

Remarks by Federal Chancellor Victor Klima at the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, 26 January 2000

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Holocaust is not only the worst crime of the 20th century, it is one of the most monstrous crimes in the whole history of mankind. Anyone who does not say this clearly and unambiguously is unsuitable to be entrusted with any responsible public position, either national or international. Any such person has no role to play in political life or in government service. Any person who denies or minimises the Holocaust does not have the basic human qualities that are a precondition for any responsible activity in politics.

I come from a country where the effects of the Holocaust were especially horrible. Until 1938, up to 180,000 Jewish people lived in Austria. Within a few years, more than 60,000 of them were killed and over 100,000 were forced to leave the country.

You know I come from a country in which there are two historic truths, which we perceived in different ways. What started in the days of March 1938 ended for hundreds of thousands of Austrians in concentration camps, on the battlefields of the Second World War or in the bombed-out cities where their homes had been. But there is also another historic truth, a truth which we long - far too long - refused to see: Many citizens of my country supported the Nazi regime and helped to keep its annihilation machinery going to the very last day. Few saw the truth of what Heinrich Heine wrote as long back as 150 years ago - that "first the books burn, then the people". We have every reason to be a reflective generation.

Yes, there were those actively involved in the crimes and there were the fellow-travellers. And there were also "the Just": some of them are remembered in Yad Vashem, the unique memorial and research centre. They risked their life to resist and help the victims of persecution and thereby left us an inheritance of hope that one can remain a human being even at the most inhuman times.

I stand before you today as the first Federal Chancellor of the Republic of Austria who was born after the war. And I stand before you with profound concern. I understand why you are following the current political developments in Austria very attentively. I would like here and now to address this appeal to the future Austrian federal government, whatever its ultimate composition may be: In the awareness of both historical truths - that Austrians were victims and that they were perpetrators - and in view of our responsibility for the future, there must be no doubt about the continuation of the critical confrontation with the Nazi past. The aim has to be to clear up the facts without reservation, to reveal the structures of injustice and to pass on this knowledge to coming generations as a warning for the future. One of the standards by which the next Austrian federal government will be judged internationally is how sensitively and fittingly it addresses these difficult and painful questions of Austria's Nazi past. And, while taking due account of the primary responsibility of the companies involved, the new government will also have to deal with the question of Nazi slave labour - one of those dark chapters of our past with which we have not yet come to terms.

In this spirit, I once again repeat our apologies to the Jewish people and I bow to all victims of Nazism. And when I now pause in my speech for a few heartbeats, every heartbeat stands for tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions of murdered human beings, fathers, mothers, children.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

"On the threshold of the 20th century, it looks as if it could become the century of humanity and brotherhood of all human beings," the Chicago Tribune wrote on 1 January 1901. At the end of the century, the balance sheet could not be more contradictory and this is also reflected in the history of my country: mass misery and mass destruction in the first half, and a take-off to new dimensions of economic and political cooperation and new dimensions of freedom and prosperity in the second half of the century.

What are the next steps? Will the 21st century be the century of humanity and of the brotherhood of all human beings?

There are at present many developments that make me optimistic, and some of them are connected with the subjects of the Stockholm Conference on the Holocaust. This is a good opportunity to thank and congratulate my friend Prime Minister Persson and his staff most warmly for organising this conference. The presence of numerous heads of state and government at this first big international conference at the beginning of the new century and the contents of the final document are a manifesto of our common responsibility and moral obligation: Only if we can explain to the coming generations what happened and how it could happen, can we develop in them the ability to resist any form of inhuman ideologies. Remembrance, research, information and education - the themes of the Stockholm Conference - are vital prerequisites to reach this aim.

In my country, too, open questions remain on the Nazi past. Jointly with the Vice-Chancellor and the Speaker of the National Assembly and the Speaker of the Bundesrat (Federal Council), I have therefore asked an independent Historical Commission to embark on extensive research into the whole complex of questions connected with the confiscation of property in the territory of the Republic of Austria in the Nazi era and expropriation and compensation provided by the Republic of Austria after 1945. This is one of the most ambitious contemporary history research projects ever launched in the second Austrian Republic, a project that may lead to a rewriting of the history of my country in some areas and a project that is sure to lead to some painful conclusions. But of one thing I am sure: Truth makes us free and we are strong enough to hear and bear the truth.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Only if we keep the past awake, will we be prepared for the future. Hence Austria strongly supports the creation of national Remembrance Days. A few years ago, we introduced May the 5th - the day of the liberation of Mauthausen concentration camp - as the "Remembrance Day

against Violence and Racism in Commemoration of the Victims of National Socialism". We cannot and will not forget what happened in our country. With this Remembrance Day, Austria has joined a European initiative and I would greatly welcome it if the Stockholm Conference were to encourage more nations to take such a step. We need symbolic acts of common remembrance and collective warning never again to stray from the path of democracy, freedom and law.

In the new Europe, it will be one of our foremost tasks to learn how human beings of different cultural and religious origins, of different generations with their special values, can live with one another in dignity and tolerance. If we take this Remembrance Day seriously - and surely this is what we all want to do - we must act so that this kind of Europe becomes more of a reality every day. And another thing: The experiences of the Nazi era teach us that we must spot and fight the growth of inhuman attitudes like racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism as soon as they are beginning to take root. I am therefore very pleased that we succeeded in attracting the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia to Vienna. Thereby we demonstrate - and we also confirm this by our active policies in the area of human rights which we pursue both within and outside the European Union - that the Austria of today has learned from its past and actively works for a Europe of tolerance. It is our common duty and responsibility to make sure that there shall never again be any place for inhuman ideologies in our ever more united Europe.

In this context, I would like to direct your attention to a special event. On 7 May 2000, The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra will perform a special act of commemoration in the quarry of Mauthausen concentration camp. In that killing ground, where human beings from nearly all European nations were imprisoned and murdered, the anthem of the European Union - Beethoven's Ninth Symphony - will be intoned and will give an audible and visible sign to the world for a hopeful new start into a century of humanity and tolerance. I have invited Elie Wiesel and Romano Prodi to speak at the ceremony and I hope that many heads of state and government will also follow our invitation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Elie Wiesel once said: We must teach young people never to give up in the fight against two dangers - the struggle against fanaticism and the struggle against indifference. Both fanaticism and indifference support those who would trample human rights and democracy under foot.

That is why I think that today every school should also be a house of history and education to encourage tolerance and understanding. Austria's curricula and school textbooks devote a great deal of space to the Holocaust, more than in many other countries. These accounts are frequently updated and complemented by historians and survivors of the Holocaust. We have also completely reformed teacher training as well as the teaching of history, which now devotes a whole year to recent history with special emphasis on the Holocaust.

In this context, I think it would be a good idea to arrange for international projects to compare school textbooks. We are already doing this under a cultural agreement with Israel. At the

same time, we want to organise more exchange visits for young people to foster a better understanding between our two countries.

For my country, as for others, the rule holds: The better educated young people are, the more immune they are against xenophobia, the more strictly they reject prejudices, the less susceptible they are to the plague of anti-Semitism and racism.

Yet if you ask me today whether all this is enough, you will get an honest answer: No, it is not enough. For even in this day and age we find that a political style that incites to hate has its attraction for many people. In addition to information, education and research, we must also battle against the structural factors that pave the way for authoritarian ideologies. I am thinking primarily of unemployment and social injustices. Inhumanity is a plant that often grows in the morass of economic and social crises. Sweden and Austria have a great tradition in the policy of full employment, especially in the fight against youth unemployment. Young people in particular must be able to feel that societies care for them, that their country needs them and that they are important for their nation's future.

This, too, should be the message of Stockholm. Thank you for your attention.