

AJC AND GERMANY

History in the Making, 1945–2020

DEIDRE BERGER

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AJC Global Jewish Advocacy

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The story told in this essay is unique— *and it is riveting.*

AFTER THE END of the Second World War, following the Nazi Final Solution that annihilated six million of Europe's nine million Jews, not to mention countless others, what would be the future relationship of Jews with Germany?

For some, the answer was both obvious and understandable: none. There was no conceivable way, they believed, to engage postwar Germany against the backdrop of what had befallen the Jewish people. Germany should be shunned at all costs, consigned to oblivion for eternity.

For the leaders of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) at the time, however, the answer was different. It is not that they were any less horrified by the events of the previous 12 years; they were equally pulverized, of course.

Rather, they understood something that led them to another conclusion. In retrospect, it was a brave, even brilliant, insight.

Precisely because of the Holocaust, Germany had to be engaged. It was too consequential a country — situated in the center of Europe no less and the cockpit of one devastating war after another — to be ignored or avoided, tempting though that might be.

And so they set out with an ambitious, even audacious, goal: to try to influence the direction of postwar Germany, seeking to help ensure the emergence of a peaceful and democratic country, which learned the painful lessons of its history and charted an entirely new, and more hopeful, future.

It wasn't easy or quick, not at all. For one thing, there was simply no playbook for how to go about this. Nothing like it had ever been tried before, not even close. For another, not every German in postwar Germany was necessarily eager to confront the past, reject antisemitism, and embrace a new outlook on life.

My admiration for AJC's leaders in the first decades after the war knows no bounds. Despite criticism from some other Jews, they persevered through thick and thin, determined to make a difference and help write a new chapter in German and Jewish history. And, amazingly, they succeeded beyond anyone's wildest imagination.

In the past 70 years, Germany has evolved as a nation committed to the protection of human dignity, ever mindful of its past, a founding member of the European Union, NATO ally, home to a growing Jewish community, and strategic partner of Israel.

If anyone wishes to understand what sets AJC apart, what explains the organization's DNA and approach to our mission, and what have been the fruits of our labor, this essay lays it out in impressive detail, context, and texture.

I wish to express gratitude to my cherished colleague, Deidre Berger, the essay's author and, despite her own modesty, one of the principal drivers of our successful efforts in Germany during her nearly two decades leading our AJC Berlin team. Previously, Deidre was the National Public Radio correspondent in Germany. She knows Germany intimately, is passionate about German-Jewish relations, and has a journalist's well-honed communications skills. They are on full display in this essay.

David Harris
AJC CEO

Front Cover: AJC leadership delegation meets with Chancellor Merkel in Berlin, October 10, 2018.

Photo: Bundesregierung / Eckel



Rabbi Sidney Lefkowitz (right) leads Jewish service, broadcast by AJC and NBC radio, from Aachen, Germany, October 29, 1944

AJC and Germany: History in the Making, 1945–2020



Deidre Berger

AS WORLD WAR II in Europe came to a close on May 8, 1945, American Jewish Committee (AJC) was already seeking strategies to help Germany avoid falling back into racist authoritarianism. AJC understood that fostering democratic values among the German people and setting up democratic institutions in Germany were necessary to help create conditions for an enduring peace.

Seven months earlier, AJC's interests were demonstrated when, in cooperation with NBC radio, the first Jewish religious service from Germany since the advent of Hitler was broadcast live across the United States. Rabbi Sidney Lefkowitz, a chaplain serving in the U.S. Armed Forces, led the service on October 29, 1944, with 50 Jewish soldiers, on a battlefield near the site of a destroyed synagogue in Aachen. Private First Class Max Fuchs served as cantor and Catholic Chaplin Father Edward Waters and Protestant Chaplain Bernard Henry also spoke. Artillery shells and gunfire were heard in the background during the praying.

The Jewish service also was directed at the German people, a warning, in the words of Milton Krentz, then AJC's radio director, that "the Allied armies, composed of every color, faith and nationality, will never halt until freedom takes the place of tyranny on every inch of Axis soil."

Immediately after the war not everyone on the victorious Allied side shared AJC's belief that Germany could be brought back into the Western fold. Nevertheless, AJC was determined to assist in the herculean task of reconstruction of a post-WWII Germany by fighting still virulent strains of antisemitism, upholding human rights, and promoting an appreciation for democracy.



Ruins of the Reichstag in Berlin, 1945

Aiding the Survivors and Promoting Democracy

THE FIRST CHALLENGE at hand was addressing the situation of hundreds of thousands of traumatized Holocaust survivors. Not only had the vast majority lost all or most of their families, but they were physically and spiritually adrift, without the homes and the Jewish communities as anchors that had once defined their daily lives. AJC opened a European office in Paris and stationed correspondents in several countries to help displaced Jewish survivors and monitor developments. AJC European director Zachariah Schuster traveled several times a month to Germany to keep AJC apprised of the situation.

In 1945, shortly after the end of the war, an AJC delegation visited Displaced Persons (DP) camps in Germany, and what its members saw prompted AJC to advocate successfully for the creation of a U.S. government Office of Advisor for Jewish Affairs. The first advisor, Judge Simon Rifkind, an AJC member, convinced U.S. military authorities to set up separate camps for Jewish survivors, who were being subjected to antisemitism in camps that included ethnic Germans inculcated with Nazi ideology who were fleeing the communist-controlled eastern part of Germany. In 1946, AJC helped initiate the Citizens Committee on Displaced Persons to promote admission to the U.S. for Jewish DPs.

Even at this early stage, AJC also sought to promote democracy in Germany. In 1946, AJC organized and financed the Gotthold Ephraim Lessing Association for the Promotion of Tolerance, a framework to stimulate the civic involvement of Germans. By 1948, the Lessing Association had branches in Frankfurt, Munich, Würzburg, and elsewhere. Yet AJC found it challenging to build civic spirit in a society long dominated by an authoritarian government that had little tradition of citizen action, and the Lessing Association had difficulty developing lay leadership. A potential source of philanthropic energy had vanished with the murder or expulsion of Germany's civic-minded Jewish community, many of whose members had donated generously to prewar social and cultural institutions. AJC became increasingly concerned with the weakness of

democratic sentiments and the persistence of Nazi sympathies, antisemitism, and xenophobia.

Alarming reports from its network of staff and correspondents in Europe convinced AJC of the need for a comprehensive reorganization of the German educational system. In September 1947, AJC Executive Vice President John Slawson warned: "If we build up Germany materially at the present time without doing a complete spiritual and educational reorganization job, we are building up a Frankenstein monster who will infect and menace the world."

AJC sought ways to foster a prodemocracy agenda for Germany in the face of widespread skepticism in the American Jewish community about the country's ability to reform itself. After a 1947 AJC survey found that 61% of Germans still held racist sentiments, AJC formed a special committee on Germany. That October, noting that "little progress has been made eradicating Nazi ideology among the German people, and racism and antisemitism are still rife among them," AJC's Executive Committee urged reeducation and pro-democracy measures, as well as programs to combat antisemitism. To bolster its efforts, AJC commissioned a series of studies, appearing between 1949 and 1952, to create greater public awareness of the problem. And starting after the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949, AJC received regular dispatches on developments in German politics and Jewish life from its correspondents in Germany.

Since the generation that had matured during the Hitler regime was difficult to reach, AJC sought to involve German youth in reeducation programs. In 1948, the German Youth Division of U.S. Army Headquarters Munich Military Post began showing AJC's landmark film *Make Way for Youth* to young people, parents, teachers, and youth leaders. The army told AJC that "there is no doubt that *Make Way for Youth* was a positive, contributor in gaining... community support of a Youth Program in Germany." The film was eventually seen by hundreds of thousands of young people in Germany, Austria, Japan, and Korea.

Given the historical roots of modern antisemitism in Christianity, AJC had a strong interest in reaching out to Christian groups to encourage them to acknowledge and counter antisemitism. In May 1950, Elliot Cohen, editor of *Commentary* magazine, founded and published by AJC, addressed a meeting of the Society of Christians and Jews in Berlin. Cohen was the first postwar American Jewish intellectual to address a German forum about German-Jewish relations. He called on Germany's religious, political,

academic, and cultural elite to engage in soul-searching in order to renew a German-Jewish dialogue.

AJC maintained its dialogue with Christian interlocutors by sending Community Relations Director S. Andhil Fineberg to Germany for six weeks in 1954. He was discouraged by the lack of confrontation with the Holocaust that he encountered, reporting that "the Christians who lived across the street from any of Germany's synagogues on November 9, 1938, when every synagogue in Germany was set afire, were evidently not at home that evening. Most Germans were presumably out of town when their Jewish neighbors vanished. Nor did they glimpse the frightened groups huddled at dawn at the railroad stations, awaiting deportation."

AJC Proposes Operation Candle, and Restitution

IN 1950, AJC'S COMMITTEE on Germany released a report, "The New Threat from Germany," that warned about growing signs of a renewed Nazi movement and expressing concern about former Nazis in government positions. Over the next three years, AJC continued to collect data on new German ultranationalist parties, pointing out their cooperation with neo-Nazi groups in other countries.

AJC issued a pathbreaking policy statement in 1951. While vigorously criticizing the lackluster German confrontation with the crimes of the Nazi regime, AJC rejected the idea of collective German guilt, choosing instead to emphasize policies that encouraged democracy. The statement called upon the U.S. and the other Allied powers to intensify programs of reeducation, while urging Germany to take concrete actions to display its commitment to democracy. AJC stood out at the time as the *first* and the *only* international Jewish organization willing to engage in shaping the future of Germany, a position that would reverberate decades later during German unification.

The extraordinarily positive response to this statement by both U.S. and German government officials spurred AJC, in consultation with U.S. and German leaders, to propose "Operation Candle," a package of democracy and human rights programs drawing upon AJC's experience in fighting Nazi-inspired antisemitism in the U.S. The name was borrowed from the saying attributed to Confucius that "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness." AJC suggested the formation of a national agency to address human rights issues and intergroup relations that would unite democratic forces in Germany. The agency would be launched by convening a German National Conference on Human Rights and Group Relations. There would also be AJC-sponsored visits by Germans to the U.S. to learn more about intergroup relations, as well as the development of educational material to foster understanding of Judaism and Jewish contributions to culture and society. The concept was endorsed by U.S. High Commissioner for Germany John McCloy, and other officials, and a small professional staff

was set up. But, unfortunately, U.S. occupation authorities were unwilling to commit the necessary funding to allow broad implementation.

AJC continued to support Jewish life in Germany, where more than 20,000 Jewish survivors remained. In September 1951, Professor Herman A. Gray, chair of AJC's Foreign Affairs Committee, and Zachariah Schuster, director of AJC's European office in Paris, visited a number of German cities, meeting with Jewish leaders and attending sessions in Berlin of the Central Council of Jews in Germany.

In 1954, AJC Honorary President Jacob Blaustein published a letter pledging AJC support for the community, saying, "I pray to God that from the tragedies of the past you will draw the strength to look to the future with hope, secure in the knowledge that we have not forgotten you."

The issue of German restitution to survivors of the Holocaust and their families loomed large. This was a thorny issue for Jewish organizations,



Zachariah Schuster, director of AJC's European Office in Paris, regularly visited Germany

"AJC was the first Jewish organization to seek contact with Germany after the Holocaust, and AJC remains today an important partner for Germany-both in terms of dialogue with American Jewry and transatlantic relations in general."

— Angela Merkel, German Chancellor

since many viewed Germany as "eternally damned," and restitution could be seen as providing Germans with a form of absolution. But growing tensions with the Soviet Union and the outbreak of the Korean War provided an opportunity to address the issue. Since U.S. policy saw West Germany as a potential asset in defending Europe from Soviet expansionism, AJC emphasized that the price of German reentry into the Western alliance should be moral acknowledgement of its crimes and restitution and reparations to its victims.

To this end, AJC's 1951 policy statement on Germany that called for coupling reconciliation with restitution helped build a consensus on restitution to individual victims of the Holocaust, as well as to the State of Israel. In addition, AJC President Jacob Blaustein lobbied President Harry Truman, High Commissioner McCloy, and State Department officials to press Germany on restitution.

As a first step, Blaustein helped create the 22-member Conference of Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, of which he became senior vice president, which provided Germany with a negotiating partner representing Jewish victims of the Nazi regime. He then helped the Claims Conference and the German government work out a restitution agreement of close to a billion dollars. At its annual meeting on January 27, 1952, AJC deemed the agreement a "first step toward Germany's assumption of its moral and legal responsibilities for the unprecedented crimes committed by the Third Reich in the name of all Germany people."

Addressing Antisemitism Through Education

ONE OF AJC'S CORRESPONDENTS in Germany was Eric Warburg, a member of the well-known Warburg banking family, who was born in Hamburg and fled the Nazis in 1938 to live in the U.S. After moving back to Hamburg in 1956, he helped found the prestigious Atlantic Bridge transatlantic organization, as well as the American Council on Germany. Warburg remained a member of AJC's Foreign Affairs Committee and acted as a media watchdog, alerting AJC to antisemitic articles.

On May 11, 1956, the AJC Executive Board appealed to the West German government for prompt action to counter a sharp increase in antisemitic activity, including the surging popularity of the antisemitic forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The Board stated: "In this tense atmosphere, the current conspicuous increase of anti-democratic and antisemitic propaganda may well presage a serious threat to Western Germany's morale and stability." Indeed, while German officials did display more concern about antisemitism, public opinion polls gave cause for worry. A U.S. government survey in 1957 showed that 39 percent of Germans were "definitely antisemitic" and 29% "conditionally antisemitic." AJC wrote to West German President Theodore Heuss, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, and Social Democratic Party Chairman Erich Ollenhauer about renewed verbal aggression against Jews, casual social boycotting, new cemetery and synagogue desecrations, and antisemitic propaganda from Arab and East European sources.

In the summer of 1958, AJC Executive Vice President John Slawson and Europe Director Zachariah Schuster, on a visit to Germany, determined that schools not only had inadequate social studies curricula and did little to encourage civic participation, but also that they omitted much contemporary history, that textbooks minimized Nazi crimes, and that pro-Nazi attitudes were popular among parents and teachers.

To underline its concerns, AJC published a report in 1959 called "The German Dilemma: On Antisemitism and ultra-nationalism in Germany." That October, AJC honorary president Irving M. Engel participated in



AJC Executive Vice President
John Slawson (r) and Max Horkheimer (l)

the Bad Godesberg Conference, co-organized by the Atlantic Bridge and the American Council on Germany. In his speech, Engel emphasized the importance of strong transatlantic ties and restated the need for a comprehensive reform of the German educational system to promote democracy and civic responsibility. Following the conference, he and Schuster met with Chancellor Adenauer to press the AJC recommendations.

These visits led to an even stronger focus for AJC on education for democracy in Germany. AJC's persistent engagement with school education issues was acknowledged by the German Permanent Conference for the Ministers of Education, the coordinating body for all state education ministers in the country. The Conference secretary general, Kurt Frey, later commended AJC for its proposals on dealing with issues of youth and education, "fully aware of the complexities of the problem of how to combat on the deepest level the anti-democratic attitudes among the younger generation," and advised that they had been presented at meetings of the school commission.

The battle against antisemitism became even more urgent following an outbreak of alarming incidents in Germany, starting with the desecration of the Cologne synagogue on Christmas Day 1959. There were 450 recorded incidents in Germany in the month that followed. In June 1960, AJC met again with Chancellor Adenauer to express grave concerns about the resurgence of neo-Nazism and antisemitism.

To help German schools develop more democratic structures and teaching methods, AJC initiated the German Educators Program in 1960, which provided annual three-week study missions to the U.S. for prominent German educators. The program provided exposure to the democratic climate of American schools through meetings with U.S. educators and observation of classroom teaching and teacher training.

The program was conceived and directed by Dr. Max Horkheimer. He had led the prestigious Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt before the war, and founded AJC's research division in 1944 while in exile in the United States. It had 127 German participants over ten years, and was funded at various stages by the New World Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the cultural division of the German Federal Foreign Ministry, the state of Hesse and other German foundations. Horkheimer conducted follow-up programs for alumni to encourage the adaptation and transfer of the American practices to German schools. But lack of funding led to abandonment of the program in 1971.

Reforming Oberammergau

SINCE ITS EARLIEST DAYS, AJC has been concerned about the impact of passion plays, which feature virulent antisemitic tropes depicting Jews as bloodthirsty, vengeful, and devilish. The largest and oldest of these plays, staged since the mid-17th century, takes place every ten years in Oberammergau, in southern Germany. Even after the Holocaust and the Catholic Church's 1965 Nostra Aetate declaration "absolving" Jews of responsibility for killing Jesus, Jews continued to be portrayed in Oberammergau as demonic Christ-killers.

In the 1950s, AJC began lobbying to remove antisemitic elements from the play. In 1968, AJC's Director of Interreligious Affairs, Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, was asked by German government authorities and church leaders to propose changes to the upcoming 1970 script. But his recommendations were ignored, leading AJC to call for a boycott of the 1970 play. AJC also issued a study entitled "Oberammergau 1960 and 1970: A Study in Religious Antisemitism."

An AJC delegation travelled to Germany in 1977 to propose to Catholic officials a systematic examination of the Church's understanding of Jews and Judaism, and how it is reflected in passion plays. This led to a symposium on November 17, 1978, co-sponsored by AJC and the Bavarian Catholic Academy in Munich. An overflow crowd of more than 400 participants were there, among them scholars, theologians, educators, religious and government officials, civil society leaders, and a large delegation from Oberammergau. Rabbi Tanenbaum presented a paper on "The Role of the Passion Play in Fostering Antisemitism Throughout History." During their visit, the AJC delegation also visited Oberammergau, where town officials invited them to return the following year to give a series of lectures on Jewish perspectives on the passion play.

Alas, the dialogue that took place had little impact on the 1980 performance. After viewing the play, Rabbi Tanenbaum declared Oberammergau the "international capital for the promulgation of some of the worst forms of demonic religious antisemitism in the world today." His successor at

AJC, Rabbi A. James Rudin, along with other Jewish partners, helped achieve changes to the 1990 play, so that Christ's death was shifted more to the Roman prefect Pilate, and alterations in staging and costumes reduced stereotypical Jewish portrayals. In the 2000 performance, Jesus's Jewish identity was underscored.

One of Rabbi Rudin's successors at AJC, Rabbi Noam Marans, has continued to engage with the Oberammergau producers, convened an interreligious academic advisory council to meet regularly with them, and brought the producers to the U.S. and Israel to help them revise questionable historical passages. In 2019, AJC launched a website to explain Oberammergau within the context of Christian-Jewish relations. While differences remain, the significant reduction in antisemitic elements in the play underlines AJC's commitment to long-term interreligious dialogue and collaboration.



Decennial passion play in Oberammergau

Exchange Programs as Cultural Diplomacy

DURING THE 1970S, AJC, with encouragement from West German diplomats, ramped up its German-American Jewish dialogue. The Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS), the policy arm of the Christian Democratic Union, was the first German group to jump at the opportunity. Negotiations between the two organizations led to the creation of a remarkable annual exchange program, the first between an American Jewish organization and a German nongovernmental agency. It continues, 40 years later, with undiminished verve and impact today.

More than 400 German opinion leaders, politicians, academicians, and business executives have participated in this pioneering program, as have more than 400 AJC lay leaders representing a wide range of professions and cities across the U.S. Each institution hosts the partner delegation for an intensive seminar in several cities, focusing on Jewish life, historical memory, and contemporary politics. Participants meet with high-level politicians and government officials, policy analysts, diplomats, journalists, and Jewish leaders. Alumni describe the program as "a life-changing experience."

In the early years, there was uncertainty on both sides about whether or how to address the most sensitive issues in German-Jewish relations, such as the Holocaust, the place of Israel, the political impact of American Jewish organizations, how Germany treated Jews and foreigners, and the division of Germany. However, the candor of AJC's Adenauer partners, as well as the intensity of the personal contacts the program fostered, made it a game-changer in postwar German-Jewish relations.

"The cooperation between the AJC and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation has been instrumental in breaking the silence that kept Germans and Jewish Americans apart, with the AJC championing dialogue and reconciliation with Germany," wrote University of Chemnitz historian Professor Beate Neuss, one of the early German participants.

The warm relations fostered by the program encouraged AJC and KAS to also organize a series of high-level conferences on political issues, including foreign policy (1996), immigration and naturalization (1997), and

politics, the media, and remembrance (1998). And in 2005, the two organizations organized a 25th anniversary celebration in Berlin, addressed by Angela Merkel during her campaign to become Chancellor. Since then, the two organizations have held joint conferences on transatlantic relations and on countering terrorism.

Over four decades, the AJC-Konrad Adenauer Leadership Exchange program has demonstrated the benefits of conducting post-Holocaust German-Jewish dialogue in an atmosphere of openness and candor that allows for, and even encourages, discussion of emotionally wrought issues. As AJC CEO David Harris has noted, "It is an attempt to ensure that the lessons we have learned about the dangers of the slippery slope of antisemitism and bigotry are well understood. It is about looking to the future with a shared sense of purpose and a passion for justice."

"This program was one of many elements intended to further consolidate German democracy, which is founded on human rights and committed to protecting freedom."

— Angela Merkel, German Chancellor, on the 30th anniversary of AJC-Konrad Adenauer Foundation Exchange program.

AJC's dedication to people-to-people diplomacy also resulted in a close partnership with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, associated with the Social Democratic Party. In 1983, the two launched a series of cooperative programs that has included AJC missions to Germany and reciprocal trips of Social Democratic leaders to the U.S. to learn more about contemporary U.S. politics and American Jewish life. In 1998, the two organizations convened the first of many annual conferences in Berlin on transatlantic and Mideast affairs, with participants from the U.S., Germany, Eastern Europe, and Israel.

In 2009, shared concerns about growing antisemitism in Europe led AJC Berlin and the Friedrich Ebert Forum to establish the European Forum on Antisemitism. It provided annual networking meetings in Berlin for top Jewish community representatives from more than 20 European countries that dealt with such issues as security, antisemitism, government relations, nationalism, and populism.

Outreach Eastward

IN ADDITION to its involvement with the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), AJC was also concerned about the German Democratic Republic (communist East Germany). Only a few Jewish communities survived there after the war, and Soviet-inspired antisemitic campaigns in the early 1950s prompted hundreds of Jews to flee to West Germany. The Jewish community in East Germany dwindled to the hundreds, with even fewer actively involved. In 1983, making history, AJC became the first American Jewish group to send an official delegation to meet with East German officials and leaders of the Jewish community. Afterward, Eugene DuBow, head of AJC's Community Services Department, had AJC provide prayer books and other ritual necessities to the community. He also arranged for German-speaking rabbis from the U.S. to lead High Holy Day services in East Berlin in 1984 and 1985, and subsequently persuaded the East German government to allow an American rabbi to serve the community for several months.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet bloc between 1989 and 1991, AJC began reestablishing ties to Jewish communities in East Europe that had been largely cut off from the West during the communist era. At the same time, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, affiliated with the Free Democratic Party, saw an opportunity to open offices in central and eastern Europe to help build democracy and civic society there. The two organizations recognized their common interest in fostering intergroup understanding and promoting democracy for a new generation of political leaders in Europe's emerging democracies.

In 1992, AJC and the Naumann Foundation inaugurated an annual program, "Promoting Tolerance in Central and Eastern Europe." It brought together emerging political leaders from the region for introductory seminars in Europe, followed by an intensive study tour in the United States, where they learned strategies to reduce prejudice and stimulate diversity and pluralism. Participants were exposed to a wide range of ethnic and minority groups, observed how minority groups were viewed in society,

and studied how they maintained their identity and how interest groups conduct political lobbying.

Renamed "Advancing Democracy," the AJC-Naumann program has several hundred alumni who play leading roles in central and eastern European countries, including as Cabinet-level officials. They also work in politics, media, and civil society, having gained exposure to ways of combating intolerance and hatred and supporting minority rights.

The "Bitburg Affair" and Its Repercussions

DESPITE ITS OPTIMISM about Germany's democratic future, AJC continued to insist that the country distance itself from the Nazis and their crimes. Thus, AJC leaders became concerned that the looming statute of limitations deadline in Germany could enable Nazi criminals to escape justice. To prevent this, AJC President Richard Maass headed an AJC delegation to Germany in 1979 that convinced Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and his government to abolish the country's statute of limitations for prosecuting those charged with murder during the Holocaust.

One of AJC's most dramatic actions in postwar Germany was its intervention in the visit planned by President Ronald Reagan and West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl to the Kolmeshöhe Cemetery near Bitburg, in southwest Germany, on May 5, 1985. Chancellor Kohl had asked the president to join him in commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Nazi surrender by paying tribute to German soldiers killed in World War II. The chancellor felt the joint visit would symbolize reconciliation and emphasize the U.S.-German alliance.

But once it became known that at least 49 members of a notorious Waffen-SS guard unit were buried there, both the U.S. House and Senate passed resolutions asking the president to cancel the visit. Despite those resolutions, a personal plea by renowned Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, demonstrations organized by Jewish groups, and letters to the president from numerous ethnic and religious groups, Reagan was not swayed.

Since AJC was the Jewish organization with the most extensive ongoing dialogue with German opinion leaders, comments by AJC leaders and staff were featured extensively in the media. AJC undertook high-level intervention with both the White House and the German Federal Chancellery to get the visit cancelled, with AJC President Howard Friedman and Associate Director William Trosten shuttling among Bonn, New York, and Washington. On April 29, 1985, Presidential Advisor Michael Deaver met at the White House with AJC officers and top staff members, and President Reagan himself spoke briefly to the delegation. Deaver informed AJC that

the visit would be shortened and a graveside speech by the president cancelled. At the suggestion of AJC, President Reagan and Chancellor Kohl also visited the gravesite of Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, where Reagan spoke about Adenauer's sense of shame for the Holocaust and his support for the State of Israel. In addition, the two leaders also visited the former concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen, where they spent more time than planned and President Reagan delivered a highly emotional speech.

The ongoing sensitivities on both sides of the American Jewish-German relationship, evidenced by the Bitburg affair, impelled AJC to investigate the problem more deeply. To this end, it resumed cooperation with the Atlantic Bridge. Over the next decade, the two organizations frequently convened groups of leading U.S. and German experts to explore the changing contours of German-American Jewish relations.

In November 1987, the two organizations cosponsored a conference in Germany on "American Jews and the Federal Republic of Germany: Problems and Opportunities," to reflect on the Bitburg visit, examine controversies related to Holocaust memory, and discuss stereotypes plaguing Jewish-German relations. Subsequent follow-up conferences were on "Addressing Current Concerns in Germany and in German-American Relations" and "Current Concerns in American-Jewish-German-Israeli Relations."

To mark the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Buchenwald, AJC and the Atlantic Bridge met in Freiberg, in eastern Germany, to discuss the future of Holocaust memory, rising nationalism and xenophobia in post-communist Europe, and prospects and challenges for Arab-Israeli peace. In 1996, a conference in Jerusalem addressed "Developments in German-Jewish Relations," and the next year "The Jewish Dimension in German-American Relations: Perceptions and Realities" was the subject of a session in Berlin also co-sponsored by the Central Council of Jews in Germany. And in 2003, the Executive Committee of the AJC Board of Governors met in Berlin with leading officers of the Atlantic Bridge to examine the state of transatlantic relations. Most recently, AJC CEO David Harris addressed Atlantic Bridge leaders in Berlin in 2017 on "Transatlantic Relations, Antisemitism, and the Fight against Terror."

Taking a Stand on German Unification, and Opening an Office in Berlin

A HUGE MILESTONE in AJC's relationship with Germany came with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which precipitated the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe. The end of the Soviet empire reopened the possibility of German unification, a subject that triggered immense trepidation in the Jewish (and larger) world. In addition to raising the specter, once again, of a powerful German state in the center of Europe, its eastern half, under communist rule, had never taken responsibility for the Holocaust, denied compensation to survivors, had no diplomatic relations with Israel, and pursued aggressively anti-Zionist policies, including support for terrorist groups. Nevertheless, AJC, viewing developments with a mixture of apprehension and hope, became the first Jewish organization to speak out in support of German unification. Written by AJC's David Harris, the son of Holocaust survivors, the Statement on German Unity, issued on May 17, 1990, raised questions about the future, but took an optimistic stand.

It asked, "Will the end of Germany's division also augur the end of historical memory about the Nazi era and the incalculable tragedy and destruction it wrought? Will November 9, the anniversary date of Kristallnacht, now be wholly replaced in the German consciousness by November 9, the anniversary date of the Berlin Wall's first holes? Will a united Germany ever again flex its muscles and attack its neighbors as it has twice in this century alone?" Nevertheless, the AJC statement praised the end of communism in eastern Germany, since it meant the triumph of "democracy and human dignity" over "fear, repression and control economies."

At the same time, as the number and significance of AJC's exchanges and programs with Germany grew, a more unified structure to coordinate them became necessary. Thanks to the generosity of a couple from Los Angeles, the Lawrence and Lee Ramer Center for German-Jewish Relations was created in 1993 as a central address for AJC's engagement with Germany. It was administered by AJC staff based in Washington, D.C., but not for long.

In 1994, David Squire, an AJC lay leader from Boston, called AJC CEO David Harris to ask if AJC might be interested in opening an office in Berlin. Harris was emphatically in favor. It would be in a building on Leipziger Platz, a once-elegant address in the eastern part of the city that had been Europe's busiest traffic intersection and most frequented outdoor square before the war. At the time, it was owned by the distinguished German-Jewish Mosse family, to which it was restituted after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The family then sold the property to a developer on condition that the new edifice would house a living Jewish presence. The Boston-based architect for the property, a member of the Mosse family, consulted with Squire, a Boston lawyer, who immediately grasped the potential of an office in Berlin for AJC, the American Jewish organization with the longest and most extensive ties to Germany and the German Jewish community. The location thus became the permanent home for the Lawrence and Lee Ramer Center for German-Jewish Relations. In addition, AJC leader Dottie Bennett, whose family fled Nazi Germany, dedicated the Hans Adler Library and Conference Center at the AJC Berlin office as a living memorial to her father, and the Mitzi Spiegel Executive Office was dedicated by AJC leader Daniel Spiegel in memory of his mother.

Even with AJC's long history of engagement with Germany, not everyone associated with AJC was eager to establish an office in the heart of the newly unified Germany just 50 years after the end of the Holocaust. Harris and top officers held extensive discussions with undecided AJC members, and Community Affairs Department Director Eugene DuBow, who had accompanied numerous AJC missions to Germany, visited more than a dozen AJC regional offices to allay misgivings and discuss the proposed plans.

The momentous decision to open an office in Berlin was a powerful signal of faith that a newly united Germany was taking important steps to atone for its past and demonstrating responsible partnership and leadership in the reunification of Europe. In preparation for the opening, a conference was held in 1997 on "The Jewish Dimension in German-American Relations: Perceptions and Realities." Present were politicians, journalists, academics, and public intellectuals, both Jewish and non-Jewish, and the conference dinner featured a presentation by German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel.

The official opening of the AJC Berlin Office was marked by a gala dinner on February 8, 1998, at Berlin's elegant Adlon Hotel, in the presence of

more than 100 AJC officers and leaders from around the U.S., and approximately 400 high-level German officials, including Foreign Minister Kinkel, diplomats, and journalists. After four years of planning, demand ran high for invitations, and journalists noted in advance that the event was a remarkable sign of American Jewish trust in modern German democracy. It was covered widely by the German and international media.

Foreign Minister Kinkel remarked at the dinner that AJC was returning to its roots, given that AJC was founded by Jews of German descent and predicted it would assume an important bridge-building function, given the pioneering work developing German-Jewish dialogue. "The AJC office in Berlin adds another important strand to the close bonds between the Federal Republic of Germany and the state and people of Israel," he said.

"The American Jewish Committee has pioneered the German-Jewish-American dialogue."

— Klaus Kinkel, German Foreign Minister (1992–1998)



AJC CEO David Harris, German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel, and AJC President Robert Rifkind at AJC Berlin opening gala, February 1998

At the dinner, David Harris reviewed how AJC had sought, since the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949, to participate in the remarkable growth of Jewish life and German-Jewish relations. "With each passing year," Harris noted, "this contact has widened and deepened. As such, it has allowed us to understand better the remarkable changes at hand here in these past fifty years and the overriding importance of strengthening the ties that have, in a strange and unexpected historical twist of irony, now joined Germans and Jews at the hip for all time."

The purpose of AJC's new Berlin office, under the leadership of founding director Eugene DuBow, was to act as a watchdog to monitor extremism and antisemitism; ensure the maintenance of accurate historical memory; support the renewal of Jewish life; strengthen Germany's ties with the U.S. and Israel; and act as Germany's partner in confronting challenges to transatlantic security and democracy.

The message was received with great interest. More than 300 articles were published in Germany and abroad about the event. AJC Berlin quickly became a popular address in the German capital, earning a reputation for frank and open discussions about transatlantic and Mideast issues. In January 2000, former National Public Radio correspondent Deidre Berger took over leadership of the office, with founding director DuBow returning to Germany on a regular basis to accompany AJC missions and exchange programs.

"It is particularly gratifying to note that the network of German — American relations has, of late, also been extended by new institutions in Germany.... The American Jewish Committee has opened its office in Berlin; it is good to know that this respected organization is now present in the German capital."

— Helmut Kohl, German Chancellor (1982–1998)

A Special Relationship with the Bundeswehr

IN 1994, A GROUP of German military youth officers asked to visit AJC headquarters in New York to learn about American Jewish life. This marked the beginning of a remarkable partnership between members of the German armed forces and AJC officers and leaders, based on the conviction that the Bundeswehr, a key institution that mirrors German society, can be a vital force for sustaining democracy and transatlantic security in the country.

The collaboration led to frequent exchanges on transatlantic security issues and on Jewish life during visits in both the U.S. and Germany. In 1995, the German armed forces invited AJC CEO David Harris to Germany on a speaking tour to mark the 50th anniversary of the defeat of the Nazi government. In six German cities, Harris spoke to hundreds of high school students and army officers.

The exchange has also produced concrete cooperation on humanitarian aid for those in need. In 1999, refugees from Kosovo overwhelmingly Muslim, who had fled to camps in neighboring North Macedonia because of a policy of ethnic cleansing by Serbia's Slobodan Milošević, were living in a tent encampment erected by the Bundeswehr and operated by the German branch of the Order of St. John. AJC, eager to contribute urgently needed medical supplies but unable to transport them to Macedonia, arranged with the Bundeswehr to fly the medicine and medical equipment to the camps. The joint venture was a compelling symbol of a once unthinkable cooperation between Jewish and Christian organizations, with the assistance of the German air force, to aid Muslim refugees in Europe. As David Harris, author of the idea, said: "If this kind of cooperation is possible 50 years after the Holocaust, anything becomes possible."

Through education seminars organized by the Leadership Academy of the Bundeswehr since 1999, several thousand career officers from all branches of the armed forces, with a large concentration of youth officers, have visited AJC headquarters in New York for frank and intensive exchanges with David Harris and other AJC staff and lay leaders. AJC

has been in regular contact on both sides of the Atlantic with the German Defense Department's Federal Academy for Security Policy (BAKS), which provides advanced training on security affairs for mid-level career security experts in government and business. Harris has often spoken at the German Armed Forces Command and Staff College to mid-level and higher career officers, and has also addressed German armed forces' institutions of higher learning, the Helmut Schmidt University in Hamburg and the Bundeswehr University in Munich.

Furthermore, AJC Berlin has often hosted army officers, while Deidre Berger, AJC Berlin Director until 2019, has spoken at military medical training academies in Germany, as well as at the Bundeswehr Center

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"The Bundeswehr sees the AJC as an important enrichment for our officers. We would not want to be without the partnership."

— Peter Struck, German Defense Minister (2002–2005)



German military officers with AJC CEO David Harris

for Leadership Development in Koblenz. AJC Berlin has also integrated exchanges with German military personnel into many of its exchange programs and general program work.

While there were misgivings by some American Jews at first about regular AJC exchanges with German military officers, continued dialogue and exposure grew to the point that German officers in uniform attended AJC annual meetings. Ironically, it was at AJC's urging that German officers donned their uniforms to visit the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., signaling acknowledgement of their country's responsibility for the Holocaust and Germany's determination to defend democracy.

In recognition of the importance of this unique partnership between an American Jewish organization and the German armed forces, German Minister of Defense Peter Struck awarded AJC's David Harris the Golden Cross of Honor of the German Armed Forces at a 2004 celebration in Berlin marking ten years of the relationship. Thanking Harris, Minister Struck said, "You ensured that mutual interests were fostered and intensified. In this way, you contributed to dispelling the reservations that still exist regarding the German armed forces." In his reply, Harris remarked: "Our shared values emanate from the very building blocks of our respective societies: democracy, the rule of law, and respect for the dignity of the individual. The ties that link this precious fraternity of kindred nations, including, of course, Israel, must never be permitted to fray."

At the 15th anniversary of the partnership in 2009, Harris and Defense Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg signed an historic agreement to intensify the relationship "by inaugurating an annual mission by a delegation of the Bundeswehr to regions suitable for deepening an understanding of Jewish-German-American history and culture." Since then, intensive annual study missions on Jewish life and on U.S.-German-Israeli relations have taken place in Germany and Israel for German military officers.

Jews and Other Minorities

PEOPLE OF TURKISH ORIGIN living in Germany compose the country's largest minority today — a status held by Jews before the Holocaust. AJC, convinced of the importance of coalitions among minorities to help maintain a resilient democracy, has developed particularly strong ties with them.

After the fall of the wall, there was an outbreak of violent and sometimes deadly right-wing attacks directed against people presumed to be foreigners. On May 29, 1993, in a particularly horrific incident, four right-wing young men set fire to the house of a Turkish family in the city of Solingen, in the northwest German state of North Rhine Westphalia. Five women and children died in the ensuing blaze and other family members suffered serious injuries. This arson attack sent shock waves throughout Germany — President Roman Herzog spoke at the funeral ceremony of the five victims at a Cologne mosque. AJC CEO David Harris and Eugene DuBow, Director of AJC's Community Relations Department, flew specially from New York to attend the funeral in order to signal AJC's solidarity with Germany's Turkish-speaking community.

In 1999, a devastating earthquake near Adapazarı, Turkey, killed at least 17,000 people, injured at least 45,000 others, and left half a million homeless. The AJC Berlin office moved quickly to support emergency relief efforts by the Israeli international development organization Mashav, which built a temporary village for refugees, including an AJC-sponsored school. AJC CEO Harris and Berlin Director Berger attended the opening ceremonies when the village was completed, and, together with the Israeli and Turkish prime ministers, Harris was a keynote speaker. AJC Berlin also reached out to Turkish organizations in Germany, offering condolences to the many family members of earthquake victims living in the country. And AJC made a donation to the Turkish Union in Berlin-Brandenburg to distribute for relief efforts in Turkey.

That marked the beginning of a sustained relationship to strengthen Jewish-Muslim understanding in Germany. In the summer of 2001, Harris

and AJC President Harold Tanner chaired the Berlin office's first American Jewish-Turkish Roundtable, with the participation of politicians, heads of Turkish organizations, academics, and social workers. Harris stressed that "until this country is safe and secure for all people, be they Jews, Turks or new immigrants, the work is unfinished." There ensued regular roundtable discussions with leaders of the German-Turkish community whenever AJC leaders visited Berlin. The relationship makes clear why AJC and its Turkish partners responded immediately to a terrorist attack on both a Jewish synagogue and the British Embassy in Istanbul in 2003. Overnight, AJC Berlin organized an ecumenical ceremony at the city's Oranienburgerstrasse Synagogue. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim representatives participated, carrying lit candles in memory of all the victims.

That same year AJC Berlin instituted its long-running Turkish-Jewish Young Professionals Roundtable, which addresses issues ranging from religious controversies to political matters, often commenting on developments in Turkey and Israel from a German perspective. Many of the participants became active contributors to a wide range of other AJC programs and events, including celebrations of Jewish holidays and dinners to break the Ramadan fast. AJC has also brought several groups of Muslims active in government, education, culture, and academia on study missions to Israel.

Growing ties between AJC and Germans of Turkish origin led to the creation of the "Political Salon," a bimonthly fireside chat for prominent members of minority groups in Germany, including well-known cultural figures and politicians. The events, co-hosted by Cem Ozdemir, a member of parliament for the Green/Alliance 90 party, and AJC representatives Sergey Lagodinsky (now a member of the European Parliament) and Deidre Berger, were often addressed by government officials and members of parliament, stimulating lively discussions and leading to jointly published articles.

When, in 2006, the Federal Chancellery began discussing ways to overcome discrimination in the German labor market, AJC established a parallel NGO Integration Forum, which met regularly to formulate recommendations to the federal government on enabling grassroot minority organizations to have greater input in the national discussions. In *Migrant and Minority Organizations Call for a New 'We' in Germany*, representatives of the Forum's two dozen organizations declared the importance in erasing distinctions between "us" and "them" in German society in order to achieve equality and fair representation.

AJC Berlin worked closely as well with the U.S. Embassy in Berlin on outreach to Muslims and others of diverse ethnic heritage in Germany. In 2008, AJC Berlin partnered with the embassy in hosting an interfaith Passover seder at the residence of U.S. Ambassador William Timken, establishing a tradition that continued under subsequent ambassadors. In 2011, the Berlin office and the U.S. Embassy sponsored a joint Thanksgiving Diversity Breakfast hosted by U.S. Ambassador Phil Murphy and AJC Berlin Director Deidre Berger.

Among the large number of immigrants to arrive in Germany were Yazidis from northern Iraq, survivors of the attempted genocide by Islamic State (ISIS). The fate of this ancient minority, whose religion draws upon elements of Zoroastrianism, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, deeply touched many in the Jewish world. At events sponsored by AJC in New York and Berlin, AJC brought attention to their plight. In 2015, AJC Berlin worked with the Berlin-based, Yazidi-directed NGO Hawar Help! to mark the first anniversary of the ISIS invasion of the Yazidi ancestral homeland. Nadia Murad, a survivor who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018, and Hawar Help! founder Duezen Tekkal spoke at the moving ceremony.

In 2019, AJC launched its "3i: Immigration, Integration, Identity" project to examine the nexus of immigration, integration and identity, particularly in France and Germany, home to Europe's largest Muslim communities. Conferences were held in Berlin and Paris, where government officials, academics, NGO representatives, and journalists discussed the successes and failures of integration policies, raising concerns about a growing "de-integration," as young Europeans of migrant background struggle with their multiple identities. A consensus emerged that unless the governments in liberal societies find ways to more effectively integrate minorities European unity was likely to unravel.

The AJC Berlin Ramer Award for Courage in the Defense of Democracy was established in 2013 to recognize outstanding individuals in civil society who put their lives at risk to defend democratic rights and values. Recipients to date have been Ahmad Mansour (2013), a psychologist and expert on Islamic extremism; German parliamentarian and human rights activist Marieluise Beck (2016); journalist Duezen Tekkal (2017), a film producer and German Yazidi activist; Professor Dr. Jan Kizilhan (2017), a German-Yazidi mental health institute director; and German parliamentarian Cem Ozdemir (2018), a leader in human rights and integration issues.

Sustaining the Overlooked Survivors

ONE GROUP OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS who had not yet received restitution from Germany were those living in Eastern Europe, where the Cold War made it impossible to get compensation from Germany. But the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism created new opportunities to advocate for this group. AJC became the principal champion of restitution for these "double victims," survivors living in Eastern Europe who had not received compensation from Germany and had also suffered from antisemitism under communism.

On the eve of the war's 50th anniversary, AJC launched a campaign to press the German government to pay pensions to the aging survivors no matter where they lived. AJC met with German officials on the issue, and when private diplomacy brought no results, AJC launched a public advocacy campaign that generated a letter from 82 U.S. senators urging Chancellor Helmut Kohl to address the plight of these forgotten survivors.

Following confirmed reports that Germany was paying pensions to SS veterans in Eastern Europe, AJC published an ad in *The New York Times* with photos of a Holocaust survivor and a former Latvian SS member, with the headline, "Guess Which One Receives a German Government War Victims Pension?" This drew significant media attention and the resulting public outrage induced the German government to relaunch negotiations with the Claims Conference. Due to AJC's efforts in January 1998, the German government announced a $110 million fund to pay more than 20,000 Holocaust survivors living in the former Soviet bloc. "Only when the American Jewish Committee went public with its tenacious campaign [for compensation for Eastern European Holocaust survivors] was there any progress," *The Washington Post* observed.

Another category of victims who had not received compensation were former Nazi slave and forced laborers, despite vigorous efforts by several members of the German Parliament. Lawsuits filed in the U.S. by survivors and their descendants against individual firms put pressure on them to settle. AJC organized numerous private meetings to help facilitate

Guess Which One Receives a War Victims Pension from the German Government.



Survivor of a Nazi Ghetto in Eastern Europe



Veteran of the Latvian Legionnaires and the Waffen-SS

If you guessed the survivor, you're wrong, sad to say. While Holocaust survivors in other parts of the world are eligible to receive German pensions, Holocaust survivors in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have never received a pension of any kind from Bonn. Inexplicably, the German government has simply drawn the line at providing such direct assistance to this group of survivors.

Not so, however, for many of the survivors' former tormentors. Believe it or not, the German government provides generous monthly pensions to Nazi war veterans, whose injuries or even mild, chronic ailments qualify them for "war victims pensions."

In the U.S. alone, there are 3,377 pensions sent each month to veterans of the armies of the Third Reich or their dependents!

After the fall of communism, many Waffen-SS veterans in the Baltic states and elsewhere in Eastern Europe discovered they, too, were eligible and are now receiving such pensions from Germany, while their victims are not.

Today, an estimated 15,000-20,000 Jewish survivors of ghettos and concentration camps live in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. They are old, many are in poor health and financially destitute. Surely, they deserve some help and comfort in the last years of their lives.

Join our call to the German government to correct this grievous wrong. Bring justice to the real victims of the Holocaust. Contact us to see how you can help.

The American Jewish Committee

Robert S. Rifkind, *President* — David A. Harris, *Executive Director*

165 East 56th Street, New York, New York 10022

(212) 751-4000, ext. 271

Visit our web site at www.ajc.org

negotiations between the U.S. and German governments that would bring an agreement on compensation. The advanced age of many of the survivors gave the issue urgency, but most lacked adequate documentation of their forced labor and had little access to the detailed archives of the International Red Cross. A resolution was found in the creation of a central compensation fund, in which the German government would be an equal partner along with those businesses that had used slave and forced labor during the Nazi years. Those businesses, in return, would have legal peace, i.e., immunity from being sued in U.S. courts.

But few companies wanted to risk tarnishing their public image by the admission that they had used slave and forced labor, and so many did not participate in the fund. By the summer of 1999, only a small number of German corporations had agreed to join it. AJC Berlin, led by Deidre Berger, thereupon wrote to the CEOs of more than 100 large German corporations that had yet to join urging them do so, and AJC published an ad in *The New York Times* thanking those that already had, while calling on the others to follow suit. Convinced that further action was necessary, on December 10, 1999, AJC Berlin released a comprehensive list of more than 250 German firms that had used slave or forced labor, and the following month released the names of more than 100 Berlin-based companies. Two major German daily newspapers, *Tagesspiegel* and *TAZ*, published the list, attracting broad national and international media attention. A week later, U.S. and German negotiators signed an agreement that established a ten-billion-Euro fund to compensate several million former slave and forced laborers. The German parliament ratified the agreement and established the Remembrance Responsibility Future Foundation to carry it out.

A small portion of the money was designated for a perpetual educational fund, and AJC convened a conference on "The Future of the Future Fund," together with the Central Council of Jews in Germany and NGO partners. The conference brought together high-level diplomats and government officials, corporate executives, academics, and representatives of NGOs and Jewish communities to help define what the educational fund would do.

An outgrowth of AJC involvement in the issue has been the partnership it established with Allianz, a multinational insurance company based in Germany that was one of the original founders of the foundation to compensate slave and forced laborers. In 2010, AJC and the Allianz Foundation launched the annual Third Generation Initiative program, in partnership with Germany Close Up, to enable 20 American Jewish and German young

professionals to spend a week together in Germany reflecting on the past, and exploring contemporary affairs in Germany, the U.S., and Israel. The program continues to this day, with the German Federal Foreign Office as the newest partner. Participants meet with politicians and diplomats, visit Holocaust sites, learn about corporate history, meet members of Berlin's vibrant Jewish community, and engage in discussions with local students. Upon returning home, many of the AJC participants take on additional leadership roles in the organization, while many German participants, including young professionals working in various divisions of Allianz, become engaged with German-Jewish issues.

Sustaining Holocaust Memory

IN 2009, AJC BERLIN, together with the French Embassy, hosted an event with Paris-based Father Patrick Desbois, a Catholic priest previously honored by AJC who had undertaken a survey of Holocaust mass graves in Ukraine, where Nazi killing squads shot an estimated 1.5 million local Jews. Fewer than a third of the approximately 2,000 gravesites were marked, and most were in a state of neglect. Inspired by the visit and the work of Father Desbois' Yahad in Unum organization, AJC proposed to the German government that it launch a program to protect these gravesites. After the government agreed, AJC Berlin worked with the German Federal Foreign Office to develop "Protecting Memory," a pilot project creating memorials at five of the gravesites in western Ukraine in cooperation with local officials and clergy, and educating teachers and students about the local Jewish heritage of their towns and the impact of the Holocaust. The project was designed to establish standards and guidelines for similar sites, enabling individual communities and local organizations to later create such projects on their own.

To implement and complete this project, AJC organized an international coalition of partners: Father Desbois' Paris-based Yahad-in Unum; the London-based Conference of European Rabbis and Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe; the Kiev-based Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies; and the Ukrainian Jewish Committee, in consultation with the Central Council for Jews in Germany and the German War Graves Commission. There was also an advisory board of leading historians and memorial site professionals. In June 2015, AJC, together with about 80 members and friends of the international coalition, dedicated the five sites — in Rava-Ruska, Kyslyn, Ostrozhets, Prokhid, and Bakhiv.

The attention drawn to the issue by AJC convinced the German Federal Foreign Ministry to launch a second phase under the leadership of the Berlin-based Foundation Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe. In 2019, an additional 12 memorial sites were dedicated at Holocaust mass graves in central Ukraine, and another three at sites for Roma victims.

Combating Antisemitism Through Education

OMINOUSLY, GERMAN unification was accompanied by a rise in right-wing and antisemitic expressions, and AJC monitored them closely.

In 1990, AJC sponsored the first systematic study, since the fall of the wall, of German attitudes about Jews, Holocaust memory, and Israel in a survey conducted by the German-based Enmid Institute and the U.S.-based D3 Systems. It found that 58 percent of Germans either strongly (30%) or somewhat strongly (28%) wanted to put the memory of the Holocaust behind them; 39% believed that Jews exploited the Holocaust for their own purposes; 38% agreed with the statement that Jews exert too much influence on world affairs; 52% agreed that Israel had no special claim on Germany and was a state like any other; and 38% considered Zionism to be racism. A second AJC-commissioned Emnid study, four years later, determined that more than 20% of Germans harbored negative attitudes toward Jews; 20% believed that Jews exerted too much influence on German society; and 31% believed that Jews exerted too much influence on the world.

AJC worked to counter negative feelings toward Jews and other minorities through education. In 2001, AJC Berlin convened the Tolerance Education Network (TEN), bringing together leading educational experts from different parts of Germany to share their experience using anti-bias programs, strengthen research on democratic education, and improve advocacy for such programs with key government institutions. The network, set up in cooperation with the Berlin-based Institute for Comparative History, also received input from AJC's Chicago office, which had done similar work on anti-bias education.

The next year, AJC Berlin, in cooperation with the Frankfurt-based Fritz Bauer Institute and the Anne Frank Youth Center, set up a bimonthly forum called Task Force: Education on Antisemitism, which provides opportunities for teachers to discuss with each other how to respond to antisemitic incidents in German schools. It remains today one of the leading sources of guidance on educational approaches to dealing with the problem among young people. The German parliament's first Independent Expert

Commission on Antisemitism, in its 2011 report, commended the Task Force as an outstanding example of civil society combating antisemitism.

In 2002–03, more than a decade after the unification of Germany, AJC sought to measure the adequacy of Holocaust education in German schools. AJC Berlin commissioned a qualitative pilot survey from the University of Frankfurt's education department, conducted at several schools in Frankfurt, that examined both what and how information about the Holocaust was being taught, how much students actually retained, and the impact of Holocaust education on an increasingly diverse student body. The university used the study, which identified significant gaps in curriculum and teaching methods, as the basis for an academic conference on Holocaust education.

During a visit to New York in 1999, German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, alarmed about manifestations of hatred against minorities in his country, asked AJC to share with German educational authorities "Hands Across the Campus," the successful core-values curriculum that educators had developed for AJC in Los Angeles in 1980. Its goals were to build understanding of history and current events, heighten appreciation for human rights, and encourage pupils to take a more active role in society.

After the Federal Union for Political Education and Paderborn University worked with AJC to adapt the curriculum to the German situation, a German version for high schools was launched in 2003 in Berlin, with the cooperation of the Berlin-Brandenburg State Institute for Education and Media and financial support from the Ford Foundation. Additional partners were the Society for Democratic Education and the Regional Centre for Education, and Democracy. The program proved so popular that an elementary school version, "Hands for Kids," was released in 2010, enabling children to identify shared values with their peers of diverse backgrounds. The introduction of the "Hands" curriculum by the Berlin and Brandenburg state governments also entailed the organization of annual teacher-training programs, which, to date, have prepared teachers at several hundred schools in the two German states to use the curriculum. The state of Berlin cites "Hands Across the Campus" for providing basic competencies in democratic thinking and considers it one of the most important educational pillars in combating antisemitism.

AJC also cooperated with the Berlin state government in the creation of educational materials specifically geared to tackle the problem of antisemitism. In 2010, the two partners issued the curriculum "Active



AJC “Hands for Kids” curriculum used in Berlin and Brandenburg schools, December 10, 2010

Against Antisemitism." Targeted to schools servicing students from diverse backgrounds, it included basic information on Judaism, Islam, radicalization, and antisemitism. The following year, AJC Berlin received a multiyear grant from the German government to bring together a group of educational experts to create the curriculum "Getting Fit for Democracy: Active Against Antisemitism." This innovative program, targeted to youth of migrant backgrounds, was based on on-site evaluations of what was being taught at schools and youth centers, and was developed in partnership with the Berlin State Government Education Division, the Berlin-Brandenburg State Institute for Education and Media, and the Regional Center for Education, Integration and Democracy (RAA). The curriculum included material on Jewish life, information about young people and rescuers during the Holocaust — including Muslims — and perspectives on Israel.

In 2017, a significant uptick in antisemitism was reported in Berlin schools, fueled principally by radical Islamist ideology. AJC Berlin recognized the dangerous role being played by adherents and missionaries of Salafism, an ultra-conservative branch of Islam, often with jihadist elements, that was spreading in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. AJC, working with its longtime partners in the Berlin state government's educational ministry and its state institute for education and media, launched a two-year program of teacher training on radicalization and antisemitism for teachers at more than two dozen schools. AJC Berlin also commissioned a publication, *Salafism and Antisemitism in Berlin Schools: A Report from the Classroom*, based on interviews with teachers at 20 Berlin schools. Its release focused nationwide attention on the spread of antisemitism and anti-democratic behavior in many schools. In 2019, AJC issued a new curriculum online titled *Strengthening Democracy: Active Against Antisemitism and Salafism*," which included practice-based approaches to dealing with Islamic radicalization in the classroom.

The Ongoing Struggle Against Antisemitism

THE ORGANIZATION for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was the first major intergovernmental organization to respond to the renewed threat of violent antisemitism in Europe. Its 56 members include the U.S., and it also allows significant participation by nongovernmental organizations. AJC worked closely with the American and German governments in preparation for the OSCE's 2004 initial high-level conference, which took place in Berlin. AJC Berlin sponsored a series of lectures on antisemitism, in cooperation with the Heinrich Boell Stiftung, to create greater public awareness of the issues.

In addition to working with the German government and NGOs on the conference, AJC had a hand in the wording of the chairman's statement, which called new manifestations of antisemitism "a threat to democracy, the values of civilization and, therefore, to overall security in the OSCE region and beyond."

Under the aegis of the OSCE, AJC forged an international network of NGOs and educators dedicated to fighting antisemitism. At the request of the German Federal Foreign Office, AJC Berlin led coordination efforts for an NGO Forum the day before the OSCE conference, working together with the Central Council of Jews in Germany, the Center for Research on Antisemitism at the Technical University Berlin, Honestly Concerned, the Amadeu-Antonio Foundation, and the Heinrich Boell Foundation. There were approximately 400 participants from Germany, other European countries, the U.S., and Israel. AJC helped draft a final declaration at the NGO Forum, signed by dozens of organizations, which called on all sectors of society "to censure inaction and complacency regarding antisemitic manifestations, recognizing that antisemitism can unravel the fabric of civil society if allowed to flourish unfettered by public condemnation and legal prosecution."

The conference highlighted the need for both a uniform definition of antisemitism and a special OSCE envoy on antisemitism. AJC played a leading role in drafting and coordinating what came to be known as the

Working Definition of Antisemitism, a standard non-legal definition that has been adopted by numerous governments, including the U.S., Germany, France, and the U.K. The special OSCE envoy post on antisemitism was established in 2005, with German parliamentarian Gert Weisskirchen appointed to the position. AJC Berlin team members worked extensively with him. In 2009, Rabbi Andrew Baker, AJC Director of International Jewish Affairs, succeeded him, creating additional avenues for AJC's work with the OSCE. Baker has been reappointed to the post each year until today.

In 2013, in response to continuing security problems for Jewish communities in Europe, Rabbi Baker suggested a special OSCE event to prompt governments to respond to the growing threat. Germany agreed to host the conference. AJC Berlin secured the participation of the German Ministry of the Interior, and brought together Jewish community leaders from across Europe for this first high-level conference addressing the responsibilities



AJC leadership delegation meets with Chancellor Merkel in Berlin, October 10, 2018

Photo: Bundesregierung / Eckel

"Without the help of AJC, the position of the Federal Commissioner for the Fight Against Anti-Semitism would not have been established."

— Felix Klein, the first German Federal Commissioner

of governments to provide security for their Jewish communities. In 2014, Berlin again was the venue for a major OSCE conference on antisemitism, as Germany convened a ten-year follow-up event to the pathbreaking conference a decade before. Not only did AJC make a major contribution to conference planning, but AJC Berlin was also one of two co-organizers of the Civil Society Forum held the day before the conference.

AJC's persistent efforts to have the Working Definition of Antisemitism implemented as widely as possible culminated in 2016 with Germany, the OSCE chair in office, obtaining an OSCE consensus on adopting it. German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier pushed for its adoption by the OSCE and won the approval of all but one of the 56 member countries, the Russian Federation.

In 2008, AJC Berlin and AJC's Department of International Jewish Affairs, working together with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, instituted in Berlin the European Forum on Antisemitism, which later became an annual event. It brought together leaders of Jewish communities from 20 countries throughout Europe to exchange information and advice on issues of security and foster new ideas about strengthening Jewish life. The forum also facilitated exchanges with high-level German government officials and parliamentarians, encouraging German leadership in the fight in Europe against antisemitism, and its website provided information on current developments.

Increasing public attention in Germany on the need to combat antisemitism led the German parliament to hold a special hearing in 2008 to consider further steps. Testifying before it, AJC Berlin Director Deidre Berger urged the installation of a national commissioner on antisemitism affairs to coordinate ongoing efforts and stimulate new approaches.

Instead, the German parliament set up an Independent Expert Commission on Antisemitism in 2011 to survey the field and make

recommendations. A second such commission was set up two years later, which adopted the AJC Berlin recommendation for a commissioner. In 2018, the first commissioner, Felix Klein, was appointed.

Nevertheless, there was widespread unhappiness in the Jewish community that neither of the expert commissions had included a Jew. Therefore, AJC Berlin, together with the Amadeu-Antonio Stiftung and the Moses Mendelssohn Center at the University of Potsdam, created the Network for Research and the Fight Against Antisemitism (NEBA), to bring more Jewish voices into the public discussion about antisemitism and Jewish life. NEBA convened two heavily attended conferences, in 2016 and 2018, to debate pressing issues of antisemitism in politics, academia, the cultural sphere, and everyday life. A keynote speaker at the 2016 conference was Professor Deborah Lipstadt of Emory University, who received considerable assistance from AJC during her London trial triggered by infamous Holocaust denier David Irving.

Since the opening of AJC Berlin, the office has kept an ever-watchful eye on manifestations of antisemitism and right-wing extremism, conducting advocacy meetings and media campaigns to highlight problems and push for increased efforts to counter the phenomenon. AJC has also sometimes filed charges, as it did against a Turkish book fair in Berlin for selling such antisemitic literature as "The Protocols of Zion" and the Hezbollah-produced film "Sarah's Blue Eyes." Shockingly, Berlin prosecutors refused to find aggravated antisemitism that could be sentenced. More successful were the charges filed in 2009 against Amazon for distributing Holocaust denial literature, discovered by AJC Berlin. A Munich prosecutor ordered Amazon to take down the items.

Enhancing German-Israeli Relations

WITH THE EMERGENCE of the State of Israel, AJC leaders urged the U.S. government to help the new Jewish state resettle and absorb Holocaust survivors. AJC's Jacob Blaustein's critically important role in negotiating West German reparations for the Holocaust included securing significant funding for those survivors in Israel. Blaustein later noted that the reparation funds were the single most important source of income at the time for the State of Israel.

Germany also supplied arms to Israel in the late 1950s and 1960s. When this became public in 1964, Germany suspended the aid, fearing that it would lead Egypt to recognize East Germany. AJC President Morris Abram sharply protested the decision to German State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Karl Carstens. On May 12, 1965, Germany agreed to full diplomatic relations with Israel and paid compensation for the curtailed arms shipments. Weeks later, on June 2, AJC highlighted the importance of this move at a meeting in New York between AJC President Morris Abram and German Chancellor Ludwig Erhard.

AJC continued to follow closely developments in German-Israeli relations, a fact acknowledged by German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel during the opening of the AJC Berlin office in 1998. Kinkel stated that "the AJC office in Berlin adds another important strand to the close bonds between the Federal Republic of Germany and the state and people of Israel." Indeed, a key reason AJC located an office in Berlin was to underline the importance of the German-Israeli alliance for both American Jewry and the U.S.

One of the first issues the new AJC Berlin office addressed in depth was the image of Israel in German print media reports of the so-called "Second Intifada." AJC commissioned the Duisburg Institute for Language and Social Research to conduct a quantitative study of how six different newspapers reported on four recent events, examining the language and content for potential bias and distortion.

The resulting 2002 report was entitled *The Mideast Coverage of the Second Intifada in the German Print Media, with Particular Attention to*

"The AJC laid the groundwork for the occasion we are celebrating today (the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and Germany). And for the past 50 years, the AJC has continued to be a key partner for Germany in its dialogue with American Jewry and in our transatlantic relations."

— Harald Braun, former Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations, speaking in New York at the UN celebration on May 19, 2015.

the Image of Israel. The researchers found repeated bias that, though perhaps often unintended, was nonetheless problematic. The factors leading to distortion, they suggested, were oversimplification about Israeli actions; a paternalistic attitude toward the Palestinians; language reminiscent of classic antisemitic stereotypes, such as blood libel; false equivalencies between the Nazi past and current Israeli government policies; minimization of the German past; and liberal use of quotes by those Israelis critical of their own government's policy. The report, which received nationwide press attention, led some journalists and editors to take a more nuanced stance toward the ways Israel was portrayed in their media outlets. Later, researchers cited the study as a catalyst for changes in methodology and conclusions.

Also, in response to the intense political debate about Israeli actions at the time as well as to the paucity of balanced background information, AJC Berlin in 2003 established a high-level Israel Coordination Committee, together with Reinhold Robbe, head of the German-Israeli Parliamentary Group. This body, which met regularly until 2012, provided briefings and updates on German-Israeli affairs. It convened members of parliament and directors of government agencies and nongovernmental organizations to provide briefings and updates, serving as a national coordinator for major anniversaries and events related to the German-Israeli relationship.

That same year, AJC Berlin launched annual trips to Israel for decision-makers from the German government, parliament, media, and civil

society, particularly those whose portfolios touched on Israel but who had little or no personal exposure to the country. Beginning in 2018, Austrians have also participated. The trips are conducted under the auspices of AJC's Project Interchange, which specializes in organizing fact-based study trips to Israel for leading decision-makers. Additional trips have been conducted with the assistance of AJC Jerusalem for German parliamentarians, members of the German armed forces, and directors of transatlantic think tanks. All trips are followed up with evaluation sessions in Berlin. The more than 250 program alumni remain in close contact with AJC, receiving regular material and updates Project Interchange, as well as invitations to participate in AJC Berlin activities.

In 2007, AJC Berlin issued a collection of essays entitled *Oh Israel! The Future of German-Israeli Relations*, to foster a more positive understanding of modern-day Israel and German-Israeli relations. Two dozen German opinion leaders from parliament, media, and the non-governmental arena contributed pieces outlining their personal perspectives on why the relationship to Israel is of vital importance to Germany.

AJC Berlin conducts policy discussions and roundtables on an ongoing basis to bring additional perspectives to aspects of German policy on Israel and the Mideast. In 2014, in anticipation of the 50th anniversary the following year of German-Israeli diplomatic relations, AJC Berlin instituted "50/50 German Israeli Relations: The Next 50 Years — A Transatlantic Dialogue Project 2014–15." Building on the foundation of Holocaust memory, it aimed to define new links for the relationship to keep German-Israeli bonds strong. There were two seminars in Berlin, held in cooperation with the German Council on Foreign Relations, the Foreign Office and the Federal Academy for Security Policy, as well as a conference in Tel Aviv, held in cooperation with the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS). The events brought together a total of more than 200 leading experts to review the history of the German-Israeli relationship, outline approaches to contemporary issues, and set new markers for the next 50 years. The seminars engendered a strong network of relationships among the participants.

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of German-Israeli relations in 2015, the Embassy of the State of Israel in Germany gave awards recognizing outstanding contributions to fostering the relationship. AJC Berlin received the top award in the category of NGOs.

In 2015–16, a mass movement of refugees and migrants, mostly from the Mideast, arrived in Europe, with more than a million people ending up

in Germany. In 2016, AJC helped its longtime partner IsraAID, a private Israeli humanitarian relief agency that responds to catastrophes around the world, launch a program of psychosocial care and therapy for traumatized arrivals in Germany, including survivors of the attempted ISIS genocide of the Yazidis in northern Iraq. Positive response to its work encouraged IsraAID to open a Germany branch that has worked cooperatively with AJC to assist the integration of newcomers arriving in Germany.

Fostering the Transatlantic Relationship

FROM THE BEGINNING, AJC believed that a key mission for its office in Berlin was to uphold the importance of the transatlantic relationship, which, building on the foundation of Holocaust memory, helps protect Jewish life, not to mention the freedoms and liberties of democracy. Indeed, AJC Berlin, one of the few representations in Berlin of an American organization, has come to play an important role hosting discussions on matters of importance to transatlantic affairs.

AJC's Berlin operations began parallel to the move of the German parliament from Bonn to Berlin, which brought officials, parliamentary staffers, and nongovernmental representatives to the new capital in its wake, who were eager to discuss transatlantic challenges with representatives of an American Jewish organization.

One example was AJC's cooperation with the German-American Parliamentary Group and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in bringing younger members of parliament to visit the U.S. In 2002, AJC Berlin launched its Transatlantic Roundtable series, featuring speakers from Germany, the U.S., and Israel, and bringing together mid-level staffers from all branches of government and parliament, as well as civil society. From the beginning, the discussions enjoyed considerable popularity, particularly in light of tensions in German-American relations due to the Iraq war, providing the opportunity for open and confidential discussions. Even after the launching of numerous other transatlantic discussion circles in Berlin by many think tanks and foreign policy institutes, AJC's special perspectives on transatlantic affairs ensured the long-term popularity of such events.

In 2003, AJC Berlin instituted a high-level German-American advisory board, which meets twice a year, in Berlin and the U.S. AJC members of the AJC Berlin Ramer Institute Advisory Board are alumni of the AJC-Konrad Adenauer Foundation Leadership Exchange Program, and thus are familiar with contemporary German politics and society. The board includes distinguished Germans in numerous public policy fields who maintain a strong interest in German-American Jewish affairs; in addition, there are

"The AJC has been investing in the transatlantic partnership for decades in an exemplary way. Indeed, the new Berlin office has, for ever more American Jews, become a bridge of understanding with the Germany of today."

— Joschka Fischer, German Foreign Minister and Vice Chancellor (1998–2005), addressing the 2001 AJC Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C.

additional U.S. members prominent in transatlantic affairs. The advisory board meetings have provided an outstanding forum for open and honest discussions of transatlantic and German-Jewish affairs. Founding Chair of the Advisory Board was Lawrence Ramer, and the German Co-chair was Rita Suessmuth, the former president of the German parliament. Other AJC members who have served as chair are Anthony Meyer, Steven Wisch, and Allan Reich. An additional German co-chair is Hildegard Mueller, a former state secretary in the Federal German Chancellery.

Another measure taken by the AJC Berlin Ramer Institute to signal the importance of U.S.-German relations was honoring leading bridge-builders of the postwar American Jewish-German relationship. In 2008, AJC Berlin created the Ernst Cramer Award for Outstanding Contributions to American Jewish-German Understanding. The award was named in recognition of the achievements of journalist Ernst Cramer, one of the most prominent postwar personalities to create links between American Jewry and Germany. He was a German Jewish émigré to the U.S. who returned to Germany with the U.S. army. He became one of the early promoters of the renewal of democracy in Germany, helping establish the pro-American and pro-Israel Axel Springer Publishing Company. Cramer was closely affiliated during his career with AJC, which depended on his wise counsel in the 1998 establishment of its office in Berlin.

The first recipient of the Ernst Cramer Award, in 2008, was Michael Blumenthal, founding director of the Jewish Museum in Berlin. Blumenthal is a German-Jewish émigré to Shanghai who moved to the U.S. and became U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, later writing a book about his German Jewish family history. He received the award "For your pioneering work

commemorating Jewish history and enhancing the Jewish presence in modern Germany." Ernst Cramer gave the laudatory remarks for the first bestowal of the award in his name.

In 2010, on the occasion of 30 years of the AJC-Konrad Adenauer Leadership Exchange Program, the award was presented to the Konrad Adenauer Foundation leadership "for strengthening bridges to the American Jewish community, anchoring Holocaust memory among younger generations, and promoting awareness of Jewish life in the U.S., Germany and Israel."

In 2013, on the 15th anniversary of the opening of the AJC Berlin Lawrence and Lee Ramer Institute for German-Jewish Relations, the Ernst Cramer Award was given to Lawrence (posthumously) and Lee Ramer, founders of the institute. Cramer, in his laudation for Michael Blumenthal, proposed that Lawrence Ramer be a later recipient of the award to honor his distinctive commitment to German-American Jewish relations. In 2013, as Cramer had also passed away, the award became posthumous testimony to the achievements of both Cramer and Ramer in stimulating dialogue between the American Jewish community and German leadership.

In 2014, AJC honored Phil Murphy, a former U.S. Ambassador to Germany, with the Ernst Cramer Award, "in recognition of his steadfast commitment and spirited dedication to Jewish affairs, Jewish-German relations and to the State of Israel."

The transatlantic dialogue at the AJC Berlin Ramer Institute deals frequently with Mideast affairs, and early on included discussions about Iran's role in fostering extremism in the Mideast and Europe. Alarmed by the annual Al-Quds day demonstrations in Berlin that foment hatred of Israel, AJC Berlin became one of the first supporters of counter-rallies and other events to raise public awareness about the true nature of Al-Quds day, an international anti-Israel propaganda event created in 1989 by the Iranian Islamic leadership. In 2006, AJC Berlin published the brochure *Antisemitism 'Made in Iran': The International Dimensions of Al-Quds Day*, becoming the first organization in Germany to disseminate comprehensive information about the antisemitic nature of the event.

Also in response to the yearly Al-Quds marches, AJC Berlin reached out to police and security forces in Berlin regarding Islamic extremism. Beginning in 2004, it instituted annual training seminars and post-event evaluations to help responsible police commissioners understand the underlying antisemitic and radical messages propagated. In cooperation

with the Community Security Trust in London, AJC Berlin also brought in British security experts for an exchange with their Berlin counterparts on issues of extremism. In 2016, based on legal advice that AJC Berlin provided to police officials, the city of Berlin forbade the display of Hezbollah flags and symbols at the annual rally, and instituted stricter regulations on propaganda at the event.

In 2006, AJC Berlin worked with the Federal Agency for Civic Education to convene a conference in Berlin on Holocaust denial propagated by the Iranian government, held parallel to the perverse Iranian "competition" for caricatures on the Holocaust.

In 2009, AJC Berlin worked with the Aspen Institute and the Heinrich Boell Foundation on a high-level conference entitled "Towards a New Transatlantic Strategy on Iran and its Nuclear Program." It was one of the first events highlighting in detail the doubts of German and international experts about the course and true intent of the Iranian nuclear program. The conference was followed up in 2012 and again in 2013 with seminars for experts cosponsored by AJC and the Boell Foundation, which examined the impact of sanctions on Iran's nuclear program and possible political paths forward to break the impasse.

AJC convened subsequent international experts' seminars in 2014 and 2015 that reexamined the sanctions regime and discussed the status of negotiations to contain Iranian nuclear ambitions. Through the series of expert seminars as well as informational brochures shared with key decisionmakers and members of parliament, the AJC Berlin Ramer Institute kept a constant focus on sanctions and breaches of agreement on the part of the Iranian regime.

Furthermore, AJC and its Berlin office advocated tirelessly for the German government to support placing the terror organization Hezbollah on the terror list of the European Union. In 2013, the German Interior Ministry announced, that as a result of the dialogue with AJC Berlin, it would support the listing. But since the EU listing was restricted to the so-called "military" wing of Hezbollah, AJC continued to advocate for a full listing of the organization on the EU's terrorism blacklist, plus urging Germany to follow the lead of the Netherlands and U.K. to ban all Hezbollah activity within its borders. In April 2020, Germany announced a total ban on Hezbollah activities in the country, a step welcomed by AJC.

In addition to its work on Islamic radicalism, AJC Berlin has worked tirelessly to alert German decision-makers about developments in

right-wing extremism through conferences and public campaigns. In 2011, the AJC Berlin Ramer Institute commissioned a comparative study from the international law firm Hogan Lovells on hate crime legislation in the U.S., the EU, and four EU countries (Germany, UK, Poland, and France). The *Study on National Legislative Efforts to Prevent and Combat Hate Crime* pointed to the importance of effective law enforcement to reinforce existing legal provisions dealing with hate crimes. This was the first study to survey legislation as well as the application of hate crime law in the transatlantic arena.

The arrival of more than a million migrants in Germany, beginning in 2015, mostly from Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan, created political turmoil and strengthened far-right parties that were anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim. This created a dilemma for many in the Jewish community. While Jewish groups were traditionally friendly to immigrants and minority groups, there was widespread consternation about the impact on Jewish life of such a large group of Muslims coming from countries with blatantly antisemitic policies. Furthermore, there were concerns about the ability of Germany to integrate so many people coming at once from non-democratic cultures, all the more so given the challenges of integration even prior to 2015.

AJC commissioned Professor Dr. Guenther Jikeli of the University of Indiana/University of Potsdam to conduct a qualitative study of attitudes among refugees toward Jews and Western values. The 2017 study, *Attitudes of Refugees from Syria and Iraq towards Integration, Identity, Jews and the Shoah*, demonstrated that while refugees held a mostly positive view toward Germany, valuing the freedom and security they enjoyed there, their world views were largely shaped by conspiracy theories. Antisemitic stereotypes were often expressed in the interviews, though members of some religious minorities, particularly Kurds, had more positive attitudes toward Jews. There was little knowledge of the Shoah and a fundamentally negative image of Israel, even if, once again, there were some exceptions among the Kurdish refugees. Dr. Jikeli and his team of researchers distilled from the comments that sources of antisemitism included social circles, schools, media, and certain interpretations of Islam. The publication of the study was widely covered in the German media and helped create greater awareness of the urgent need to address antisemitic and anti-Western stereotypes among immigrants.

To further reinforce the importance AJC accords to the transatlantic relationship, the organization took the groundbreaking step of planning its

annual Global Forum in Berlin, June 14–17, 2020, marking the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II and the 30th anniversary of German unification. Never before had an American Jewish organization made such a public statement of commitment to German postwar democracy and the key role of Germany in sustaining the transatlantic relationship. The event was scheduled to include more than 2,000 participants from the U.S., Germany, and dozens of other countries around the globe, with confirmed speakers including German Chancellor Angela Merkel and German Minister of Foreign Affairs Heiko Maas. By beginning the program in the former concentration camp of Sachsenhausen, located an hour outside Berlin, and ending with an outdoor ceremony in front of Berlin's symbol of freedom, the Brandenburg Gate, the plan was to take participants on an emotional and intellectual journey from the past to the future.

Regrettably, however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant restrictions on both travel and conferences, AJC had to cancel this historic Global Forum, replacing it instead with a Virtual Global Forum.

Angela Merkel, who was first elected Chancellor of Germany in 2005, and had addressed the AJC Centennial Gala, in Washington, D.C., in 2006, alongside President George W. Bush and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, was preparing to greet the 2020 Global Forum attendees, expected to be the largest gathering of a Jewish advocacy group in Berlin since World War II.



Chancellor Angela Merkel and President George W. Bush at AJC Centennial Gala, 2006, Washington, D.C.

Jewish Life in Germany Today

FOLLOWING THE FALL of the Berlin Wall, thousands of Jewish refugees from the Soviet Union came to Germany, overwhelming the resources of the small Jewish community of less than 30,000 members to integrate them. The German government agreed to assist, recognizing the historical opportunity to strengthen Jewish life in Germany. Under the special refugee status offered by the German government, more than 200,000 Jews and family members subsequently came to Germany from former Soviet Union lands, at one point creating the fastest growing Jewish community in the world.

AJC, which historically enjoyed close ties with Germany's Jewish community, early on expressed support for Germany's nascent Jewish postwar community, unlike many American Jewish organizations that rejected the reestablishment of Jewish life in Germany after the Holocaust. Following the opening of its office in Berlin, AJC further intensified its relations with German Jewish leaders.

On March 23, 2003, members of AJC's Executive Committee and senior AJC staff attended an Executive Board meeting of the Central Council of Jews in Germany (Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland). Council President Paul Spiegel noted that the arrival of Jews from eastern Europe presaged a new beginning for Jewish life in Germany, pointing to a recent contract with the government giving the community greater legal recognition and financial stability. He also mentioned his concern about a rise in anti-American attitudes in Germany in the wake of the war in Iraq. AJC CEO David Harris concurred, and said that Jews in Germany and the U.S. shared the goal of protecting and defending Jewish life, and promoting mutual respect, mutual responsibility, and moderation as bulwarks against extremism. Both leaders agreed on the importance of standing up for Israel and conveying Jewish values.

In June 2005, AJC Berlin and the Central Council of Jews in Germany held a joint Russian Jewish seminar in Berlin for emerging lay leadership in Jewish communities throughout Germany. The seminar focused on

issues of identity, Jewish community structures, and communication and networking skills, inspiring many participants to become more active in their home communities. The event was based on concepts developed by AJC in its outreach to recent Russian-speaking Jewish immigrants in the U.S.

As incidents of antisemitism began spreading in schools, AJC, in 2008, convened a "Jewish Educators Circle" of Jewish teachers working both at Jewish schools and at public schools to improve knowledge of Jewish life and history at schools. The group met frequently over the course of the next four years, the educators exploring ways to defend their own identities as Jews in an increasingly hostile climate, as well as exchanging best practices about methods to transmit information about German Jewish life past and present.

In 2008, at the tenth anniversary celebrations of the founding of AJC Berlin, AJC profiled the growing vibrancy of Jewish life in Germany. At a gala dinner at the Jewish Museum, AJC donated Torah scrolls to new communities in Schwerin in eastern Germany and in Hamburg. It also bestowed its newly created Sidney Lefkowitz Award for International Jewish Renewal on Charlotte Knobloch, a Holocaust survivor and President of the Central Council of Jews, "in recognition of your tireless efforts to revive Jewish life in Germany after the Holocaust."

In 2010, 20 years after the fall of the wall, AJC and the Central Council of Jews in Germany convened a major conference, "The Jewish Dimensions of 1989/90." American, German and eastern European representatives and chroniclers of Jewish life discussed the impact of the unification of Europe on its Jewish communities, viewed through the lens of memory, identity, education, and religious life. A consensus emerged that the end of the Cold War meant a new start for Judaism throughout Europe, with new institutions and learning centers emerging to foster Jewish life and spiritual renewal. Although concerns were expressed about rising levels of antisemitism, animosity toward Israel, and strained relations with Muslim communities, the overall assessment was that a more intensive Jewish life in Germany and Europe was likely.

In 2012, the emergence of a well-organized and aggressive anti-circumcision movement in Germany posed a major challenge to Jewish life. This attack on a key Jewish and Muslim practice was orchestrated by circumcision opponents who had gained increasing visibility in part through the internet. Triggered by postoperative bleeding in the case of a young Muslim



Berlin's Brandenburg Gate lit with the Israeli flag in solidarity following a terror attack in Jerusalem in which four IDF soldiers were killed, January 9, 2017

boy in Cologne, it soon broadened into the full register of medieval antisemitic stereotypes.

In response, AJC, working together closely with the Central Council of Jews in Germany, met with politicians and opinion leaders to provide them with greater understanding of the Jewish religious imperative for circumcision. Under the guise of children's rights, opponents pressed to ban circumcision, some even claiming that U.S. recommendations on circumcision were part of a plot by American Jewish doctors. AJC released a brochure, prepared by Deidre Berger, exposing the pseudoscientific nature of the anti-circumcision assertions, which were based on questionable research with inadequate sample bases that had not undergone peer review. AJC's work brought greater public awareness to the urgency of the issue, exposing the faulty reasoning and distorted claims behind the calls to ban circumcision. Chancellor Angela Merkel cited the AJC study in expressing her opposition to the resolution, and members of parliament publicly thanked AJC by name for its research and assistance on the issue. Eventually, the German parliament ensured that legal restrictions on circumcision were acceptable to the Jewish community.

In 2018, for the 20th anniversary celebration of the AJC Berlin Ramer Institute office, AJC again profiled the diversity and strength of Jewish life in Germany, praising the significant strides it had taken while integrating tens of thousands new members. It bestowed the Sidney Lefkowitz Award for International Jewish Renewal on Dr. Josef Schuster, head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, the inscription reading, "For your outstanding contribution securing and strengthening the Jewish presence in united Germany." The Central Council of Jews and AJC remain in close contact, augmenting and supporting one another as they face threats to Jewish security, assert the place of Israel in the family of nations, and nurture Jewish life in Europe and the U.S. In addition, AJC Berlin has been in frequent dialogue with a broad variety of German-Jewish institutions, pro-Israel advocacy groups, and Jewish educational and other institutions that are shaping Jewish life in Germany.

The German-Jewish Path Forward

GERMANY HAS ALWAYS PLAYED a special role in AJC history, from its founding by Jews of German descent, to its postwar involvement in promoting democracy in Germany, and to the establishment of the Lawrence and Lee Ramer Institute for German-Jewish Relations, which expressed a decision to commit significant resources to opening an office in the newly unified Berlin. The involvement of AJC in Germany for more than a century is an outstanding example of the vital role that an organization can play in creating a safer world for Jews and all minorities, addressing threats to democracy, and working toward mutual understanding and peace among nations. AJC has launched initiatives and policies that have directly touched the lives of millions of people.

At key moments in its relations with Germany, AJC has taken courageous positions, risking potential clashes with existing U.S. and German government policies or with prevailing American Jewish public opinion. In the postwar years, AJC was the first global Jewish organization to commit itself to Germany's renewed sovereignty, as well as to the reestablishment of Jewish life in Germany. Following the fall of the wall, AJC was again the first major Jewish organization to support German unification. In its post-war quest to anchor Germany in the community of Western nations, AJC has remained resolute in its search for a better future, while never forgetting or minimizing the crimes of the past.

Even during tense moments in the dialogue, AJC has repeatedly raised its voice in favor of outreach, dialogue, and people-to-people exchange. Through its strong emphasis on partnership and exchange, AJC has built durable bridges with Germany reflecting its long-term engagement, support for the transatlantic partnership, the security of Jewish life, and the promotion of strong German-Israeli relations.

In these endeavors Chancellor Merkel has been a valued partner of AJC. In January 2010, she received the organization's prestigious Light Unto the Nations Award in recognition of "her steadfast defense of human freedom, human dignity and human rights are all hallmarks of her visionary leadership."



AJC CEO David Harris presents the AJC Light Unto the Nations Award to Chancellor Angela Merkel, 2010

Presenting the award in Berlin, Harris noted that "for AJC, her particular commitment to the special and enduring relationship of Germany to Israel, to, as she herself has put it, a culture of remembrance regarding the legacy of the Holocaust, and to tenacious opposition to antisemitism, Holocaust denial and trivialization, and all forms of racism, cannot be praised often enough."

Looking back on 75 years of post-war AJC engagement with Germany, AJC CEO David Harris has said: "Perhaps no other issue better captures AJC's uniquely forward-looking, results-oriented approach than our post-war engagement with Germany. The pathway has been enormously difficult, but we've persevered. The results speak for themselves."

Indeed, AJC's annual Global Forum scheduled for June 2020 would have been the largest gathering of Jewish advocates ever to take place in postwar Germany.

Our message is clear: Ever mindful of the legacy of the Holocaust, alert to threats against Jewish security, committed to strong U.S.-German-Israeli relations, AJC will stay the course of its more than century-long span of relations with Germany. Wherever possible, AJC will collaborate with its valued German partners in government and civil society to confront and surmount the myriad threats in the 21st century to our transatlantic core values and to democracy.

AJC's work in Germany has demonstrated over and over again the power of an outreached hand and a bold vision to overcome the consequences of unparalleled human depravity during the Holocaust. It is a telling case study in AJC vision and methodology, and the mind-boggling, history-changing results of seven decades speak for themselves.


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