

Minister of State Pieper,

Your Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen

May I welcome you with great respect at the opening of the exhibiton of Micheal Kestgens : Russian Jews Germans.

The photos exhibited have an astonishing impact and record sometimes very diffucult individual pathes and lives that cross each other. The same complexity, diversity and also adversities describe our own region – in a broader sense Central Europe – and the history of its nations. In this environment it is especially important to understand the past and if needed to be realistically confronted with it. Reunited Germany set a good example when 1991 she offered home for thousands of immigrants with Jewish background.

Pictures – on canvas or photographic paper – are to grasp the moment but can tell the story of a whole life. The photographes displayd here are especially wordy: they cover more than 2 decades and relate to farewells and new beginnings, to those arriving and settling, to the search for belonging somewhere, to religious traditions but most of all they are motives of the search for our own identity. The exhibition gives us an insight into the element of modern German history that is only partially present in the media and the public.

Although the process of searching for a physical and spiritual home has been difficult in the past 20 years, decades after the horrors of the shoah and during the flee from the memory of socialist oppression, almost all of the immigrants are succesfully integrated in the present German society and have retained and even strengthened their highly complex identities to which the title of our exhibition is also referring to: Russians Jews Germans – as it is written without any comma, hyphen or punctuation.

As the generation in post-war Germany did, we ourselves have to be realistic about the shameful chapters of our history so that hatred can never again escalate in a disaster unworthy of common humanity. We, who bear public responsibilities, must be especially aware of that. The location of the exhibition is therefore an indication. Last year we remembered here among others the devoted of work of Raoul Wallenberg who fought against one of the dictatorships of the 20. century and finally got victim of the other one.

It is an obligation to come to terms with our past – and as the year of Wallenberg also shows – we are committed to do so. It is a great pleasure for us to have the opportunity and cooperate with our German partners in this – like we did in the exhibition of the Holocaust Memorial Centre „Persecution-Life-saving – New start” in our embassy in Berlin; or the Deutsche Bühne from Szekszárd with its performance on the life of Wallenberg in Berlin. When the Hungarian Parliament approved last December a resolution on the memory day of the expulsion of Germans living in Hungary, it followed the same goal of national narrative.

We Hungarians can very well identify with the fight of small communities for survival and self-fulfilment. Jews and Hungarians as nations have both had to fight continuously for having their legitimacy accepted, and will always have to do so. We are convinced that everyone has the right to live at the place of his own residence, according to his belief and identity and not threatened by the state power or forced to assimilate, but live in peace and security guaranteed by the state and exercise his individual and community rights.

It is this year 40 years ago that Hungary and the Federal Republic of Germany took up diplomatic relations. The strength and dynamics of the cooperation is rooted in external initiatives like this one today.

I hope you enjoy the exhibition and that the message of the photographs will inspire and benefit us all.

Thank you for your honoring attention.