

New law on the Foundation for Displacement, Expulsion, Reconciliation: putting Germany first

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On 16 October, the Bundestag held the first reading of the government's draft law on the Foundation for Displacement, Expulsion, Reconciliation (Stiftung Flucht, Vertreibung, Versöhnung, SFVV). Established in 2008, the foundation is tasked with preserving the memory of forced migrations in the 20th century, including the displacement of Germans during and after the Second World War, particularly from the former eastern territories of the German Reich and Czechoslovakia. One of its objectives was to establish a permanent exhibition at the Documentation Centre for Displacement, Expulsion, Reconciliation; the exhibition opened in Berlin in 2021. Until now, the foundation has operated under the 2008 Act on the German Historical Museum (DHM). The new legislation would remove it from the DHM's organisational structure and transform it into an independent federal foundation subject to legal oversight by the Federal Ministry of the Interior. The bill also revises one of the foundation's objectives for the Centre's permanent exhibition, giving explicit priority to the experiences of German expellees (see Appendix).

The reform has received support from the Federation of Expellees (BdV), CDU/CSU politicians and some members of the AfD. By contrast, it has drawn criticism from some historians and the Greens, who fear that it could weaken the European perspective of the Centre's permanent exhibition. Given the backing of the governing coalition parties, the parliamentary committee is unlikely to make any substantial changes to the bill, which is therefore expected to enter into force largely unchanged.

The law's adoption will strengthen the influence of the Federal Ministry of the Interior, currently controlled by the CSU, over Germany's historical policy. Moreover, by explicitly stipulating that the commemoration of expulsions should focus on German experiences, the new legislation will lay the groundwork for changes to the Centre's permanent exhibition.

Commentary

- **The law marks another step towards bringing the institutions responsible for Germany's historical policy under CDU/CSU control. It also lays the groundwork for changes to the permanent exhibition at the Documentation Centre for Displacement, Expulsion, Reconciliation in Berlin.** In November 2025, the government transferred responsibility for overseeing the SFVV and the Federal Institute for Culture and History of the Germans in Eastern Europe (BKGE) to the Federal Ministry of the Interior. CSU politicians, who have traditionally maintained close ties with the expellee community, have played a particularly

active role in these efforts. On 23 July, Klaus-Peter Willsch, chairman of the Expellees Group within the CDU/CSU parliamentary group, welcomed the proposal to make the foundation independent and give explicit legal priority to German experiences. At the same time, he called for a swift overhaul of the permanent exhibition, which some expellees have criticised for showing insufficient empathy for their suffering. Stephan Mayer (CSU), chairman of the Federation of Expellees (BdV), also expressed support for the reform.

- **Changes to the permanent exhibition now appear inevitable, although the precise nature of the revisions remains unclear.** The Centre's new director, Roland Borchers, supports revising the exhibition. He announced plans to do so at a meeting with leaders of the CDU/CSU's Union of Expellees, Resettlers and German Minorities (UdVA) on 6 July, emphasising the need to focus the foundation's work more closely on its core subject, namely the expulsions of Germans, and to raise the Centre's profile. Borchers primarily favours targeted modifications to the exhibition, including changes to guided tours and the introductory section, along with greater use of eyewitness accounts. He has also highlighted the need to present individual experiences with greater empathy and to revise the exhibition's visual design. The existing exhibition places the displacement of Germans within the broader context of Nazi Germany's aggression, the occupation of Poland and forced migrations across Europe. It has received widespread praise from German and Polish historians.
- **The AfD also advocates radical changes to the Centre's permanent exhibition.** Its politicians accuse the current exhibition of excessively framing the expulsions of Germans within the broader history of migration, including the experiences of refugees from Syria and Ukraine. During a Bundestag debate on 25 June, Matthias Helferich (AfD) criticised the exhibition in its current form for relativising German suffering and subordinating its content to a narrative centred on Germans as perpetrators and victims of Nazism. Götz Frömming (AfD), the parliamentary group's spokesperson for cultural affairs, described the post-war expulsions of Germans as a crime against humanity. Moreover, the AfD links Poland's demands for reparations to the 'wrongs suffered by German expellees'. During the same debate, Ronald Gläser (AfD) criticised the German government for adopting a 'one-sided Polish perspective' and demanded that discussions of compensation for Polish victims of the German occupation also take account of expropriations, persecution and 'killings of German expellees'.

APPENDIX

Key provisions of the new law on the Foundation for Displacement, Expulsion, Reconciliation (SFVV)

- The SFVV will be transformed into an independent federal foundation under public law. The Federal Ministry of the Interior will exercise direct legal oversight over the SFVV. It has had political responsibility for the foundation since 1 November 2025, when it took over responsibility for matters concerning German expellees and their historical heritage from the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media.

- A representative appointed by the Federal Ministry of the Interior will chair the foundation's board, which will expand from 21 to 22 members, and will have a casting vote in the event of a tie. Moreover, the board will be unable to adopt resolutions on budgetary and personnel matters, including the appointment or dismissal of the director, without this representative's consent. Until now, this power has rested with the representative of the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, who has also been guaranteed the chairmanship of the board. Once the new law enters into force, the Federal Government Commissioner for Matters Related to Ethnic German Resettlers and National Minorities will become an ex officio member of the board.
- The bill proposes to amend Article 2(2)(1) to specify how the foundation's objectives should be pursued through the permanent exhibition: "The establishment, maintenance and further development of a permanent exhibition devoted to flight and expulsions in the 20th century, taking into account their historical background and context as well as their European dimensions and consequences, with the flight, expulsion and integration of Germans during and after the Second World War forming the main focus (*Schwerpunkt*) of the exhibition." The existing 2008 law does not give priority to German experiences.