



# BULLETIN

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## COMMENTARY

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### **The position of the Federation of Expellees in the Foundation “Escape, Expulsion, Reconciliation”**

Ryszarda Formuszewicz

*The dispute about nominations to the board of the Foundation “Escape, Expulsion, Reconciliation” resulted in the stronger position of the Federation of Expellees. The concessions made to the organization will reinforce its aspirations to be the principal custodian of remembrance of the forced migration of the German population.*

At the beginning of January the Head of the Federation of Expellees Erika Steinbach presented the conditions for renouncing her place on the Board of the Foundation “Escape, Expulsion, Reconciliation.” She appealed for the Foundation to be transformed into a fully-fledged public foundation, for abolition of approval of candidates for its Board by the federal government and greater representation of the Federation on the Board. She also demanded inclusion of the *Lastenausgleicharchiv* in Bayreuth in the structure of the Foundation and increasing of the exhibition space in the Center in Berlin. The Federation’s proposals were negotiated between the leaders of the coalition parliamentary clubs, i.e. the Christian Democrats and Liberals, with the authorities of the Federation of Expellees.

The agreements reached in the compromise announced on 11 February go a long way to meeting the proposals made by the Federation of Expellees. For Steinbach’s renunciation of a place on the Board, the Federation has obtained a promise that amendments will be made to the major points of the act regulating the Foundation’s activity. Furthermore the amount of space dedicated in the center will be increased by approximately one third. In the center digital archives regarding *Lastenausgleich* are also to be made available. The Federation did not manage to push through legal changes to make the foundation independent of the German Historical Museum.

The most important change among those announced is the transfer by the federal government to the Bundestag of the power to determine appointments to the Foundation Board. The number of members of the Board will rise from 13 to 21, while there will be no changes to the group of entities currently entitled to be represented on the Board. Except for foreign minister, home affairs minister and the federal government commissioner for culture and the media, other entities will however have the right to appoint a larger number of representatives. The Bundestag will be represented in future by four persons, and the Catholic and Evangelic Church and the Central Jewish Council in Germany will each have two representatives. The Federation of Expellees will gain the most from the change, as it will obtain the most influence on the Foundation Board thanks to its entitlement to designate up to six members. This would mean that all of the deputy chairpersons in the Federation could be on the Board. At the same time there will be a major change in the proportion of Board members appointed by the state authorities to those appointed by other institutions.

The transfer of responsibility for deciding appointments to the Board from the government to the parliament can be seen as a formal measure to allow a compromise to be brokered with the important stakeholder that the Federation of Expellees remains. The ruling coalition will retain its influence over approval of individual candidates and the actions of the parliamentary groupings will be subject to consultations. The agreements reached during this process may however to a large extent take into account internal political functions for remembrance of forced migration, while external conditions, for instance attention to good relations with Poland, will be less important.

Although the fact that Erika Steinbach will not be on the Foundation Board is in line with Polish requests, the role of the Federation of Expellees in the forming of German historical policy will increase at the same time. The final outcome of the clash for Steinbach’s place on the Foundation Board is therefore not a favorable one, because it will help to sustain the conflict potential in Germany’s relations with its eastern neighbors.