Final report of the meeting

Holocaust education and intercultural understanding in South-East Europe: renewing the “Ex-Yugoslav” Pavilion in Auschwitz-Birkenau

Third meeting of the international steering group

Skopje, 18-19 April 2013

A meeting organized within the initiative
Introduction

This report presents the highlights of the discussions held during the meeting on “Holocaust education and intercultural understanding in South-East Europe: renewing the “Ex-Yugoslav” Pavilion in Auschwitz-Birkenau”, organized in Skopje on 18-19 April 2013 by the Ministry of Culture, with the support of the UNESCO Venice Office, within the framework of UNESCO’s Intersectoral Platform for a Culture of peace and nonviolence. This meeting was organized to continue discussions on the renovation and transformation of the (former Yugoslav) block nr. 17, situated within the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau, Poland, and to the setting up of a joint exhibit on the Holocaust.

Participating experts were representing Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia, and The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. International institutions participating were UNESCO, Mémorial de la Shoah (France), Topography of Terror (Germany). Were also present representatives from the State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau (Poland).

Prior to the meeting, visits to historic sites of persecution of Macedonian Jews in Skopje and to the Holocaust Memorial Center, hosted by Goran Sadikarijo, Chief Executive, was organized for all participants.

Anthony Krause, Head of Culture Unit of the UNESCO Venice Office, underlined the necessity to present the preparatory work undertaken since the last meeting in Sarajevo around the 4 thematic chapters of the exhibit (Time and Space, Victims, Perpetrators and Collaborators, Resistant) and to...
start selecting exhibit items, in order to define common approaches and elaborate a harmonized storyline.

Anthony Krause also informed that he had been asked to convey to the participants, especially ministry representatives, a message received from Hannah Lessing, Secretary General of the Austrian National Fund for the Victims of National Socialism, regarding the renovation of the common exhibition premises. He informed that Austria would bear the costs of the renovation of Block 17 in advance, in order to make Block 17 usable as soon as possible, and that the 6 Successor States, users of the upper floor, would need to reach rapidly a consensus with the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation on the amount of the proportional contribution to the renovation (amount of the expenditure incurred for rendering the upper floor useable) and the terms and conditions of its reimbursement to the Foundation. He added that a high level contact group from the 6 countries would probably need to be appointed to carry out this parallel negotiation.
The debates focused on the following topics, following the thematic structure of the exhibit:

**Chapter 1, Time and Space**

- The 6 countries confirm that working groups have been established and that data is being collected. More time is needed to process the data.
- Meanwhile, the following is agreed:

**Introductory panel**

- An introductory text will be prepared by the coordinating group to put in a broader perspective the general timeline, space and background.

**Timeline/chronological panel**

- Every country will select about 10 dates.
- These dates should be related to the deportation of victims to the concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, and integrated in the history of the region, with a short explanation.
- It is also agreed that the timeline will also introduce general political background information, starting in 1918 (creation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia).
- The coordinating group will then harmonize the proposals and propose a consolidated timeline.

**Maps**

- Every country will choose up to five maps explaining the most important stages of the occupation and of persecution policies in the regions of former Yugoslavia and bordering states. The focus should be the timeframe between April 1941 and the liberation.
- For the understanding of the historical background, a few maps will also need to be presented, explaining the pre WW II situation and political evolutions: borders before 1918, after World War I Peace Treaties (1919/1920), after April 1941 (invasion Yugoslavia), after 1947 (Paris Peace Treaty).
NB: It is to be noted that many corresponding maps for the Yugoslav space are already available and can be found for instance on the website of the US Holocaust memorial Museum: European Jewish population distribution, ca. 1933; Yugoslavia, 1933; European Romani (Gypsy) population 1939; Invasion of the Balkans, April 1941; Partition of Yugoslavia, 1941; Major Nazi and Axis camps in southern Europe (1941-1944); Escape routes from German-occupied Europe, 1942; Partition of Yugoslavia, 1941; Partition of Yugoslavia, 1943; Croatia, 1943; Serbia, 1943; Deportations from southern Europe, 1942-1943; Major ghettos in occupied Europe 1930-1944; Southern Europe, 1945.


Social and Cultural background:

- To explain and contextualize maps/timeline, countries will select documents (photos, biographies, etc) important for the general understanding of the political, social and cultural background (Jewish communities in ex-Yugoslavia before WWII, political and cultural life before WWII, the multicultural mosaic before WWII, etc).
- It is suggested that a short introductory film could be specifically produced to introduce the general topic, space and timeline of the exhibit, on the model of the film used at the Holocaust Fund of the Jews from Macedonia.

Documentation:

- It is to be noted that few historical film footages related to ex-Yugoslavia can be found on the website of the US Holocaust memorial Museum, although they are not directly connected to Auschwitz. Some of them can be indicative of general background to deportation scheme: Jews at forced labor in Belgrade, May 1941; Ustasa forces round up villagers, Croatia, Wartime; Yugoslav partisans prepare to fight Yugoslavia, Date uncertain; Romani (Gypsy) campsite in Slovenia, 1943; Romani (Gypsy) men at forced labor, Croatia, 1943; Deportation of Jews from Bulgarian-occupied Macedonia, 1943. Website for films: http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_list.php?MediaType=fi
Similarly, it is to be noted that a selection of photographs related to ex-Yugoslavia can be found on the website of the US Holocaust memorial Museum, although they are not directly connected to Auschwitz. Some of them can be indicative of general background to deportation scheme: A flag bearing a swastika is raised over the city hall in Sarajevo after German forces captured the city. Sarajevo, Yugoslavia, April 16, 1941; An order to Jews and Serbs from the Croatian nationalist Ustasa government to move out of certain city neighborhoods. Zagreb, Yugoslavia, 1941; Streetcar in Belgrade bearing the sign: "Forbidden to Jews." Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 1941-1942; Jews forced to clear rubble from streets following the bombardment of Belgrade. Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 1941; A child wears the compulsory Jewish badge. The "Z" stands for the word "Jew" (Zidov) in Croatian. Yugoslavia, after May 22, 1941. Website for photographs: http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/gallery_ph.php?ModuleId=10005456.

Finally, it is to be noted one oral history video related to ex-Yugoslavia can be found on the website of the US Holocaust memorial Museum, also indicative of general background to deportation scheme: Flory (Floritza) Jagoda, born 1923 in Sarajevo, describes anti-Jewish measures following the occupation of Zagreb in 1941. Website: http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/gallery_oi.php?ModuleId=10005456

Chapter 2: Victims

An introductory text will be prepared by the coordinating group to put in perspective the general topic of victims.

The 6 countries confirm that working groups have been established and that data is being collected. More time is needed to process the data. Video oral testimonies of Auschwitz survivors have already been prepared in several cases (Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia).

It is agreed that all groups of victims (Jews, Roma, partisans, etc.) should be dealt with in this chapter.

It is agreed that the exhibit space cannot at this stage present a complete general database/list of all victims from the 6 countries. However, the experts will compile a panel in which all groups are listed with the following specifications: Group, estimated number of deportees to Auschwitz, persecuted on other sites, development and important deportation dates between 1941 and 1945. Details will need to be given on itineraries and specificities of convoys (departures/arrivals, etc.). In the absence of an exact numbered evaluation, this panel will also explain how far the numbers on persecutions/deportations are precise and where are the research problems, geographical changes, etc.
Each country must select approx.. 3 biographies of Auschwitz victims (representing diversity of groups of victims) and collect related materials (pictures, documents, objects, etc.) for each biography (NB: biography + related material= 1 item). The choice of biographies should be consistent with the fact that most of the deportees died in Auschwitz and were not survivors.

Each country must also prepare/select approx. 3 oral video testimonies of Auschwitz survivors, with small synthetized presentation of each video.

Chapter 3: Perpetrators and Collaborators

- An introductory text will be prepared by the coordinating group to put in perspective the general topic of Perpetrators and Collaborators.
- It is agreed that focus should be on 2 levels: general policy of persecutions; individual perpetuators. The occupation by foreign countries as well as the collaboration of the existing state authorities and societal groups will be explained.
- Every country should select biographies, pictures, items and related material to illustrate the general topic.
- All delegates agree to summarize the most important development of the state crimes committed during WW II in their region and the responsible governments, institutions, and persons in short papers.

Chapter 4: Resistants

- An introductory text will be prepared by the coordinating group to put in perspective the general topic of Resistants (including topic of Yugoslav Partisans).
It is agreed that materials presented in the exhibit related to this topic will concern as a priority Resistance movements/actions/organizations in Auschwitz.

It is also agreed that special panels could also concern i) Righteous among Nations, ii) others forms of resistance during process of arrests/deportation (resistance starts in transitional camps, such as Sajmište camp).

Every country should select biographies, pictures, items and related material to illustrate the general topic.

**Database**

It is agreed that in parallel to the preparation of the exhibit, a general database focusing on victims deported to Auschwitz from all historical regions of Yugoslavia during WW II should be established. If known also other victims from historical Yugoslavia can be included. This database will be established for research/educational purposes in the first step, and eventually possibly used as a fundament in the exhibition in the Auschwitz museum.

It is agreed that a restricted working group, chaired by Milan Koljanin (mbkoljanin@gmail.com), and comprising Elijas Tauber (taubereli@yahoo.com), Nataša Mataušić (n.matausic@hismus.hr), Boban Batrićević (batricevic1968@gmail.com), Kaja Široke (kaja.sirok@muzej-nz.si), Goran Sadikario (tbc) (goran.sadikario@holocaustfund.org.mk) will work on this issue and agree as soon as possible on a standardized template.

The model template used by Serbia will be shared as soon as possible by Olga Manojlović Pintar (olgasasa@eunet.rs) with other experts from this group.

Considerations on how to use this basic database with additional applications, e.g. for education, will need to be developed.

**General Conclusions: Timeframe and Working Methods**

**Deadlines:** The exhibition should open in 2015, to coincide with the 70th anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. This means all the exhibit storyline (texts and items) should be finalized by June 2014.
• **Compilation of materials:** UNESCO Venice Office will establish very shortly a web Google Document interface/Drop-box and indicate how to access/post items on the dropbox. 6 folders, for each museum/country, will be created. UNESCO will also share a standard template for the description of items. All delegations have agreed to upload approx 10 to 15 items for chapters 2, 3 and 4 onto the dropbox. Materials regarding chapter 1 can be uploaded (maps, background items) or sent by email (timelines) to the working editorial group (Deadline: 14 June).

• **Editorial Working group:** to facilitate the work and coordinate all inputs/comments received regarding the contents of the exhibit, it's decided to establish an editorial group consisting of Olga Manojlovic Pintar (olgasasa@eunet.rs), Nataša Mataušić (n.matausic@hismus.hr), and Kaja Širok (kaja.sirok@muzej-nz.si), with the support of Karel Fracapane and Anthony Krause (UNESCO), entrusted with the task to compile/synthesize/harmonize/edit. The 3 appointed international experts (Radu Ioanid, Olivier Lalieu, Thomas Lutz) will continue to support in an advisory capacity. On the basis of the items selection and accompanying texts provided on the fact sheets, the coordinators will combine and harmonize the draft general presentation, to facilitate the discussions during the next meeting.

• **Materials:** it is agreed that materials/items in the exhibit will be replicas, not originals.

• **Language:** it is agreed that language for presentation texts/captions in the exhibit will be English/Polish. The designer will need to identify an astute device for presentation in the 6 languages of the participating States (model used in Belgium pavilion).

• **EU funding:** Kaja Širok (Slovenia) will share with the group, for comments and approval, a proposal for EU funding (EACEA “active remembrance”) on didactical activities serving to build a common platform for research/educational purpose about the material from ex-Yugoslavia countries. Deadline: 30 April

• **Design of exhibit:** like in the Austrian case, modalities for a call to tender for the realization of the exhibition (design and production) will need to be discussed.

• **Financial renovation** of Block 17: in accordance with message conveyed by the Austrian National Fund, it is understood that countries need to establish a high level contact group to reach rapidly a consensus with the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation on the amount of the proportional contribution to the renovation (amount of the expenditure incurred for rendering the upper floor useable) and the terms and conditions of its reimbursement to the Foundation. It is requested that an official written message be sent directly to relevant Ministries of the 6 countries in this regard by the Austrian National Fund, also indicating the amount of costs for the renovation. **NB:** further to discussions after the
meeting, Mrs Asja Draca Muntean, Senior Advisor, Ministry of Culture of Serbia (asja.draca@kultura.gov.rs) has kindly accepted to coordinate with other Culture Ministry focal points on future steps to be taken.

- **Next meeting**: the next meeting will be on 3 and 4 July 2013 in the Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau (date is now confirmed by Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau). This expert meeting will serve to i) discuss the items selected and first draft of storyline, ii) visit other National pavilions iii) visit Auschwitz archives.

![Photo credit: © UNESCO/Karel Fracapane](image)