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Taking Responsibility. Sending a Signal.

National Fund, General Settlement Fund, Fund for the Restoration of the Jewish Cemeteries in Austria: despite the many differences between these Funds – their origins, their tasks, their structure and their working methods – there is one thing they have in common: they are proof that Austria is coming to terms with the darkest sides of its history – the years of Nazi rule – and has been for some time; that it is assuming responsibility for the victims of this regime, a regime that was also supported by many Austrian citizens.

The National Fund, with its payments to all Austrian victims of National Socialism as a gesture of recognition; the General Settlement Fund, with its payments for losses of assets suffered as a result of Nazi persecution and the possibility of restitution of property; and, finally, the Fund for the Restoration of the Jewish Cemeteries in Austria, with its efforts to nurture a cultural, religious and emotionally important element of Austria's history:

They all embody the philosophy that dealing with Austrian history should not be limited to speeches on special occasions but manifested in a practical way, which can be felt by the victims and their descendants and demonstrates that they have not been forgotten.

The work of the General Settlement Fund has been completed; the gesture payments by the National Fund are also becoming less frequent. Only a handful of eyewitnesses still survive to bring us closer to their experiences. But this does not mean that the time has come to draw the frequently called for line under the past (“*Schlussstrich*”). On the contrary, with the advent of a new generation, focus has shifted towards safeguarding recollections for the collective memory.

Remembrance work and learning from the mistakes of the past form part of a political learning process which each generation must absolve for itself. Today's children and young people are at the heart of this learning process, for it is they who will shape the society of tomorrow. The National Fund renders a contribution by funding projects and publishing the life stories of survivors. The redesign of the Austrian exhibition in Auschwitz concentration camp and the Shoah Wall of Names Memorial, coordinated by the National Fund, also send an important political signal.

We place special importance on good communication with the applicants. Over the years, the expert knowledge of our staff and their experience in dealing with the victims saw the Funds develop into a reliable and competent information and support center in questions of National Socialism, property seizure, compensation and restitution. In addition, the documents collected during the course of the application processing have grown into a unique archive, from which not only historians but also researchers from other disciplines will profit.

All three Funds – the Fund for the Restoration of the Jewish Cemeteries in Austria, projected to span 20 years; the National Fund, with the realignment of its main points of focus; and the now dissolved General Settlement Fund – remain indispensable elements in Austria’s efforts to responsibly come to terms with her past.