



Summary Report

Roundtable event: Raising awareness about the Holocaust

28 January 2014

Venue: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chisinau, Moldova

Introduction

OSCE participating States have committed themselves to “promote remembrance of and, as appropriate, education about the tragedy of the Holocaust, and the importance of respect for all ethnic and religious groups” (MC Decision 12/04, MC Decision 10/05). The commitment to promote Holocaust education, remembrance and research and encourage an annual day of remembrance was also part of the 1998 Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, which forms the basis of the work of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). In 2005, a resolution by the UN General Assembly designated 27 January as the *International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust*, thus acknowledging the universal implications of this event.

In co-operation with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) facilitates the exchange of good practices in the area of Holocaust remembrance and education. The Holocaust Memorial Days organized in different OSCE participating States are an important opportunity for governments to both introduce and intensify activities related to remembrance and education, to speak out against anti-Semitism and to confront Holocaust denial. Reflecting on this watershed in European history also allows societies to focus on the importance of promoting human rights, mutual respect and understanding in today’s world.

Organized on the margins of 27th January, the roundtable event set out to raise awareness about the Holocaust. It gave the participants an opportunity to jointly discuss the significance of promoting Holocaust remembrance and education, including by looking at some of the challenges faced in this regard. Furthermore, the roundtable served as a platform to exchange good practices on Holocaust remembrance and education and present relevant practical tools and initiatives. Finally, the purpose of the meeting was to consult and engage with Moldovan stakeholders on questions linked to Holocaust remembrance and education, including with a view to exploring opportunities for further international exchange and co-operation on related issues.

09:30-10:00

OPENING SESSION

Moderator: Mr. Valeriu Chiveri, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration

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Ms. Elena Beleacova, Director General, Bureau for Interethnic Relations

Mr. Jan Plešinger, Deputy Head, OSCE Mission to Moldova

Ms. Floriane Hohenberg, Head of the Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

Dr. Kathrin Meyer, Executive Secretary, International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

Mr. Valeriu Chiveri, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, welcomed the participants and thanked ODIHR and IHRA for their co-operation. He placed the organization of this roundtable in the context of the international community's commitment to commemorating the Holocaust, which was expressed in the 2005 resolution by the General Assembly of the United Nations. Mr. Chiveri noted that the organization of the roundtable reflects the moral responsibility of the Moldovan authorities to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive. He stressed that the event took place at the time of the promotion of educational reforms regarding the national minorities in Moldova. He expressed his hope that the event will strengthen the country's efforts to combat anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia, intolerance and all kinds of discrimination.

Ms. Elena Beleacova welcomed the participants on behalf of the Bureau for Interethnic Relations and underlined the need to raise awareness about the Holocaust among the wider public so as to make it an essential element of the protection of human rights. She noted the support given by local government authorities, civil society and different communities to the establishment of a monument dedicated to the victims of Holocaust in Moldova. The speaker emphasized that a revival of Jewish life and culture became possible after Moldova declared its independence in 1991. Ms. Beleacova also mentioned the Roma genocide during the Second World War. She emphasized that significant progress in combating intolerance against Roma and Jews has been made in Moldova over the last couple of years. In this regard, she referred to the *Action Plan to support the Roma ethnic group in the Republic of Moldova 2011-2015*.

Mr. Jan Plešinger addressed the participants on behalf of the OSCE Mission to Moldova. Mr. Plešinger stressed the importance of the implementation of OSCE commitments in this area and emphasized the role of the OSCE as conflict prevention and resolution mechanism. The speaker underlined the need to remember the historical developments that led to the Holocaust and emphasized the importance of making sure that history does not repeat itself. He expressed appreciation for the fact that Ms. Beleacova referred to the Jewish, but also to the other victims of persecution in her speech. In closing, Mr. Plešinger noted that it is a priority of the Swiss

Chairmanship of the OSCE to give voice to and work more with youth. He stressed the OSCE Mission to Moldova's willingness to involve youth in its work and emphasized the importance of educating the younger generation in Moldova about the Holocaust.

On behalf of ODIHR, Floriane Hohenberg thanked the Moldovan Government for its cooperation and noted that the roundtable was an opportunity for an exchange with governmental and non-governmental actors about existing initiatives, challenges and good practices with regard to Holocaust remembrance in Moldova. She noted that the International Holocaust Remembrance Day had been marked all across the OSCE region on the day before and referenced related OSCE commitments and other international declarations related to Holocaust remembrance. Ms. Hohenberg argued that Holocaust remembrance and education may not solve, but certainly contributes to addressing contemporary challenges related to anti-Semitism and racism. She concluded by mentioning ODIHR tools and initiatives in support of remembrance activities that commemorate the Holocaust and the Roma genocide.

Dr. Kathrin Meyer recalled that the IHRA had emerged from an initiative by the Swedish Prime Minister Gøran Persson that led to the Stockholm Declaration of 2000 which forms the basis of the work of IHRA. With its 31 member states, IHRA, she stressed, is the only inter-governmental body devoted exclusively to the memory of the Holocaust, focusing on both policy and practical initiatives and bringing together governments and experts in the field of Holocaust education, remembrance and research. Dr. Meyer noted that IHRA member states agree on the need to recognize and address Holocaust denial. She stressed that IHRA is interested in reaching out to new countries, especially to those that were affected by the Holocaust. In closing, Dr. Meyer emphasized that collective memory defines societies' presence and future and stressed that remembrance of the Holocaust is essential for building democratic and pluralistic societies.

10:30-12:30

SESSION I: What can be done to promote remembrance of and raise awareness about the Holocaust?

Moderator: Dr. Kathrin Meyer, Executive Secretary, International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

Mr. Andrei Chistol, Head of Division for International Cooperation, Ministry of Culture

Mr. Ion Duminica, Executive Director, NGO "Porojan"

Mr. Evghenii Bric, Executive Director, Iudaic Institute

Ms. Anne Giebel, Adviser on Combating Anti-Semitism, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

Followed by discussion

Welcoming the participants on behalf of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Moldova, Mr. Andrei Chistol described the double responsibility of the Ministry to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust and to raise awareness in order to prevent such tragedies from happening in the

future. He noted that the Ministry of Culture co-operates with other institutions in organizing cultural events and also mentioned the co-operation with the Jewish Cultural Centre “Kedem” in the preparation of Holocaust remembrance initiatives. Mr. Chistol expressed hope for an increase of the co-operation with the Jewish communities of other Moldovan cities. The speaker emphasized the important role of the National Library in raising awareness about the Holocaust, including among children. He also mentioned a photo exhibition about the Holocaust at the National Historical Museum in Chisinau as well as a theatre performance on this topic.

Mr. Ion Duminica referred to the important role of an exhibition that recently raised awareness about the Roma genocide in Moldova, stressing that the majority of the visitors had not heard about this topic before visiting the exhibition. He laid out several challenges related to the Roma genocide, such as, a lack of political will and public interest to address the issue, a strong necessity to revise textbooks and a lack of data. Drawing on historical facts, he noted that many survivors were not willing to speak because of the traumatic impact of their experiences. The speaker expressed concern about the fact that a monument erected to commemorate the Roma genocide had been demolished in Moldova. He welcomed that the event provided governmental and non-governmental representatives with an opportunity to speak about this issue. Mr. Duminica recommended organizing a similar roundtable reaching out to society at large.

Mr. Evghenii Bric provided a comprehensive overview of the history of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust in Moldova, stressing that particular challenges emanate from the difficulty of estimating how many Jews were killed during the Holocaust in Bessarabia due to the changing borders. Mr. Bric mentioned statistics that suggest that 300.000 Jews were killed and added that a number of burial places of Jews have yet to be identified. He noted that the aim pursued in 1940 was to clean the territory of Jews. Mr. Bric emphasized the need to develop statistics of the number of Moldovans that saved Jews during the Holocaust. Turning to the situation since 1990, Mr. Bric noted that the Moldovan Government has officially condemned pogroms and that there have been no anti-Semitic demonstrations ever since independence. At the same time, he expressed concern about acts of vandalism targeting Jewish symbols, such as, the Menorah.

Ms. Anne Giebel introduced the participants to the Holocaust as a key point of reference for a number of human dimension concerns covered by the OSCE’s comprehensive approach to security. These include the need to promote, defend and protect human rights, the importance of non-discrimination and the need to address biases, such as, anti-Semitism and racism. She stressed that the OSCE raises awareness about the Holocaust, incl. at the highest political level, but also by working with IHRA to facilitate the exchange of good practices among experts. She presented ODIHR publications that contain information about how governments and educators prepare remembrance days. Ms. Giebel stressed that official Holocaust Memorial Days are an opportunity for governments to introduce and intensify their efforts to raise awareness about the Holocaust, stressing also the significance of civil society initiatives to promote remembrance.

Introducing the discussion, Dr. Meyer emphasized the need to share good practices and experiences at an international level as well as the importance of research in revealing the historical facts about the Holocaust and the Roma genocide. A participant noted that commemorating the Holocaust has so far not been part of her community’s activities and pledged to reconsider this following the roundtable event. Several participants emphasized that there is a

need for special efforts to educate the young generation about the Holocaust, noting that such activities are more effective if an active role is given to the students in the learning process. One participant stressed the importance of governmental responses to acts of vandalism targeting symbols such as the Menorah. A representative of the Moldovan Government mentioned the current Action Plan to develop a curriculum of Roma history, culture and traditions, noting that there are also plans to develop a similar curriculum for Jewish history and culture. The need to respond to manifestations of Holocaust denial was also stressed by one of the discussants.

14:00-16:00

SESSION II: What is the role of education in remembering the Holocaust?

Moderator: Ms. Floriane Hohenberg, Head of the Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

Ms. Corina Lungu, Adviser, School Education Division, Ministry of Education

Ms. Richelle Budd-Caplan, International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (Chair of the Steering Committee on Holocaust Memorial Days, Member of the Education Working Group, Member of the Israeli delegation to IHRA, Yad Vashem)

Dr. Werner Dreier, International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (Member of the Education Working Group, Member of the Austrian delegation to IHRA, Erinnern.at)

Followed by discussion

Ms. Corina Lungu noted that the young generation is a mirror of society and stressed the role of curricula as an instrument of social change. In this regard, she explained that the educational reform undertaken in 2010 aimed at changing the model of education, paying more attention to the development of skills, such as, civic solidarity and intercultural tolerance. Ms. Lungu stressed the importance of the promotion of multiple perspectives and of the acceptance of diversity, also in history classes. She noted that the Holocaust is addressed as part of the history curriculum in grade 9 as well as through optional subjects. The speaker also laid out how the Ministry of Education co-operates with the Jewish community in promoting Holocaust and tolerance education, including through essay contests. She pledged that the Ministry would further promote such activities and seek partners to co-operate in teaching about the Holocaust.

Ms. Richelle Budd-Caplan stressed that experience shows that the Holocaust is being and can be successfully taught to students and noted that Holocaust Memorial Days provide educational opportunities. She drew the participants' attention to guidelines on how to teach about the Holocaust prepared by IHRA and laid out some of the goals and learning outcomes of remembrance activities. She stressed the significance of creating an educational process by using modern technology, introducing research assignments, working with witnesses, testimonies or visual history etc. Ms. Budd-Caplan also presented some concrete examples of educational

initiatives taken by teachers from a range of different countries that had participated in a training activity at Yad Vashem, noting that her institution's approach includes emphasizing the human story of the Holocaust.

Introducing the work of his organization in training teachers on issues related to the Holocaust and the Roma genocide on behalf of the Ministry of Education, Dr. Werner Dreier stressed that Holocaust remembrance has come to be seen a responsibility of the government rather than of the Jewish community in Austria. He stressed that Holocaust remembrance should be regarded in a *glocalized* context, noting that Holocaust-related sites can be used to enable learning activities at the local level, while also stressing that the local perspective should be integrated into a transnational dialogue with international partners. Dr. Dreier stressed the importance of a multi-perspective approach to learning about the history of mass violence in a democratic society and emphasized the need to empower learners to draw their own conclusions. He stressed that conflicting memories should be addressed in the classroom as well as in society at large.

In the ensuing discussion, it was noted that governments play an important role in preventing tragedies such as the Holocaust. Several participants emphasized that the roundtable marked the first time that the international dimension of the Holocaust was discussed in Moldova. One participant recommended to the government to establish an official Holocaust Memorial Day in Moldova. Another participant mentioned Moldovan families who had saved Jews during the Holocaust by hiding them in their houses. Two participants shared their thoughts about what aspects are important when it comes to Holocaust education, mentioning the need to provide students with the facts, but stressing also that Holocaust education plays a role in promoting tolerance, mutual respect and understanding. One participant noted that Moldova was at the very beginning of addressing these issues and expressed appreciation for an exchange with experts from other countries. Two participants noted that several projects have already been initiated by the Jewish Cultural Centre in Moldova to promote tolerance and remembrance of the Holocaust and expressed an interest in further co-operation with governmental organizations. One participant focused on the notion that multiple perspectives should be reflected in history classes and argued that it would be euphemistic to present historical figures involved in the Holocaust as controversial. Drawing on her own experiences, a participant shared how she works with her students to promote remembrance of the Holocaust, emphasizing that her efforts had inspired the students to do voluntary work on this issue. Ms. Hohenberg stressed the importance of remembrance as an inclusive process, where debates are facilitated and important facts are shared. She also stressed the importance of governments working with civil society on this issue.

16:30-16:45

CLOSING REMARKS

Closing remarks were provided by Ms. Corina Calugaru on behalf of the Moldovan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Integration as well as by Ms. Floriane Hohenberg on behalf of ODIHR and by Ms. Elena Beleacova on behalf of the Bureau for Interethnic Relations. All speakers thanked the participants for their co-operation in making the event possible and stressed their commitment to further co-operation on issues related to human rights, Holocaust remembrance and education. Ms. Beleacova pledged that further such roundtable would take place in the future.