

**Introductory statement for panel on Holocaust education**  
**Moderator Gert Weisskirchen**

*“The postulation that Auschwitz shall never  
be again is the first to education.”*  
Theodor W. Adorno<sup>1</sup>

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me to host this special panel on Holocaust education. I strongly believe that this is a critical topic of concern to all of us. A better understanding of the impact of teaching about the Holocaust can help us all in our efforts to combat hatred and plant the seeds of respect and pluralism.

As the generation of the survivors gradually disappears, education about the Holocaust becomes ever more important. However, this is in contrast to the findings of recent surveys that show that growing numbers of young people place National Socialism and the Nazi persecution of the Jews firmly in the past, considering it to be irrelevant to the present. Correspondingly, knowledge about basic facts of the Holocaust is declining, according to a 7-country survey recently conducted by TNS Sofres in Paris, commissioned by The American Jewish Committee.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, educational experts have started stressing the importance of programs that connect the past, present and future.<sup>3</sup>

There is still a checkered approach throughout the OSCE region to dealing with the history of the Holocaust. While Holocaust education is an obligatory part of school curricula in some countries, little is taught systematically in other countries. It is important to update our approaches to Holocaust education in those countries where the era is widely taught and establish basic curricula in those places where it is lacking altogether.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to re-thinking approaches to Holocaust education, it is important to recognize its limits as an antidote to dealing with contemporary antisemitism. This is also the main point of a highly commendable new report by ODIHR that surveys the status of Holocaust education and programs to combat antisemitism in the OSCE region.<sup>5</sup> In order to create more awareness of the historical and current manifestations of antisemitism, it is critical to distinguish between the distinct patterns of antisemitism and issues of racism. Such programs also need to confront the dilemma that some members of marginalized groups who are themselves victims of discrimination may nonetheless make antisemitic arguments. This makes it hard to

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<sup>1</sup> Theodor W. Adorno: *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit*. (Frankfurt am Main, 1971, suhrkamp), p. 88

<sup>2</sup> AJC: *Thinking about the Holocaust 60 Years Later. A Multinational Public-Opinion Survey* (2005)

<sup>3</sup> Taskforce Education on anti-Semitism & AJC: *Results of the European Workshop: Education on anti-Semitism*, (Berlin, April 18-20, 2004), p. 10

<sup>4</sup> Taskforce Education on anti-Semitism & AJC: *Results of the European Workshop: Education on anti-Semitism*, (Berlin, April 18-20, 2004), p. 7

<sup>5</sup> ODIHR: *Education on the Holocaust and on Anti-Semitism: An Overview and Analysis of Educational Approaches* (Juni 2005) <http://www.osce.org/odihr/documents.html>

delineate between victims and perpetrators. One approach is to familiarize students studying history with decisions and moral dilemmas in everyday life, in order for them to better understand parallels to their own experiences.<sup>6</sup>

It is clear that while it is essential to our post-war societies to study the heinous crime of the Holocaust, such education should be complemented by programs that teach about current forms of antisemitism. It is important that we do not lose sight of the particularity of the Holocaust. While such education contains important universal lessons regarding discrimination, genocide and other crimes against humanity, it is important to present this material in such a way that avoids de-contextualizing the Holocaust. A recent example in Germany was the phrase “bombing Holocaust” coined by the far right-wing party NPD to describe the WWII allied bombardment of Dresden.<sup>7</sup> Such phrases are in fact even more dangerous than outright Holocaust denial – the latter remaining a frightening phenomenon in its own right<sup>8</sup> – because they chip away at the foundations of memory, destabilizing our common understanding of the basic values on which our postwar societies have been built.

A growing danger in recent years has been the shifting patterns of antisemitism. Scholars have identified the so-called ‘secondary antisemitism,’ which shifts blame for antisemitism to the victims. For instance, there is an uncomfortably widespread view that Jews are exploiting the memory of the Holocaust for their own purposes, that Israel is treating the Palestinians in the same way in which the Nazis treated the Jews, or that Jews are themselves to be blamed for antisemitism.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, conspiracy theories and overly simplified views of world politics often correspond to antisemitic patterns of thought.<sup>10</sup> Examining such patterns is complicated by the fact that their very elaboration may serve to anchor antisemitic stereotypes instead of working against them.<sup>11</sup>

These stereotypes and clichés are identified in a detailed manner in the excellent EUMC Working Definition of Antisemitism.<sup>12</sup> I will adopt this working document to provide a definitional basis for my work as personal representative on the issue of combating antisemitism.

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<sup>6</sup> Taskforce Education on anti-Semitism & AJC: Results of the European Workshop: Education on anti-Semitism, (Berlin, April 18-20, 2004), p. 8

<sup>7</sup> Der Stern, 21. Januar 2005, Jörg Schurig/dpa: „Bombenholocaust von Dresden“

<sup>8</sup> Deborah Lipstadt: Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory (London, 1993, The Free Press/Macmillan)

<sup>9</sup> Aribert Heyder, Julia Iser & Peter Schmidt: Israelkritik oder Antisemitismus? Meinungsbildung zwischen Öffentlichkeit, Medien und Tabus. In: Wilhelm Heitmeyer u.a.: Deutsche Zustände 3. (Frankfurt am Main, 2004, suhrkamp), pp. 144-165; Henryk M. Broder: Ein moderner Antisemit. Möllemanns Aussagen verraten ihn selbst. In: Tobias Kaufmann & Manja Orlowski (Hg.): „Ich würde mich auch wehren...“ Antisemitismus und Israel-Kritik – Bestandsaufnahme nach Möllemann (Potsdam, 2004, weber), pp. 27-29; Yves Pallade: Medialer Sekundäranisemitismus und das Versagen gesellschaftlicher Eliten. In: Klaus Faber (Hg.): Altneuer Antisemitismus (Potsdam, forthcoming, Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg)

<sup>10</sup> Tobias Jaecker: Antisemitische Verschwörungstheorien nach dem 11. September (Münster, 2004, Lit)

<sup>11</sup> Susanna Harms: Mit Shoa Education gegen aktuellen Antisemitismus? Interview mit Gottfried Köbler. In: "Vor Antisemitismus ist man nur noch aus dem Monde sicher. Antisemitismus und Antiamerikanismus in Deutschland" (Klett, 2004, Leipzig), pp. 104; Taskforce Education on anti-Semitism & AJC: Results of the European Workshop: Education on anti-Semitism, (Berlin, April 18-20, 2004), p. 5

<sup>12</sup> EUMC: A Working Definition of Anti-Semitism

<http://www.hagalil.com/antisemitismus/2005/01/definition.htm>

Another important aspect of teaching about the Holocaust today is to avoid the danger of reducing Jewish history to a history of victimhood. In most countries, existing schoolbooks and curricula urgently need revision to incorporate more information about their country's Jewish history, as well as information about large centers of Jewish life today, including the U.S. and Israel. The framework guidelines on this issue developed by the Leo Baeck Institute in Frankfurt could serve as a model for revisions.<sup>13</sup>

Training educators and student leaders is a critical element in revising curricula on the Holocaust and designing new educational material on combating antisemitism. Given that teachers are a reflection of society at large, inevitably bringing problems such as secondary antisemitism into the classroom, it is important to deal with this problem openly. The fact that there are no easy solutions is no reason to stop us from beginning to find the solutions. Education must also be understood in a broader sense. It takes place not only at educational institutions but in the public sphere, including in the media. Here we need to be aware of antisemitic propaganda in Arab and Turkish-language extremist literature, which is increasingly finding its way into mosques and private schools within the OSCE region.<sup>14</sup>

The Task Force on Antisemitism and Education of the American Jewish Committee's Berlin Office has identified a growing conflict for teachers trying to teach the Holocaust to students with migrant backgrounds, for whom national history may not be their sole frame of reference.<sup>15</sup> This is no reason to stop teaching about the Holocaust, but good reason to be sensitive to the varying frames of reference of the students in a classroom.

We have on our panel a group of world-renowned experts. I would like to ask them to help us better understand how Holocaust education can be used in combating today's antisemitism, its possibilities and limits, and additional educational approaches for tackling the pernicious issue of antisemitism.

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<sup>13</sup> Taskforce Education on anti-Semitism & AJC: Results of the European Workshop: Education on anti-Semitism, (Berlin, April 18-20, 2004), p. 6

<sup>14</sup> Claudia Dantschke: Islamistischer Antisemitismus. In: "Vor Antisemitismus ist man nur noch aus dem Monde sicher. Antisemitismus und Antiamerikanismus in Deutschland" (Klett, 2004, Leipzig), pp. 24-34

<sup>15</sup> Taskforce Education on anti-Semitism & AJC: Results of the European Workshop: Education on anti-Semitism, (Berlin, April 18-20, 2004), p. 9