

Welcome
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politische Bildung)

You have just heard the first part of a reading from "Voices from the Past", in this case the story of Raymond Portefaix, followed by extracts from the war diaries of Stanislaw Masny and Elio Materassi. All of the texts are from the war period, and we wanted to present them in their original language, in order to make it clear that most of the people who were sent here to carry out forced labour were, in fact, not German. I am pleased to be able to welcome Harry Callan from Ireland, the relatives of Eugène Bouton and André Migdal from France, the daughter of Klaas Touber from the Netherlands, the daughter of Raymond Portefaix and representatives from Murat, the descendants of Elio Materassi, and many other international relatives of witnesses from Belgium, France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, and Poland. But also from Germany: Richard Lahmann, a survivor from Bremerhaven, and the descendants of former German concentration camp and Gestapo prisoners.
Thank you for making the long, and surely difficult, journey to Bremen so that you could be here today!

You can probably imagine how happy, satisfied and relieved I am to be standing in front of you.
There is a lot of history behind this bunker, the Bremen Regional Centre for Political Education, and the "Denkort Bunker Valentin".
From a "place of terror and crime" to an "unwanted ruin in the north of Bremen", from a "German Navy depot" to a place of remembrance brought to the attention of the public by the Bremer Theatre, and from an idea for a memorial to the "Denkort Bunker Valentin".
This is a place in which we can think of the crimes of the past and their victims. In which knowledge of the Nazi era can be acquired. In which political education can and should be provided to a diverse range of target groups.

About two years ago, I thought that I already had an idea of how the finished memorial site would look. But it is only in recent months, through daily monitoring of the construction measures and the work here on the site, that the dimensions of this new memorial museum have become clear to me. Invitations such as that from the city of Murat in June 2014 have made it clear to us how much suffering, terror, attention, and interest in our work is associated with the site. The obstacles faced during this project were large: Beyond the outlined path, there were fundamental questions which we needed to answer.

How could we involve the local initiatives and associations, as we worked towards a professional-looking working memorial museum? How could we tell stories and at the same time raise all of the right questions? How could we satisfy all of the requirements of this site, while creating something new, which corresponded to the dignity of the place?

In the last few years of the construction period, the challenge for the Regional Centre and the builders was that keywords such as trade cost control, fire and safety concepts, construction schedule, donation receipt, and call for funds dominated our everyday lives. It was not always easy to keep our eyes on the goal during the rigid production process, but we managed it, and many thanks must be given.

I cannot name them all, but some just have to be mentioned: I would like to thank the State of Bremen for its tremendous support. Thanks to the Federal Commissioner for Culture and Media, and Prof. Neumann for the funding; the Senator for Economics, Labour and Ports; the European Union; Bremer Landesbank, and the Institute for Federal Real Estate for the tour of the site.

To the local associations and initiatives: Geschichtslehrpfad Lagerstraße/U-Boot-Bunker Valentin e. V.; Dokumentations- und Lernort Baracke Wilhelmine; Internationale Friedensschule Bremen, and the association "Erinnern für die Zukunft" e.V. I very much hope that we will continue to keep this place alive even more intensively in the future.

Thanks to the Scientific Advisory Board, which has fulfilled its role, and has provided us with many hints and suggestions.

And naturally, I would like to thank the local staff: Christel Trouvé, Marcus Meyer, Sandra Kern, Juliane Mettler, Henrik Schütt, Maren Zerhusen, Jasmin Nitzschner, Mirko Wetzels, Kathrin Herold. They are just some of the many freelancers who have determined the daily work on the site. I would also like to thank Christoph Theiling, Hunter Heinzelmänn, Sven Grotheer, David Lindemann, and Ulrike Rosemeyer for their help with the construction work, and the many other companies, maintenance groups and project officers.

The construction has ended, but a journey has begun. The journey to a documentation centre, an academic and political education centre, a research site, a place for meetings, and a place which will help to raise the right questions based on both history and on current political challenges.

I was recently asked whether, in light of such burning issues as the refugee crisis, the strengthening of migration societies, and the current ruptures in civilisation, it was still appropriate for a National Centre for Political Education to put so much energy into a new memorial museum. All I can say is: Yes. Firstly: The history of the bunker and the history of suffering of the victims are still relevant today, and deserve to be told. And secondly, I am convinced that: Only on the basis of memory and a conscious approach to the past, is it possible to develop the correct settings and to make decisions in the present day.

I am delighted to welcome you here today, and I will now hand over to the Mayor and the President of the Senate, Dr Carsten Sieling.