

3 May 2023

Programme for the commemoration ceremony

marking the 78th anniversary of the end of the war
and the liberation of the concentration camps

- Music** **Violin Sonata Op. 31. No. 2, 1** by Paul Hindemith
The works of Paul Hindemith (1895-1963) were banned under National Socialism. This prompted him to emigrate, first to Switzerland and later to the USA.
- Greeting** **Prof Dr Oliver von Wrochem**
Director of the Foundation of Hamburg Memorials and Learning Centres
- Welcome** **Dr Peter Tschentscher**
First Mayor of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg
- Music** **Aubade voor fluit solo Op. 19a.** by Marius Hendrikus Flothuis
Marius Hendrikus Flothuis (1914-2001) composed this work in 1944 in the Vught concentration camp for a fellow prisoner.
- Speech** **Barbara Piotrowska**
Daughter of a Neuengamme prisoner and survivor of the Ravensbrück concentration camp
- Music** **Wiegala** by Ilse Weber
Ilse Weber (1903-1944) composed songs in Theresienstadt which she sang and played on the guitar to comfort children in the infirmary. In 1944, she voluntarily accompanied the children in her ward to Auschwitz, where she was murdered in the gas chamber.
- Speech** **Balbina Rebolgar**
President of the Spanish Amical de Neuengamme

Welcome

Claudia Roth

Minister of State for Culture and the Media

Music

Die Moorsoldaten (arrangement: Thomas Böttger)

Written in 1933 by prisoners in the Börgermoor concentration camp.

Musical accompaniment provided by the award and scholarship winners of the "**Jugend musiziert**" youth music programme: **Aila Nelles** (soprano), **Nane Schulz** (flute), **Magdalena Mahnke** (violin), **Roja Nelles** (cello), **Qiyang Huang** (guitar)

The ceremony will be followed by a wreath-laying at the former detention bunker.

Musical accompaniment: **Samantha Wright** (clarinet)

Oliver von Wrochem

Dear Ms Piotrowska,

dear First Mayor Dr Tschentscher,

dear Minister of State Roth,

dear representatives of the Senate, Parliament and consular corps,

dear President of the Spanish Amical, Balbina Rebollar,

dear ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

We want to commemorate the 78th anniversary of the end of the war and the liberation of the concentration camps together with you today. As Director of the Foundation and the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial, I would like to welcome you all warmly on behalf of the employees.

I am delighted that delegations from the membership associations of the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme and the family members of former Neuengamme prisoners from Belgium, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Israel, Spain and Ukraine are here with us again today. We are especially thankful to have Barbara Piotrowska from Warsaw, who will speak to us after First Mayor Tschentscher, as well as other survivors of the concentration camps: Livia Fränkel and Elisabeth Masur-Kischinowski from Stockholm, Natan Grossmann from Munich, and Dita Kraus from Netanya, who made the arduous journey despite their advanced age to join us here. They will participate in our programme over the coming days in eyewitness discussions and a conversational café. Thank you very much for this.

The Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, Minister of State Roth, is on her way and will speak to us at the end of the event. Her attendance, and that of the First Mayor, show that the memory of National Socialist crimes is firmly anchored on the level of both the state and the federal government.

Hamburg surrendered without a fight on 3 May 1945, just a few days before the end of the war and Germany's liberation from National Socialism.

The prisoners from Neuengamme had previously been hastily removed from the camp by the city's National Socialist elites. Tens of thousands of them died in the last weeks of the war on death marches, or they starved or died of exhaustion in camps for the dying, or they were massacred. Even on 3 May, around 7,000 of them died in the Bay of Lübeck. In the days leading

up to Germany's surrender on 8 May, the survivors lived between fear and hope. It makes sense, therefore, that in connection with the establishment of 8 May as a commemoration day in Hamburg, the days before this should also be designated as remembrance days.

It took a long time before the crimes committed in the Neuengamme concentration camp were publicly acknowledged in Hamburg. It was not until 2005 that the entire grounds here were dedicated as a place of documentation, admonition, learning and active exchange. We come together again here today, at this central site of remembrance for the victims of National Socialist persecution, to remember the crimes committed here and remind ourselves of how important it still is, in light of the historical mass crimes initiated by Germany, to stand up against illiberal movements and defend democracy and human rights.

We are grateful for the many connections we have made today thanks to our cooperation with the associations of former prisoners and their family members in various countries in Europe. We want to express our great appreciation to all of you who maintain the memory of the sites of National Socialist crimes and repeatedly raise public awareness of the topic of resistance.

The people amongst us who survived persecution and violence in the Neuengamme concentration camp are now very old. Many were not able to travel here today, but they are with us in our thoughts. The fewer former prisoners there are to bear witness, the more important it will become for us to preserve the memory of them, of their experiences and their messages for the following generations.

Many survivors of Neuengamme passed away in the last year. I would like to read the names of those we lost in the past 12 months.

Marcel Bayod, Thérèse Boudier, Dimitrios Efthymiadis

Hédi Fried, Aron Gross, Albert Emile Garnier,

Margot Heumann, Liselotte Ivry, Adrianus van Lieburg,

Ivan Moscovich, Roger Manceau, Jean Rigot,

Nachum Rotenberg, Paula Schemiavitz,

Kamila Sieglóvá, Pierre Vignes.

Concentration camp memorials are central sites of remembrance for society, and as such, their work is heavily influenced by current events. This is the second year that our communal remembrance on 3 May has taken place against the backdrop of Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine, which is illegal under international law and has brought endless

suffering to so many people. The war also has a direct effect on our work and our view of memory cultures in Eastern Europe. Descendants of Neuengamme survivors from Ukraine have reached out to us, and the experiences of this new war are now superimposed on the stories told by their family members. We are trying to assist them together with the voluntary Friends of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial, private individuals and the Aid Network for Survivors of Nazi Persecution in Ukraine. Multiple family members of former prisoners from Ukraine are here with us today, and I would like to extend a special welcome to them.

Even nearly 80 years after the end of the Second World War, many National Socialist crimes, especially those committed in Eastern Europe, remain unresearched, and many biographies of the victims of National Socialist persecution, as well as the perpetrators, have not yet been told. Memorial work is essentially also research work. We are therefore very grateful that federal funding has enabled us to maintain contact with Ukrainian scholars. We are also trying to maintain contact with scholars from Belarus and Russia who continue to study National Socialist crimes – often in exile – while being subjected to repression from their own states.

As was the case last year, we did not invite the consular representatives of Russia and Belarus to this commemoration ceremony because of the ongoing war. We will, of course, lay a wreath for the concentration camp victims from these countries today.

In closing, I would like to warmly thank everyone contributing to this event today. I especially want to mention the speakers as well as the musical accompaniment to our commemoration ceremony provided by "Jugend musiziert", and by Samantha Wright during the wreath-laying. Many thanks also go to those who made the earlier events as well as the programme for today and the coming days possible, including Dr Alexandre Froidevaux and Juliane Podlaha. And thanks to all of you here today for your support and your communal remembrance!

After this event, we will go together to the detention bunker in the former prisoner camp to hold a commemoration ceremony there.

And now I would like to hand over to the First Mayor.

Translation / Übersetzung: Jessica Spengler

Peter Tschentscher

Dear Professor von Wrochem,

dear ladies and gentlemen,

Hamburg was handed over to British troops on 3 May 1945.

Even before the end of the war and Germany's official capitulation on 8 May, the SS started erasing the traces of National Socialist crimes in our city.

The Neuengamme concentration camp was cleared and the prisoners were sent on death marches.

Thousands died on these marches or later fell victim to Allied bombing while being held on ships in the Bay of Lübeck.

Many other concentration camp prisoners from the satellite camps of Neuengamme – prisoners of war and forced labourers – were liberated after 3 May and, often seriously ill and traumatized from their imprisonment, they had to create a new life for themselves under difficult conditions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have gathered today to commemorate the 78th anniversary of the liberation of Neuengamme together with survivors and the descendants of former prisoners.

I want to extend a special welcome to those of you who have travelled here today, sometimes from a great distance:

- Ms Livia Fränkel [Sweden],
- Ms Dita Kraus [Israel],
- Ms Elisabeth Masur-Kischinowski [Sweden],
- Mr Natan Grossmann [Germany],
- Ms Barbara Piotrowska [Poland], who will speak to us soon.

As children and adolescents, you experienced tremendous suffering in the Neuengamme concentration camp, and many of you lost your immediate family members.

Ladies and gentlemen,

After the end of the war, hardly anyone had the courage to confront the crimes of the National Socialists.

A prison was built in the grounds of the former concentration camp. It was not closed until 2006.

For many decades, former prisoners and the Amicale Internationale de Neuengamme fought for a worthy site of remembrance to be created here.

Today the former Neuengamme concentration camp is a place of commemoration, learning and encounters, and many young people visit it.

The Foundation of Hamburg Memorials and Learning Centres is dedicated to continuing historical research, conducting interviews with witnesses, and archiving the accounts of former concentration camp prisoners and forced labourers.

The Hamburg Memorials are thus making an important contribution to keeping the memory of the victims of National Socialism alive – as a way of honouring the victims, and as a warning for future generations.

Democracy cannot be protected by the constitution, security agencies or courts alone.

We ourselves have to defend it every day – by taking consistent action against antisemitism, populism and discrimination, and taking a clear stand for humanity, tolerance, and freedom.

Thank you very much!

Translation / Übersetzung: Jessica Spengler

Barbara Piotrowska

I wrote down these memories of the Second World War a few days after the anniversary of Russia's armed attack on Ukraine (24.02.2022). The nightmarish experience of the Second World War has become a reality again. People are dying and fleeing, cities and villages have been destroyed. The civilian population is suffering. Once again, a ruthless aggressor is on the attack.

Today we are united in the need to commemorate all those who suffered and died in the Neuengamme concentration camp. We want to preserve the memory of the tragic fate of the people in the concentration camps as a warning against hate, contempt and the thirst for power, which leads to wars and the inhumane treatment of defenceless victims.

My memories – those of a child – consist mainly of images of events, situations and the explanations from my parents.

I was born on 30 November 1935 in Lemberg (now Lviv in Ukraine). My father, Antoni Stachowicz, an engineer, was a senior assistant at the Lemberg Polytechnic University and worked for Polish radio. My mother, Marta Stachowicz, was an accountant.

In April 1939, my father was transferred to Warsaw with the family for his work.

The Second World War started for Poland in September 1939. I was not yet four years old at the time. On 1 September, Nazi troops invaded Poland from the west. Like thousands of Polish residents, our family fled from the Germans and went east – to Lemberg. But the Soviet attack on 17 September 1939 stopped us – we returned to Warsaw. Our country was divided into two occupation zones. Normal life and my normal childhood were over.

Secondary schools, universities and cultural centres were closed. People were not allowed to study the Polish language or history. The civilian population was especially viciously persecuted in occupied Poland, the intelligentsia and scientific elites were liquidated, and the Jewish population was persecuted. The attackers shot and hanged civilians in street executions, they deported them to labour and concentration camps. They subjected Polish children to Germanization.

From the Polish territories occupied by the Red Army, masses of people were transported deep into the Soviet Union, and to forced labour camps known as gulags. In 1940, the Soviets shot more than 20,000 interned Polish officers, high-ranking government officials and members of

the intelligentsia. These events are known as the massacre of Katyn. The aggressors wanted to turn the conquered Polish population into nothing other than an passive, unskilled labour force. As a little girl, I waited anxiously with my mother every day to see whether Father had returned home from work. Father, who was supposed to have opened and run a radio station near Warsaw after being transferred from Lemberg, could not reveal either his job or his educational background. He worked as a technician at the municipal gasworks.

When I went to kindergarten and then the first year of primary school in 1942, my parents arranged with some acquaintances that a group of children (five or six) would be taken to school and picked up again by just one parent – so the adults would not be exposed to the street raids organised by the Germans.

In school, we did not write in notebooks, we used a stylus on slate tablets so everything could be quickly erased from the tablet if there was an inspection by the Germans. We children knew that we had to say we were only playing and drawing.

I still see, hear and remember the air-raid alarms, blazing fires and burning houses, having to hide and live in cellars.

Under these conditions of dreadful terror, a resistance movement formed which carried out activities such as publishing underground newspapers; holding secret classes, lectures and cultural meetings; founding secret radio stations; and undertaking acts of sabotage and armed attacks. In Poland, the largest resistance organisation was the Home Army – the Armia Krajowa or AK. All of the resistance movement's activities were punished by the occupiers with massive reprisals, even against the civilian population.

In April 1943, the uprising broke out in the Warsaw ghetto – a dramatic, honourable uprising by the Jewish population against extermination. The uprising was brutally quashed, and thousands of Jews were murdered or sent extermination and labour camps.

The Warsaw Uprising began on 1 August 1944. Unfortunately, the Red Army on the other side of the Vistula did not support the insurgents. The bombing, heavy artillery and direct, unequal fighting against the occupiers lasted for 63 days. I remember living in cellars during this time. There was no food or water. I remember that the children helped their mothers prepare bandages for the medics. Even today I can hear the sound of the shells from the railway guns. And again the children were afraid: What will happen? Will we survive? As long as we can stay with Mama and Papa!

During the uprising, thousands of insurgents and civilians died or were cruelly murdered.

Around 600,000 Warsaw residents passed through the transit camp known as Dulag 121 in Pruszków near Warsaw, where the Germans carried out selections – for forced labour in the Third Reich, for imprisonment in camps, for expulsion.

After the population was driven out of Warsaw and their possessions were looted, buildings were set on fire and blown up.

I remember how we were thrown out of the house. It was 29 September 1944 – the last days of the uprising. We were forced to go to Pruszków and imprisoned in the Dulag 121 camp. I still have the image of the streets in my mind – the ruins of the houses, the bodies of people and animals, Nazis with guns. The living conditions in this camp were terrible, and families constantly worried about being separated.

At the start of October 1944, after the selection in the transit camp, I was deported to Germany with my parents on a large family transport. We were crammed together – around 80 people in a cattle wagon, with nowhere to sit, with a hole in the floor as a toilet and a small barred window below the roof of the wagon. The men and boys over the age of sixteen from this transport were taken to the Hamburg-Neuengamme concentration camp, including my father. It was said that they were going to the baths, but they never returned. That was the last time I saw my father. He died there after just two months in the camp, on 8 December 1944, at the age of 44.

During the long pause in the train journey and my father's separation from us, I could hear cheerful music coming from the camp, and through the window in the wagon I could see men rolling large concrete wheels. This is the image of this place that has stayed with me to this day.

I have a letter that my father wrote to the family on 26 November 1944. He was worried about me and my mother, and he mentioned his hut number, 4, and his camp number, 54925.

Women and children from this transport were taken to the Ravensbrück concentration camp. I remember the horror. It was dark, and after the doors of the wagon were opened, we were ordered to jump out. Headlights shone in our eyes, and there was a row of SS men with barking dogs, and female guards with whips. Some people wound up with broken arms and legs. We were forced into a huge tent. The conditions were dreadful: bits of straw, torn dirty blankets, lice, cold, terrible sanitary conditions.

My mother found a place at the side of the tent, near the entrance. Outside the tent was a large pail – to be used as a toilet. Everyone was afraid that mothers and children would be separated, and they were afraid of the SS men and female guards who hit the prisoners. Everyone was hungry. I remember that when our mothers left the tent to find food or go to work, for example,

we children would sit by the tent openings and wait for our mothers to return. They were terrible hours.

After weeks of living in the tent, women with children were taken to various work details that were subordinate to the Ravensbrück concentration camp – in order to work.

I was taken with my mother and a large group of women with children to a farm in the village of Kleptow to work. The children stayed in closed rooms there, and the mothers went to work. The owner of the estate, a farmer, abused the women from Warsaw who were not used to working in the countryside. He hit the women who kneeled or bent over while working and forced them to do everything while standing on straight legs. I remember that my mother was once brought back to our room unconscious – beaten. My shock and fear for my mother's life were indescribable. The children and I tried to save her. After a long time, she came around again.

After the farm work ended, we were taken to the men's work detail of Ravensbrück concentration camp, the Zehdenick brickworks. I remember my fear when the mothers went to work and we children were locked up again. I felt a similar fear at the next place where the mothers had to perform forced labour, the sugar factory. We were crammed into rooms with bunk beds, where the sanitary conditions were terrible and we were tormented by the lice that were everywhere.

In March 1945, we were taken to the region around the city of Jena. The end of the war was coming, everyone knew it.

To erase the traces of their crimes – concentration camps, forced labour sites – the Nazis forced the prisoners on death marches. Anyone who couldn't walk was shot. What did the shooters think and feel? On the death march, at the age of nine, I experienced moments of horror, situations in which my mother and I were close to death. Two events have become permanent symbols in my life.

The people in the areas we passed through sometimes threw us something to eat. I caught an apple once. I ate it and held the core in my hand. Men approached us, prisoners – skeletons in striped uniforms. One of them lunged at me and grabbed the apple core from me. My dismay, my tears and my mother's voice: 'Basia, just think of how terribly hungry and determined this man must have been – don't be afraid'. Ever since then, the apple has become a kind of symbol in my family.

The second memorable event on the death march: My legs are so done in that I can't walk. What fate do you face then? Death. In the morning, my mother sneaks out of the sleeping quarters and

acquires a deep pram, and this is how she transports me, a nine-year-old girl – pulling, pushing me in this pram. My mother, who is weak and hungry herself, finds enough mental and physical strength to arrange for help to save her child, for us. This is an example of my mother's heroism. The death march led us near Weimar. A large group of people was housed in barns on a farm. A farmer guarded us with a gun. It was April 1945. We could already hear the sound of fighting from the west. The adults worked on the farm. We were given wretched food, but I remember the soup that was cooked on the stove: potatoes and cabbage soaked in milk. To this day I think it was the best soup of my life. Where did the milk come from? The mothers were given milk ration cards, and they used them to acquire milk somewhere nearby.

One time, we children ran ahead of the mothers returning with the milk, and there were young boys from the Hitler Youth standing on both sides of the road with guns pointed at us and our mothers. Shock and dismay – how can this be? We already hear the sound of fighting from the war that the Germans have lost, freedom is within reach, and they want to shoot? The mothers shouted at these boys: 'What are you doing? You have mothers and sisters at home, and you want to shoot at us – defenceless, innocent people? The war is ending, the front is moving closer – you're going to die, too!' The young people gave up. They refrained from shooting at us. We were liberated by the American army near Weimar.

American soldiers driving by in big cars threw food to us. I remember tinned food, white bread and thick grey chocolate. We were all hungry, but we were warned not to eat too much or too fast. Nonetheless, there were many deaths and gastro-intestinal illnesses.

We survived thanks to the strong will of my mother, who did not succumb to despair, who fought against adversities, hoped for freedom and trusted in God's protection.

What I experienced in occupied Warsaw, in the Ravensbrück camp and then in other places in Germany as well as on the death march shaped my entire life, my attitude towards people and the world.

After the end of the war, I stayed in Germany with my mother until mid-1946, in facilities that had been set up by the Americans to care for the liberated victims. We spent a long time in camps in Ludwigsburg and Stuttgart that had been established for Poles. In Stuttgart, I attended the fourth year of primary school from January to May 1946, and my mother worked in administration and the cultural sector. In July 1946 we returned to Poland after we had received official notice of Father's death.

Returning to our home confronted us with a terrible reality – Warsaw and the entire country lay in ruins. Millions of Poles had to start a new life under the system imposed by the Soviets. Houses and places of work had been destroyed, possessions lost, family members had been murdered or died. We found ourselves in very difficult circumstances again: without Father, without a home, without any belongings. It took many years before we had reached a certain minimum standard of living. I acutely felt the absence of my father and my great longing for him throughout my youth.

After we returned to Poland, we first lived with relatives outside of Warsaw, and then from October 1946 with acquaintances in Warsaw. In July 1947, my mother was allocated a room in an apartment where there were already two families living, and it was not until 1966 that my mother and I, together with my husband and our son, moved into our own apartment for the first time. This gives you an impression of the post-war situation in Warsaw.

In October 1946, my mother began working in the accounting department of the Warsaw Municipal Gasworks as the widow of an employee from the time of occupation, while I went back to primary school. I completed secondary school in 1953 and earned a master's degree in precision engineering at the Warsaw Polytechnic in 1959. I worked in the Central Office for Weights and Measures for 40 years.

I combined intensive professional work with family life. My husband and I, along with our young children, always lived with my mother. In the last years of her life, I cared for her when she became gravely ill. We were by her side until the end of her life in December 1971.

The events of the war are 'with me' all the time. It was a tremendous experience for me and my family when we received my father's signet ring, wedding ring and pocket watch from Bad Arolsen – 57 years after my father's death.

My mother did not live to see this unexpected event. I remember my mother with tenderness and gratitude, as a mentally strong woman, but one who was very sad after the war. She lost her husband and her worldly possessions, but with strength of will she created a new home for us. She never wanted to think about the war, however, or to join organisations for former prisoners or take part in their activities.

It was only quite late – in the year 2000 – that I became active in the association of former prisoners of the Neuengamme concentration camp, as well as in the work of the association of former prisoners of Ravensbrück, and I am a member of the Ravensbrück International Committee.

I contacted and kept in touch with several people from 'our' transport. I am still in contact with Ewa Żelechowska-Stolzman, who now lives in Krakow. Our fathers were taken to the Neuengamme concentration camp together and died within a month of each other – my father on 8 December 1944, and Ewa's father (no. 54946) on 8 January 1945. We were together with our mothers in a tent in the Ravensbrück concentration camp and then at the brickworks.

The opportunity to lay flowers at the Ravensbrück and Neuengamme memorials and to commemorate all those who died there is a special experience for us.

My experiences of the war and the odysseys after it are being shared today – in Europe of the 21st century – by hundreds of thousands of people from Ukraine. Apparently the memory of the Second World War was not enough to restrain Russia's military violence and aggression. On Thursday, 24 February 2022, the Europe that we created together in the decades after the war came to an end. Once again, millions of people who are mourning the loss of loved ones have to start their lives over and rebuild their homes and their country. But when?

What we need is the solidarity of all states in the effort to end the fighting and liberate Ukraine. I appeal to the politicians to end the violence and crimes being committed by the aggressor Russia.

Thank you for your attention!

Translation / Übersetzung: Jessica Spengler

Balbina Rebollar

Dr. Peter Tschentscher, Erster Bürgermeister der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg,

Prof. Dr. Oliver von Wrochem, Vorstand der Stiftung Hamburger Gedenkstätten und Lernorte,

Frau Claudia Roth, Staatsministerin für Kultur und Medien,

Sehr geehrte Deportierte und Überlebende,

Liebe Martine Letterie, Präsidentin der Amicale Internationale, Freundinnen und Freunde, Mitglieder der Amicale Internationale,

Verbandsvertreterinnen und -Vertreter, meine Damen und Herren,

es ist mir eine große Ehre, im Rahmen dieser jährlichen Gedenkfeier zum 78. Jahrestag der Befreiung des KZ-Neuengamme zu Ihnen sprechen zu dürfen.

Als Präsidentin der Amical de Neuengamme von Spanien möchte ich zuallererst derjenigen gedenken, die hier gestorben sind, und derer, die überlebt haben, die gelitten haben, die ohne

Freiheit gelebt haben, die zur Zwangsarbeit gezwungen wurden, die geschlagen, misshandelt, gefoltert wurden und unter Hunger und Not gelitten haben..., ihrer und ihrer Familien.

Ich bin die Tochter eines Deportierten. Mein Vater, Evaristo Rebolgar, gebürtig aus Asturien (Spanien), arbeitete mit seinem Vater als Fischer. Die ganze Familie widersetzte sich aufgrund ihrer republikanischen und demokratischen Ideologie dem Staatsstreich, der von faschistischen Militärangehörigen gegen diesen Versuch der Demokratie in Spanien durchgeführt wurde. Er meldete sich als Freiwilliger und setzte nach dem Fall der Nordfront seinen Kampf in Katalonien fort, wo er verwundet wurde. Am Ende des Krieges ging er nach Frankreich ins Exil und wurde in Argelès-sur-Mer interniert.

In Spanien wurden Vergeltungsmaßnahmen gegen seine Familie verübt. Sein Vater wurde erschossen und seine Schwester festgenommen. Da er nicht nach Spanien zurückkehren konnte, schloss er sich einer CTE an (Compagnies de travailleurs étrangers). 1940 war er an der Maginot-Linie und floh vor der deutschen Invasion nach Süden. Einige Zeit später wurde er festgenommen und im Gefängnis von Clairvaux und anschließend in den Lagern Rouille, Voves und Compiègne-Royallieu eingesperrt. Am 21. Mai wurde er nach Neuengamme deportiert, wo er die Nummer 32042 erhielt.

Er war im Kommando Helmstedt-Beendorf. Am Ende wurde er nach Wöbbelin verlegt, wo er von der US-Armee befreit wurde. Danach ging er nach Frankreich ins Exil und kehrte 1949 nach Spanien zurück, wo er heiratete und zwei Kinder bekam, uns, die wir heute noch leben.

Dieser Lebensweg, den ich gerade beschrieben habe, gilt für die überwiegende Mehrheit der Spanier. Die Reise ins Innere des Nationalsozialismus begann nicht mit dem Einmarsch der Nazis in Frankreich. Diese Menschen kamen bereits aus einem mehr als zwei Jahren andauernden Krieg gegen Francos faschistische Regierung, die durch Nazideutschland und die italienischen Faschisten unterstützt wurde.

Die wichtigste Gruppe der spanischen Deportierten – mehr als 70 % – war die der republikanischen Kämpfer, die sich in den Kompanien der französischen Armee einschrieben, welche 1940 nach der Invasion in Frankreich zusammenbrach. Es war das zweite Mal, dass sie gegen die faschistische Barbarei kämpften. Als Franzosen gefangen genommen, endeten sie in den Jahren 1940/1941 als Staatenlose im KZ Mauthausen.

Eine weitere Gruppe waren die Republikaner, die sich an der französischen Résistance, am Maquis, an den Unterstützungsnetzwerken beteiligten..., und die schließlich in verschiedene

Konzentrationslager des Reichs deportiert wurden. Sie wurden ab 1942 zu diesen makabren Zielen gebracht. Auch nach Neuengamme, wo es schätzungsweise 750 Spanier gab.

Die Zeugnisse der Spanier, die in diesem Lager waren, sind rar. Erlauben Sie mir, einige Worte mit Ihnen zu teilen, die Francisco Castillo seinen Kindern diktiert hat:

„Wir kamen Ende Mai im Lager an. Danach brachten sie uns zu einem abgelegenen Kommando. Der Sommer und der Herbst waren hart, aber der Winter war furchtbar anstrengend. In diesem Jahr war es schrecklich kalt in Deutschland, bis zu minus 20 Grad. Wir mussten um 5 Uhr morgens aufstehen. Sobald wir aufstanden, mussten wir uns aufstellen. Angezogen mit gestreifter Kleidung und in Holzschuhen mussten wir warten, bis sie uns gezählt und noch mal gezählt hatten. Jeden Morgen sahen wir mindestens sieben oder acht tote Männer auf dem Boden liegen, die vor Kälte, Hunger und Erschöpfung gestorben waren.

Dann mussten wir zwei, drei Kilometer bis zur Fabrik gehen. Die fast sterbenden, skelettartigen Männer schienen sich wie Maschinen zu bewegen. Ihnen gegenüber stand die raffinierte Organisation der SS und ihre Grausamkeit. Ihr Ziel war es, uns zu eliminieren, uns zu demütigen, unsere Moral zu brechen.

In dieser Situation des menschlichen Untergangs gab es einen großen Geist der Solidarität und sogar eine heimliche politische Organisation. Wenn einer von uns misshandelt wurde oder auf der Krankenstation lag – wo die Männer fast verhungerten – gab jeder etwas von seiner Suppe dazu und wir versuchten, sie zu den Schwächsten unter uns zu bringen.

Zweimal haben sie mich zu 25 Stockschlägen verurteilt. Sie haben mich bis zur Erschöpfung verprügelt. Beim zweiten Mal brachten sie mich in die Krankenstation. Dort lag ich, als ich evakuiert wurde. Ich floh und schloss mich einer Gruppe von Lagerhäftlingen an. Dann kümmerte sich die sowjetische Armee um uns.“

Aber es gab mehr Häftlinge, an die wir erinnern wollen: die Mitglieder der Internationalen Brigaden, die an der Seite unseres Volkes gekämpft haben und die Spanien immer voller Emotion in ihren Herzen getragen haben. Einige von ihnen haben unsere Nationalität seit Beginn des Bürgerkriegs erhalten. Andere bekamen sie leider erst viele Jahre später. Sie wurde ihnen von der spanischen Regierung im Rahmen des ersten Gesetzes der historischen Erinnerung verliehen. Wir gedenken ihrer!

Und wir vergessen auch nicht die Nachkommen der Tausenden Juden, die infolge von antisemitischen Gesetzen aus Spanien vertrieben und über ganz Europa verstreut wurden. Die „Sephardim“, die schließlich deportiert wurden und so viele Spanier in den Lagern der Nationalsozialisten trafen. Es gibt viele Zeugnisse von unseren Landsleuten, die gerührt waren, als sie in den Lagern Juden begegneten, die unsere Sprache sprachen. Sie haben Sepharad, ihr schmerzlich vermisstes Spanien, nie vergessen! Wir haben die Pflicht, alle jüdischen Opfer des Holocaust, viele von ihnen auch unsere Schwestern und Brüder, hier zu erwähnen. Sie sprachen wie Spanier und fühlten sich wie Spanier. Heute können ihre Nachkommen – als Wiedergutmachung – die spanische Staatsangehörigkeit erwerben. Wir halten sie in Erinnerung! Als die Lager befreit wurden, war diese Befreiung für die Spanier noch nicht vollständig, da sie – wie bereits erwähnt – staatenlos waren. Wir dürfen nicht vergessen, dass der Siegeszug der Alliierten dem Faschismus in Deutschland, Italien und in den besetzten Ländern ein Ende setzte, während in Spanien der Diktator bis 1975 weiterregierte.

Viele kehrten erst viel später zurück und ein Mantel des Schweigens bedeckte jeden Hauch von Freiheit in Spanien. Und so mussten wir während der ganzen Diktaturzeit überleben. Wie der galicische Dichter Ferreira sagte, war es „eine lange Nacht aus Stein“.

Im franquistischen Spanien interessierte die Frage der Deportierten niemanden, und als sich die Demokratie ihren Weg allmählich bahnte, kam damit erst mal auch keine Erinnerungspolitik.

Und nach all diesen Lehren, nach so viel Barbarei und so viel Krieg müssen wir heute zusehen, wie faschistische Bewegungen in Europa, sogar in unserem Spanien, wiederbelebt werden. Wir sehen die Stärke dieser Welle, die von einem Teil der Gesellschaft angenommen wird.

Die uns bisher fremd klingenden Warnungen in den Erzählungen der spanischen Deportierten im französischen Exil, die in den 60er und 70er Jahren des letzten Jahrhunderts die Gefahr des Faschismus in Europa beschworen, bewahrheiten sich nun.

Wir können nicht aufhören. Die Erinnerungspolitik wird immer notwendiger, unsere Waffe ist der Kampf gegen das Vergessen. Ein gutes Beispiel ist diese Gedenkstätte, die von der Stadt Hamburg errichtet worden ist. Wir drücken hiermit unsere Dankbarkeit darüber aus.

Heute erleben wir als Folge der russischen Invasion in der Ukraine eine Situation, zu der wir uns auch äußern müssen. Ich schließe mich dem an, was der Präsident der französischen Amicale de Neuengamme letztes Jahr in diesem Forum angemerkt hat. Wir glauben, dass Europa bedroht ist und dass es nicht akzeptiert werden kann, dass eine freie Nation wie die Ukraine von Russland

besetzt wird. Das Risiko ist offensichtlich, und wir müssen im Rahmen unserer Gemeinschaftsinstitutionen vereint sein.

Die spanische Amical de Neuengamme wird morgen hier im Gedenkhain eine Mauer einweihen, die den spanischen Widerstandskämpfern und den Interbrigadisten gewidmet ist, die als unsere Schwestern und Brüder im ersten Abwehrversuch gegen den Faschismus gekämpft haben.

Zum Schluss möchte ich die Erinnerung an einen Deportierten auf diese Tribüne holen, dessen Geschichte für uns alle die historische Synthese unseres Leidens darstellt: Miguel Karner. Er war ein Deutscher, der vor dem Nationalsozialismus floh und in Spanien arbeitete, Spanier wurde und als Republikaner im Krieg mitwirkte und sich den Internationalen Brigaden anschloss. Nach dem Fall Kataloniens ging er nach Frankreich ins Exil.

Er kämpfte zusammen mit einer Gruppe Spanier in der Résistance gegen die Nazis. Von der Gestapo verhaftet, wurde er nach Neuengamme deportiert. Als er freigelassen wurde, kehrte er nach Frankreich, nach Carcassonne, zurück und wurde Mitglied der französischen Amicale de Neuengamme und des Verbandes der spanischen Deportierten.

Nachstehend möchte ich ein paar Worte von ihm aus dem Jahr 1969 zitieren, die heute noch und für immer gelten:

„Wir Überlebenden haben geschrien und geschworen: ‚NIE MEHR‘. Bleiben wir nicht beim Hass, aber vergessen wir nicht... Die Welt und besonders die Jugend müssen informiert, alarmiert werden. Der Faschismus ist nicht ausgerottet. Der Frieden ist noch nicht gewonnen, es gibt immer Kriege. Die Taube fliegt gut mit ihrem Olivenzweig in alle Ecken der Welt, aber siehe da, unter ihren Flügeln verbirgt sich oft die verdammte Munition.

Dieser Aufruf [zum Frieden] ist immer noch gültig. Es sollte nicht nur von uns gelesen werden, sondern von allen Menschen, von der ganzen Jugend. Er sollte in alle Sprachen übersetzt werden und sein Klang sollte in allen Ecken der Welt widerhallen.

Wir alle wünschen uns Frieden in der Gesellschaft, unter den Menschen, wünschen uns Arbeit, Brot und Wohlstand. Damit es eines Tages, bald, so sein kann, müssen wir VEREINT bleiben. Lasst uns alle noch stärker und freundschaftlicher vereint sein, so werden wir Gleichberechtigung für alle Deportierten und für die Familien erreichen.

Ehre denen, die den Frieden verteidigt haben und weiterhin verteidigen.“

Vielen Dank!

Übersetzung: Marta Díaz Piñeroba

Claudia Roth

Dear Livia Fränkel,

dear Natan Grossmann,

dear Dita Kraus,

dear Elisabeth Masur-Kischinowski,

dear Barbara Piotrowska,

I am happy and grateful to be with you here today. You have come to Neuengamme from Warsaw, Prague, Stockholm and Munich, as survivors, as witnesses. A few of you have returned here often, with your relatives, with your children and grandchildren. It has never been an easy journey with a light burden. For the survivors, remembering also means keeping a wound open. I thank you all very much for taking this upon yourselves. I thank you for coming here and for your commitment over the past decades.

Over the course of 78 years, a space to remember has been created here, a place of connection with those who were deported here, robbed of their freedom, tormented and killed and could never leave this place again. But a connection has also formed between you, the survivors and your family members. The grounds of the Memorial are now dedicated to commemorating this connection between the generations.

Tomorrow, dear Ms Rebollar, you and other relatives of Spanish former prisoners, members of the Internationale Brigades, 'Red Spaniards' and other opponents of the Franco regime will dedicate a monument to your family members here. Thank you for your commitment, and thank you for coming.

Many routes lead to this place, from far-off Spain, Ukraine and Russia, from France and Belgium, from Italy and Greece, the Netherlands and Denmark.

These were routes taken by over 80,000 men and more than 13,000 women who were registered with a prisoner number in the Neuengamme concentration camp. Another 5,900 prisoners were registered separately, or not at all. At least 42,900 people were murdered in Neuengamme.

The fact that the routes they were forced to travel now connect us, reconnect us – as Europeans – was only possible at the price of remembrance.

Without you, the witnesses, this would not have been possible. It is your achievement. And it is our responsibility to share what we have learned.

The way that this can succeed over the course of generations, even without the direct involvement of eyewitnesses, was described by the American historian Omer Bartov in a wonderful book about his family's hometown in Eastern Galicia. He was late in embarking on his search. All of the people who could have remembered further back than his mother were dead. Very few of the family photographs he had were labelled. And yet he managed to learn a great deal about the history of the city that his mother had left decades before. He was able to track down survivors, talk to their descendants, seek out eyewitnesses.

And ultimately, he learned something else from the history of this city: That we are all (and I quote):

'merely one link in that fragile yet astonishingly resilient chain of generations, of fate and struggle, of which history's relentless unfolding of events is made. Who we are, what we remember, how we raise our children, what we say and believe in and cherish and despise – these are the combined consequence of haphazard chance and human action, taken for reasons good and bad, deliberate and thoughtless, by us and by our ancestors.'

History in this sense is always also family history, Bartov says, the distant echo of a time that is lost but never entirely forgotten.

Everything that the historian Omar Bartov describes here is something I encountered myself in the multimedia project for the exhibition entitled #WhatDoYouWantToDo, in the accounts of people young and old who are tracing the stories of their families. The curiosity, reluctance, and even recoiling from experiences one would have preferred not to have – I was able to see and hear it all.

The project ended last year, but the exhibition is still available online and offers video clips and teaching materials to download. I not only recommend it because it was sponsored with funds from the 'Youth Remembers' programme of the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media. I recommend it because it is an opportunity to see younger women

and men in particular think about their own history in a series of pieces about various historical questions.

I especially remember a sentence spoken by a young woman who tried to trace her grandfather's journey through the Soviet Union as a Wehrmacht soldier. It is a kind of summary:

She said that what she found particularly important about democracy is that it enables us to create a society in which everyone has a place, and in which everyone is accepted and taken as they are.

I think this sentence is not just a precise description of democracy, it is also an expression of what the work of remembering can achieve in the best case: enlightenment and civic education. We have a duty to continue this mission.

Translation / Übersetzung: Jessica Spengler