

INTRODUCTORY WORDS

For more than four decades the Documentation Center of Austrian Resistance (DÖW) has been one of the most important institutions researching resistance and persecution of Austrians in the National Socialist period. Yet, the Documentation Center is also a social barometer that decries extreme right-wing and neo-Nazi dangers and vehemently warns of racist and anti-Semitic tendencies.

In 1978 the first large permanent exhibition of the DÖW was opened at the Old Town Hall in Vienna. Through this exhibition as well as contemporary witnesses, thousands of pupils became acquainted with the historic developments ahead of the »Anschluss« and with the history of resistance and persecution between 1938 and 1945.

In the 1990s Federal Chancellor Franz Vranitzky and my predecessor to the office of Federal President, Thomas Klestil, have for the first time publicly admitted to a co-responsibility of Austrians in the crimes committed by the NS-regime. Thus, the path was paved for further research on the victims of NS-crimes, which reached a peak with the work of the Historical Commission appointed in 1998 to investigate confiscation of property during the NS-period and restitution and compensation after 1945.

The Documentation Center's new exhibition takes these recent developments into account. It presents a factual depiction of Austria's entanglement with the NS-regime. The focal points are the persecution of the Jews as well as of other minorities and the heroic resistance of Austrians in the midst of a hostile environment full of denouncement and incitement. Neither does the exhibition omit unpleasant facts of postwar history: the mainly formal implementation of the denazification process; the incomplete prosecution of NS-criminals; the numerous, but only hesitantly and not sufficiently implemented measures toward restitution and compensation, but also current right-wing extremism, racism, and anti-Semitism.

As Federal President it is my wish that both exhibition and catalog will be widely received and thus, the possibly most important task of the Documentation Center of Austrian Resistance can be accomplished: to tell about the horror of this chapter in Austria's 20th century history so as to make a contribution in the 21st century against intolerance, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and antidemocratic tendencies. This we owe to the victims of persecution and to the women and men of the Austrian resistance.

Heinz Fischer
Federal President of the Republic of Austria