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Further development of the Advisory Commission

With the agreement of the federal states and the leading municipal associations, the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, Monika Grütters, has presented key points for the further development of the Advisory Commission on the return of cultural property seized as a result of Nazi persecution, especially Jewish property, which was established in 2003.

These are:

- the option for the Commission to be called upon by private individuals in future, on the side of the holder of the cultural property,
- greater transparency, especially through publication of the Commission's Rules of Procedure,
- expansion of the Commission from eight to ten members, including at least one Jewish member who can make a more direct contribution from the perspective of victims,
- public justification of recommendations.

Monika Grütters, Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, said: "The thorough investigation of National Socialist art theft is an ongoing commitment for Germany. It was therefore extremely important for me to develop the Advisory Commission in this way in order to ensure it is able to continue performing its sensitive and challenging duties successfully in the future, with recognition from all sides. The Commission serves to ensure that Germany deals honestly and assertively with its past. These proposed reforms are an important step towards achieving ever-better implementation of the Washington Principles – in the interests of the victims of Nazi art theft and their descendants, and also of museums in Germany."

The Federal Cabinet approved the further development of the Commission this week. The Chiefs of Staff Conference has today unanimously agreed the proposals and referred the key points to the KMK Plenum of Ministers for the final decision to be taken.

The following new members were appointed to the Advisory Commission: Professor Raphael Gross, director of the Simon Dubnow Institute for Jewish History and Culture; Gary Smith, philosopher and former director of the American Academy in Berlin; and Marion Eckertz-Höfer, former president of the Federal Administrative Court.

Other changes at the Commission concern the ten-year limit on the term of office for newly appointed members and the option for the Commission to order expert reports if necessary in future. The Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media will cover the costs associated with the preparation of these expert reports.

Prof. Monika Grütters said: "I anticipate that all German museums without exception are, of course, prepared for proceedings before the Advisory Commission. This is made necessary by the moral and historical duty towards the victims of Nazi persecution. It is also in the institutions' own interests. Should the parties not come to an agreement on an appeal to the Commission, I urge the bodies responsible for the institutions to work towards an appeal in accordance with the agreed and effective Washington Principles. Personally I shall continue to provide strong support for the institutions funded by my department."

The Commission was formed in 2003 by the federal government, the federal states and the leading municipal associations to mediate in cases of dispute involving the restitution of cultural assets that were confiscated during the "Third Reich", especially from persecuted Jewish citizens, and which are now held by museums, libraries, archives and other public institutions in the Federal Republic of Germany. The Commission acts as a mediator between the organizations in possession of the col-

lections and the former owners of the cultural assets or their heirs, if desired by both parties. It can also make recommendations for settling disputes.

Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, Monika Grütters, once again expressed her deep appreciation for the outstanding work carried out to date by the Advisory Commission and for the enormous voluntary commitment of its members. This was especially true for Prof. Jutta Limbach, the former president of the Federal Constitutional Court who recently passed away. Prof Limbach had been the chair of the Commission since its inception.