



Deutscher Bundestag  
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This is my second visit to Babi Yar. I believe this memorial is a place of threefold remembrance: firstly, of the murder of 33,000 Jews here in September 1941. Secondly, of the up to 1.5 million Jews who were killed in Ukraine between 1941 and 1945. And thirdly, of the six million victims of the Holocaust in total. In many countries, there were people who became complicit in the barbarism of the Holocaust. That too is part of the history of the period. But the Holocaust was and remains the darkest chapter in German history.

It is important to remember, not simply engage in official ceremonies. Those responsible for planning and organising the Holocaust were able to draw on a much older and more widespread ideology which holds human life in contempt: anti-Semitism. In 1945 Europe, including Germany, was liberated from fascism. That does not mean, however, that anti-Semitism was also consigned to history. It lingers on in old and new guises. Irrespective, it should be noted, of whether Jewish people are present or not, anti-Semitism is still with us. The battle against it in people's minds therefore remains an urgent and permanent challenge.

Truly comprehending what happened is becoming a more difficult process for younger generations. The Holocaust took place a long lifetime ago.



“Zeitzeugen”, as we call them in German, “contemporary witnesses”, are becoming increasingly rare. But the knowledge of what happened must nonetheless be passed on in such a way that those born in a later era can comprehend it, both emotionally and intellectually. To ensure it never happens again, anywhere. In my experience, there are two ways of relating the history of the Holocaust. Starting from the end: the mass murders, the gas chambers and firing squads. Or starting from the beginning: with Jews, human beings, being treated as the ‘Other’.

Wherever people start to make a distinction between those who are considered useful and those who are seen as being harmful, between those who are superior and those who are inferior, between those who are normal and those who are unnatural – wherever this occurs, the perverted ideology which was the real root of the Holocaust has not yet been eliminated. Incidentally, none of the major religions permit distinctions of this kind. They also run contrary to the principles of the Enlightenment. And the Universal Declaration of Human Rights forbids them. Its message is that human dignity is inviolable, for all people. Irrespective of what they believe, the way they live, or whom they love. Individual diversity is a human right.

The two key issues I focus on in my work as a Member of the German Bundestag are civil rights and democracy. That includes the fight against right-wing extremism, racism and anti-Semitism. I consider myself a left-wing politician. And so you can imagine that there are many issues where I steadfastly espouse positions which differ from those of politicians from other parties.



But there is one issue where I always strive to achieve a cross-party alliance, no matter what other differences may exist. Namely when it comes to nipping right-wing extremism, racism and anti-Semitism in the bud.

That is the lesson I have learned from the past. And Germany's history also teaches us that the reason fascism gained power was not that the Nazis were so strong. It was because democrats were hopelessly divided on crucial issues. This must be remembered when commemorating the millions of victims of the Holocaust. I was born in 1963 and therefore bear no guilt for the Shoah. But I do have a responsibility for what happens in the present and the future. And this also includes ensuring that what was once inconceivable never happens again. That is why I am here today.

In my capacity as Vice-President of the German Bundestag, I would add that in 2008 the German parliament unanimously adopted a motion on fighting against anti-Semitism and fostering Jewish life. This too is not just a question of official commemoration, or of remembrance. It is a commitment which has been made by policymakers and society as a whole. I see how common anti-Semitic clichés are in many countries, especially in view of the current crises. And so, in closing, I would like to repeat once more: anti-Semitism has nothing to do with political criticism. Anti-Semitism is an ideology which holds human life in contempt.