participating in a project and contacts the inquirer directly, the National Fund often drops out of the circuit. However, in many cases

As a member of the Secretariat for many years, almost from the beginning of the National Fund, I take care of many applicants from all over the world. In view of the heart-breaking life stories, it is always of great importance to me to be of assistance to them in attaining a payment from the National Fund. Although I do not often assist them face to face, I am predominantly in written contact with them as a result of the many letters from and to applicants which pass through my hands in the Secretariat – from the request for an application form to sending a letter confirming the award of a payment. Understandably, the correspondence is not always pleasant. We often receive letters in the Secretariat in which the applicants complain, because the application processing takes so long or because their application was rejected when it did not fulfill the requirements. The great majority of correspondence is, however, positive, friendly and respectful. The applicants often write to us of their present life or of their earlier life in Austria, because for them we represent a connection or a bridge to their old homeland and sometimes they also request “just an apple strudel recipe”. When I read letters of gratitude from applicants, expressing their thanks for the payment from the National Fund and the fact that they have consequently been able to reconcile themselves with Austria, I am especially pleased to have made a small contribution to their happiness.

**Carina Fürst**

Head of the Secretariat of the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund

we are kept informed of how things work out, and we know that an astonishingly large number of interested applicants make themselves available to these artistic, scholarly or educational projects. It is in the nature of things that not all such requests are successful and a hesitant or negative response on the part of the applicant is always respected.

The requests we get from persons and institutions wanting to be put in contact with victims of National Socialism concern different groups of victims and cover an extremely wide range of subjects. They come from private initiatives, educational institutions, schools, universities, documentation centers and other institutions, both from Austria and abroad. Contact is sought with survivors for interviews, video recordings, films, exhibitions, documentations, archives, scholarly projects, research projects, artistic projects, events, etc.

We ourselves welcome in particular **requests from schools**. Some of the projects our applicants have got involved in are described in greater detail below.

In 2007 the National Fund was approached by Mag. René Wintereder, one of the teachers of the *Akademisches Gymnasium* in Vienna. For an interview project with his pupils he was looking for people who had fled to Shanghai during the era of National Socialism and had returned to Vienna after World War II. The source of inspiration for this project was the Tauber Fund that had been set up in memory of Dr. Robert Tauber, who was forced to emigrate to Shanghai in 1939. Upon his death in 2000 the Fund, which provides assistance to young refugees to help them get an education, came on stream. The National Fund carried out complicated research and was able to locate 16 people who shared the same fate as Dr. Tauber. The results of this project, including two interviews with contemporary witnesses conducted by students, were published in a special edition of the magazine *Gedenkdienst*<sup>3</sup>.

In 2009/2010, Mag. Wintereder again approached the National Fund with an interesting and important request. There had been a longstanding plan at *Akademisches Gymnasium* to contact former pupils who had been expelled from the school during the years of National Socialism. The school wanted to invite contemporary witnesses to the annual remembrance ceremony, which is held at the school each April, during which the pupils who had been expelled were commemorated. 28 applicants who were former pupils of the school were contacted by the National Fund on behalf of the *Akademisches Gymnasium*. The feedback was most satisfactory, which illustrates the great interest of the applicants in reconnecting with their past and their one-time homeland, as well as their great willingness to tell their stories. One applicant wrote: "I would be glad to be of assistance to any one who has serious interest in the history of those sad days", and another applicant informed us that "I believe that the present

<sup>3</sup>GEDENKDIENST. Zivilersatzdienst – Holocaust-Education – Europäischer Freiwilligendienst (ed.), *Gedenkdienst*, no. 1a/07 (special edition, May 2007).

students' project [...] is a worthy and welcome development, and I am grateful to the National Fund for bringing it to my attention". In total 13 contemporary witnesses agreed to participate in the remembrance ceremony at the *Akademisches Gymnasium* in April 2010.

In many schools action is taken to actively examine their own past during the National Socialist era. In 2007, the BRG 7 Kandlgasse<sup>4</sup> approached the National Fund to inquire as to whether the National Fund had any information on the 97 former pupils who had been relegated from the school in 1938, and whether a letter could be forwarded to the survivors with an invitation to a celebration marking the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the school. Many former students responded. In addition to the many responses, the project of the BRG 7 had a particularly happy outcome: a lively correspondence developed between the former and the present students of the BRG 7 and the heads of project, Mag. Vera Cerha and MMMag. Dr. Christopher Treiblmayer. In addition to this, two old school friends, one of whom emigrated to South America in 1938, while the other went to the United States, were reunited. The correspondence, together with contributions by renowned scientists, has been published in a book sponsored by the National Fund, which was presented at the Jewish Museum on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2010 in the presence of one of the former students.<sup>5</sup>

Other requests for contacts with survivors of National Socialism are related to **projects in the field of academic research**.

Dr. Maria Ecker from the Department of History and Political Science at the University of Salzburg approached the National Fund in 2006 for her study on multi-narrativity of the life stories of Holocaust survivors. For her project, Dr. Ecker wished to carry out follow-up interviews with survivors living in the USA whose life stories were already documented in the Austrian Heritage Collection of the Leo Baeck Institute in New York. These people had thus given interviews on their lives already and had put down their stories in writing. The aim of Dr. Ecker's project was not only the completion of their biographies but also the investigation and analysis of the methodological aspects of different forms of autobiographical narrative (audio and video interviews, questionnaires, written documentation, memoirs etc.) that originated from one and the same person but had been pieced together in installments delivered over a long period of time. The National Fund was able to contact 37 people for this project. The rate of response was impressive – 20 people got in touch – and Dr. Ecker has since traveled to the USA on two occasions to conduct interviews with the participants.

A few more examples are cited to give the reader an impression of the sheer diversity of the inquiries received by the National Fund. In 2005, the National Fund was

<sup>4</sup><http://schulen.eduhi.at/brg7>

<sup>5</sup>Vera Cerha, Christopher Treiblmayer (eds.), *Weggewiesen 1938 – Vom Gestern ins Heute geholte Schicksale jüdischer SchülerInnen am Realgymnasium Wien 7*, Vienna 2010.

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Above: Memorial plaque at the BRG 7

Above right: MMMag. Dr. Christopher Treiblmayr at the unveiling of the plaque at the BRG 7

Below right: Former students Ilse Wolf (USA), Otto Zinn (Brasil) and Paul Schwarzkopf (USA) unveil the memorial plaque at the BRG 7

approached by the *Geschichte-Cluster* of the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute with regard to a research project on the historical population of the 2<sup>nd</sup> municipal district of Vienna. In 2006, there was interest in the fates of Austrian Jews who had fled to Czechoslovakia after the *Anschluss*; in 2009 we received a request to help the inquirer establish contact with Viennese Czechs who had been active in the resistance. In the same year the National Fund was also able to establish contact with victims for a project at the Natural History Museum Vienna concerning “studies” on the anthropological measurement of bodily characteristics, which were conducted on an assortment of stateless Jews in the football stadium in Vienna in 1939.

In early 2007, a group of three students of cultural and social anthropology at the University of Vienna asked the National Fund to locate former Jewish students of Viennese universities, who they wanted to contact for a project on 20<sup>th</sup> century Jewish university life. The students intended to carry out biographical interviews to contextualize the circumstances of Jewish students both in a historical and a modern regard. The National Fund located 16 applicants who were contacted on behalf of the budding social anthropologists.

The National Fund also serves as a point of contact for writers of dissertations, doctoral theses and academic papers on relevant subjects. We were able, for instance, to trace and contact 30 people who had emigrated from Styria to Israel for Mag. Victoria Kumar, a post-graduate student working on a doctoral thesis on the “Emigration of Styrian Jews to Palestine”. In response to our letters, altogether eight “Styrian” Israelis contacted Mag. Kumar, and after the Hanukkah celebrations in Tel Aviv and Haifa, during which Secretary General Mag. Hannah M. Lessing presented the work of Mag. Kumar, a further seven people got in touch with her and offered to participate in interviews. Since then, Mag. Kumar has met with over half of the people who contacted her.

Contact with contemporary witnesses is not only sought for academic projects but also for **documentation projects and archives**.

For an archival project concerning audiotape interviews in Austria's *Mediathek* in the fall of 2006 Dr. Albert Lichtblau of the University of Salzburg sought to make contact with National Fund applicants living in Cape Town. The National Fund was able to identify seven people as potential candidates for this interview project. The interviews were designed to supplement the extensive and detailed documentation of autobiographical interviews with victims of National Socialism in the form of audiotape recordings as unique historical documents in the collection of the *Mediathek*. This project resulted in over 600 interviews, which are currently being digitized by the *Mediathek*.

Mag. Günter Müller from the Institute for Economic and Social History of the University of Vienna contacted the National Fund in 2007. He was looking for written tes-

testimonials from so called half- and quarter-Jews for the autobiographical text archive "Documentation of Autobiographical Chronicles". The search for written biographical testimonials of so called Jewish *Mischlinge* ("half-castes") in an archive of over 30,000 files that are not filed systematically with regard to their autobiographical content proved particularly challenging for the National Fund. Mag. Müller was provided with suitable material in the form of previous publications of the National Fund<sup>6</sup>, which also contained life stories of the survivors of National Socialism.

The National Fund also lent support to smaller and more specific initiatives for documenting autobiographical narratives by carrying out research and establishing contact. The following was a request from Mr. Simon Birnbaum. Mr. Birnbaum has an extensive collection of Bibles, most notably of Jewish translations since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to collecting Bible editions, he has also been engaged in documenting their translators and authors<sup>7</sup> and was looking for living relatives of the translator Lazarus Weiser, who had not survived the Holocaust. The National Fund was indeed able to trace a descendant of this Bible translator and contact him on behalf of Mr. Birnbaum – sadly he did not respond.

We also receive many requests for contact with survivors and their descendants from **regional initiatives**.

The Municipality of Klosterneuburg was trying to contact people who had lived in the town prior to 1938 for a project being carried out in conjunction with the *Hauptschule Hermannstraße*: "The Jewish Community of Klosterneuburg in the 1930s". The project aimed to research individual life stories within the Jewish population of Klosterneuburg during the 1930s on the basis of statements by contemporary witnesses and of such sources as letters, photographs, etc. In response to this inquiry, the National Fund was able to locate 16 people who had lived in Klosterneuburg in the 1930s. With one of the two people who contacted the Municipality of Klosterneuburg an intensive correspondence developed. The detailed oral reports, documents and photos illustrating the family history of this person are included in the exhibition "... keine Spur von den verflossenen Tagen". *Die jüdische Gemeinde Klosterneuburg. Geschichte, Schicksale, Erinnerungen* ("...not a trace of by-gone days." The Jewish Community of Klosterneuburg. History, fates, memories) from 14<sup>th</sup> November 2008 to 9<sup>th</sup> May 2010, and in the publication of the same name, the fourth special volume of the series *Klosterneuburg. Geschichte und Kultur*.

Other municipalities in Austria have also started to try and locate their former Jewish inhabitants. In doing so they often request the assistance of the National Fund, which,

<sup>6</sup>Nationalfonds der Republik Österreich für Opfer des Nationalsozialismus (ed.), *In die Tiefe geblickt*. Vienna 2000; Renate S. Meissner on behalf of the National Fund (ed.), *10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the National Fund. A Closer Look and Future Prospects*, Vienna 2005; as above, *10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the National Fund. Figures. Data. Facts*, Vienna 2005.

<sup>7</sup>[www.bibelarchiv.com](http://www.bibelarchiv.com).

as a center of competence with contacts to a vast number of Holocaust survivors and their descendants, is ideally suited for the purpose.

The National Fund is also approached by **artists** searching for survivors of the National Socialist era.

Research in the National Fund database was, for example, carried out on behalf of a painter looking for surviving Roma and Sinti and for resistance fighters. The artist proposed to film these people and use stills from the videos as the basis for portraits. As none of the applicants contacted by the National Fund on her behalf got in touch with either the Fund or the artist, this project could sadly not be undertaken.

Contemporary witnesses are also important discussion partners for people who make inquiries pertaining to **film and television projects**.

An outstandingly successful example was the documentary film project of the filmmaker Cornelia Reetz. Ms. Reetz works for the Beth Shalom Holocaust Centre in Nottinghamshire, England, an educational and memorial site which provides information on the Holocaust and works closely with survivors. Cornelia Reetz was trying to locate non-Jewish victims of National Socialism, as these were under-represented in the centre's exhibition and it was generally not a well-known fact among the British public that a wide range of other people and groups had also fallen victim to National Socialist persecution. The National Fund therefore undertook research to find people who were persecuted on grounds of their origin, sexual orientation or political stance, as well as the descendants of people murdered as part of the euthanasia program "T4". The National Fund was able to trace a large number of people, many of whom responded to the letter from the National Fund and were subsequently put in touch with Ms. Reetz. In December 2008, Ms. Reetz visited the National Fund in person. Finally, five contemporary witnesses agreed to be interviewed and were filmed by Ms. Reetz in December 2008. These filmed conversations have now been made accessible to the visitors of the Beth Shalom Holocaust Centre in Nottinghamshire.

The National Fund has also worked in cooperation with the Austrian Television Corporation (ORF) on several occasions, providing assistance in contacting Holocaust survivors. In 2007 and 2008, the ORF carried out preliminary work for the ORF "Programming Focus 1938", which was designed to mark the Year of Remembrance 2008. The programs, directed by Andreas Novak and conceived for that purpose, included a three-part contemporary history documentary<sup>8</sup>. The National Fund assisted the ORF in the

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<sup>8</sup>"*Der Untergang Österreichs*" by Andreas Novak, "*Flucht ins Ungewisse*" by Robert Gokl and Tom Matzek, "*Alltag unterm Hakenkreuz*" by Robert Gokl.

production of Part Two of this series, *Flucht ins Ungewisse*<sup>9</sup>, by tracing and contacting survivors. *Flucht ins Ungewisse* focused on the predicament of people who were forced to leave Austria from one day to the next after the National Socialists came to power. Providing an impressive insight into the fates of emigrants, who subsequently settled in countries as far apart as South Africa, Israel, the USA and Venezuela, it premièred on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2008 on ORF 2.

In many ways, the research, implementation and follow-up that the National Fund undertook in connection with this documentary was paradigmatic for the way the Fund is dealing with its applicants. The identification of possible candidates and their selection required intensive research and correspondence. Once that stage had been dealt with, sufficient time was necessary for the survivors and the filmmakers to establish a rapport. Like the National Fund, the ORF film team took great care to ensure that all their dealings with the survivors were marked by utmost sensitivity. Making contact with people who, as victims of the National Socialist regime, were about to describe their ordeal in front of a camera required a maximum of tact. In long preliminary discussions a strong foundation of trust was laid between the film team and the survivors so that in the end good film material was collected within a relatively short period of filming. This was the only approach that was capable of ensuring the physical and mental wellbeing of the interviewees. The ORF team was also available to the contemporary witnesses for follow-up talks after filming was completed; it was obvious they might need assistance in what was basically a very stressful situation for them. To this day the staff of the ORF are in contact with some of the interviewees.

In 2008, the National Fund was again able to support the ORF for another documentary called *Verfolgt, verschleppt, vernichtet* by Tom Matzek.<sup>10</sup> Over a 12-month period the National Fund undertook research into subjects such as "war crimes", "medical experiments", "forced sterilization" and "Hartheim". The intention was for the documentary not to stop at the documentation of the so called medical experiments, which were in fact part of the extermination strategy of the Nazis, but to provide life stories of people who got caught up in this machinery and to give some idea of what consequences these experiences had on people who, against all odds, managed to survive. The challenge inherent to this kind of research lies in not succumbing to disbelief in the face of absolute evil, in "not becoming numb", as the director and scriptwriter Tom Matzek put it. After the National Fund had established contact with its applicants, it became evident that only a handful of people were prepared to talk about their ordeal. Some had never even spoken to their own families about what they had been subjected to. The documenta-

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<sup>9</sup>A joint production of the ORF and Lhotsky-Film with the support of the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism and the Future Fund of the Republic of Austria.

<sup>10</sup>A joint production of the ORF and pre tv, sponsored by the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism and CineStyria Filmkunst.



ORF-Zentrum, Würzburggasse 30, A-1136 Wien

Dear Madam or Sir,

I'm writing to you as journalist working for Austrias public broadcaster ORF. I'm part of a team of reserachers preparing a multimedia project for March 2008. Thanks to the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism I have heard of your story following the events of the "Anschluss" in March 1938 in Austria. I'm very interested to hear more from you about your story: your experiences and impressions in the moment of this tragic historical event as well as your way to your new life in South Africa. I hope that you are interested to give me the opportunity to talk to you, because these memories are important for us and our history. At least we as media people have the reonsibility to make sure that stories like yours are made available for a younger generation who was born long after the historic events.

I would be happy to receive an answer from you and get to know you personally on my research trip at the begin of november.

ORF Bildung und Zeitgeschehen  
Würzburggasse 30  
A-1136 Vienna  
Austria/Europe

best regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "T. G.", is written over the "best regards" text.

Request from the ORF to the applicants of the National Fund during the course of the preparations for the documentary "Flucht ins Ungewisse" by Robert Gokl and Tom Matzek



Left: Chaja Knaani with Tom Matzek from the ORF in the Engev Kibbutz in Israel during filming for "*Flucht ins Ungewisse*"  
Above right: Filming with Chaja Knaani for the documentary "*Flucht ins Ungewisse*" on the beach in front of the Maggan Michael Kibbutz between Tel Aviv and Haifa (Israel)  
Below right: Filming preparations for the documentary "*Flucht ins Ungewisse*" with Doris Lurie (left) in Johannesburg (South Africa)



Above left: Doris Lurie during filming for "Flucht ins Ungewisse" Johannesburg (South Africa)  
Below left: Filming for "Flucht ins Ungewisse" in the immigrants' quarter "Hillbrow", Johannesburg (South Africa)  
Above right: The ORF team with Doris Lurie (seated center) and her husband in Johannesburg (South Africa) during filming for "Flucht ins Ungewisse"  
Below right: Chaja Knaani during filming for "Flucht ins Ungewisse" at the Austrian hospice in Jerusalem (Israel)

ry was finally broadcast as the penultimate part of the five-part series *Menschen und Mächte* on ORF 2 on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2009. Taking three life stories as its cues, this sequel traced the trajectory of the Nazi extermination strategy from the first murders by gas in Hartheim, the so called medical experiments in Ravensbrück and the ruthless exploitation of inmates through regimes of forced labor in concentration camps like the one in Aflenz to the industrialized mass murders in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Other contexts also give rise to similar kinds of requests to the National Fund. The Fund is often approached with regard to **various events** – firstly in order to establish contact with contemporary witnesses in the hope that they will participate and secondly, to provide autobiographical material which is to be presented.

When the Coordination Committee for Christian Jewish Cooperation was looking for contemporary witnesses in connection with events and ecumenical religious services in remembrance of the November Pogroms, in which texts written by survivors were to be featured, they turned to the National Fund for help. After obtaining the consent of the persons concerned the National Fund was able to provide several life stories for these events.

The National Fund is not only requested to research and provide autobiographical texts and materials. Requests are also made to the National Fund which require a higher level of **research and processing**. The National Fund endeavors to provide support in such matters by carrying out research and conveying the resulting outcomes, information, literature and other details determined.

A call for help in such a context requiring far-ranging research was a request for information on children and young people from Cologne aged between four and 20 at the time, who had fallen victim to National Socialist euthanasia in Austria. The information was needed for the annual remembrance ceremony for the victims of National Socialism from Cologne. A search of the relevant literature undertaken by the National Fund unearthed several pertinent articles and identified institutions that were likely to have pertinent original sources in their archives. The Hour of Remembrance for Victims of National Socialism, entitled *Erinnerung – Eine Brücke in die Zukunft* ("Memory – A Bridge to the Future"), took place on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2010 at the Antoniter Church in Cologne.

### **The life story archive of the National Fund: résumé and outlook**

Due to its primary tasks, the National Fund has not yet had the opportunity to view and structure the autobiographical holdings in its archives. The material collected from the applications filed with the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund – should it serve as a basis for extensive research – would have to be processed accordingly due to its present state. This will be a major undertaking in order to enable the utilization of this unique

source which would be of great significance for scientific research as well as for the National Fund to offer efficient and sufficient assistance in response to future inquiries.

Particularly in view of the advanced age of the applicants, who may still be able to add to the available material during its processing in the form of further correspondence, supplementary interviews, graphic material, photographs and historical documents, it would be wise to schedule the processing of this data for the immediate future. This will ensure that this treasure trove of bitter but salutary knowledge – the life-enhancing fruit, as it were, wrested from life-threatening suffering – is preserved for the benefit of present and future generations.

The multitude of personal narratives that reflect the most diverse aspects of Austrian contemporary history, constitute a unique approach to Austrian historical identity which is to be safeguarded as a part of Austria's collective memory.



A view of the archive of the National Fund



PHOTO: GEORG SCHENK



The legal staff at the General Settlement Fund: (from left to right) Mag. Richard Rebernik (Head of the Payments Department), Mag. Alexandra Brunner, Mag. Andrea Lederer, Dr. Katrin Gloyer, Mag. Verena Tadler, LL.M., Dr. Martina Wendl, Mag. Doris Macht (Head of the Communication with the Applicants Department), Dr. Nora Pichler (Head of the Heirs Department), Mag. Christine Schwab (Division Head of the General Settlement Fund), Mag. Marie-Isabelle Hofmann, Dr. Markus Gstettner, LL.M., Mag. Catherine Friedmann; absent: Dr. Nina Bjalek, Mag. Sandra Fössl, Mag. Mariola Glawischnig, Mag. Maida Hadzic (Head of the Case-Processing Department), Alia Kezer, Mag. Karoline Klaus, Mag. Gerlinde Münzberger-Reisch, Mag. Sonja Öhler, Mag. Angela Paulick

The General Settlement Fund  
for Victims of National Socialism

# **A Review and Current Developments**

Mag. Christine Schwab

While the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism was established as early as 1995, the General Settlement Fund for Victims of National Socialism was founded six years later on the basis of the so called Washington Agreement of 17<sup>th</sup> January 2001. After nine years of activity and the commencement of the closing payments in July 2009, this article provides a review of the developments that have taken place since 2001.

## Key information on the General Settlement Fund

**Aim:** The purpose of the General Settlement Fund is to provide a comprehensive solution to open questions of compensation of the victims of National Socialism and, by means of voluntary payments, to recognize Austria's moral responsibility for losses and damages which were inflicted on Jewish citizens or other victims of National Socialism as a result of or in connection with the National Socialist regime.

Amount of compensation paid/total amount available: The compensation payments of the General Settlement Fund are calculated on the basis of the amount of the established losses and are paid out *pro rata* in relation to the total amount of 210 million US dollars available.

### Compensated categories of losses:

- liquidated businesses, including licenses and other business assets
- real estate, insofar as *in rem* restitution has not been granted
- bank accounts, stocks, bonds, mortgages
- movable property, insofar as they have not been compensated on the basis of the amendment to the Federal Law on the National Fund (Federal Law Gazette I no. 11/2001)
- insurance policies
- occupational or educational losses (only in the equity-based procedure)
- other losses and damages (only in the equity-based procedure)

**Application requirements:** The group of people eligible to file applications comprises both persons directly affected by National Socialism (and in the claims-based procedure, also associations) and their heirs, applying *mutatis mutandis* the provisions of the (Austrian) General Civil Code. These persons were persecuted by the National Socialist regime on political grounds, on grounds of origin, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, due to a physical or mental handicap or to accusations of so called asociality or have left the country in order to escape such persecution and suffered losses or damages as a result of or in connection with events having occurred on the territory of the present-day Republic of Austria during the National Socialist era.

**Organs:** Pursuant to the General Settlement Fund Law, the organs of the Fund are the organs of the National Fund – the Board of Trustees and the Secretary General. The position occupied by the Committee of the National Fund is held by the Claims Committee, comprised of one member nominated by the USA (Prof. Robert Rosenstock until September

2004, Prof. Vivian Grosswald Curran from September 2004 and, since July 2006, Jonathan Greenwald); one member nominated by the Austrian government (Dr. Kurt Hofmann, Retired Vice-President of the Supreme Court); and one member nominated by these two as their Chairman (Sir Franklin Berman). The independent Claims Committee is competent to decide on applications for monetary compensation of assets.

Proceedings at the General Settlement Fund: Losses can be asserted either in the claims-based or the equity-based procedure. Above all, this distinction plays a role in the standard of evidence to be submitted. The losses or damages are calculated individually. Previous Austrian compensation measures that have already been carried out – there were almost 30 different restitution and compensation measures in total – are taken into account.

**Applications to the General Settlement Fund:** In total, around 20,700 applications were filed during the two-year filing period, which expired on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2003. On average, these applications contain claims for two to four different originally aggrieved persons. In turn, several claims are asserted for each of these originally aggrieved persons. That means that the General Settlement Fund had to process and evaluate a total of 120,000 individual claims in the various categories.

## ***In Rem* Restitution**

Proceedings before the Arbitration Panel for *In Rem* Restitution: In addition to the proceedings for monetary compensation before the Claims Committee, the General Settlement Fund Law also stipulates that properties as well as movable property of Jewish communal organizations which had been seized in connection with events having occurred on the territory of present-day Austria during the National Socialist era and which were publicly-owned on the cut off day, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2001, were, under certain conditions, able to be restituted *in rem*.

The independent Arbitration Panel was established with the General Settlement Fund to examine applications for *in rem* restitution. It is composed of the Chairman, o.Univ.-Prof. Josef Aicher, and the members ao.Univ.-Prof. August Reinisch and retired ambassador and Hon.-Prof. Erich Kussbach.

Since my participation in the restitution negotiations, which were concluded with the Washington Compensation Agreement in 2001, as an employee of the Ambassador Dr. Ernst Sucharipa, I have had many opportunities to work in cooperation with the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism.

In implementation of the restitution and compensation measures resolved for the – predominantly aged – victims of the National Socialist regime, the Fund, established in 1995, was given an additional, extremely sensitive task with a heavy workload. From today's perspective, the speed with which the National Fund was able to develop the necessary structures and use the experience gained in its prior activities in the interests of the countless applicants from all around the world is therefore all the more remarkable.

As an institution *sui generis*, the National Fund has succeeded in becoming a sensitive and competent point of contact for victims of National Socialist injustice and their families and in being able to provide help as efficiently and unbureaucratically as possible. It is thanks to the great personal dedication, experience and empathy of the staff of the Fund that the human as an individual remains at the forefront.

**Mag. Michael Haider**

Director of the Austrian Cultural Forum Tokyo  
2000-2001 Office manager for the Office of the  
Special Ambassador for Restitution Matters Dr. Ernst Sucharipa

## Beginnings

Although the considerations underlying the establishment of the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund are different – the National Fund was called into being on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Second Republic and on the basis of a domestic initiative, while the General Settlement Fund was the result of lengthy negotiations between the United States, various victims' representatives and Austria, which had been occasioned by the class action suits against Austria and Austrian companies – both Funds were confronted with similar problems upon commencement of their work. One of the difficulties encountered by the General Settlement Fund was the fact that there was no national or international measure that could serve as a suitable model for the structure of the Fund. In comparison to other national or international measures, which generally only provided compensation in one or two different categories of assets – as in the case of the Swiss banks – it was evident from the outset that the task of compensating ten different categories of assets in two types of procedures while also taking into consideration compensation already received on the basis of previous measures would be much more extensive and demanding. Although the General Settlement Fund was to work under the auspices of the National Fund and was therefore able to fall back on the experience of the latter, notably in dealing with applicants, its entirely different legal setup meant having to start from scratch in many areas. The necessity of developing a completely new concept began with the creation of an application form for the General Settlement Fund and continued with the infrastructure and organization, not to mention the development of individual work routines and guidelines for the legal processing.

The early days of the General Settlement Fund were therefore shaped by considerations as to how to process the claims – 300,000 individual claims were expected – and at the same time the need to do justice to the special needs of the applicants.

In order for the Claims Committee to be able to begin carrying out its legal mandate – the examination of and decision on the submitted applications – Rules of Procedure had to be created with and for the Claims Committee and guidelines had to be developed for processing the applications. This involved a particular challenge: due to the international orientation of the Committee and the bilingualism which was later also enshrined in the Rules of Procedure, the procedural languages German and English had to be used throughout.

It was obvious from the outset that the documentation of persecution and the loss of assets would play a fundamental role in the proceedings at the General Settlement Fund. Therefore it was necessary – building on the existing contacts of the National Fund – to establish contact with all relevant archives in Austria and beyond, and to clarify the holdings and the means of access that were available to both the applicants and the staff of the Fund. This was one of the key requirements to ensure that all historical facts necessary for the processing and legal appraisal of the applications could be accessed.

Many applicants had hardly any documents to show and, despite the de facto possibility of obtaining the requisite documents from one of the various archives, many were not in a position to do so due to age or their residence abroad. For this reason and on the basis of the research mandate deduced from the Law – previous compensation payments had to be taken into account for each individual claim – historical research soon became a primary activity of the General Settlement Fund. As the initial results of the research were being collected, the Historical Research Department was developed to ensure maximum efficiency. Over time, a database containing digitalized finding aids for various archives and other information was compiled, which now comprises over 220,000 entries. This makes it possible to conduct practically comprehensive searches for extant documents. In this way, the documents necessary for each application can be identified and ordered from the archives. Consequently, losses can be taken into account that, without the research undertaken by the General Settlement Fund, would otherwise have been rejected, either because the necessary documentation was unavailable or because the applicant himself/herself had been unaware of these losses – something which the staff were often confronted with. One needs to bear in mind that many applicants were still children when these losses occurred. The opportunity created by the Claims Committee to extend applications in certain cases was therefore particularly important. So far, almost 74,000 documents have been received by the General Settlement Fund from archives and other cooperative departments in all parts of Austria. More than 49,000 of these were obtained by the staff of the General Settlement Fund.

The development of basic guidelines for the research carried out at the General Settlement Fund presented a particularly complex challenge. These guidelines were to enable the assessment of losses suffered seven decades ago. In order to establish the claimed amount (the total amount of all applicants' claims recognized by the Claims Committee), the Claims Committee's assessment of each individual loss was imperative.

It was a foregone conclusion more or less from the start that equal treatment of the 120,000 individual claims was called for and that applicants had to be provided with as much information on their applications as possible, not only with regard to research. The principle of aiming for maximum efficiency in processing the applications and the desire for transparent work processes led to the standardization of much of the work of the General Settlement Fund. The historians and lawyers of the General Settlement Fund drew up a standardized research procedure for researching documents, in a first step of which the same file holdings were examined for each application.

Legal guidelines for the preparation of the decisions were developed in cooperation with the Claims Committee and in compliance with its requirements. It soon became clear that a special procedure would be needed to handle the unexpectedly high number of claims. Here the main concern was to process the applications with maximum effici-

Due to the complexity of the General Settlement Fund Law and the time constraints governing the processing of applications, the workflows for the General Settlement Fund, installed at the National Fund, had to be standardized and professionalized. To this end, a separate research department was established, the focus of which was the ascertainment of property seized in Austria and its restitution.

The disadvantage of this standardization was that it has not been possible for this department to take a closer look at the person "behind the file" and make contact with them to ask questions and substantiate the claims.

The absence of direct contact was able to be compensated through the extensive research and the possibility of extending applications on the basis of located documents, and had no effect on the correct execution of procedure.

This meant for the historians, however, working solely with files with a focus on documents from the 1930s to the 1970s, and it is hard to avoid the feeling that many of us have missed the opportunity to meet the amazing people in whose name this compensation measure is being carried out.

**Mag. Iris Petrinja**

Head of the Historical Research Department of the National Fund  
and the General Settlement Fund

ency, precision and speed and to make sure that things that were the same were dealt with in the same way and, conversely, things that were different were dealt with in a way that took into account their being different. At the same time – not least because of the large number of employees involved with each application – a uniform standard of quality had to be ensured in the preparations for the decisions. It was also necessary to prepare draft decisions to be presented to the Claims Committee as a basis for their decisions. The Claims Committee must be able to take the fact for granted that uniform standards have been maintained in the production of these drafts, i.e. that the same standards have been applied throughout the historical research and the legal processing. The fact that the internationally composed Claims Committee was not able to be constantly on site, i.e. in the offices of the General Settlement Fund where the staff worked during the production of the decision drafts, also had to be taken into consideration. Therefore, allowance had to be made for the need to be able to electronically circulate information and fundamentals for decision-making.

On the basis of all of these considerations, a “standardized procedure” was developed by the staff of the General Settlement Fund, for which the Fund’s lawyers had provided initial ideas and concepts. The centerpiece of this procedure is the tailor-made, database-based software application “SVneu”. Supported by an innovative electronic case examination formula, lawyers can determine whether the requirements for an application are present. While the application guarantees that each claim is subjected to the same formal examination, the database on which it is founded ensures that the same decisions are reached for people and losses that are related to several claims. The relationships between the applicants, heirs and historical persons, the processing status and a multitude of further data on the case can be visualized in their most up-to-date form at any time. The application and the database therefore enable the information on the applicants and their applications to be comprehensively and quickly administered. Consequently, information concerning individual applications can be given out quickly and in detail, for example on the telephone. Using this “standardized procedure” and its realization in the form of this innovative procedural software, efficient preparation of the decisions for the Claims Committee can be guaranteed.

### **The development of an organizational structure**

The proceedings at the General Settlement Fund, which, as a result of the construction selected by the legislator, are demanding in terms of both time and volume of work, require a corresponding number of staff. In 2005, the General Settlement Fund employed a staff of 140 people, 79 of whom, predominantly lawyers and historians, were employed full-time. The work processes which had been developed for processing the applications called for increased specialization. Over time, this led to the creation of new departments in the General Settlement Fund in addition to the Historical Research and Legal Case-Processing Departments, each of which played a specific role. In addition to the so called



Staff of the IT Department of the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund: (standing from left to right) Tais Martí Fusté, Johann Müllner, Irina Wurz, Mag. Michael Pisecki (Head of Department), Michael Mürkl, Georg Ramler, Mag. Harald Hubinger, Mag. Daniela Weber, (front row from left to right) Farzad Omid, Janis Lena Meißner, BA; absent: Doris Altinger, Ulrich Fischer

support departments – the Archive, the Secretariat and the IT Department – there was the Data Compilation and Processing Department, which recorded the submitted applications electronically in preparation for their legal processing in the “standardized procedure”, the Heirs Department, the Department of Communication with the Applicants and, upon commencement of the payments from the General Settlement Fund, the Payments Department, which first carried out the advance payments and was subsequently entrusted with the disbursement of the closing payments. The Arbitration Panel is supported by a separate department comprised of lawyers and historians.

In order to continuously monitor the work processes in and between the departments of the General Settlement Fund, internal reporting was introduced in 2004. The workflows are presented in a weekly report containing the departments’ key figures. The results are discussed in a weekly meeting of the Heads of Department and workflows can be adapted if necessary.

The Heirs Department, the Department of Communication with the Applicants and the Payments Department, which were established after most of the other departments had come on stream, lend themselves particularly well to the portrayal of the current developments and special requirements of the work at the General Settlement.

Providing the highest level of care to the applicants had already been a top priority of the National Fund. Right from the outset of the General Settlement Fund, it was clear that providing assistance and support to the applicants was going to constitute an important part of the task, not least because the majority of the applicants to the General Settlement Fund had already filed applications with the National Fund. At the same time, in comparison to the lump sum payments by the National Fund, the proceedings were infinitely more complex and the applicants’ desire for information was correspondingly great. Initially this task was assigned to the lawyers in the Legal Case-Processing Department. However, it soon became evident that this posed a dilemma to many of the legal staff. If they devoted themselves to processing the applications, their support of the applicants suffered. If they dealt with the concerns and questions of the applicants, they were only able to process a few applications. In order to resolve this problem, the Department of Communication with the Applicants was created in December 2006. Since then, applicants have been able both to make use of a telephone hotline and ask members of the legal staff for assistance.

The fact that the number of surviving applicants is continuously decreasing and that, since the beginning of its work, the General Settlement Fund has been confronted with many deaths was reflected in the establishment of the Heirs Department. One of the main tasks of this department is tracing the heirs of late applicants in order to be able to resume the proceedings before the Claims Committee. The goal is to obtain



The staff of the Data Compilation and Processing Department of the General Settlement Fund:  
(from left to right) Mag. Michael R. Seidinger (Head of Department), Mag. Michaela Niklas,  
Patrik Wonisch; absent: Mag. Catharina Wintereder



The staff of the Applicants' Telephone Support Department of the General Settlement Fund: (from left to right) Alexandra Berner, Tanja Witzmann, Mag. Paul Ferstl, Mag. Yvonne Schürmann-Zehetner, Mag. Matthias Kusche, Verena Leitner; absent: Tamima Baldass, Mag. Adrian Ortner, BA

The best things and those which make the biggest impression on me during my telephone contact with the applicants:

The variety of stories and the way of dealing with these fates, a variety which reflects the endless possibilities of existence and stands in contradiction to a simplified and generalized view of victimhood.

The variety of places where they live, from where they often greet us with an old Viennese accent – from South America to Australia, from Canada to Sweden.

The variety of types of family – from close groups providing mutual support and solidarity, to those who have not been in touch with one another for decades.

The variety of ways in which they deal with the process of filing applications to the Fund – for some the process is emotionally very important and is closely connected to memories, pain, suffering and hurt, others have a very sober attitude towards the application and the procedure.

The variety of conversations with our applicants – from cheering, inspiring and interesting to frustrating and sad, depressing and devastating, often surprising, sometimes difficult and, all in all, valuable and enriching.

**A member of the Applicants' Telephone Support Department  
of the General Settlement Fund**

documents with which the status as heir can be substantiated. In this context, the staff have to conduct a juridical appraisal of national inheritance documents from around 100 states worldwide. The Claims Committee then decides on the resumption of proceedings.

### **The first payments from the General Settlement Fund**

In 2005, the General Settlement Fund was able to successfully overcome a particular hurdle. The Washington Agreement of 2001 and therefore also the original, unamended version of the General Settlement Fund Law stipulated that the reduced, pro rata financial awards – contingent upon the capped total amount available – were to be calculated and disbursed on the basis of the claimed amount determined by the Claims Committee. At this time in 2005, it was already obvious that, due to the number of claims still to be processed, the final settlement would be substantially delayed. This would have meant that the applicants, the majority of whom were already very old, would have faced an even longer wait before payment became due. As a result, an amendment to the General Settlement Fund Law was passed, whereby payments could be made to applicants whose applications had already been decided. This amendment to the General Settlement Fund Law (Federal Law Gazette I no. 142/2005) was prepared by the staff. At the same time, all work processes, which until then had been geared towards making payments after all applications had been decided, had to be adapted. Moreover, it was necessary to plan new processes for the advance payments and to develop new software. After the last legal requirements for the advance payments – the rejection of the last class action suits pending in America and with it the “legal closure” sought by Austria – had been fulfilled, the General Settlement Fund made the first advance payments in December 2005. In order to be able to determine the amount of the advance payments, an estimate of the sum total that the recognized claims would eventually add up to had to be made first. To this end, share prognoses were commissioned by the General Settlement Fund on the basis of which the provisional payment quotas were determined. In the claims-based procedure the quota was 10 percent and in the equity-based procedure and for seized insurance policies it was 15 percent of the recognized claims.

This development called for the establishment of the General Settlement Fund’s Payments Department, whose first task was to carry out the initial processing of the advance payments. By summer 2009, over 18,000 provisional payments to applicants, heirs and co-heirs totaling around 161 million US dollars had been processed.

### **The closing payments**

In addition to the advance payments, the processing of the as yet undecided applications continued. By the end of 2008, the research for 20,600 applications had already been completed, over 20,400 applications had been processed by the legal staff and around 20,300 applications had been decided by the Claims Committee. At the same

time, it became evident that a few very complicated, extensive applications, which it would take an unknown amount of time to resolve, were going to hold up the closing payments to the other applicants. Therefore, a further amendment to the General Settlement Fund Law was passed in 2009.

This amendment (Federal Law Gazette I no. 54/2009) was also prepared by the staff of the General Settlement Fund. Some of the stipulated procedural steps had to be taken prior to the commencement of the closing payments, so the Claims Committee had to amend its Rules of Procedure. In this amendment, it was determined that the General Settlement Fund was to produce a report on the claims that had already been decided by 1<sup>st</sup> July 2009 – the day on which the amendment to the Law was enacted. This report contained the total amount resulting from claims decided by the Claims Committee up to that point. After the Claims Committee had confirmed the accuracy of this report, it was presented to the Board of Trustees of the General Settlement Fund.

On the basis of these decisions, which had been approved by the Claims Committee by 1<sup>st</sup> July 2009, and of the total amount available to the General Settlement Fund for making these payments, the final payment quotas for both types of procedures were calculated and determined by the Board of Trustees. By 1st July 2009, the Claims Committee had recognized claims totaling around 1.5 billion US dollars. In view of the cap on the General Settlement Fund of 210 million US dollars, which was set out in the Washington Agreement as the result of the negotiations, and of the fact that this amount was not sufficient to cover all of the asserted losses, which came to be seen as inevitable fairly early on, the Law provided for applicants to only receive an aliquot share of their recognized claims. How much this was going to be would not become clear until the end of the procedure or, as it turned out, at the time of the legal amendment. In July 2009, it was therefore established that the share of determined claims recognized by the Claims Committee that would be disbursed in actual fact amounted to 10.56 percent in the claims-based procedure, 20.74 percent for seized insurance policies (due to a legal provision, insurance policies had to be handled separately) and 17.16 percent in the equity-based procedure. For decisions reached by the Claims Committee after 1st July 2009 (or during the course of a reopening or of an amendment resulting from a legal appeal against a decision reached prior to 1<sup>st</sup> July 2009) the Federation has provided further means in line with the determined quotas.

For applicants who have already received an advance payment this means that they will now receive the balance of the established payment quotas as part of the closing payments. As the final payment quotas are very close to the advance payment quotas already determined, the closing payments are very small in the majority of cases. For those applicants who have not yet received an advance payment, the amount they are to receive is determined on the basis of the closing payment quotas.

A résumé of my work in the National Fund... It's difficult to summarize my work during the last five years here. Words occur to me, emotions surface, but to actually describe the work here is not possible... Perhaps because the subject is difficult and does not really lend itself to "description".

I didn't choose to do this work because of the subject matter involved. As a member of the post-post-war generation, I knew that this chapter of our history is very, very dark – indeed on two counts: what has happened was "very dark" as was the way in which it was dealt with in the following years.

When I started my work here, the main priority was to carry out the payments as swiftly as possible and over the last few years the volume of work and the pressure to complete it has continued to increase... Not only because the applicants are getting older. In recent years the work has been our main focus in the Finance Department and not the subject matter behind it. Nevertheless, there was always this other aspect involved. It could always be felt that the work here was always about something "different"... About consciously and honestly dealing with a very dark chapter of history.

It was and is not always easy to justify this work to the outside world – I was very often confronted with a lack of understanding and have heard statements such as "it's still going on; has that still not been finished with...". On the other hand, it is evident from the telephone calls and letters from the applicants that the subject will never be closed for them... But nevertheless, in addition to a deep woundedness, in addition to the great distress suffered during their lives, an overwhelming gratitude can often be felt, and it can be felt that this small gesture that we are making here enables a small piece of reconciliation with their homeland... And it is this that makes our work worthwhile.

**A member of the Finance Department of the National Fund  
and the General Settlement Fund**

The process for making closing payments is similar to that for the advance payments. All applicants receive "closing payment packages" containing the necessary information. It is important to once more explain the complicated procedure for the two payments – advance payment and closing payment – to the applicants in detail. If the documentation that has been sent in is incomplete, staff get in touch with the applicants to obtain what is missing. As with the advance payments, the General Settlement Fund aims to give priority to applicants who were directly persecuted under the National Socialist regime.

An important step in processing and disbursing the payments is determining the present whereabouts of the applicants. Due to their age, many applicants move in with relatives or go into old people's homes or residential care. The high level of mobility in the Anglo-American world even among the elderly does not make things easier. Sometimes applicants who have not been in touch for some time can no longer be reached at their previous address. As most countries in question do not have a system for registering addresses, the search for these individuals can be a tortuous process. In many cases, the search has ended with the General Settlement Fund learning that the applicant has passed away prior to receiving the closing payment, with the consequence, as far as General Settlement Fund is concerned, that more and more heirs are to be taken into account, which makes payment even more complicated. The Fund estimates that there are currently over 23,000 recipients. This number results, on the one hand, from the number of applicants and the known heirs of deceased applicants and, on the other, from the estimated number of unknown heirs of deceased applicants, for which the Fund relies on previous experience. Also included in this figure are the so called co-heirs – these are people who may be included in the proceedings by the applicants in accordance with an option granted by the Claims Committee.

In the meantime, the disbursement of the closing payments, which commenced in July 2009, is on track. As of early March 2010, the Payments Department had already sent out 17,000 "closing payment packages". Over 11,000 responses to these packages have been received, some of which require further correspondence. Payments have already been made or will be transferred shortly to over 9,700 applicants. The total value of all closing payments processed so far amounts to over 21 million US dollars.

The bulk of payments to living applicants will have been effected in the foreseeable future. However, the number of payments that, as we know from experience, will prove difficult to process – for example in cases where a response from the applicants is still outstanding, which requires further correspondence, or where new research must be initiated – will rise, with the result that the payment process will slow down somewhat during the course of 2010.

The Legal Case-Processing Department currently has around 30 applications that have not yet been completed. Their completion and decision by the Claims Committee is also imminent. The number of appeals and re-openings is also on the decrease.

I have now been working at the General Settlement Fund for almost ten years and during this time I have witnessed its development from a small team into a large organization with a staff of over 150. There was never a quiet moment, the demands were ever increasing, the processing of applications became more complex each year. Nevertheless, the fundamental aspects remained the same: the commitment and motivation, the dedication and openness of the staff of the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund and their respect for the victims, through whose fates and stories it was possible to look into the abyss of (in)human acts.

The fact that the General Settlement Fund is reaching its conclusion fills me partly with sadness and partly with joy, because an important step has been taken towards Austria dealing with its past. Many people wish to work on something meaningful – for me this wish has come true.

**Walter Amtmann, BA**

Head of the Archives of the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund



The staff of the Archives of the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund:  
(back row from left to right) Denis Karalic, Mag. Dejana Petrovic, Walter Amtmann,  
BA (Head of Department), Edgar Kolbach and one other staff member



The staff of the Arbitration Panel for *In Rem* Restitution of the General Settlement Fund: (standing from left to right) Mag. Andreas Liska-Birk, Dr. Lukas Wallner, MMag. Susanne Helene Betz, Mag. Martin Niklas, Mag. Thomas Baar, Mag. Günter Gößler, Mag. Peter Stadlbauer, Mag. Alfred Fehringer, Mag. Claire Fritsch, E.MA, Mag. Harald Greifeneder, Mag. Alexander Wallner, (seated from left to right) Mag. Sebastian Fellner, Mag. Barbara Grün-Müller-Angerer, Sarah Higgs, BA (Hons.), Mag. Karin Hirsch (Head of Department); absent: Mag. Eva Birk, Annette Eisenberg, MSc, Mag. Anna Kalbeck, Dipl.-Museolog, Stefanie Lucas, Dr. Linda Neufeld

What remains to be done therefore in the General Settlement Fund's core areas is procedures involving heirs and the processing of the outstanding payments, along with the search for the individuals who we have as yet been unable to contact to inform them of the payment.

### **The Arbitration Panel for *In Rem* Restitution**

In addition to the monetary compensation for losses, on which the Claims Committee decides, claims for the restitution of properties and of movable assets of Jewish communal organizations can be filed with the Arbitration Panel for *In Rem* Restitution, established with the General Settlement Fund. Due to its different legal structure and the case-by-case nature of application processing, claims of this kind take a proportionate length of time to settle.

Both the proceedings and the decisions of the Arbitration Panel differ fundamentally from those of the Claims Committee for monetary compensation. Despite this, the commencement of its work was characterized by a number of similarities. Here too, Rules of Procedure had to be developed in cooperation with and for the Arbitration Panel. The available research options and the accessibility of archives had to be ascertained, and a specific work method had to be developed that was adequate to the challenges of the proceedings before the Arbitration Panel.

With regard to the Arbitration Panel, persons who were persecuted by the National Socialist regime on political grounds, on grounds of origin, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, or of physical or mental handicap or of accusations of so called asociality, or who left the country in order to escape such persecution and their heirs are eligible to file applications, applying *mutatis mutandis* the provisions of the (Austrian) General Civil Code. A requirement for the restitution of a property or of movable property of a Jewish communal organization is, among other things, that the seizure occurred in connection with events having occurred on the territory of present-day Austria during the National Socialist era and that the property concerned was publicly-owned on the cut off day, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2001, the day on which the negotiations in Washington were concluded. A further requirement is that the property has never been the subject of previous restitution proceedings and neither the applicants nor relatives of the applicants have already received any other form of compensation. Only cases in which the Arbitration Panel reaches the unanimous decision that such a previous decision or settlement by agreement constitutes an "extreme injustice" or cases where the claim was rejected by Austrian courts or administrative bodies due to lack of evidence which was at the time unavailable but has in the meantime become accessible, for example through the research of the Arbitration Panel, are exempt from this ruling. As restitution and compensation measures have already taken place in most cases of seized property, it is primarily the "extreme injustice" of previous proceedings that is to be examined by the Arbitration Panel. Yet it is precisely the

term “extreme injustice” as employed by the General Settlement Fund Law that poses one of the special challenges in the *in rem* restitution proceedings. As there is no precise legal definition of the term, the Arbitration Panel had to establish guidelines of judicial practice.

As the facts of the cases to be evaluated date back to the late 1930s, they have to be legally examined in a first step. The Arbitration Panel has opted for a process in which each case is dealt with on an interdisciplinary basis by lawyers and historians, who work together as a team.

In most cases, applications for *in rem* restitution – like those to the Claims Committee – are only incompletely documented to begin with. The applicants are often not the originally aggrieved persons or those persons who sought restitution after 1945. The result is that these persons are generally only capable of making imprecise submissions. Obtaining documents for applicants who are not resident in Austria also plays a major role in *in rem* restitution; it is frequently fraught with difficulties. The historians of the Arbitration Panel’s business apparatus therefore actively search for documents – as with the compensation from the Claims Committee, most applications would have to be rejected were it not for this procedure.

A fundamental difference to the proceedings before the Claims Committee is that there are more participants in the proceedings – the applicants on one side and the public owners on the other. This means that the Arbitration Panel has to conduct proceedings in which both sides are heard. Above all, this means ensuring that the same level of information is always available to all the parties to the proceedings.

With regard to the applications themselves, the Arbitration Panel differentiates between “substantive” applications, which meet the formal legal requirements, above all public ownership on the cut off day and ownership by the applicants or their legal successors in 1938, and “formal” applications, which do not meet these requirements because, for example, no specific property was named or because the requested property was privately-owned on the cut off day.

Prior to the decision on the formal applications, the applicants are provided with the opportunity to improve their applications. In some cases, an application can become “substantive” as a result of such supplementary submissions or research.

A substantive application can take several months to process, due, above all, to the very complicated historical research necessary for each case. In order to obtain additional documents, a written request for improvements is sent to the applicants. The application and all related documents are then delivered to the public owner so that they may submit a statement. This statement is then passed on to the applicants, together with

all researched documents. They then also have the opportunity to submit a statement. Subsequently, a draft decision is prepared by the staff on the basis of the detailed facts of the case and the submitted statements. This is discussed in the sessions of the Arbitration Panel and – if necessary – adapted. The Arbitration Panel’s examination process then ends with either a recommendation for restitution of the requested asset, a rejection or a dismissal of the application. The implementation of a recommendation for restitution falls under the competence of the relevant public owner.

By 31<sup>st</sup> December 2009, 2,196 applications had been received by the Arbitration Panel for *In Rem* Restitution. 874 applications – 565 “formal” applications and 309 “substantive” applications – were able to be decided to date.

## **Outlook and résumé**

As the General Settlement Fund is to be dissolved upon completion of its work – a further difference to the National Fund with regard to the legal set-up, as the National Fund was established without an “expiry date” – all the steps necessary to wind down an institution of this kind have to be taken.

Besides many other concerns, emphasis is to be placed on the maintenance and processing of the extensive archives of the General Settlement Fund (they are partly connected to the archives of the National Fund as a result of both Funds having many identical applicants) and on the conservation and further usability of the above mentioned software application – above all the database on which it is based. The extensive information that the General Settlement Fund will leave behind as the outcome of its work will form a valuable source for the future – not only for the applicants, but also for science – and is moving to the fore in connection with the conclusion of the General Settlement Fund’s activities. In the majority of the cases handled, the applicant’s submissions and documents, together with the data and documents researched by the General Settlement Fund lead to a new state of knowledge. At the level of the individual applicants, this provides access to information which was, to this extent, previously unavailable to them – as mentioned, they were generally very young during the years in question or are only the heirs of the aggrieved persons. At the same time, it is possible that the materials held at the General Settlement Fund will also be able to provide important knowledge and information in other respects. Subject areas related to property seizures by the National Socialist regime and Austrian compensation policies after 1945, which were investigated on a general basis by the Austrian Historical Commission and other academics, can now be examined on an individual level with the impressive number of cases.

In order to record the experiences of the General Settlement Fund and the outcome of its work and to render understandable the way in which these outcomes were achieved, appropriate closing documentation must be produced when winding

The gesture payment from the National Fund was received very positively by the applicants. The small amount of compensation paid by the General Settlement Fund for material damages was in many cases met with entirely understandable disappointment by the applicants. Nevertheless, with warm words, some applicants have expressed their thanks and high estimation of our work, of our dedication over the years and of our efforts. The hope remains that, after so many years, we have managed to contribute towards reaching an understanding.

**Mag. Doris Macht**

Head of the Communications Department of the General Settlement Fund

down the Fund's activities. Preparation work in this regard is currently being undertaken, for example by means of an internal project on the conservation of knowledge, in which members of various departments are participating.

Although the General Settlement Fund has currently not yet completed its task, it is already possible to sum up certain aspects. When focusing on the monetary compensation as intended by the Washington Agreement, i.e. closing the gaps and filling the deficits in the previous Austrian compensation and restitution measures, it can be seen from the composition of the claims asserted with the General Settlement Fund and recognized by the Claims Committee – around 30 percent of all claims are related to occupational or educational losses, 20 percent to liquidated businesses and the remaining 50 percent to the remaining categories of assets – that this objective is close to having been achieved, particularly in the category of liquidated businesses, which had previously never been adequately accounted for.

Particularly when including the work of the National Fund in a review, the comparison between the different approaches which were chosen for the compensation measures or, more generally, for payments to victims of National Socialism naturally arises: gesture payments, lump sums and individual compensation. An in-depth comparison would be worth making. What can be said summarily on the basis of experience regarding all these measures is that each of these forms of approaching the subject of belated recognition or compensation is justified and, at the same time, the special requirements of the applicants are accommodated. At the same time, however, none of these measures succeeds in remedying all aspects of this problem, not only because the amounts available do not correspond to the true losses. In addition to the impossibility of making amends for pain and persecution suffered, it is presumably the length of time that has been allowed to pass before these measures were put in place, which results in the feeling that it's "too late", even though the measures themselves were implemented in the best possible way.

What I have gained from my years at the General Settlement Fund touches on the interplay between the implementation of a law on a belated compensation measure and this law's transparency for the persons affected. In addition to the challenge of implementing such a measure from its first beginnings and constructing a fund with the legal mandate already described, one great difficulty was carrying out this complexly regulated matter with due regard being paid to legal procedure and to all the related demands but without placing bureaucratic stumbling blocks in the path of applicants. Particularly in this area – in addition to the fundamental problem of the above mentioned "too late" and the fact that only a certain percentage of the asserted claims are covered – the General Settlement Fund and its staff have also come in for some harsh criticism.

Yet despite such criticism, I still treasure the fact that I was able to work in these two establishments of the Republic of Austria – the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund – and hence also work on measures such as had never before existed in Austria. When, in the tenth year of the General Settlement Fund, I look back to its beginnings in the year 2001, the most important thing I have learned is that such a task can only be executed successfully – if at all – with a committed, creative, flexible, untiring team in which a wide range of experience and qualifications comes together – the close cooperation between historians and lawyers was and is particularly valuable for the work of the Claims Committee and the Arbitration Panel. For this, I would like to express my thanks to each and every member of our staff.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Special thanks are owed to Mag. Richard Rebernik for his support and to all those who contributed towards this article.

I had been unaware of the extent of the Diaspora prior to working at the Fund and despite the fact that I had always been interested in the Second World War, I could barely have imagined the paths of emigration and the extent of people's fates. It only became comprehensible to me when I spoke to an applicant from Burgenland living in Argentina on the telephone – she still had her Burgenland accent and came from the neighboring village to where I grew up. People who still speak in the dialect and language of the 1930s and 40s. The questions about the weather and the great longing for this Vienna – the Vienna of a youth which came to a brutal end. Often, this pain, this feeling of having been torn from a – perhaps with hindsight idealized – youth, is tangible. In this regard, the National Fund has made a gesture of reconciliation. On the other hand, the General Settlement Fund, in trying to assess seized assets, has to a great extent brought the old traumas back to the surface. Often, it is only in filling out the application that the victims or their heirs see the extent of their material losses for the first time, in addition to the trauma suffered. This precise assessment, in addition to the small amount with which the General Settlement Fund was endowed for distribution, was in my opinion a belated measure which had required a certain amount of generosity. I am aware that it is extremely difficult to carry out such compensation 65 years after the war. But after many conversations with the applicants, I have the impression that this very belated measure, which had to comply with difficult statutory provisions and which pursued the aim of finally closing "this chapter", had more of a negative effect on Austria's reputation abroad. Despite the many difficulties, I have found my work here at the Fund enormously enriching and an important experience which I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

**A member of the Applicants' Telephone Support Department  
of the General Settlement Fund**



During the course of its activities during the last 15 years, the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism has succeeded in becoming the most important contact and information point for all victims of National Socialism and their descendants originating from Austria. This is not only an outstanding achievement domestically, contributing to bringing the people of this country, above all the young, closer to the darkest era of our recent history and helping them come to terms with it, but it has also had a very important and far-reaching effect abroad. As somebody who has for many years been dealing with matters of Austrian foreign policy, I know – I repeatedly experienced it myself, above all during the years of the difficult negotiations for an honorable, although, by necessity, incomplete solution to the unresolved restitution and compensation of the Austrian victims – that the National Fund has contributed towards shaping the image of Austria abroad and the elimination the remaining prejudices. With this in mind, I can only hope, for myself and for Austria, that the National Fund and its dedicated staff, led by Secretary General Hannah Lessing, can continue with its activities far into the future.

**Dr. Hans Winkler**

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Head of the Diplomatic Academy Vienna

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## Thanks

Special thanks to all those who contributed texts to this volume.

## Legal Disclosure

### **Publisher:**

National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism  
Parlament, 1017 Vienna

### **Editor:**

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### **Idea and concept:**

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### **Translations:**

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The article by Prof. Yehuda Bauer appears in its original English version.

### **Translation of the article by Prof. DDr. Oliver Rathkolb:**

Otmar Binder

### **Proof reading:**

Adrian Ortner, Martin Niklas, Sarah Higgs

### **Cover photo:**

Walter Reichl

### **Team photos:**

Andrew Rinkhy

### **Art direction:**

Bernhard Rothkappel, Wilfried Blaschnek, [www.technographic.at](http://www.technographic.at)

### **Printers:**

Rötzer Druck Ges.m.b.H., Mattersburger Straße 25, A-7000 Eisenstadt

Printed in Austria

### **Place of Publication:**

Vienna

**For far too long, Austria did not do enough to face the dark side of its history. In creating the National Fund, a change in Austrian attitudes towards its own history manifested itself – from the imperfect identity as the “first victim” of Hitler to the adoption of a shared responsibility for the terrible injustices inflicted upon people of this country.**

**Dr. Heinz Fischer**  
Federal President

**Without knowledge of our own past, we will not be able to understand our present or shape our future. In the 15 years since its establishment, the National Fund has contributed towards an active and multi-faceted examination of our country’s recent past and will also have an important role to play in the future.**

**President of the National Council Mag. Barbara Prammer**  
Chairperson of the National Fund

**National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism**  
**General Settlement Fund for Victims of National Socialism**

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