

Speech
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Form of address (Bremen politicians)

but above all, survivors and descendants, and the representatives of the survivors' associations from France, Belgium, Poland and Slovenia, who I would like to welcome,

over four years ago, on 8 May 2011, we saw the start of the transformation of the "Valentin" bunker into the "Denkort Bunker Valentin". Together with the then-Mayor of Bremen, Böhrnsen, and the President of the Bremen City Parliament, Christian Weber, I, as the Minister of State for Culture and Media, unveiled a plaque which bore the slogan: The bunker will be a memorial site. Today, the bunker is a memorial site. I welcome you to the official hand-over of this memorial site to the public.

I must say that as a Minister of State, this project was close to my heart. When I was a child – I grew up in north Bremen – my friends and I played every now and then within the walls of the bunker, but we knew very little about the history of terror and suffering associated with it. I will always remember the effect that the monumental dimensions of this building had on me at the time. It was not easy to realise this memorial site project. Bremen could not manage alone. During my time as Minister of State for Culture and Media and also as a representative on a federal level for the funding of memorials to Nazi injustice, I made it perfectly clear how the Government could help, and how it could support Bremen to transform this site into a memorial. Those responsible for the site gladly accepted this help, and we could follow the development of the "Denkort Bunker Valentin" together. In the year 2010, the Regional Centre for Political Education presented a concept which I accepted, and was declared eligible by the experts appointed by the Government's Memorial Sites

Concept, and which served as the basis of the project which has now been completed. The Government and the Federal State have funded this project with more than €2 million.

I am impressed by the work which has been carried out here. In May 2011, I stood on the same spot as Mayer Jens Börnsen and I accepted the provisional management operation at the launch event. But at that time there was no route through the bunker which people could follow, there was no information centre to engage visitors, and there was also no media guide which allowed the voices of the former forced labourers to be heard.

The Government places high demands on projects which are to be funded by its Memorial Concept. This includes, not least, that the locations for which we fund the construction of memorials must be places of national significance – authentic places which demonstrate at least one aspect of the history of National Socialism. The bunker is, without doubt, such a place. The associated scientific and educational concept must be relevant. It must be based on the current state of research and technology. This applies to construction measures, but above all it applies to the presentation of the contents. Using state-of-the-art research to develop contemporary teaching resources and to create exhibitions which correspond with changing perceptions and the very different interests of visitors, this is a great skill. Here, it has been successful.

The Regional Centre has taken a brave approach. They have opted for a concept which demands something of the visitors. This is not just about knowledge. You will indeed find out everything that you need to know about the history of the bunker in the exhibitions and multimedia services. It is also about attitude, an evaluative attitude. The exhibition does not present an evaluation of what happened on this site. It is down to the individual visitor to form an opinion, to develop an attitude, to draw their own conclusions for the future based on past events, and to draw on their own actions. I wish that as many visitors as possible will accept this invitation for deep thought.

That the experience will continue to have an effect once they have left this place. That this will not end after a visit here, but that people will be intrigued and want to know more. That is the intention of the Regional Centre: No moral dictatorship, but a chance for private reflection and a stimulation for further discussion. This is enlightenment in the truest, and therefore best, sense. It is contemporary and will surely be successful. My sincere thanks go to the Regional Centre and Mr Thomas Köcher! The interest of visitors has already been aroused, as visitor numbers have doubled in recent years. There is more to come, now that the site is accessible without having to register to visit it, and the exhibitions and routes have been completed.

The Nazi obsession with armaments and the merciless exploitation of human lives as part of the Nazi conquest and extermination policy are important and difficult topics which the memorial must address, and which visitors to the memorial site must think about. Between 10,000 and 12,000 forced labourers, prisoners of war or deportees from all over Europe were forced to work here in unbearable conditions. The names of more than 1,100 fatalities are known, but the estimated figure is much higher. One of the underestimated challenges of the memorial project is not to deny the fascination which can arise from the sight of this monumental building, but to trigger a discussion about it. What matters is that we place the monument in a wider context, and mercilessly uncover the inhuman ideology behind it.

I am confident that this can be achieved with the new "Denkort Bunker Valentin", and that many people – especially in the younger generations – will accept this invitation.

Thank you!