

Opening Ceremony of
the access to the Visual History Archive
of the USC Shoah Foundation Institute
for Visual History and Education,
in cooperation with Freie Universität Berlin

Monday, October 3, 2011
Central Library, Aristoteles University of Thessaloniki

Greeting
by Mr W.Hoelscher-Obermaier
German Consul General in Thessaloniki

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to express my sincere thanks to all who made the access on the testimonies of Holocaust survivors reality.

My special welcome is adressed to the representatives of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki and Greece.

It is an especial honor for me to sit next to Heinz Kunio, himself one of the survivors of the Holocaust. The book of his sister was the first book that I read when I was appointed to become Consul General to Thessaloniki.

It is **one** important testimony a testimony in written form. From today on many more testimonies will be available. And this is important. Because it is important to keep the memory to what happened alive.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

in order not to repeat what hat been said by others, I would like to shed a flashlight on today's event from the point of view of the institution which I am representing, the German Consulate in Thessaloniki.

This year, the Consulate is commemorating its 125th anniversary. The early Consuls were witnesses of an important Jewish society in Thessaloniki, which was, at that time, a catalyst for the cultural and economic development of the city. They where also witnesses of a well functioning co-existence of German and Jewish families. A good indicator is the attendance of the German School in Thessaloniki. For example in 1911, 40 % of the students had Sephardi as their mother tongue. The German colony and the Sephardic Jews continued to live side-by-side during the Balkan war and the First World War.

This changed dramatically under Consul Schönberg, who headed the Consulate during the occupation period in other words one of my predecessors. He played a very active role in the context of the deportation of the Jews of Thessaloniki and the murders in the Martyr villages around Thessaloniki and in Northern Greece.

This has been elaborated in the study of the Historians' Commission on the role of the Foreign Service during the Second World War.

The tragedy of the Jews in Thessaloniki caused by the Germans, and the specific role of Consul Schönberg, constitute an obligation for the postwar Consulate to keep the memory alive. We therefore organized a scientific workshop on Northern Greece in the time of National Socialism in March this year, we facilitated the translation of the book "Jewish sites in Thessaloniki" into the German language and are particularly happy, that now it has been made possible to create an access to the Visual History Archive of the Shoah Foundation Institute in cooperation with the Freie Universität Berlin.

The objective is not only to investigate the history of the Jews and other groups which were so drastically affected by the German National Socialists. It is also of highest importance to teach the coming generations and to increase their awareness and capabilities to withstand any new extremists thoughts. It is my special wish to intensify the youth exchange between German and Greek groups with the focus on this historical background.

I thank all persons and institutions that made this possible and I wish good success, which means that many researchers and students shall make use of these new possibilities.

Thank you for your attention.