

ITF/OSCE-EVENT

“Lessons learned?

– Holocaust remembrance and combating anti-Semitism in 2008 –“

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Excellencies, ladies and gentleman,

Introduction

It is an honour for me to be with you today to mark 70 years since the 1938 Night of pogroms, “*Kristallnacht*”, to pay respect to victims of atrocities of that night and what followed. I would therefore like to congratulate and thank the Austrian Chairmanship of the International Task Force on Holocaust Remembrance, Education and Research, personally to Ambassador Ferdinand Trauttmansdorff and his team and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, personally to Ambassador Janez Lenarčič and his team for bringing us together on this important, historic date. This helps us to co-ordinate our work and bring it forward in a complementary fashion.

The remembrance of the Holocaust serves today, as it did in 1948, at the event of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as a reminder to the world of the evil that prevails if the basic fundamental respect for human rights is disregarded. We have come a long way, however

racism, xenophobia and anti-semitism are still very day confrontations for very many people across Europe.

Nourishing a culture of remembrance, based on knowledge of what has happened in the past and geared to a better and shared future is a task for all of us. There is a need to raise awareness about the Holocaust and there is a need to increase understanding as for what role human rights violations and anti-Semitism in particular has played in the process that led to the Holocaust. We also need to look at the human rights framework that is available to us today.

FRA mandate

The FRA joined the Task Force on Holocaust Remembrance, Education and Research as an observer in June 2007. Previously, the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia mandate has covered racism and xenophobia. The EUMC has published a number of reports documenting and analysing causes of racism and anti-Semitism and established a data collection network RAXEN that collects such data.

Data collection and research of anti-Semitism remains a priority for the Agency. In January 2008, we have published an Overview of the situation of anti-Semitism in the EU.

Based on the data collection the Agency is formulating opinions and conclusions on thematic topics for the Union institutions and Member states. FRA is also mandated to promote dialogue and closely cooperate with civil society and to raise the awareness of the general public about their fundamental rights, and about possibilities and different mechanisms for enforcing them.

Greater knowledge and broader awareness of, fundamental rights issues are conducive to ensuring full respect of fundamental rights. In short the FRA is pursuing a strategy of awareness raising, of human rights education and of substantial, evidence based advice to decision making institution at EU and at national level on fundamental rights issues.

Concrete examples of FRA work

Advancing awareness on the Holocaust goes hand in hand with raising awareness on fundamental rights. The history of anti-Semitism and Holocaust shows the consequences of a gradual and increasing denial of human rights.

At the beginning, Jews were denied social and economic rights, such as the freedom to choose an occupation, or the right to property. Later, civil and political rights, such as freedom of thought and expression were violated, and in the end Jews paid with their lives when their most fundamental rights were brutally and systematically squashed –, the right to human dignity, the

prohibition of discrimination, the prohibition of torture or the prohibition of slavery and forced labour and ultimately the violation of the right to life.

While this took place only a few spoke out. A culture of silence – a culture of acceptance prevailed. Therefore we need people to speak out, we need politicians, media and institutions to rigorously pursue these issues.

I am happy that I can report today at this distinguished forum about a number of activities of the Agency that not only draw attention to the need to remember, research and educate about the Holocaust, but also aim to underscore links with human rights in this new century.

In the field of Human Rights Education: As I mentioned earlier, education plays a key role in helping future generations realise the dangers of human rights violations. It is vital that young people learn from the Holocaust and are empowered to shape an inclusive society, based on respect for diversity and the protection and promotion of fundamental rights. In many EU Member States, visits to memorials, commemoration sites, original historical sites and historical exhibitions form an integral part of Holocaust education and Human Rights education. The FRA, therefore, decided to launch a project that studies the role that visits to original sites and historical exhibitions play in school education across the EU. The project will include an assessment of the pedagogical and human rights approaches and educational programmes of a selection of such sites in the EU.

In the field of Awareness Raising: Last year, the FRA in cooperation with Yad Vashem brought together several times groups of youngsters in order to enable them to speak, via video conference, with the Holocaust survivors in

Israel. The pupils learned about the past, but they also learned about how lessons of the past, affect us today. Through identifying specific human rights violations, the pupils also learned about educational initiatives to combat anti-Semitism and racism.

Marking 70 Years since 1938 Night of Pogrom “*Kristallnacht*”, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in cooperation with Yad Vashem is hosting today a professional Development Seminar for a Network of Educators. The Seminar with teachers from EU MS and students who have been involved in outstanding projects from EU Member States is dedicated to: (1) remembrance of victims of the night of 1938 Night of Pogroms “*Kristallnacht*”, (2) discussions about lessons learned from the Holocaust and their relevance for awareness raising about human rights today.

We are in fact setting up a network of educators within EU Member States, who we wish to develop a long term cooperation with in the field of Holocaust education and awareness raising about fundamental rights.

Further in the field of awareness raising: The FRA has produced an awareness raising tool S’cool Agenda for school children. In a form of school calendar, children get familiarised with various concepts and situations around fundamental rights.

We have included awareness raising material about the Holocaust and the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. The calendar is downloadable from our web site. I am also happy to tell you about the large amount of

requests that our Agency received (over 200.000 in short period of time). This indicates interest of young people and also demand for such product.

This year the S'cool Agenda will be published in English, German and French. For the years to come, we would like to develop proactive partnerships with those who could help to make the calendar available to young people across all EU Member States.

Last but not least, another awareness raising project of the Agency is an activity that aims to make young people more aware of the benefits of diversity and the consequences of discrimination. Today we organise a "Diversity Day" in Vienna, in cooperation with the city authorities. Participants have come from Vienna and from neighbouring cities in Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovak Republic as well as from Spain and the UK. In the main hall, more than 40 NGOs and organisations will have interactive stands inviting the young people to experience and discuss the importance of fundamental rights and equality. One of these stands is also dedicated to Holocaust, its remembrance and dangers of inaction when confronted with fundamental rights violation. As for future years, we have already started discussions with the Memorial de la Shoah and other remembrance organisations and Jewish NGOs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, learning from the past, we must empower people to understand the significance of human rights protection today. And on a day

like this let us recall that avoiding new tragedies is the responsibility of each and everyone of us.

Thank you for your attention.