

News



Deidre Berger discusses Jewish Life in Germany at the German Embassy in Bern

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At the most recent meeting of the “Ber(li)ner Salon” held by the Germany Embassy in Bern on November 7, guest speakers Deidre Berger, Anita Winter, and Herbert Winter were invited to discuss the theme “Jewish Life in Germany and Switzerland.”

Deidre Berger, Director of AJC Berlin Ramer Institute, spoke to an audience of diplomats and opinion leaders, including members of the Swiss Jewish community, about the history of Germany’s post- World War II Jewish community, starting with survivors that fled to displaced person camps in Germany after the war, continuing through the wave of Jewish immigration from the former Soviet Union in the 1980s and 1990s. She noted the arrival of several hundred thousand Russian-speaking Jews rapidly transformed the small German-Jewish community into the third

largest in Europe and a far more diverse community than before. Today, the German-Jewish community includes synagogues of all denominations, Jewish elementary and high schools across the country, three rabbinical schools and a cantorial college in Berlin and nearby Potsdam, as well as a school of Jewish social work in Erfurt. However, she emphasized that the the community still faces considerable challenges and uncertainties about its future, including a shrinking demography, the persistence of anti-Semitism and the relatively low level of participation by Jewish community members in German political life. One of the most exciting developments in recent years, she said, has been the growth of a dynamic young Israeli ex-pat community in Berlin, which is estimated at 20,000 or more, slowly becoming a long-term addition to Jewish life in the city, rather than a temporary fad. While the future remains uncertain, she concluded, German-Jewish life is flourishing today.

Anita Winter, the founder of the Gamaraal Foundation, spoke about her organization's mission and its connection to her own family history. She started the Gamaraal Foundation in 2014 to assist aging Holocaust survivors, many of whom live in poverty and still struggle with the traumas of their experiences. Ms. Winter, herself the daughter of two Holocaust survivors, spoke movingly about her German-Jewish parents experiences during Kristallnacht in 1938, fled from Germany to Switzerland, and became part of the Jewish community there. Winter concluded by describing how the responsibility that comes with her heritage has led her to take up the mission of her Foundation.

Herbert Winter is president of the Swiss-Israelite Community Association, which represents sixteen communities with a total of roughly 18,000 members. He spoke about the 2,000 year history of Jews in Switzerland and their contributions, stressing as well ongoing challenges such as stereotypes about Jews in Swiss society.

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