Madam President,
Mr Vice-President,
Honourable Members,
Mr Dainow and representatives of the Central Council [of Jews in Germany],
Aron and representatives of the ZWST [Central Welfare Board of Jews in Germany],
Rabbi Teichtal,
Felix,
Nastia and Dimitrij,
Ladies and gentlemen,

We stand here today in the Bundestag, in a place where, over three decades ago, a decision was taken that was far more than a mere administrative act. It was a promise—a political, historical and indeed moral commitment: that is, to give Jewish life a new grounding in Germany. Not merely to invoke it in lofty speeches, but to allow it, at long last, to grow again and to become once more a visible part of this society.

In the Soviet Union, antisemitism was not an aberration, but a reality endured over decades. Religious life was restricted, Jewish culture regarded with suspicion, and Jews were often denied the freedom to choose their own profession. When the political order collapsed, the threat became overt: assaults, hostility, the sense of once again being a target.

So, in the early 1990s, many Jews sought a new home. For some, it was Israel; for others, the United States. And for others still, it became Germany—the country of the Shoah, at that time a nation in flux, newly reunified. This country sought, at that critical historical juncture, to face up to its responsibility and made a promise: You are welcome here; you shall find protection; you shall become part of us.

When you, dear Dimitrij, set off by bus from Dnepropetrovsk for Germany in 1993, aged twenty-two — with three bags and six books, heading into the unknown — that promise was in the air.

In the summer of 1990 it was, at first, the GDR that admitted Jews from the Soviet Union. After reunification it was unclear whether that trailblazing precedent decision would be continued. Heinz Galinski, may his memory be a blessing, pressed with great determination for a solution. He reminded the Federal German Republic—not least as a reunited country—that it bore a historical and moral obligation not only to protect Jewish life but to make it possible once again on a significant scale. And he insisted — contrary to what the Federal German Interior Ministry of the day suggested — that refuge should not be granted only to specific groups of Jews. He was perfectly clear: "I did not survive Auschwitz in order to keep silent in the face of new injustice."

Here at the media stations we can listen back to the heated parliamentary debates: how members of parliament argued at the time, what motivated them — and how earnestly they struggled to reach a position, until finally the law was passed whose anniversary we mark today. Ultimately, it was a success.

An honest look back must also acknowledge that the ensuing immigration from the former Soviet Union posed enormous challenges for many communities. And you, dear Dimitrij, describe the rather rough landing in *Germanija* vividly in your book. Many in Germany associated the return of Jews with high expectations: the newcomers were to fill a void in history — to revive Jewish communities in Germany that had been almost entirely destroyed in the Holocaust.

Those who eventually arrived were confronted with these expectations and perhaps overwhelmed by them. Jews from the Soviet Union were often secular, well-read, with life stories that had first to be understood here.

People with, in some cases, remarkable careers in their "first lives" and yet struggled to integrate into congregations and into mainstream society, without recognition of their prior achievements, without financial resources, without language skills or in-depth knowledge of Jewish religious life.

And yet this immigration was a great opportunity. Not an abstract one — but a concrete, living, diverse, and one which at times was not without its quarrels.

And this opportunity was seized.

By people here in this room today.
People who had to relearn language and redefine their identity.
People who enriched our country: who built communities, supported young people, endured conflicts, and wove new traditions.

Over time, they have also helped shape German society as a whole — in culture and science, in music and literature, in social engagement and in the national conversation about how we live together in this country.
For that, I would like to express my most profound respect and gratitude.

Some of these trajectories can be seen in this exhibition: Wladimir Kaminer, for instance. And here on this very podium: Dr Dmitrij Belkin and Dr Anastassia Pletoukhina. They represent — like

so many others — the new Jewish present in Germany, and a profound contribution to the success of this migration story.

But today we must also look at the places where that promise remains unfulfilled. Many who came back then are now elderly — and, forgive my being crass, impoverished. Despite exceptional educational backgrounds they had had to restart their careers, or were unable to regain a foothold at all. Many are now faced with poverty in old age. A political solution is possible — and overdue. Whether through inclusion in the Foreign Pensions Act, as with the ethnic German *Spätaussiedler* relocating to Germany from the Soviet Union, or through renewed disbursement of the existing hardship fund — there are options.

What is lacking, therefore, is not the tools. What is lacking is resolve — and, ultimately, a decision.

Speaking of the darker sides, we must address another aspect of Jewish life today. There are sentences Jews had never wanted to utter again. Sentences such as:

"I'd better keep the necklace under my jumper."
"I'll take the mezuzah off the door."
"I'd better not walk down this street."
"At university I won't say that I'm Jewish."

Since October 7, such sentences have once again become part of everyday life. Visibility is once again linked to risk. Normality has been shaken.

If we want Jewish life in Germany to have a future — and it absolutely must — then it needs more than lip service in parliaments and security personnel posted outside Jewish institutions. It needs a society that says:
We want Jewish life.
Not as a warning.
Not as a symbol.
But as a natural part of our shared life.

We at the Alfred Landecker Foundation are pleased to support this exhibition because we stand for keeping memory alive, combating antisemitism in all its forms, and strengthening Jewish life today — in communities, in civil society, in education, and in science and research.

This exhibition shows: Jewish life is here. It has not always been easy, but it shapes, and it endures.

And our shared task is this:
To ensure that life here is not only possible, but truly worth living — that Jewish life has a strong future in Germany.

My particular thanks go to you, dear President Klöckner, for your tireless support of the Jewish community.

In the most difficult times you never shy away from clear messages — even when they regularly bring you considerable headwind. We see your efforts, and we appreciate them.

And my thanks to all who contributed to the success of this exhibition — Mr Weber, Ms Freizon — and I wish this exhibition many interested visitors.