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**PERMANENT MISSION  
OF GREECE TO THE OSCE**

**OSCE Conference on anti-Semitism, Vienna 19-20 June 2003**

**Session 2: The Role of Governments and Civil Society in Promoting Tolerance**

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In our days racial resentment is still a powerful force. Many places in the world thrive on deep cultural divisions and the concept that nations and people can belong to different cultural groups is based on a belief in democracy, human rights and religious tolerance.

Preserving the historical past through primary sources is only a small part of working against the possibility of a historical repetition. Primary sources are the pillars of education and the **Greek Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs** has taken great steps both through textbooks and classroom learning to meet the challenge of a multicultural approach. The Secretariat for Greek Education Abroad and Intercultural Education, established in 1996, serves as a pivotal coordinating body within the Greek educational system. It functions as a consultative vehicle through which diverse communities and relevant parties can contribute to the development of Greece's intercultural education policy. In this context the Holocaust possesses the saddest landmark in the history of mankind. That is why it is imperative that Holocaust education moves beyond continental boundaries, that it becomes a banner for human rights.

Greece has always been at the forefront whenever efforts were made to eradicate hatred, bigotry, racism and fear in the Balkans, in Europe and in the rest of the world. The post world war II government of George Papandreou was the first among European countries to pass legislative measures for the restitution of the property confiscated by the German forces during the war and to reinstate citizenship and employment in the public sector for the Jewish population. In more recent years the Greek government has worked closely with the Jewish Central Board and the Jewish communities throughout Greece in an effort to preserve and promote the Judeo-Christian heritage of the Greek people. During the Washington Conference on Holocaust Era Assets some years ago, the Greek delegation submitted reports regarding education, archives and looted artifacts. Furthermore, the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** signed an agreement in May 1999 with the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC for the exchange of documents associated with the Greek Jews, adding in this way to the growing archival collection of the Museum. Today, this undertaking has been completed, and documents relating to the history of Greek Jews are now accessible on both sides of the Atlantic. Additionally, the Service of Historical Archives of the Ministry published a historical volume – which received significant recognition by both the religious and lay community in Greece. This volume delineates the history of Greek Jews from the beginning of the century

until the end of the Second World War. Finally, the Ministry is in negotiations with the Russian government for the repatriation of the archives of the Jewish community of Thessalonika. These records had been illegally moved to Berlin by the occupying forces and in turn were transferred to Moscow.

To be in favor of human rights and democracy is not however an exclusive responsibility for leaders and governments. The extinction of racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia is up to each individual, member of the large universal community. Thus, apart of state institutions there are a number of non-profit organizations which contribute significantly to the preservation and continuation of the memory of the Holocaust, as the Jewish Museum of Greece and the George Papandreou Foundation.

**The Jewish Museum of Greece**, founded in 1977, houses today more than 8000 artifacts, remnants of the religious and domestic life of the Greek Jewish communities. It was conceived and created as a teaching museum and apart from its historical, ethnographical and musicological work, it has undertaken an extremely important social mission. Today the Jewish Museum of Greece promotes better understanding and tolerance through educational exhibits and programs (preservation, guided tours and games). These programs, whether created by the museum staff to cover the needs of visiting schools, or custom made to accommodate the special requirements of a class or group of children, or even designed to teach about a specific subject or artifact, according to the visiting teachers instructions, receives the highest status among the museums priorities. The entire permanent exhibition has been designed to teach the visitor about Jewish Holidays, Liturgy, Tradition, Religious Practices, History Shoah (Genocide), Costumes, Every Day Life and Art, thus familiarizing the visitor with a different religious community. The Museum plans to brake its boundaries and make these and other educational programs, available for traveling to the classroom, particularly of schools which are far from Athens, thus giving all pupils and students the opportunity to view, handle and understand the material evidence of another religion and tradition of Greece. The museum already dispenses information material to teachers, educators and group leaders, upon request, to aid preparation for a visit or participation in a specific educational program.

The most significant program for the education of young children on the Holocaust, being designed at the moment, called "Daniel's Story". An idea developed by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum has been adapted to the Greek events of the Holocaust, and will show, using a sequence of theatrical "stages", set up by the children themselves, the fate of another child, born into the "wrong" religion, during an unfortunate time.

Among the museum's permanent exhibits, designed to present an image of what was and is no more, a special place has been reserved for the Shoah, the Holocaust, which took the lives of 87% of the Greek Jews. Further to the artifacts, documents and photographs permanently exhibited, the completion of the installation of touch screen info-kiosks, within this and other exhibits, will enable the visitor to view the entire Holocaust collection of the museum. A small video-room established within the permanent exhibition area, offers the visitor brief films on relevant subjects. Additional periodic exhibits complement the data provided by the permanent exhibition. These exhibits are designed to expand the museum's thematology and to bring to public view artifacts not permanently displayed in order to focus on a specific aspect or present another point of view. The current plan includes presentations of temporary exhibits, received from museums and institutions in Greece and abroad, with which the Museum is in contact and co-operation. A significant part of the museum's work relates to the collection and preservation of the oral tradition of the Greek Jews, including folk tales, proverbs, recipes, poems, songs and music, stories, remembrances and testimonies.

The Jewish Museum has the only library of Jewish interest in Greece, and as such, provides facilities for numerous students, writing papers or dissertations, and researchers from Greece and abroad. Further to this, the museum's Photographic Archive, as well as the WWII Archives, provide original material to those conducting research on the subject. The photographic exhibition on the Shoah, which was presented during the Stockholm International Forum, has been selected from the Museum's Archive. In order to promote interest and understanding of the history of the Greek Jews, the museum participates in International and European Conferences and Research Projects, the most significant programs, being RAPHAEL, OIKOS II, now in progress. With the participation of three countries and their chosen museums, the project aims to present, through the museums' collection, the way migrant or smaller ethnic or religious communities, enrich and influence their larger, host community, and are in turn, influenced by it. The Jewish Museum of Greece was chosen by the Ministry of Culture to present through its collection, a story of successful symbiosis, dating from the late antiquity.

**The George Papandreou Foundation** was founded in 1989. The foundation is active in helping develop democratic institutions and to expand the reach of democratic activity, by supporting electoral procedures, human rights, local administrations and decentralization. It is well known that George Papandreou was the Liberation Prime Minister and that he headed the first post-war government after the departure of the German occupation troops. One of the first actions taken by his government was the effort to create the institutional basis for full reinstatement of the victims of the Nazi occupation, with special emphasis on the Jewish community. The George Papandreou government was the first in Europe to mobilize its energies and pass the relevant laws in order to reinstate the properties to relatives of the Jews who perished. The George Papandreou Foundation has decided to go ahead with a program offering scholarships for the children of Nazi victims, both those of the Jewish faith but also members of other communities that were subjected to barbaric acts of the occupying forces. The Foundation was chosen as the Greek non-governmental organization responsible for handling the funds from the Nazi Persecutee Relief fund Account which will be disbursed through the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

The Foundation organizes educational seminars for grade school and high school students from around the country. In 1999 alone over 50 schools (about 2000 children) attended these historical seminars. The seminars emphasize the struggle and history of modern Greece as it made its way into a full democracy, and emphasizes the equality of all citizens before the law, (isonomia) and equality before society, regardless of social, ethnic, or religious background (isopolitia). It is in the spirit of equality, democracy, and support for human rights that the Foundation continues to educate students and intervene in Greek society at large, through numerous fora, through support for and participation in conferences through books, pamphlets, lectures and overall high visibility in modern Greek society. In particular during the student seminars on modern Greek history, specific emphasis is given to the principles of a democratic society and a modern welfare state. By making these young students aware of the danger of anti-Semitism, ethnic conflict and all other expressions of hate and discrimination through photos, documents and other material of that period, the foundation builds a better future for Greece.

Greece supports officially the Interfaith Dialogue and works systematically towards peaceful coexistence and collaboration among the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. As it was affirmed in the 1992 Berne Declaration and the 1994 Bosporus Declaration "a crime committed in the name of religion is a crime against religion". One major role of religion is to bring the peace of God into the world on a local and global level. Recently the city of Thessalonica hosted the Fifth Academic Meeting between Judaism

and Orthodox Christianity (May 27 - 29, 2003). In his address representing the Minister of Foreign Affairs the Under Secretary Mr. Magriotis underlined not only the symbolic character of the meeting at the city where once flourished the largest Jewish community of Europe, but even the role of the two Patriarchies, the one in Jerusalem, a bridge of peace between Israelis and Palestinians in the Middle East, and the Oecumenical Patriarchate which, since 1977 has worked in an effort to bring peace and justice to turbulent areas around the world.