

## Jews Who Fled Germany Seek Citizenship

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NEW YORK -- When Helen Springut was growing up, her parents wouldn't vacation in Germany or buy a German car. The legacy of the Holocaust was too bitter.

But Springut, 26, has been to Germany several times and doesn't think "all Germans are Nazis."

Now she is applying for German citizenship under a law that allows Jews who fled Hitler, and their children and grandchildren, to become naturalized Germans. For many people, that means receiving a European Union passport that can pave the way for living and working in Europe.

The German law, which has been on the books since the 1950s, applies to Jews who were stripped of German citizenship during the Nazi era and their descendants. It can also apply to communists and others driven from Hitler's Germany for political reasons.

The German consulate in New York handles up to 30 such applications a month, and one law firm here says it has 120 Jewish clients seeking German citizenship.

Most of those taking advantage of the law are from regions of the former Soviet Union, but there are also applicants from the United States, Canada and Australia. More than 4,000 Israelis also received German citizenship in 2006, a 50 percent increase over 2005.

According to the German government, there are now some 200,000 Jews living in Germany, up from 25,000 before the 1989 collapse of the Berlin Wall.

Springut, a Harvard graduate who works in film production in Hollywood, has no immediate plans to move to Germany and will not lose her U.S. citizenship if her application is approved.

Springut learned she might be eligible from someone in the German consulate in Los Angeles. She then began gathering documents to prove that her paternal grandfather, who was born in Germany and left in the 1930s, was a German citizen.

It hasn't been easy. "As the Allies approached, the Nazis just burned everything," she said. "Documentation doesn't really exist."

In New York, the Fridman Law Group offers to help applicants through the process and advertises its services in local papers.

Nathalie Tauchner, who runs the group's German Citizenship Project, said the firm has handled about 120 cases and has obtained German citizenship for more than two dozen clients since starting the service one year ago.

Heinrich Neumann, a spokesman for the German consulate in New York, said applicants don't need an attorney's help. "It's a matter of fact," he said. "You have to meet the conditions."

In general, the German government discourages dual citizenship, but it makes an exception for eligible Jews. If granted citizenship, they are entitled to the same government benefits guaranteed to other Germans.

"You are equal with every other German. We don't have first-class and second-class citizenship," Neumann said.

Tauchner acknowledged that using a lawyer is not necessary "but under certain circumstances it makes your life a lot easier."

She said the law can be complicated. For example, an American Jew might think his or her grandfather was a German citizen because he was born in Germany in 1925.

But if he was the son of Polish immigrants to Germany, he might not have been a German citizen under the laws in effect at the time.

"It's one thing to say 'My grandfather was a German citizen and therefore I'm eligible,'" she said. "It's another thing to have proof of that."

Tauchner said her clients seek German citizenship for different reasons. Some fled Nazi Germany themselves and are now in their 80s and 90s.

"Their motivation is, something was taken from them in an unjust manner and they want to get it back," she said.

The children and grandchildren of the Holocaust generation have different motivations.

"They are primarily interested because it does open Europe to them," Tauchner said.

Few of those clients have definite plans to move to Germany, she added. Rather, they are thinking: "Now I can broaden my job search. I don't have to work in the United States. I can also look in England."

Not all children of Holocaust survivors are ready to make their peace; the memory of 6 million Jews killed by the Nazis persists.

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, was born in Poland in 1940 and saved from the Holocaust by a nanny who had him baptized as a Catholic.

Foxman said he has seen ads in Israel encouraging Jews to seek Polish citizenship as well. "From one perspective it's nice that Poland or Germany or some of the Eastern European countries are looking for Jews," he said.

While he has traveled in Germany, he says his own children won't go there.

"Some of the younger generation are not willing to let go yet," he said.

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