

Speech by Foreign Minister Heiko Maas at the opening of the exhibition “Protecting memory – preserving and raising awareness of Holocaust mass graves in Ukraine”

Ivanopil is a typical Ukrainian town. A picture-perfect rural idyll. Garish houses, vegetable gardens, a small lake – nestled among green fields and hills.

If you take a look at photos, you can still well imagine today what Ivanopil must have looked like in the summer of 1941. Seventy-eight years ago, when terror descended on the village with its German occupiers.

Ivanopil is typical of Ukraine also in this respect. In May 1942, German soldiers murdered more than 800 children, women and men there. They did this for one reason only: because they were Jews.

Only a few days later, some 40 to 80 Roma were murdered.

As a young boy, Deonszy Sovinski witnessed this cruel massacre. Although it was extremely dangerous to go out on the street, he and other boys climbed the acacia trees of a tree nursery out of curiosity. From there, he could see exactly what was happening on the lakeshore:

How people were crying and begging to be spared.

How shots were fired and the dying fell to the ground.

“Two days after the massacre, the water was still red from all the blood,” he remembers to this day.

Ivanopil’s history – that is the story of over 2000 mass executions in Ukraine alone. The Wehrmacht, the SS, German police units and their accomplices murdered people on village squares, in woods, in ditches and trenches:

- Over one million Jews,
- at least 12,000 Roma,
- countless Soviet prisoners of war,
- and people with mental or physical disabilities.

A map displayed over there documents this “Holocaust by bullets”. Each place where more than 500 Jews were executed is marked with a small black dot. The map of Ukraine is littered with black dots.

Despite the unfathomable dimension of these crimes, we believe that this aspect of the Holocaust still receives far too little attention. Buildings have been constructed on a number

of mass graves while others have been turned over to fields. Many sites are unknown, nameless and overgrown.

This state of affairs finally changed this summer in Ivanopil and 14 other towns. Since 18 June, there has been a memorial site commemorating the victims of the mass executions.

We have the project entitled “Protecting Memory” to thank for this. Since the end of 2015, the foundation Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe has been working to identify these mass graves and transform them into dignified memorials and information sites.

I would therefore like to thank you and your staff today, Mr Neumärker. The fact that we have completed 15 memorial and information sites in the past three years would simply not have been possible were it not for your great dedication.

The foundation is thus continuing the pioneering work that you, Ms Berger, did from 2010 to 2015. Thank you very much for this, too!

I would also like to include in these thanks all the other women and men who did their part to ensure the dignified remembrance of these mass executions. I would like to thank you, Ms Beck, for initiating memorial projects with the Zentrum Liberale Moderne in Odessa, among other places.

And, of course, I would like to thank our partners from the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies and those who exercise responsibility in the region, at the memorial sites. This wouldn't have been possible without you.

At the inauguration of the memorial plaque in Ivanopil, Leonid Kachanivskyi gave expression to what dignified commemoration means for the survivors and their relatives.

His mother Rahil was the only member of her family to survive the mass execution there. After the war, she tended the grave and visited it every year on the anniversary of the massacre. After his mother's death, Leonid visited the grave alone in recent years, tended to it and remembered the victims.

He came back once again this year. But the grave had already been looked after. And a group of pupils from the local school was there, commemorating the dead.

“I felt that I was no longer alone,” was how Leonid summed up his feelings at this moment.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The feeling of not being alone also arises as a result of remembering together.

And not being alone is important. It is important at a time

- when even elected representatives of the people openly attack our culture of remembrance and want to make us forget the unforgettable;
- when anti-Semitic crimes are on the increase on Germany's streets – we only need to think of the recent attacks on rabbis in Munich and here in Berlin;
- when hatred, lies and hate speech against Jews and other minorities take on ever more frightening forms on the internet, thereby paving the way to physical violence.

This is why exhibitions such as this one are so important – precisely because eyewitnesses are unfortunately getting fewer and fewer in number. And I hope that this exhibition will be displayed in as many places as possible around the world and that it will reach as many people as possible.

Another instrument in the fight against hatred and hate speech is quite simply opening your mouth!

After all, anti-Semites and racists are only a minority in our country. But they are vocal. And that also has to do with the fact that the majority is too quiet, too often.

However, the majority can only make itself heard if it is not drowned out by the minority.

It's therefore up to all of us to be vocal and to publicly stand up for respect, tolerance and cohesion.

Ladies and gentlemen, each commemorative plaque like the one in Ivanopil, each exhibition like this one, furthers this cause.

Because they document the truth. And because they remind us that we are not alone!

Thank you very much.