

Speech by Azize Tank (Member of the Bundestag, The Left Party)

Member of the
Committee on Labour and Social Affairs

at the debate in the

German Bundestag

on 26.02.2015

Thurs. 18:55 hrs

Agenda item 11

12. **2nd/3rd readings of the draft Act, introduced by the Federal Government, on the agreement of 5 December 2014 between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of Poland on the export of benefits for eligible individuals resident in the territory of the Republic of Poland**

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Mr President,

Minister Marek Bucior,

Colleagues,

The German-Polish agreement of 5 December 2014 was long overdue! **It puts to an end** to the discrimination of Jews and Roma living in Poland, who were previously excluded from ghetto pensions.

In close cooperation **with those affected**, we have now succeeded in moving forward with the new legislation – in just 8 months and across party lines!

I thus wish to thank **Polish Minister Marek Bucior**, who is here with us today, along with State Secretary **Gabriele Lösekrug-Möller**, for their personal commitment to the cause.

Yet we cannot rest on our laurels. There are other injustices to be eradicated!

Allow me to give an example: Imagine having worked in a German ghetto. You survived the Shoah. You are now 90 years old and living in an old people's home in Israel. You are probably eligible for a ghetto pension. Yet you, as a survivor, are not even aware of this.

That is unfortunately a real reflection of the processing of applications for ghetto pensions.

Already, there are research papers into the **“systematically unfair treatment of applicants”** by German bureaucracy. The investigation by Kristin Platt of the Bochum Institute for Genocide Research serves as an example here.

Final decisions have not been made for numerous applications by former ghetto workers: due to an alleged “lack of participation”. In addition to those in Poland who are affected, there are still some further

15,000 to 20,000 surviving ghetto workers who are also **excluded** from these pensions. According to estimates, around 45 % of these ghetto survivors are in Israel, 45 % in the United States and 10 % in Germany and neighbouring EU countries.

The Federal Government **itself confirmed these figures** in the official preface to the adopted Act amending the Act regarding the conditions for making pensions payable on the basis of employment in a ghetto, or ZRBG, which states that of the approximately 70,000 applications, only around half resulted in a positive **decision**. The remaining people have apparently not even received a formal **letter of rejection**. That is why these cases do not appear in the statistics.

Many former ghetto workers are thus not even aware of whether they are entitled to a ghetto pension, because although their application has been received by the pension fund, no formal decision has been made.

We must put a stop to injustices such as these!

**And we don't need further amendments to
legislation to do so!**

The administrative enforcement of the ZRBG,
adopted unanimously by the Bundestag, **must be
examined.**

Colleagues,

The **positive** development in ghetto pensions
payment is thanks not least to the progressive
practice of a committed judge: **Jan-Robert von
Renesse**, who worked hard to find the truth and help
the Holocaust survivors to obtain their right in the face
of adversity. On behalf of all other supporters, I
express my sincere **thanks to Judge von Renesse.**

He represents judicial independence and critical
thinking, even when confronted with resistance from
the administration and the judiciary.

Evidently, because of this, and because he submitted a petition to the Bundestag in 2012, he has been subject to **disciplinary proceedings**.

I consider this to be a scandal, and something which cannot be allowed to happen under rule of law!

Only when all ghetto workers **finally have certainty** about their applications for ghetto pensions can we consider a thorough examination of at least this part of German history to have been achieved. The agreement with Poland should herald a **genuine new start** regarding ghetto pensions.

Thank you!