
Good News Department

Austria Makes Quick Payments To Survivors

by Martin Weiss

(NAPSA)—Only three months after Austria signed an historic Holocaust compensation deal, it has begun payments for apartment leases and household goods, lost when Austria was under Nazi rule between 1938 and 1945.

The agreement was signed on January 17 in Washington, D.C., by Austria, the United States, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims, the Central Committee of Jews from Austria in Israel and the American Council for Equal Compensation of Nazi Victims from Austria, as well as victims' attorneys.

Hillary Kessler-Godin, spokeswoman for the Conference on Jewish Material Claims, confirmed that about 60 people had received a flat-rate payment of about \$7,000 each. They are the first of approximately 21,000 people eligible for such payments. Under the agreement, \$150 million has been earmarked for this purpose.

The payments will be made available quickly and unbureaucratically by the Austrian National Fund, which was established on the 50th anniversary of the Republic of Austria and has made payments to Nazi victims since 1995. It has since compiled detailed lists of possible recipients.

The quick and unbureaucratic procedure by Austria was welcomed by the Jewish Claims Conference, as well as by the President of the Austrian Jewish Community, Ariel Muzicant.

"It has to be pointed out that nowhere in Europe have payments to victims been administered as quickly and efficiently as in Austria," said Muzicant.

Similar words were found by the Chief U.S. negotiator, the former Deputy Secretary of the Treasury, Stuart Eizenstat: "Austria has shown impressive leadership for the benefit of victims who are old and urgently need this money."

The speaker of the Austrian



Photo credit: APA/Gindl Barbara

U.S. Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Stuart Eizenstat and Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel congratulating each other on the agreement of January 17th 2001.

Parliament, Heinz Fischer, made it clear that due to the age of the claimants, all payments will go out as quickly as possible and be completed during the next 12 months. Under the appropriate laws, claimants have until February 22, 2002, to register compensation demands, but Austria is at the same time trying to contact all those with entitlements.

Since the end of World War II, Austria has carried out a number of restitution, compensation and social welfare measures for victims of National Socialism. In concluding and now implementing the agreement of January 17, Austria is closing the last remaining gaps and deficiencies in such measures.

Austria's chancellor, Wolfgang Schuessel, remarked in this context that "only a country that deals openly with the ghosts of her past has a solid basis for working toward a better future."

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