

Romania: A New Trend in the Holocaust Education

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Mr. Moderator,

A new trend in the Holocaust Education in Romania has been set up with the occasion of the creation of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, in October 2003, chaired by Mr. Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize laureate and honorary member of the Romanian Academy. Besides Mr. Elie Wiesel, the Commission included respected experts in history, humanities and social sciences from Romania and abroad, survivors of the Holocaust, representatives of national and international Jewish and Roma organizations.

A new trend does not mean saying that the education in the Holocaust was previously missing, on the contrary there were significant results. For example, study institutes and centers were set up within prestigious universities where educational programs of history and civic education on Holocaust and perception were organized: “Goldstein-Goren” Centre for Hebrew Studies, University of Bucharest, “Dr. Moshe Carmily” Institute of Jewish History, “Babes-Bolyai” University from Cluj, and the Hebrew Studies Centre within “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University in Iassy, the Teachers’ Organization in Bacau.

They organized various and numerous actions in the field.

But the Final Report of the Commission has submitted to the authorities a set of recommendations concerning the Holocaust education: the review and preparation of textbooks; to revise and draft an appropriate curricula and textbooks material on the Holocaust based on the findings of the Commission’s report; to build a Holocaust memorial in Bucharest; to organize a Holocaust museum in Bucharest, and so on.

Universities are called to organize conferences and symposia, are encouraged to establish courses on the subject, both for students and professionals, cultural and public opinion leaders in the country. Also the Ministry of Education should commit itself to a long-term training of teachers qualified to teach about the Holocaust.

As a result of the implementation of the Wiesel Commission recommendations what we call a new trend has been established, a particular importance is given to the 9th of October, the day of Holocaust commemoration in Romania. This day is marked in several appropriate ways, including proclamations by the President and the Prime Minister, convening a special session of the Parliament, seminars and discussions in the media and at universities and other public institutions. The Ministry of Education organizes special programs to mark in schools the commemoration date, essay contests, inviting Holocaust survivors to speak of their experiences. Religious leaders are encouraged to observe Holocaust Remembrance Day through an interfaith ceremony and service.

For example on the occasion of 9th of October, 2006 commemorative events were organized by the local Departments of the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs in cooperation with the local Jewish Communities. I will briefly mention some of these events: session of lectures (“Life after Setting and Liberty”;

“Assuming the Past. Romanian Chapter of the Holocaust”; “Yad Vashem – a New Type of Museum”; “The Holocaust in Literature”) in Caracal, Olt; symposium and book exhibitions (“Holocaust – the Truth We Don’t Know Yet”) in Alexandria, Teleorman; symposium (“Anti-Semitism – from Reason to Effects”) in Sinaia, Prahova; exhibition of photographic art (“The Holocaust in Romania”) displayed at the local History Museum in Brasov; debate (“The Meaning of the Holocaust Day”) and symposium (“History Errors which Mustn’t Be Repeated”) in Botosani; book exhibitions entitled (“Jewish Writers Originated in Botosani”) at the local libraries in small cities of Sulița, Frumușica, Mihăileni, Ștefănești, Botoșani; symposia (“The Jewish in Vrancea and the Holocaust”) in Focșani, Vrancea, book exhibitions (“Jewish Contributions to the Universal Cultural and Scientific Heritage”) at the City Libraries in small cities of Babadag, Isaccea, Macin, Sulina; reading workshop: Avrom Sutzkever (poetry), Leopold Schobel (prose) in Macin, Tulcea.

One of the most significant recommendations of the International Commission on the Holocaust Study in Romania – comprised in the Final Report – has been the set up of the “Elie Wiesel” National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, officially inaugurated on October 10th 2005. The Institute’s aims are the identification, the gathering, the recording, the research and the publishing of the documents concerning the Holocaust, the solving of some scientific issues and the elaboration and the implementation of educational programs concerning this historical phenomenon.

In accordance with its attributions and goals the Institute has been involved in organizing and finalizing actions aimed at bringing a contribution to the knowledge of the country’s recent history by the young generation and at promoting the democratic values as tolerance and eradication of anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia as well as mitigating the discriminations’ negative effects. Among these actions we mention: the International Conferences “Violence and Terror in the Romania’s Recent History – 65 years from Bucharest Pogrom”, January 23, Bucharest; “The Iasi Pogrom, 28-30 June 1941”, June 28-29 Iassy; “Fate of Romanian Jews living in France During the Second World War”, conference held by Mr. Serge Klarsfeld (*Fondation de la Shoah*, Paris) on the occasion of commemorating the Holocaust Day in Romania, October 9, Bucharest; “Teaching Holocaust History and Memory in 21st Century Europe”, November 9, Bucharest; the trainings: “Teaching the Holocaust in Romania”, May 10-12, Bucharest (training with history teachers, organized in cooperation with “Goldstein Goren” Centre from Bucharest University); “The Genocide against Roma People in Romania: Research and Analysis”, August 21-23, Bucharest (training session); published works: “Violence and Terror in the Recent History of Romania”, University Press, Bucharest, 2006; Radu Ioanid, “The Holocaust in Romania”, Hasefer Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006; Radu Ioanid, “Antonescu’s Group under SMERS Investigation, Moscow, 1944-1946. FSB Archive Documents”, Polirom, Iassy, 2006; “The June 28-30, 1941 Iassy Pogrom: Prologue of the Holocaust in Romania”, Polirom, Iassy, 2006; “Opinion Survey Regarding Holocaust in Romania and perception on the Interethnic Relations” developed for “Elie Wiesel” National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania by TNSCSOP and financed by The International Task Force for Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research; Alexandru Florian and Cosmina Gușu “Message Analysis of Anti-Semitism and Holocaust Denial in Romanian Mass-Media 2005-2006”; Serge Klarsfeld “The Fate of the Romanians residing in France during the Second World War”, “Holocaust Memory and Anti-Semitism in Central and Eastern Europe. Comparative Issues” edited by George Voicu.

In October 2005 on the occasion of the Holocaust Day in Romania, it was released the high school optional textbook “*Jewish History. The Holocaust*”, authored by Florin Petrescu, dedicated to Jews’ tragedy in Romania during the Second World War, while in October 2006 the President of Romania inaugurated the public space where the Holocaust Memorial in Romania is to be built.

Of course, I do not exhaust the subject. Many other education activities were and are constantly developing. Concluding, I must say that the new trend in the Holocaust education in Romania is becoming significantly visible and being institutionalized is acquiring more and more an accelerated pace, tending to be irreversible.