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Session 3: Education

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Greece, a cradle of civilization, supports today, more than ever before the advancement of research and education. It is in this light that the Holocaust, one of the most tragic chapters of contemporary history, should become the standard for the continuous campaign against human rights violations and the degradation of life. No one denies today that the Holocaust was not merely the worst nightmare of the Jews, but rather the worst of human kind. The universality of the Holocaust is the fearsome potential of its repetition.

As a compelling story of humanity, the Holocaust will be forever the beacon for the future generations. Today, another challenge that states and governments face is multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is increasingly becoming a fact of life in many traditionally monocultural countries such as Greece. The Greek Government has responded to the challenge of meeting the diverse needs of "all" its citizens, regardless of their cultural, linguistic and/or religious backgrounds by adopting an intercultural approach to the provision of its government services. Although traditionally viewed as monocultural, Greece has in fact had some experience in ensuring that harmony exists between its mainstream community and its communities of diverse cultural backgrounds. These communities include, among others, the Gypsy population, the Muslim community, the Armenian community, the Jewish community, the Kurdish etc. Historically the Greek Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs has undertaken several initiatives, albeit sporadic, to ensure equal access to education. These include supporting communities to establish their own school, for example the Armenian community, or reviewing school texts in order to detract any seemingly racist references and where possible include references promoting harmony and human rights. Today for example several Greek schools texts clearly refer to the horrors of the Holocaust.

Intercultural Education policy

Today it is estimated that approximately 6% of the students attending publicly funded Greek schools are of diverse cultural backgrounds. In response Greece has actively and systematically taken steps to manage this increasingly diverse student population. In particular the Ministry of education has ardently commenced a long-term intervention program designed to productively manage diversity within the education system.

In 1996 the government of Greece passed legislation which formed the basis for meeting the diverse needs of the Greek student population. The law 2413/96 titled '*Greek Education Abroad and Intercultural Education*' stipulated that all students residing in Greece, regardless of their cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds, should be ensured the right to access education in Greece and to attain an equitable outcome.

The legislative framework that was put into place included the establishment of the following administrative structure:

The establishment in 1996 of the Secretariat for Greek Education Abroad and Intercultural Education within the Ministry of Education. The Secretariat is responsible for intercultural education initiatives undertaken in Greece. Its role, among other things, includes the following responsibilities:

1. Critical analysis of existing legislation and policies and the subsequent modification and development of improved educational policies to manage diversity in the mainstream educational system.
2. Management of funds related to intercultural education, including the submission of proposals requesting funds from the Greek Government and the European Union to ensure the maintenance and ongoing development of mainstream and specific intercultural programs in Greece.
3. Overall coordination of the independent evaluation of the intercultural education program and overseeing the subsequent review of these programs based on the outcomes of the evaluations.
4. Recommendations of future strategic directions to be adopted by the Ministry of Education.

Commemoration Days

The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is observed on March 21st. The extinction of the racist phenomenon is everyone's responsibility as members of the large universal community. One of the missions of a broad based education is to teach young people to accept difference. Racism poisons the atmosphere of trust and children, the most fragile part of human society, need to learn the history of the catastrophic results of racism and in turn should be urged to take part in activities such as the commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination every year on March 21st. They should be encouraged to join organizations dealing with issues of racism and human rights, to explore ways in which community organizations can work together to promote positive race relations.

The Day of Holocaust Remembrance and prevention of crimes against Humanity is commemorated on the specific day established for Remembrance commemorated at a regional level during which memorial services are carried out in combination with official commemorative ceremonies. Schools throughout the country actively participate in attributing honor to the victims of several massacres throughout Greece, while special attention is given to the atrocities against the Greek Jewish population of Thessalonika, the largest Jewish community in Greece prior to WWII. Furthermore, the curriculum on the subject of History provides, both in Primary and Secondary Education, didactic references to the Nazi crimes in Greece and throughout Europe. Given the above, education regarding the crimes committed by the Nazis against Greek Christians and Jews alike is enforced and also preserved for generations to come.

The Holocaust was not a historical accident. It occurred because individuals, organizations, and governments made choices which not only legalized discrimination but also allowed prejudice, hatred and ultimately mass murder to occur.

It has been argued that historical events occur twice – first at the time that they actually take place, and then a second time when they are recorded, recalled, and interpreted. If no one passes on the lessons of the Holocaust, people will avoid considering the atrocities of the Nazis. If people are not taught about the Holocaust, it will be forgotten. We are the generation that has the responsibility to make sure that the Holocaust will be remembered; that the world that was will be remembered by ours and future generations. Whatever we record, restore, or transit will become public record. Whatever we decide to ignore, to discard, or to overlook will disappear.

“The past is not dear” William Faulkner once commented, “Its not even past.”