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COMMITTEE ON RELATIONS WITH EUROPEAN NON-MEMBER COUNTRIES

SITUATION OF THE GERMAN ETHNIC MINORITY IN THE SOVIET UNION

Verbatim report of the hearing of experts

Stuttgart 7 December 1982

Mr Calatayud, Chairman of the committee, took the Chair at 10 am and welcomed the following guests:

- Mr Czaja, President of the Expellees' Association (Präsident des Bundes der Vertriebenen)
- Mr Andreas Maser, member of the Federal Executive Committee of the Association of Russian-Germans (Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland)
- Mr Kroneck, representing the Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany
- Mr Blum, representing the German Red Cross

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Mr JÄGER, Rapporteur

The purpose of the hearing is to learn, from people in touch with the situation and members of the German ethnic community in the Soviet Union, what is the position from the standpoint of human rights and how the Soviet authorities handle application for exit visas. The committee decided to hold this hearing in order to compile the factual data needed for a report to be drawn up in committee and eventually debated in the Council of Europe. In obtaining this information, we thought it useful not to rely exclusively on written reports, of which there is certainly a large quantity, but to acquire a direct insight by hearing experts from the federal government, the German Red Cross and the associations concerned with the fate of Germans from the Soviet Union, as well as individuals who have recently been allowed to leave the Soviet Union, are living in the Federal Republic of Germany and can report here on their personal experiences. These eye-witnesses were all born in the Soviet Union, grew up there and only came to the Federal Republic as adults. They bring a rich store of experience with them. On the basis of the statements we are going to hear today, the committee will draft a report and table it in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. I think this brief outline of the purpose of the hearing should be enough to begin with.

Mr CZAJA, President of the Expellees' Association (Bund der Vertrieben)

On behalf of the Expellees' Association, a federation of 22 ethnic unions from East Germany, the Sudetenland and central and south-eastern Europe, who have been expelled from their homes by communist dictatorships, and the 10 regional organisations in which they are combined in each of the Länder of the Federal Republic of Germany, I should like to thank you for taking up the question of the fate of nearly two million Germans of the Soviet Union and for referring explicitly to the rights of minorities anchored in international agreements, to the United Nations Human Rights Covenant and to the solemn political and ethical declarations of Helsinki. As a member of the German Bundestag and of its Foreign Policy Committee, I also express gratitude for the existence and valuable activity of the Committee on Relations with European Non-Member Countries.

You have before you a comprehensive and most instructive introductory memorandum by your distinguished member Mr Claus Jäger. I do not want to repeat too much of its contents when talking about the position of Germans in the Soviet Union and their problems, but simply to raise a few points orally.

These Germans did not turn up in Russia because of the Nazi dictatorship or imperialist expansion plans. German merchants contributed to the evolution of Russian towns. From the 18th century onwards, many farmers and craftsmen emigrated from the small German states to the huge Russian empire at the desire of the Russian rulers, who granted them religious and cultural tolerance and local autonomy. Most of them settled along the middle Volga or on the Black Sea. The German settlements also founded daughter communities. 95% of the Germans lived on the land until 1918.

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At the outbreak of war between the nazi and communist dictatorships in 1941, there were 3,300 closed German settlements. However, the Germans' privileges had been withdrawn in the 19th century, when they were placed on the same footing as citizens of the Russian Empire. In 1924, the Soviet Union created an Autonomous Volga German Republic. Before the second world war, the Germans had no contact with Western Europe and no connection with national socialism or with the dictatorship installed in Germany after 1933. At the outbreak of war, however, they were charged collectively with treason and deported to Siberia in August 1941; the 3,300 closed German settlements thus ceased to exist. A part of the Germans escaped deportation through being caught between the opposing front lines. About 356,000 were resettled by the German occupation forces in Germany or other German-occupied areas outside the Soviet Union; they received German nationality. Towards the end of the war, about 250,000 of these were taken back to the Soviet Union and interned in Siberia, Kazakhstan, Central Asia and the Arctic region, where the Germans deported in 1941 were also living.

Until 1955, most Germans had no identity card and hence no freedom of movement. They had to perform the most arduous work in labour camps, virgin forests, mines etc, and men and women underwent unspeakable sufferings. In 1955-56 they obtained identity cards again and were able to move around to some extent within the districts to which they had been deported. Only following a decree of 1964 by the Supreme Soviet was the collective suspicion which had led to deportation specifically removed and - I quote - officially described as an "expression of the arbitrary behaviour connected with the personality cult of Stalin". Yet, despite repeated petitions, they were not allowed to return to their original homes, nor did they obtain any cultural autonomy, although before the war they had had 11 members in the Soviet of Nationalities and three in the All-Union Soviet and possessed five universities and 400 primary and secondary schools as well as a national theatre, a publishing house, five republic-wide and 20 local newspapers. 1,846,000 persons of German origin were listed in the 1969 census, while experts estimate the actual number at between 2 and 2.4 million. Most of them live in Kazakhstan, some in the Russian Socialist Federative Republic and a smaller number in the Tadzhik and Kirghiz Republics.

After 1967, many tried to reach the Baltic states and the Moldavian region in the hope of improved chances of leaving for the Federal Republic of Germany. After the end of hostilities, moreover, there were in the Soviet Union many German nationals including displaced persons from East Prussia, isolated civilians and numerous prisoners of war. The latter were freed following Konrad Adenauer's representations during his visit to Moscow in 1955. In 1958, after the resumption of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, there were concluded not only a commercial treaty but also an agreement for the repatriation of German nationals; it has not yet been fully implemented.

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The 2 million Germans born and bred in the Soviet Union enjoy no right of self-determination and no cultural or group privileges. Deportation still has the consequence that there are no purely German schools or classes. The children are taught in school to reject the system of the Federal Republic of Germany, to reject all contact with the free part of Germany. However, there is reported to be a German-speaking theatre.

In public and in private they are often exposed to discrimination and described as fascists, although they never belonged to any Nazi organisation. Large-scale religious ceremonies must be expressly authorised. Many people are increasingly subjected to forced assimilation and russification. Despite general provisions relating to ethnic groups, the Germans have no protection for their language and culture.

No information arrives from cultural centres in the Federal Republic of Germany, and Germans are allowed no freedom to disseminate information or opinions; the distribution of news in the German language is prosecuted as prohibited propaganda. The high selling-price of German publications makes it impossible to procure up-to-date cultural and scientific material from Germany. In defiance of the declarations in Basket III of the Helsinki Final Act, no provision is made for the introduction of German regional culture under German-Soviet cultural exchanges.

Access to German consular and diplomatic representatives is made difficult. An exit visa for the purpose of visiting is practically impossible. Article 64 of the Soviet Penal Code imposes extremely heavy penalties for leaving the country and staying abroad without permission.

In contradiction to Article 27 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which the Soviet Union has ratified and whose legal obligations it has accepted, these Germans are denied the right to pursue their own cultural life together with other members of their group, to confess and practise their own religion; there is severe discrimination against them in public and social life. Like many other Soviet citizens, they are deprived of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and the right to practise religion freely.

The impediments to leaving the country hit these Germans particularly hard. According to Article 12 (2) of the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the freedom to travel, to which every citizen is entitled, may be limited only by legislation for the protection of the state. A journey abroad is possible for these Germans only at the invitation of German relatives. Rejected applications to leave probably amount to 200,000. When an application is turned down, there is no judicial check on the administrative decision or the reasons for it, which are not usually given. Those who are allowed to emigrate are not released from Soviet nationality.

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On the basis of earlier negotiations and agreements between the USSR and the Federal Republic of Germany, German immigrants arrived in widely varying numbers each year: 5,539 in 1959, only 200-300 between 1963 and 1965; the figure then rose again, reaching 9,700 in 1976, while in 1979 there were about 7,000. Since then the number of German immigrants from the Soviet Union has dropped sharply. According to the latest official statements by the federal government, there was an average of 580 arrivals per month in 1980, but only 314 in 1981 and 183 in the first 10 months of 1982.

Many Germans have been repeatedly denied permission to leave. They demonstrate singly and in groups in Moscow against the refusal of an exit visa, they send their Russian identity cards and passports back to the government offices. Many demonstrators are beaten and taken to prison. They are punished with long years in labour camps.

The Federal Republic has constantly intervened, with varying success, on behalf of those concerned, who are frequently used as bargaining counters in extorting commercial and political advantages.

The second edition of a collection of documentary material on violations of human rights against Germans in the former German territories east of the Oder and the Neisse and beyond the former frontiers is about to be issued by the Expellees' Association; pages 95 et seq give year-by-year emigration figures with tables.

In the paper "Human rights and self-determination with reference to the situation of Germans residing in the East", by Ermacora, Blumenwitz, Hacker and myself and in another paper on "Human rights for Germans in Eastern Europe", by Simma, Steiner and Kriele of the Cultural Foundation for German Refugees, of which I only possess one copy, you will find more detailed information about legal obligations in relation to human rights and possibilities for their implementation by stages. It should not be overlooked, in this connection, that the Soviet Union needs massive financial and technical assistance from the West for the purpose of assuring the food supply, developing the infrastructure and processing raw materials. So far, there has been too little counterpart in the field of respect for human rights and reduction of the oppression of ethnic groups. Persons of other communities who wish to emigrate from the Soviet Union also meet with similar difficulties, for instance the Jews. In recent months, coincident with the economic and political crises in the Eastern bloc, the emigration of Germans from the Polish-controlled areas and from Rumania has become much more difficult and has fallen off.

We are very grateful to the Soviet human rights activist, Sakharov, for his courageous interventions on behalf of these Germans. The German delegation to the CSCE conferences has repeatedly brought up their problems; likewise the American delegation leader Kampelman.

The motion with a large number of signatories which has been transmitted to us is particularly welcome. We urge them to press for strengthened implementation and observance of international agreements for the protection of national groups against discrimination and for application of the human rights conventions. It will be appreciated if they request the member states of the Council of Europe to do their best

to ensure, at the CSCE follow-up conference in Madrid, the inclusion in the final document of a demand for cessation of the violations of legal obligations under the United Nations Human Rights Covenant, for non-discrimination and freedom of travel for minorities, and that declarations to this effect be clearly set forth in the CSCE Final Act. We also ask that the attention of member states be called to two points. When discussing national reports in the UN Commission on Human Rights, the representatives of Western countries should be in possession of documentary material on the human rights situation and seek to reveal clearly the actual position of minorities in the Soviet Union as well. Furthermore, member states should urge the United Nations to draw up a convention on the rights of national and ethnic groups under alien rule.

It is possible, through the awareness of public opinion and a comprehensive knowledge of the condition of minorities, to improve their lot gradually. However, we absolutely reject the idea of misusing human and minority rights, of exploiting them for other political purposes or of treating them as commercial bargaining counters. We are concerned with the human rights of these Germans, with their cultural rights, their mother tongue, their freedom of worship, non-discrimination and the safeguard of the right to freedom of movement.

The Catholic parishes have virtually no German-speaking priests, or only very aged ones. The Lutheran parishes have only rare contacts with such ministers as may be allowed to enter the country on a pastoral visit. Many free-church communities, eg Mennonites and Baptists, meet in private homes or even in cemeteries.

Mr KRONECK, Federal German Foreign Office

According to the 1979 census, 1,936,000 Germans were living in the Soviet Union, and 57% gave German as their mother tongue. The Germans reside in the RSFSR - in the Ural districts, around Novosibirsk and in the Altai district -, in Uzbekistan, in the Kirghiz Republic, in the Tadzhik Republic, in the Moldavian SSR, in the Baltic Republics and, above all, in Kazakhstan. In numbers, they take 14th place among the nationalities of the Soviet Union.

Habitat and social structure

After the deportation from the autonomous Volga districts in 1941, the Germans in the Soviet Union had no area of the their own; they are now almost all scattered among different parts of the country, mostly on the land, in regions separated by large distances.

Since the end of the 50s, the social structure has been altered by increased immigration into the cities. The census of 1970 showed the proportion of town-dwellers among the Germans to be 45.4%, and it should by now be at least 50%. Integration with the Soviet state and the consequent assimilation are found especially among the urban population. In the towns, Germans work in factories and offices together with Russians and members of other national groups. According to the 1970 census, only 58.3% of the German urban population gave German as their mother tongue, as against 73.3% for country-dwellers. (Corresponding figures from the 1979 census are not yet to hand.)

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Nothing has been published about the present occupational structure. Only 3% of the Germans are believed to have had academic training, and access to universities is said to be difficult for Germans, particularly on account of their desire to emigrate. The Germans in the Soviet Union are highly esteemed as workers, and in some cases they also occupy administrative positions at local level; a Soviet German from the Altai district is even a member of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

It remains to be seen whether the Soviet Constitution will once again allocate autonomous districts to the Germans.

Religious life

The Germans in the Soviet Union belong to various Christian faiths, particularly the Lutheran Church, the Catholic Church and the Evangelical-Baptist Union. Religious instruction is forbidden, and religious upbringing is accordingly left primarily to the parents. Religious literature is either absent or insufficient. If a place of worship is granted to a large registered community, the state normally provides the site free of charge, while the parish must itself erect and maintain the building.

There are only 6 Catholic priests in the whole of Central Asia in the areas with the highest percentage of Soviet Germans, in the Union Republics of Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Tadzhikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; one of them is the Apostolic Protonotarius at Frunze, the only ordained priest from the ranks of the Soviet Germans. In the RSFSR there are only two Catholic churches, in Moscow and Leningrad. In the Caucasus, two priests are working at Tiflis. The situation of the Catholic Church is most favourable in Latvia and Lithuania, which contain the only two Roman Catholic seminaries in the entire Soviet Union, at Riga and Kaunas. A comparatively large number of German-, Polish- and Ukrainian-speaking Catholics - 15,000 - are living in the Moldavian SSR; the cemetery chapel at Kischinev is now their only church.

There are at present more than 300 German Lutheran communities in the Soviet Union, of which about 100 are officially registered parishes. The individual communities contain between 300 and 4,000 parishioners, excluding members of the family. It is estimated that the Evangelical Lutheran Church reaches 100,000 Germans in the Soviet Union. A marked increase in the number of parishes has been noted in the Central Asian Union Republics. They are in the care of pastors without any theological training who often have to manage without spiritual literature such as bibles or hymn-books. The largest, at Karaganda, has 4,000 members, while there are 1,000 Lutherans at Alma-Ata. The Lutheran communities in the Soviet Union are not affiliated to the Lutheran World Federation but are supervised by the Lutheran Church in Latvia, which comprises some 350,000 members with 130 ministers; in Estonia, there are 250,000 members and 90 pastors. Most members of the Lutheran communities wish to leave in peace with the authorities, and the parishes are officially registered.

Unlike the Lutheran communities, almost half the communities of the Gospel Christian and Baptist Union are opposed to official registration. Sizeable registered communities at Alma-Ata - with 1,300 Baptists, 250 of German origin -, Tashkent and Dzhambul. All unregistered Baptist

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congregations come into conflict with the authorities; their services, which are held in private homes, are often prevented or broken up. Members who distribute religious literature are prosecuted and imprisoned; there are also cases of preachers from the ranks of the Soviet Germans being detained.

The churches in the Federal Republic of Germany now have direct contacts with some parishes of Soviet Germans. For instance, in August/September 1980, the Director of the International Lutheran Union in the Federal Republic and the adviser on emigration questions at the Secretariat of the Evangelical Church in Germany were able to visit a number of Lutheran and Baptist communities in the Soviet Union. In September 1981, at the invitation of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Chairman of the External Affairs Office of the Evangelical Church in Germany went to Moscow, Leningrad, Tallinn and Riga. In June 1982 Bishop Lohse, Chairman of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany, was invited to visit the Soviet Union by the Russian Orthodox Church and the Evangelical-Lutheran Churches of Latvia and Estonia.

The German language

There are no German schools for Soviet Germans, in other words the basic subjects in the curriculum are not taught in German. However, it is possible, as an option, to take German as a foreign language; the number of hours allocated to this option varies - maximum 2-4 hours a week. The stage at which German may be taken as an optional subject also varies in different areas: sometimes in the first year, sometimes the second, sometimes the fifth.

There is no German-speaking university in the Soviet Union. Teachers of German, even in the districts where Soviet Germans are settled, provide instruction in it only as a foreign language.

According to persons evacuated to German settlement districts, they cannot obtain newspapers or periodicals from the Federal Republic, only from the GDR.

In Kazakhstan, since the 60s, the German-language publications "Freundschaft" and "Neues Leben" have been appearing respectively three times and once a week; their specific target group is the Soviet German population of that region.

There are no cultural associations for the Soviet Germans, although there are a few writers whose works are published in German.

The Soviet German theatre at Temir-Tau in Kazakhstan was founded at the beginning of the 70s with a company of 32. The actors were trained at the Shchepkin Academy in Moscow. In 1979, the company began touring other districts of Kazakhstan inhabited by persons of German origin.

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The Moscow Embassy's contacts with the German population

Our Embassy in Moscow advises Soviet Germans on their applications to emigrate in writing, by telephone and through personal interviews and supports those applications vis-à-vis the Soviet Government offices.

When visiting the Kazakhstan SSR in 1978, the Ambassador, Mr Wieck, also had the opportunity to meet Germans settled in that region.

Mr JÄGER, Rapporteur

Mr Czaja, you raised a matter on which I should like to have more detailed information, namely the question of nationality. I already have some familiarity with this problem from personal experience. Can you tell us how many Germans who have become citizens of the Federal Republic have been released from Soviet nationality? Do you know whether Germans travelling to the USSR incur any difficulties through not having been released from Soviet citizenship and hence being dual nationals? I also have a question for Mr Kroneck. You mentioned that family reunion has recently been limited to the narrowest family circle. Can you indicate the family relationships in respect of which, according to the practice as known to the Foreign Office, exist visas are granted? Is there, according to your information, a uniform practice, or do the conditions for the grant of exit visas vary according to the office dealing with the application?

Mr KRONECK

The relationships which are regarded as closest, not only in the Soviet Union but also in other countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, are those between parents and children and between spouses. We have at present no data on which to assess the percentages. But I can say that these relationships only account for part of the emigration applicants, namely those who seek to be reunited with their families. In the case of Germans who return from the Soviet Union and have no relations in the Federal Republic, the question is of course superfluous. We have no figures for refusals. That would imply either that we had access to Soviet files, which obviously is not the case, or that every Soviet German who applied to emigrate or rejoin his family notified our Embassy or some other German authority in the event of rejection. Naturally, that is not the case either. We do not know whether the practice with regard to family reunion varies in different regions; perhaps some other gentlemen can tell us more. But I should like to suggest that, with the enormous decline in emigration - we have only received 122 people from various regions in a month this year - it is difficult to ascribe specific practices to individual regions.

Mr JÄGER

May I ask a supplementary question, Mr Chairman?

Mr Kroneck, can you say whether, so far as is known, the relationships giving rise to exit visas have hitherto been limited to that between parents and children or between spouses or whether, for example, it is

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possible for brothers and sisters or grandparents to obtain them? At that point, according to your knowledge, does the possibility of family reunion cease? At what degree of relationship, in general, is permission precluded?

Mr KRONECK

I am afraid that I cannot give a precise answer. The majority of cases, after all, are not cases of family reunion but simple cases of emigration involving whole families, sometimes with 6 or 8 members. I cannot tell you, from our experience or our statistics, the point at which relationship ceases in the view of the Soviet authorities. Perhaps the representative of the German Red Cross can provide further particulars.

Mr CZAJA

Mr Jäger has asked a number of questions. Previously, the family circle was fairly wide. It should be emphasised that people could leave if they had a specific invitation from relations in the Federal Republic of Germany; these included quite distant relatives. But Mr Kroneck has reported that, on the last approach to Moscow, the answer was that permission was given in the case of very close relations. That seems to mean that restrictions are taking that direction. Probably only the people concerned can say anything more precise. The international declarations of the Red Cross, especially at the general meeting in Canada, alluded to a comparatively close family relationship, but the Soviet Union did not formerly take its stand on those declarations. The Red Cross representative will be able to tell us more.

You asked me specifically about nationality, Mr Jäger. You wanted to know how many were released and how many not. I cannot give you a definite answer; I do not know the exact proportion of those who have been released from Soviet nationality and those who have not. It would in any case be difficult to find out, because the matter is subject to data protection. To the best of my knowledge, people who arrive here as immigrants and still possess the nationality of the state in which they were previously residing are specially warned by the German registry offices when applying for a passport of the difficulties they are likely to encounter if they return to their former country without having been released from its nationality. I should mention here that, unlike other East European countries, the Soviet Union does not automatically allow Germans who come as emigrants and not just visitors to relinquish their Soviet nationality. That is quite different from, say, Polish practice: persons who arrive with Polish travel documents are deemed to be released from their nationality. The same applies to Rumania.

I am not referring now to visitors who stay on after their visit: that is a different situation. The Soviet releases nobody from Soviet citizenship without a personal application, which is exceedingly complicated. There are voluminous questionnaires, which many are afraid to complete. They demand details of distant relatives in the Soviet Union

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with whom the applicant is in touch, and he is often afraid that they will get into trouble. So far as I have heard - but perhaps the Germans from Russia will shed more light on the matter - even after the application has been submitted, it takes a long time to obtain a permit.

You asked about negative consequences. I have not come across many cases where Germans who have arrived here from the Soviet Union go back there on a visit, but there are some. I have not so far heard of any difficulties over this, if they came with regular exit documents. A serious difficulty does arise, however, for the internal security of the Federal Republic and for the safety of the persons concerned as a result of dual nationality. You must remember, Mr Jäger, that the East European nationality laws, and especially those of the Soviet Union, demand unconditional obedience to the authorities of the state. A national must comply with all demands made on him by those authorities. This means that there are thousands of people in the Federal Republic of Germany on whom the Soviet authorities make specific demands, which may vary greatly in different phases of the evolution of policy. Please do not forget that many of these people were resettled in Germany during the war and taken back to camps in the Soviet Union afterwards. Many, and even their children, still remember those times. The problem of nationality seems a very serious one to me; but, until now, the Soviet Union has been pursuing a very restrictive policy in releasing people from Soviet nationality, even more so than the other East European states. I have stressed the scope of the nationality laws accordingly. They cannot be compared with our own nationality laws, which do not require obedience in defiance of fundamental and human rights or the performance of acts contrary to the laws of other countries.

The CHAIRMAN

We are told that the Germans who went to Russia in the 18th century at the request of the authorities had a contract guaranteeing them the right to return to Germany if they wished. Has the Federal Republic of Germany tried to revive that clause in its bilateral agreements with Russia?

Secondly, in German legislation, do you automatically grant German nationality to persons of German descent? Can you open consulates in the areas where Germans are established in the USSR? Is it possible to provide German nationals with legal aid in Russia through lawyers, German or even Russian, in support of applications in accordance with Russian law and procedure?

Again, are there any other Germans resident in Russia, for instance former prisoners of war or displaced persons, or are we only concerned with the descendants of the ancient German communities who have been deported? Is it possible in the Soviet Union to move from one place to another, to join up together freely, or are these people forced to stay in the same place forever? Is it possible for the German Embassy and Consulates to maintain cultural centres or circulate newspapers and periodicals designed for persons of German origin? Is there any possibility for welfare work?

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On the religious question, you have mentioned the seminaries of the various faiths: are these seminaries intended exclusively for the German communities, or do they cater for Germans and non-Germans belonging to the same religion? Are there distinctions between registered and unregistered religious communities; in other words, is there discrimination?

Mr CZAJA

Thank you for all your questions. On the first question: the 2 million ethnic Germans who were born in the Soviet Union - as opposed to the dark figure for prisoners of war and displaced civilians who have not yet returned, about whom we know very little in the Federal Republic - have no German nationality while they are living in the Soviet Union. Under German law, they lost their German citizenship long ago on acquiring Soviet nationality. But, if they emigrate and settle permanently in the Federal Republic, they obtain German nationality by virtue of Article 116 of the Basic Law. Thus they are not treated as German nationals either by the Soviet Union or by the Federal Republic, and the possibility of legal aid is therefore naturally limited; Mr Kroneck may have something more to say about this. Of course the Federal Republic endeavours, on the basis of the UN Human Rights Covenants, to put in a word for those concerned and to intervene in individual cases in a suitable manner without infringing upon Soviet sovereignty. There is probably also some legal aid through lawyers in the Soviet Union, and the Foreign Office has a special legal aid section. It is likely that there are some cases of discreet consular and diplomatic intervention on behalf of persons who are punished or sent to labour camps because of their insistent request to emigrate. I have no knowledge of any direct cultural services provided by the Consulates or the Embassy, and they are probably impossible owing to the restrictions on the movement of diplomatic personnel imposed by Soviet regulations. I understand - and I have heard this not only from relatives but also from charitable organisations and ethnic associations - that parcels etc are sometimes sent to these people.

The Embassy has no list of the addresses of prisoners of war or displaced civilians who still possess German nationality; it is not even certain whether there are any such and, and if so, whether they are in camps, although this is asserted sometimes in publications in the Federal Republic. Nothing definite can be said on this point. The greater part, at all events, consists of Soviet citizens of German origin. They were born in the Soviet Union and are descended from immigrants of the 18th and 19th centuries. They reside, of course, in Kazakhstan and other districts; some of them live in groups and have contact among themselves.

You also asked about religious freedom. Mr Kroneck indicated that registered communities have certain possibilities. Apart from these, Gospel Christians, Mennonites and others sometimes meet in cemeteries or other quiet places, or in private homes, for prayer meetings and divine service. The Bible plays a very special part, virtually unknown to the West, in the lives of these people. Especially for elderly persons, the Bible is an inexhaustible book whose religious contents they talk about to their grandchildren. Many religious values are passed down within the family. Mr Kroneck has commented on the various denominations, and I am most grateful for his systematic report.

The situation of the Roman Catholic Church in the Soviet Union is unclear. There are a few priests who care for Ukrainian- and German-speaking Catholics, and there is one German priest. There are also services with sermons in German in a few of the larger towns with registered communities. They are conducted partly by German-speaking Polish priests, partly by Lithuanian priests and partly by priests from other Baltic diocese. Enormous distances have to be covered. Mr Kroneck mentioned that the Evangelical Church in Germany makes great efforts to reach isolated groups by sending Bibles or by pastoral visits. Here again the Baltic priests certainly play a significant part. Moreover, there is a large number of free-church communities served by lay preachers; they include Mennonites, Gospel Christians and Pentecostalists. There is an abundance of humanitarian activity in the religious sphere. Only registered communities are allowed to hold public services. The others have to meet in private houses, cemeteries etc, and often incur the risk of punitive measures. The fate of the German-speaking groups in the matter of religious care is shared by other religious groups. I know the Germans strive to have services with German hymns, or at least sermons in German, but of course that is not possible everywhere. Sometimes they attend Polish services. Perhaps the Russian-Germans can tell us more about this.

Mr KRONECK

I cannot add much to what Mr Czaja has said. With your permission, I should like to refer once more to the question - the legal question - of consular protection. In almost all cases, a would-be emigrant who is still in the Soviet Union has not German nationality. In accordance with Article 116, already quoted, they can apply for it under the simplified procedure as soon as they reach the Federal Republic of Germany. There are only a few exceptions where an ethnic German also has German nationality. They are cases in which people happened to be in Germany during the war and recovered German nationality even though retaining their Soviet citizenship at the same time. Such cases are very, very few. But in these cases, too, a dual national who is in one of the two countries, specifically a person with both Soviet and German nationality, is naturally claimed by the Soviet Union as a full Soviet citizen with all the rights and obligations entailed.

The converse applies also in the Federal Republic of Germany. Municipal law follows international law here, and the dual national cannot be relieved of his status. In terms of consular protection, this means that our Embassy in Moscow or our Consulate in Leningrad (I have noticed, Mr Chairman, that you always speak of consulates in the plural, but we have only one consulate in the Soviet Union) has no possibility of providing consular protection in such cases. There is of course always the possibility, as Mr Czaja mentioned, of trying to achieve something through official channels on humanitarian grounds. Such attempts are made frequently.

The position as regards cultural services is similar. The possibilities for a cultural presence of foreign countries in the Soviet Union are extremely limited; that applies not only to the Federal Republic of Germany, but to other countries as well. Of course, symphony orchestras can be exchanged; then they appear in Moscow or Leningrad. But I do not think that is an answer to your question.

As regards religious care, the situation is as Mr Czaja described it, and registration of a church has some, though not great, advantages. I mentioned that in many cases a site is provided for the building of a church; that is of course not nearly so easy for an unregistered church.

I think that is all I can add on this subject.

The CHAIRMAN

If there are no questions, we will thank Mr Kroneck and Mr Czaja. I now call Mr Blum, representative of the German Red Cross.

Mr BLUM, German Red Cross

The President of the German Red Cross thanks you warmly for the invitation to talk to the Committee on relations with European non-member countries about the situation of the German ethnic community in the Soviet Union, with special reference to family reunion. At the same time he requests your indulgence for his inability to come here in person, owing to other pressing engagements, and has asked me to present the report of the German Red Cross on the subject under discussion.

As the two previous speakers (MM Czaja and Kroneck) have already commented on the political and cultural situation of Germans in the USSR, I will confine myself to discussing:

a. the position of would-be emigrants in the USSR,

b. the procedure required for initiating and carrying through family reunion, and

c. the situation and trend regarding family reunion.

According to the January 1979 census, about 1,936,000 Germans are now living in the Soviet Union, not all of whom, however, are contemplating emigration. Nevertheless, the German Red Cross is following developments in the reunion of families from the USSR very closely.

In order that you may appreciate the anxiety of the German Red Cross, permit me to illustrate the trend by giving you the figures for immigrants from the USSR, namely:

1976	9,704	immigrants
1977	9,274	"
1978	8,455	"
1979	7,226	"
1980	6,954	"
1981	3,773	"
1982, to 30 November	1,959	"

From these statistics you can see that, since 1976, the emigration quota has dropped continuously and, particularly in the past year, very sharply. On the most optimistic forecast, we cannot count on more than 2,100 emigrants in 1982. That would be the worst result for 10 years,

Would-be emigrants in the USSR also view this trend with great concern, for they fear that they will never receive permission to leave; moreover, they are subjected to strong pressures, which take the following forms:

job discrimination;

pressure by the authorities to evacuate their homes or move to other republics;

return of applications to emigrate;

threat of imprisonment;

refusal to issue application forms;

inadequate opening hours at militia offices;

exercise of pressure at works meetings;

derogatory comment on the economic situation in the Federal Republic by the media.

In other words, an increasingly restrictive policy is applied in respect of permits, and increasingly lengthy emigration proceedings are hedged about with many difficulties.

The distressing attendant circumstances are causing unrest among would-be emigrants in the Soviet Union. Sometimes, accordingly, they have formed committees in the hope of overcoming the difficulties more successfully through a joint effort; within these groups, they continue to work desperately for their departure; in view of the difficulties mentioned, they rely greatly on the activities of the German Red Cross.

Soon after the end of the war, at the request of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva, the German Red Cross had already taken up the questions of family reunification and the return of Germans from Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. Immediately after the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany, the federal government invited the German Red Cross officially to take care of the interests of Germans applying to leave Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. The Red Cross is the only institution in the Federal Republic that deals with tasks relating to family reunion and emigration, and each successive federal government so far has desired the German Red Cross to play an active role. For this reason, the German Red Cross has also, especially in connection with family reunion, worked together with its opposite number, the Soviet Red Cross, in preparing emigration dossiers which are subsequently passed on to the authorities.

All Germans and ethnic Germans who arrive from the Soviet Union have been registered with the Red Cross as desirous of emigrating. According to our records:

- 99% of arrivals already have permission to remain in the Federal Republic permanently.

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In other words, only:

1% come on a visit and stay on without permission.

- 91% come in order to join close relatives, ie children joining parents, married couples or brothers and sisters coming together, parents joining children.

Only

9% come to join more distant relatives (eg cousins, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces).

It is noteworthy that only about 4% obtain an emigration permit on their first application.

The complaint often made in the Federal Republic of Germany that immigrants from the Soviet Union are past working age and hence constitute a burden on German pension funds can be demolished by indicating the age structure:

up to 18 years of age: 32%
19-65 " " " : 57%
over 65 " " " : 9%

Immigrants from the Soviet Union come mainly from:

Kazakhstan
The European part of the Soviet Union
The Kirghiz Republic.

In view of the negative trend, the German Red Cross has also brought this situation to the notice of politicians; for instance, it briefed the Federal Minister of the Interior, Mr Genscher, in May last year, before his trip to Moscow, and likewise Federal Chancellor Schmidt in November last year, on the occasion of his visit to the then General Secretary of the CPSU, Mr Brezhnev.

Moreover, the German Red Cross had talks at Bonn in July with the Soviet Red Cross, for the purpose of securing an increase in the emigration quota. The Soviet Red Cross has also helpfully offered to take over "hard core" cases from the German Red Cross and, as in the past, to bring about a satisfactory solution.

The German Red Cross in the Federal Republic does not pursue an emigration policy of its own: it operates, within the framework of the limits set by government policy and the resulting agreements, as the natural intermediary between governments, as defined in the Resolution on Family Reunion of the International Red Cross Conference at Toronto in 1952. The German Red Cross takes the internal political situation of the Federal Republic into account and does not present this subject in a way which the political forces could make use of for their own political ends; it should be remembered that the Bundestag elections are being held in March 1983.

The German Red Cross is exclusively concerned with applications to emigrate. These applications are forwarded to it either by the applicants in the USSR or by their relatives living in the Federal Republic.

At the moment, about 100,000 outstanding requests to emigrate are registered with the German Red Cross. The trend causes us great concern, not only because of the modest emigration quotas but also because at present every individual who arrives from the USSR lodges applications for 4 other people with the Red Cross. Far from mitigating the problem, this aggravates it.

In view of the extremely unsatisfactory development of family reunion, the German Red Cross must make use of every possible means of bringing the quotas up to at least the level of the year 1976.

Our activity includes, in particular, informing the politicians and asking them to seize every available opportunity of urging their Soviet interlocutors to increase the numbers of emigrants under family reunion arrangements. We make this same request today to the members of the Parliamentary Assembly.

Mr MASER, Association of Russian-Germans (Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland)

I have the honour today of representing the Association of Russian-Germans here. I should like first, on behalf of the Federal Chairman, Mr Usselmann, and of the Federal Executive Committee, to thank you warmly for the invitation to this hearing. I also thank you particularly on behalf of those who cannot do so themselves, namely the German community in the Soviet Union.

After the previous speakers have told us so much about the German ethnic minority in the Soviet Union, it is difficult to add anything fresh. I may just mention that about 100,000 Germans emigrated to Russia between 1763 and 1862 at the invitation of Catherine the Great and Alexander I. The Crown allotted them 1.4 million dessiatines of wild, uncultivated steppe land along the Volga and about 647,000 dessiatines in the Black Sea region (1 dessiatine = 2,7 acres). They founded some 300 closed settlements, the so-called mother colonies.

By 1914 the German population had risen to 1.7 million. New settlements (daughter colonies) had been founded: 440 on the Volga, 1,800 in the Black Sea area and about 500 in Siberia. The total number of German villages had reached 3,300 in 1914, and landholdings had been augmented by private purchase, amounting to about 9,5 million hectares (excluding the Baltic districts). That is rather more than the total arable land in the Federal Republic today.

The October Revolution of 1917 brought the Volga Germans autonomous status in the form of an autonomous district (Decree of 19 October 1918). On 20 February 1924, this district was transformed into an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) of the Soviet Germans with self-government,

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its own military force and German as official language. Besides the Volga German ASSR, 17 self-governing German districts were created: 6 in the Russian Federation (RSFSR), 9 in the Ukraine and 2 in the Caucasus (Georgia and Azerbaidjan).

In the German Volga Republic, for example, which contained only one third of the total German population, there were in 1937 171 German schools (out of a total of 257), 11 technical colleges, 3 working men's colleges, 5 universities, 72 club buildings on collective farms, a national theatre and a children's theatre; 21 German newspapers appeared; in the 3 years 1933-35 alone, 555 miscellaneous publications were printed in German with a total output of 2.86 million volumes, including 1.47 million textbooks and other educational works. In short, the Germans were on an equal footing with all the other nationalities of the Soviet Union. However, as early as 1934, lists of the Germans were drawn up; those lists were the basis of the persecutions of 1936-38 and the deportations in 1941.

Then came the events of the second world war. The greatest and most terrible tragedy for the Germans in Russia began with the Supreme Soviet's Decree of 28 August 1941. In pursuance of that draconian Decree, all the Germans were forcibly uprooted and scattered over areas beyond the Urals. They were transported in cattle trucks to Siberia, Kazakhstan, Altai and the far north and outlawed. Families were torn asunder, all their belongings, save a little hand-luggage, were confiscated. All the churches and chapels were destroyed or turned over to other uses, the ministers of religion were killed. The Autonomous Republic was officially dissolved. Thus, every basis for national and cultural existence and development was withdrawn from the German community. The line was total assimilation, in effect russification.

Once the war was over, the Germans in Russia believed they could return to their own villages, but they were wrong. At the same time as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was being proclaimed at the United Nations, the Russian-Germans had to sign a paper certifying that they had read the Supreme Soviet's Decree of 26 November 1948. That Decree banished the Germans "for all time" and forbade them to leave the locality without permission of the Special Kommandatur. The Decree of 13 December 1955, more than 10 years after the war, removed the infamous supervision and control of the Special Kommandatur; but the Germans were forbidden to go back to their former homes or to try to reclaim confiscated property. The accusations of espionage and collaboration were maintained.

The Germans were at least partially rehabilitated by the Supreme Soviet's Decree of 29 August 1964, by which their innocence was established: "Life has shown that these wholesale accusations were unfounded and reflected the arbitrary action connected with the personality cult of Stalin" - thus says the Decree. However, despite official acknowledgement of their innocence, the Russian-Germans, unlike the other deported ethnic groups - Balkars, Kalmyks, Chechens and Ingush - could no longer return to their former homes.

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The present condition of the German ethnic minority is determined by those 4 Decrees of the Supreme Soviet. They prove irrefutably that the German minority is entirely innocent and have been robbed of the essential foundations for existence and development as an ethnic community. There can be no question of equal rights, for every national and ethnic group - except the Germans - has an autonomous republic, a national region or, at least, a national district. The creation of the Soviet Union, which is now celebrating its 60th anniversary, was only possible because every national and ethnic group, however small, was guaranteed its national existence and free development.

Although a section of the Soviet-Germans have come to terms with this injustice and are virtually assimilated, there is a considerable number unwilling to accept this situation. Numerous petitions have been sent to the Moscow Government. Between 1965 and 1967, 3 delegations raised the question of complete rehabilitation and the restoration of autonomy in the Supreme Soviet and the Central Committee of the Communist Party. But the Soviet Government stood firm: it acknowledged that the best solution would be to transfer the Germans from the steppes of Kazakhstan to the Volga, but asserted that it was impracticable. Still worse, the members of those delegations were persecuted in their home towns by the KGB and by public prosecutors, they had difficulty in obtaining employment, they were accused of simply seeking to secure a "cushy job" in any future government of the restored Autonomous Republic.

Another section of the Russian-Germans recognised the hopelessness of their position and wanted only to get out of the Soviet Union as soon as possible. Many already started to prepare for emigration in 1956, when trunks full of applications arrived at the German Embassy in Moscow. But only a few were then allowed to leave. After the abortive attempts to recover autonomy, some tried to go to the German Democratic Republic in the years 1967-72, but most were not allowed to do even that.

When the policy of détente between East and West was initiated, there were revived hopes of being able to return to Germany. In January 1972, a delegation of 19 Germans from Estonia and Latvia was received by Mr Dumin at the Supreme Soviet. After the restoration of autonomy had been turned down once again, the question of freedom to emigrate to Germany was raised for the first time in the highest quarters.

At this point action groups were formed, which drew up lists of would-be emigrants from among their relatives and acquaintances. When a substantial number of signatures had been obtained, they drafted an "appeal to the United Nations and to all men of good will", to which were appended the reasons for the desire to emigrate. This appeal, signed by about 7,000 families (35,000 persons), was submitted to the Supreme Soviet in Moscow on 18 May 1973, and copies, with a list of names, were also sent to the Federal Republic of Germany. Some courageous individuals demonstrated in Moscow at that time, relying on Article 13 (2) of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states:

"Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country".

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How did the Soviet authorities react to these expressions of the wish to emigrate? By immediate reprisals; Waldemar Kolbe and Arkadi Seifert were sentenced respectively to 2 years' and one year's imprisonment in May 1973; Johann Fertig, Victor Klink, Victor Werner, David Paustjan and Erich Abel were all sentenced to 2-3 years' imprisonment in October 1973; the same sentences, sometimes involving rigorous detention, were meted out to Valentin Klink, Kornelius Thissen, Leo Selinger and Eduard Keller in November 1973. The names of more than 40 people are known who were arrested and convicted simply in connection with the desire to emigrate.

The following are still in prison now:

a. for attempted emigration

1. Anhaldt, Alexander, b. 3.2.62, from Nartkala

2. Lafera, Erich, b. 31.5.57, from Alamedin, Kirghiz Republic

3. Maier, Georg, b. 4.8.62, from Omsk

4. Maier, Lilia, b. 14.9.39, from Omsk (on probation)

5. Maier, Vladimir, b. 10.9.36, from Omsk

6. Marsall, Artur, b. 10.12.36, from Dushambe, Tadzhik Rep.

7. Reiser, Waldemar, b. 1956, from Frunze

8. Till, Alexander, b. 13.7.57, from Novosibirsk

9. Tranz, Selma, from Omsk (on probation)

10. Schwarzkopf, Wilhelm, b. 25.6.23, from Trudovik Kurdai, Kazakh Republic

11. Schaab, Johann, b. 28.5.41, from Prochladny, Kabardim Balkar Republic;

b. for conscientious objection to military service, in connection with attempted emigration

1. Dickmann, Nikolai, b. 1929, from Marianovka, Omsk Dist.

2. Dirksen, Jakob, b. 1924, from Appolonovka, Omsk Dist.

3. Klassen, Rudolf, b. 24.9.1931, from Karaganda, Kazakhstan.

Another 30 people are on a list which I shall circulate.

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At present, emigration from the Soviet Union is possible only on the basis of an invitation from relations in Germany, in other words in a very narrow context of family reunion. But even here the Soviet authorities have erected many obstacles. When a request is made, they often refuse to issue a pro-forma. They require from the place of work a certificate which nobody is able to draw up, or they insist that the applicant's superior should also appear at the visa office. Expulsion or dismissal from school or university is not unusual. In factories, universities and places of residence, meetings are held at which would-be emigrants have to justify themselves and answer questions. The list of tricks could be extended indefinitely, for there is no limit to the ingenuity of the Soviet bureaucracy.

What is essential, in the eyes of the Association of Russian-Germans, is contained in the resolution passed by the 16th Federal Congress of Russian-Germans on 29 June 1980. The concise volume "Volk auf dem Weg" contains the text, and I will circulate it shortly. I should just like to indicate the most important points:

1. freedom to emigrate for all who wish, with simultaneous release from Soviet nationality;

2. immediate cessation of every kind of reprisal against would-be emigrants;

3. a bilateral agreement between the Governments of the Federal Republic of Germany and the USSR on emigration from the latter country;

4. full rehabilitation, including restoration of autonomy to the Volga region and to all forcibly dissolved ethnic districts in the Ukraine, the Caucasus and other areas.

The brief quarter of an hour allotted to me does not admit of a more detailed exposition of the present situation of the German ethnic minority in the Soviet Union. Compatriots, who have personally lived through almost all the vicissitudes of the Germans in Russia, have been invited to this hearing. They are more than willing to give you the full details.

The CHAIRMAN

Thank you, Mr Maser; this afternoon, at 3 o'clock, we shall put questions to 7 members of the German ethnic minority.

The committee heard 7 members of the ethnic minority nominated by the "Landsmannschaft der Deutschen in Russland", who had left the Soviet Union in 1980 and 1981.

The Chairman closed the sitting at 6 pm.