

*OSCE Conference on anti-Semitism and on other forms of
intolerance
(Cordoba, 8-9 June, 2005)*

ENGLISH only

Confronting Holocaust Memory: Building for the Future

Address by

H.E. Mr. Mihai-Razvan Ungureanu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania

The re-evaluation of our own past, implying in most cases its restructuring according to concealed data and new facts, is or should be simultaneous to the process of assuming responsibility for those events from a political, academic, educational and – last but not least – civic perspective.

The impact of the historical evidence, re-arranged in its natural order on the public awareness and on the political media, is astonishing and takes various forms: from speechless acceptance to a vocal denial.

Looking back, understanding, accepting and assuming are even more difficult. The post - communist European societies are tempted – in order to comprehend the core of the tragedy – to absolve themselves of the difficulties of the transition, to give up to victimizing tendencies, or to situate themselves at the confluences of different written and re-written historiographies.

Coming back to the time zero of the Romanian Holocaust means, nowadays, assuming the fact that this episode was recorded in different forms during the last decades of the Romanian historiography. Initially, almost all references to the Holocaust were removed, barely tolerated or even forbidden and, when resurfaced, they reflected the myths of a new generation, absolved of responsibility. A comparative approach was preferred, minimizing the number of victims and the political decisions of that moment.

We can say that the real democratization of the discourse on Holocaust does not begin at the same time as the process of catharsis of the Romanian society. Instead, is triggered before our very eyes: by setting up an International Commission and publishing its Report on the Holocaust in Romania, by the endorsement of its recommendations by the political elite and civil society as a whole, by the commemoration of a Holocaust Remembrance Day, by implementing a national strategy to improve Holocaust teaching, by becoming a member of the International Task Force on Holocaust, by setting up an Institute for Holocaust Studies and a Holocaust Museum.

These initiatives concentrate the attempts of the last decade to take responsibility for the history of the Romanian Holocaust. The historical research has therefore a double value. First, it concludes a period marked by singular voices, concerned with writing the chapter on the Holocaust of the Romanian historiography, and by peripheral and strongly overshadowed polemics on the phenomenon, if we are to compare them with other fundamental debates involving the civil society. Second, it closes a relatively long temporal sequence by addressing difficult subjects, avoided for a long time, such as the evolution of the Jewish issue, the internal development of anti-Semitism, the territoriality of the

Holocaust, the real succession of historical events, the number of victims and the political responsibility.

The recent studies appear as a huge, yet not exhaustive, collection of writings, attempts to publish documents and testimonies on the Romanian Holocaust, initiated by historians, as well as by survivors, writers, artists or journalists.

At the same time, the new approach on the Holocaust in Romania marks the beginning of the process of analyzing the nature of the contemporary anti – Semitism phenomenon, its connections to the new threats to global security.

I believe that Romania proved its political courage to assume the past and to reconcile with its national conscience, bypassing the above-mentioned historical stages. Let's not forget that we belong to a region where the Holocaust is still subject to political controversy. By making all these steps, the entire Romanian political class proved the irreversibility of the democratization process, entitling us to a dignified place among equal members of the European family.

By studying the Romanian Jews history and the Holocaust episode, we have discovered a new perspective on the components of our national identity, with particular meaning for the centers of the Romanian spirituality, especially those in Moldova, which have a long tradition of living together with the Jewish communities. A great number of Jewish personalities, with a major contribution to the political, economic, social and cultural life, came from these regions, some of their destinies being tragically affected by the pogroms and deportations of those times.

All these endeavors would have hardly been possible without the sincere support and cooperation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington and with the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem. We are also grateful to the American Jewish organizations, especially B'nai B'rith International and the American Jewish Committee, for their constant support granted along the years to Romania's efforts of reconciling with its own past.

An important role was played by the last decades' Agreements between the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington and the various Romanian institutions possessing archives from the Second World War period. These admirable efforts must continue, aimed at presenting the wrongdoings of the past and to guarantee the education of young generations in the spirit of the truth is of utmost importance.

The tragic experience of the Holocaust compels us to continue the efforts of the last years and to assume the responsibilities derived from past events. The education in this field and the research of the Holocaust will prevent the recurrence of such tragedies, by confirming the spirit of dialogue and tolerance binding all members of the Romanian society, regardless of their ethnic ties and religious beliefs.

I strongly believe that the history of the Jewish communities as a whole, knowing the multiple aspects of their lives before the Second World War, the history of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust are all fields of research and possible motivations of the educational process, not yet explored in their entire complexity. It's a new way in a new Europe. Concepts are

changing, they go across disciplines with tremendous speed, and we, as members of the civil society, are the architects of these changes in a living world with a complicated past, which continues to influence Romania's modern choices.