

State Secretary Németh,
Your Excellences,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to come here and open the exhibition „Russians Jews Germans“ which was enabled by the invitation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary and the support of the Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany. Our intention with the exhibition is to draw the attention to Jewish immigrants in Germany and to Jewish life in Hungary. The focal point of the exhibition of the Jewish Museum Berlin is the people who came as Jewish immigrants to Germany from the former Soviet Union. The background is a unique agreement in history.

In the 1980ies the GDR had exactly 8 small Jewish communities with 400 members. The GDR supported financially the communities but felt no responsibility for the crimes of the Holocaust because it understood itself as anti-fascist and declared that the perpetrators lived exclusively in West-Germany. This started to change slowly and short before the end of the GDR-dictatorship when due to the emergency situation of the collapsing economy of the GDR, the Jewish GDR-citizens were to function as a lever to better relations with the USA.

The historic step was taken by the first freely elected ‚Volkskammer‘ of the GDR: in July 1990 the GDR government under Lothar de Maizière approved the admission of Jewish citizens from the Soviet Union. In the last days of the sovereign GDR 2600 Jews came to Germany. This was the start of a massive wave of emigration from the Soviet Union which also ceased to exist and allowed freedom for its Jewish citizens. They hoped for a better life and better education possibilities for their children. Germany was wise enough to admit all immigrants with Jewish background. Since 1990 more than 200 000 Jews came to Germany, half of them were admitted by the Jewish communities.

Immigration has changed Jewish life in Germany completely which is a big fortune for our country. The Jewish communities have admirably integrated the newcomers, one could say: prime integration exemplified. However, this was not easy – in Augsburg e.g. increased the number of community members from 199 to 1500, in Wuppertal from 82 to 2266. Most of the immigrants spoke no German, had no access to Jewish religion or traditions and often diplomas and degrees were not accepted and the new start was very difficult. Now, when we are happy about a flourishing Jewish life in Germany, we know we owe this greatly to the Jewish people. We can see them here in the photos exhibited. In Germany we have again Jewish schools, academic training institutes, rabbinical seminaries, synagogues and houses of worship and a lot more. Young people of the next generation have no language problems; they are Germans and take life for granted in Germany - in their mother country.

It is a big fortune for Germany that after the Shoah this could happen and we are grateful for it. It reminds us to protect this Jewish life from anti-semites and right-wing extremists. Germany is a tolerant and open country with an open and pluralistic society. We support Jewish life and wish that Jews feel safe and at home in Germany – wherever they were born. Thank you.