

*The role of Holocaust memorials and museums in human rights
education: the case of Greece**

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I. Introductory remarks

According to UNESCO: “education should encompass values such as peace, non-discrimination, equality, justice, non-violence, tolerance and respect for human dignity”¹. Indeed, if effectively and consistently implemented, human rights education will inevitably lead our societies to embrace a culture of human rights, where rights and responsibilities will be clearly defined and recognized, while prevention and prosecution of human rights violations will be part and parcel of every individual’s responsibility. As the Council of Europe puts it, human rights education: “is a culture where human rights are as much a part of the lives of individuals as language, customs, the arts and ties to place are”². Human rights are inextricably intertwined with dignity, equality, respect and the rule of law. Freedom from discrimination is essential for those that want to live in dignity. After all contemporary genocides have been the result of denial of those basic human rights.

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¹ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/human-rights-education/>

² <http://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/introducing-human-rights-education>

The situation of Jews in Greece is an example of how the lack of human rights education leads to the denial of the most fundamental human rights, while at the same time offers the opportunity to contemporary society to reflect on notions such as human dignity and implement them in all sectors of human activity and especially in education. Up until World War II Greece had a thriving and prosperous Jewish community. Made up mainly of two branches – the Romaniote Jews who are indigenous and have inhabited Greece for 2000 years and the Sephardic Jews (or Sephardim) who migrated to the Ottoman Empire from Spain and Portugal in the wake of the Granada fall – the Jewish community had an outstanding presence in Greek public life. During the Nazi invasion and occupation of Greece (1941-1944), large portions of the Jewish population were transferred to extermination camps. The so-called “Shoah” diminished astoundingly Jewish presence on the Greek territory by putting a horrifying end at centuries of Jewish history in Greece and changing inevitably public life in the respective urban centres.

Holocaust memorials have been erected in all major cities, while museums and synagogues have also a long-standing presence in urban centres (Chania, Salonica, Athens, Rhodes etc.). However, Greece could not avoid the anti-Semitic wave that swept across Europe. Holocaust memorials have been vandalized and synagogues desecrated, anti-Semitic hate speech and stereotypes became common place, including by public officials, anti-Semitic political parties, such as the Golden Dawn, consolidated their presence in the political sphere. These attitudes are partly owed to the fact that educational institutions in the country seem to overlook the Holocaust and its relevance for human rights education, while public opinion largely ignores the contribution of Jews in the formation of contemporary Greek history. Instead of promoting human rights education, holocaust memorials have operated as points of friction.

The present paper aims to explore the way that memorial sites can link the history of the Holocaust to human rights, in furtherance of the central idea of the UN era: promotion of human dignity, equality and fundamental human rights for all.

II. A brief look into the Jewish history of Greece

i) History of Greek Jews: from ancient times to World War II

As already mentioned in the introductory remarks, the Jewish community of Greece is distinguished in two branches, the Romaniote or Greek-speaking Jews and

the Sephardim or Ladino-speaking (Spanish with Hebrew orthography) Jews. The former trace their roots back to the Hellenistic period or according to other accounts to the Roman Empire and are considered “Hellenized”. In an extraordinary mixture the Romaniote Jews adopted the language and customs of Greece but maintained their distinct Jewish identity refraining from being absorbed even by the prevalent Sephardim community. A major urban centre of Romaniote presence was the city of Ioannina in northwestern Greece. Just before World War II, Romaniotes in Ioannina numbered about two thousand. On 25 March 1944 almost the entire community was deported to Auschwitz where they were exterminated. In the wake of the Shoah only two hundred Romaniotes returned to the city, while some of the survivors moved forward to Palestine where the state of Israel was later formed. Other cities with Romaniote presence are Volos, Chalkida³ etc.

On the other hand Sephardic Jews emigrated to Greece in late 15th century. After the fall of Grenada in 1492 a royal edict by the joint Catholic Monarchs of Spain (Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon), also known as the Alhambra Decree⁴ called upon all Jews of the conquered territory either to convert to Christianity or leave the country. Around 50.000 Jews converted into Christianity and remained in Spain. The rest, which formed the majority almost 250.000 people, decided to spread around Europe or to settle in the Ottoman Empire well-known at the time for its tolerance towards religious communities. Most of them resettled in Thessaloniki, which gradually received the denomination “Mother of Israel”.

Indeed the history of Thessaloniki up until World War II is inextricably intertwined with the Jewish community. Mark Mazower describes aptly the contribution of “Sephardites” to the cultural and economic life of the city⁵. Victoria Hislop in her novel “The Thread”, describing the history of a Jewish family who ran a tailoring and dressmaking business in the city, gives a vibrant depiction of Thessaloniki in 1917 five years after its liberation from the Ottoman Empire – just

³ Mardohay Frizis, a member of the Romaniote community of Chalkis, was a well-known colonel that was killed in the battle during the Greco-Italian war of 1940-1941.

⁴ It is worth mentioning that the edict was formally revoked on 16 December 1968 almost five centuries after it was issued. In 2014, the government of Spain decided to grant the Spanish citizenship to Jewish descendants as a form of compensation, without requiring the giving up of their present nationality, see *Rubio Marín R., Sobrino I., Martín Pérez A., Moreno Fuentes F. J.*, Country report on citizenship law: Spain, revised and updated January 2015, available at http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/34480/EUDO_CIT_2015_04-Spain.pdf?sequence=1.

⁵ See *Mazower M.*, *Salonica, city of ghosts: Christians, Muslims, and Jews, 1430-1950*, Harper Perennial, 2005.

before the devastating fire that destroyed a great part of the city including the historic quarters of the Jewish community – when its population was a mixture of Christians, Muslims and Jews:

“The colour and contrast of its rich ethnic meze was reflected in the variety of outfits paraded in the streets: there were men in fezzes, fedoras, trilbies and turbans. Jewish women wore traditional fur-lined jackets and Muslim men their long robes. Wealthy Greek ladies in tailored suits with a hint of Parisian haute couture were in striking contrast to peasants in richly embroidered aprons and headscarves, who had come in from the surrounding rural areas to sell their produce. The upper town tended to be dominated by Muslims, the area nearest to the sea by the Jews, with Greeks occupying the city’s outer edges, but there was no segregation and in every area people from all three cultures mixed together”⁶.

The raise of nationalism in late 19th century, the collapse of the empires in the wake of World War I⁷ and finally the genocide committed by the National Socialist regime of Germany in occupied European territories during World War II diminished the multicultural and particularly Jewish past of the city. From that era few remnants can be traced in the city. Even the Jewish cemetery is lying underneath a university hospital. Jewish presence has also been erased from the collective memory of the city’s inhabitants. Nowadays, the mayor of Thessaloniki strives to restore the eradicated Jewish history, doing his part as representative of a public authority to combat anti-Semitism and intolerance⁸.

ii) Genocide and reparations

In 1943 with deportation to Auschwitz over ninety percent of Salonica's fifty thousand Jews were murdered. Similar was the fate of almost all Jewish communities in Greece⁹. It is worth noting that the “Final Solution” was implemented also with

⁶ Hislop V., *The thread*, Headline Review, 2011, p. 17.

⁷ See the extraordinary novel of Joseph Roth, “The Radetzky March”, published in 1932, describing the history of the Trotta family and the life of one of its members as soldier of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the outer province of Galicia (present-day Ukraine) home to many Ashkenazi Jews. Also, *Bartov O.*, *Erased: vanishing traces of Jewish Galicia in present-day Ukraine*, Princeton University Press, 2007.

⁸ See the relevant article in Israeli newspaper Haaretz, *Thessaloniki Strives to Revive Its Jewish Past, but Encounters a New Form of anti-Semitism*, <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish/features/premium-1.626438>

⁹ See the site of the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece for a comprehensive presentation of all the Jewish communities before and after World War II in Greece, <http://www.kis.gr/en/>. It is worth noting that in Zakynthos, thanks to the fierce resistance of the local

regard to Jewish legacy as the German occupying power destroyed the vestiges of Jewish history, the archives and liturgic scrolls, while it confiscated their property, seized their merchandise and expropriated their houses.

The first registration took place on 11 July 1942. 9.000 men from 18 to 45 years old were forced to gather at Liberty Square, were subjected to inhuman treatment and were conscripted to perform forced labour across the country. Faced with this situation, the Jewish community sought negotiations with Max Merten, an SS officer counsellor to the military governor and in charge of civilian affairs in the Salonika-Aegean area. Merten received, on November 1942, a ransom of 2.500.000.000 drachmas in order to free Greek Jews from further compulsory work. The agreement was not meant to be kept by the German side. It only provided it with more time to continue and in fact accelerate expropriations of Jewish property and valuables. Even the centuries old Jewish cemetery with almost 500.000 tombs was not spared. It used to stand where the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki now stands¹⁰.

The carefully organised extermination of the Jewish population of Thessaloniki starts after the German surrender in Stalingrad. Its first sign was the order issued by Dieter Wisliceny, Adolf Eichmann's special envoy, on 6 February 1943 which introduced German Nurnberg Racial Laws¹¹. All Jews were marked with the Yellow Star of David and provided with special identity cards. The order also imposed the segregation of the Jewish community into ghettos. Three ghettos were established in Salonica, one of which the "Baron Hirsch" "accommodated" Jews that were brought in from other Macedonian cities.

Deportations begin shortly afterwards. On 15 March 1943 the first convoy headed to Krakow and ultimately to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Almost all convoys had as their final destination the concentration camp of Auschwitz except from the one that left on 2 August 1943 and headed to Bergen-Belsen. The fate was common for all: selection of those fit for slave labour and those destined to medical experiments from the ones that were immediately gassed and burned in the Crematoria¹².

Mayor Loukas Karrer and the Metropolitan Bishop Chrysostomos, no registration of the island's Jews took place. The Jewish community was saved from plight hiding in remote villages of the island. As a tribute to these two men, the Jews of Greece erected a monument in their memory in the courtyard of the old Synagogue, see http://www.kis.gr/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=375&Itemid=113.

¹⁰ See *Hagouel P.I.*, History of the Jews of Thessaloniki and the Holocaust, West Chester University of Pennsylvania, 14 November 2006, p. 8 et seq.

¹¹ *ibid.* p. 11-12.

¹² *ibid.* p. 17.

Max Merten was identified as the perpetrator of the deportation of Salonica's Jews, in close collaboration with Adolf Eichmann and his special envoys Dieter Wisliceny and Alois Brunner. Adolf Eichmann faced trial in Israel, convicted for crimes against humanity and executed. Dieter Wisliceny was tried in Nuremberg and again in Bratislava for complicity in the mass murders of Jews from Slovakia, Hungary and Greece. He was executed in 1948. Alois Brunner remained at large, although he was tried in absentia and condemned to death by French Criminal Courts for the genocide of Jews in France.

The Merten case is representative of the reluctance of Greek authorities to pursue the indictment of German war criminals. Merten was not indicted during the Nuremberg trials but he visited Greece in 1957 and was recognized by one of the surviving Jews. Despite the unwillingness of the Greek government to reopen the chapter of war criminals during the German occupation, under pressure by public opinion Merten was tried, convicted of war crimes and sentenced to 25 years. He had only served 8 months, when he was freed and returned to Germany by virtue of a general amnesty promulgated by the then Prime Minister¹³. Law 3933/1959 suspended all criminal prosecutions of German war criminals transferring all jurisdiction to the German criminal system, while Legislative Decree 401/1959 extended applicability of the law to those already serving, namely to Merten. By virtue of these legislative instruments, Greece was blocked from pursuing other prosecutions, for instance against Alois Brunner¹⁴.

At the level of reparation, compensation was paid by Germany to the victims of national socialist genocidal practices (almost 115 million German marks) in 1961 by virtue of a bilateral treaty between Greece and Germany¹⁵.

III. Intolerance

i) General remarks

¹³ See for a comprehensive account, *Spiliotis S.-S.*, "An affair of politics, not justice": the Merten trial (1957-1959) and Greek-German relations, in Mazower M. (ed.), *After the war was over. Reconstructing the family, nation and state in Greece, 1943-1960*, Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 293-302.

¹⁴ The laws of 1959 were repealed in 2010 by virtue of Law 3849/2010, Government Gazette vol. A 80/26.5.2010 (article 22 a).

¹⁵ See Law 4178/1961.

The findings of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance are indicative of the increase in anti-Semitic statements in the media and other public debates. Prejudices vis-a-vis the Jewish community are commonplace, including by public officials¹⁶. Since 1997, when the first report on Greece was published, until 2014 the situation has considerably deteriorated. Indeed, in the first report on Greece, we only find one reference to anti-Semitism. In a paragraph dedicated to education and training, ECRI praised the Greek government for its decision to withdraw passages with anti-Semitic connotations from school books¹⁷. It is interesting, though, that the awareness of the Greek authorities over anti-Semitic discourse, coincides with a surge in anti-Semitic violence. After the second Intifada broke out and violence increased in the occupied Palestinian territories anti-Semitic acts multiply in Greece. The situation deteriorated even more with the entry in the Parliament of the political party “Golden Dawn”, well-known for the hate speech reproduced by its members¹⁸. In addition to reproducing stereotypes and anti-Semitic statements, the attitudes included acts of violence, since Jewish cemeteries, synagogues and monuments erected in memory of the Holocaust were vandalised and desecrated¹⁹.

ii) The legal framework

Although Greece has enacted criminal law provisions aimed at combating racism and intolerance, the implementation of these provisions is far from adequate. The relevant legislation is Law 927/1979 “On punishing acts or activities aiming at racial discrimination” as supplemented by Law 1419/1984. In particular, section 1.1 penalises incitement to discrimination, hatred or violence towards individuals or groups because of their racial, national or religious origin, through public written or oral expressions. Section 1.2 prohibits the constitution of, and membership in, organisations whose aim is to organise propaganda and activities involving racial discrimination. Section 2 punishes the public expression of offensive ideas to an

¹⁶ Characteristic in this regard is the hate speech towards Jews produced by the Golden Dawn party, while a representative of the Greek Orthodox Church (Metropolitan Seraphim of Piraeus) blamed Jews for orchestrating the Holocaust, see ECRI, 5th report on Greece, §§38-39.

¹⁷ European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Report on Greece, CRI (97) 52, September 1997, §13.

¹⁸ ECRI’s 5th report mentions an incident in the national Parliament when the spokesperson of the party read the anti-Semitic forgery Protocols of the Elders of Zion during a plenary session on 23 October 2012, §46.

¹⁹ In October 2012, the Holocaust Memorial for the Jews of Rhodes was vandalized, while the local synagogue was desecrated in May 2010, ECRI, 5th report on Greece, op.cit. §39.

individual or group by virtue of their ethnic or racial origin or their religious affiliation, while section 3 penalises the act of refusing, in the exercise of one's occupation, to sell a commodity or to supply a service on racial grounds.

The abovementioned legislation was amended in 2001 (Law 2910/2001) empowering the public prosecutor to act *ex officio* in respect of offences of incitement to racial discrimination, hatred or violence as these are stipulated in article 1 Law 927/1979. This means that he/she is enabled to initiate a case upon learning of a potential offense or when alerted by human rights defenders or a group targeted by racial hatred statements. Moreover, pursuant to article 23 Law 3719/2008, which amended article 79 of the Criminal Code, motives of ethnic, racial or religious hatred when committing an offense are considered an aggravating circumstance²⁰. Up to the adoption of this amendment, racist motives of a crime were taken into consideration when determining the sentence.

As regards other documents one should mention Regulation no 1 of the National Radio and Television Council on journalistic ethics for radio and television (Code of Journalistic Ethics for Radio and Television), adopted on 20 June 1991 (Government Gazette 421/B/21.6.91), whose article 5 states: "It is not permissible to depict persons in a way liable, in practice, to encourage the degradation, social isolation or unfavourable discrimination against a section of the public for reasons relating, in particular, to sex, race, nationality, language, religion, ideology, age, sickness or infirmity, genetic orientation or occupation"²¹.

The most important legal development is the adoption in 2014 of a new anti-racist law combating hate crimes and denial of genocide that has provoked fierce reactions due to alleged disproportionate restrictions of the freedom of speech. Law 4285/2014²² amends the obsolete Law 927/1979 by adapting it to EU Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008 on Combating Certain Forms and Expressions of Racism and Xenophobia by Means of Criminal Law. The law penalizes public incitement of violence or hate speech and imposes harsher punishments in case of public officials. Particularly important is article 2 of the text, according to which "Anyone who intentionally, either orally, through the press,

²⁰ See ECRI General Policy Recommendation no. 7.

²¹ See for a compilation of legislative acts and case-law, 2011 Expert workshop on the prohibition of incitement to national, racial or religious hatred – Annex – European Legislations – L-L. Christians <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Expression/ICCPR/Vienna/Annexes/Greece.pdf>

²² Government Gazette vol. 191/10.9.2014.

online, or by any other means or methods, condones, trivializes, or denies the existence or seriousness of the crimes of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, the Holocaust, or Nazi crimes, when those crimes have been established by international court decisions or the Greek Parliament, if this conduct is directed against a group of persons or a member of such a group defined by race, color, religion, descent, national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, or gender identity and in a manner that is likely to incite hatred or violence or is of a threatening or insulting nature against such a group or one of its members, will be punished by the punishments indicated above”. The law also regulates the liability of legal persons, while it empowers the public prosecutor to initiate prosecution *ex officio*.

iii) National case-law

In its fourth report ECRI makes reference to certain cases of anti-Semitic discourse brought before Greek courts. In particular, on 19 September 2008, the Court of Appeals in Athens sentenced the publisher of the newspaper “Eleftheros Kosmos”, along with one of its columnists to a five-month suspended sentence under Law 927/1979. The reason was an article published in the issue of 12 March 2006 containing anti-Semitic statements²³. Another well-known case is the trial of author K. Plevris for his book “Jews: the whole truth” which denies that Holocaust took place. The Court of Appeals found that the accused: “incited deeds and actions that could provoke discrimination, hatred and violence against persons and groups of persons, solely because of their racial and ethnic origins, and expressed offensive ideas against a group of persons because of their racial and ethnic origin” and sentenced him to a 14 month suspended sentence and three years probation²⁴. The defendant was finally acquitted in 2009.

While no one can undermine the importance of criminal sanctions, penal prohibition as such cannot contribute effectively to combat stereotypes and hate speech in everyday life. These are combated through effective human rights education.

iv) Public policies

²³ ECRI, fourth report, par. 16.

²⁴ Athens Court of Appeal, case no 163/13.12.2007. See for a compilation of the case-law, 2011 Expert workshop on the prohibition of incitement to national, racial or religious hatred - Annex – European Legislations – L-L. Christians, *op.cit.*

As regards public policies, the Greek government, responding to a request by the Jewish community of Thessaloniki, decided to designate the 27th of January as “Greek Jews Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Day”²⁵.

IV. The way forward: human rights education and Holocaust memorials

a) Human rights education in Greece

The first step to defend and protect effectively human rights is to learn about them. Human rights education is a *conditio sine qua non* for the consolidation of a tolerant society. This is already identified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which recognizes that the right to education should strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms (article 26). The same document in its preamble stresses the duty of “every individual and every organ of society ... to strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms”. These duties were given a conventional form in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Article 13 of this instrument establishes the right to education which “shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”. Furthermore, this provision stipulates that “education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace”. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, supervisory organ of the abovementioned instrument, has emphasized in its General Comment on article 13 that: “Education is both a human right in itself and an indispensable means of realizing other human rights”²⁶.

In 1993 the World Conference on Human Rights declared that human rights education is “essential for the promotion and achievement of stable and harmonious relations among communities and for fostering mutual understanding, tolerance and peace”. The following year the UN General Assembly decided to declare the UN Decade of Human Rights Education (1995-2004), urging all UN member states to promote “training dissemination and information aimed at the building of a universal

²⁵ Note verbale, Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations’ Office in Geneva, ref. no AS 1861, “Information of the Greek government regarding the implementation of the General Assembly Resolution 61/164, dated December 19th 2006, on Combating defamation of religions”.

²⁶ General Comment no 13: the right to education, UN doc. E/C.12/1999/10, 8 December 1999, §1.

culture of human rights”. Thus, governments have the duty to promote human rights education and incorporate it into school curricula so that young people become early enough acquainted with notions such as equality and dignity in order to foster peace and democracy.

Human rights education has been essentially defined as “training, dissemination and information efforts aimed at the building of a universal culture of human rights through the imparting of knowledge and skills and the moulding of attitudes”²⁷. The Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (2010)²⁸ defines Human Rights Education as “education, training, awareness raising, information, practices and activities which aim, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviour, to empower learners to contribute to the building and defence of a universal culture of human rights in society, with a view to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms”. In the same vein, the United Nations World Programme for Human Rights Education defines human rights education as: “Education, training and information aimed at building a universal culture of human rights”. A comprehensive education in human rights aims on the one hand at providing knowledge about human rights and their protecting mechanisms and on the other at fostering the necessary skills that will contribute to the implementation of human rights in everyday life. Consequently, human rights education is necessary to combat discrimination and promote equality and human rights education action plans of government should have at their core the full development of human personality, as well as the sense of its dignity.

Greece’s human rights education is still in an embryonic state. ECRI has already underlined the need to promote human rights education in Greece with a particular focus on issues of tolerance and respect for cultural diversity²⁹. According to the note verbale of the Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations’ Office in Geneva³⁰, the Greek state has taken the following measures throughout the year 2006

²⁷ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Human rights education and human rights treaties, §1, available at <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/HRTreaties2en.pdf>.

²⁸ Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education

²⁹ ECRI, 2nd report on Greece, §43.

³⁰ Ref. no AS 1861, “Information of the Greek government regarding the implementation of the General Assembly Resolution 61/164, dated December 19th 2006, on Combating defamation of religions”.

to combat anti-Semitism in the framework of implementation of the United Nations' General Assembly resolution 61/164 of 19 December 2006, entitled "Combating defamation of religions: a) four new school textbooks contain information about the Holocaust, b) the Pedagogical Institute wrote a special text about the Holocaust, the life of the Greek Jews, the German occupation and the attempts of the Greeks to save the Jews which was delivered in schools on 27/1/2006, c) the General Secretariat for Youth covered the expenses of an album under the title "The Holocaust of the Greek Jewry – Monuments and memories" which was published by the Central Board of Jewish Communities, d) a seminar about immigration, diaspora and racism was organized in 2006 by the University of Crete – the first out of ten seminars to be attended by teachers, e) organization of a Pan-Hellenic essay writing competition under the topic "The Greek Jews and the importance of the remembrance of the Holocaust". The two winners were awarded a visit to Yad Vashem, f) participation of 18 teachers in a seminar organized by the Yad Vashem museum, g) organization of official ceremonies during the Holocaust Remembrance Day (27/1/2006).

Although important these initiatives are rather fragmentary, since they only cover the first pillar of human rights education which is awareness. Furthermore, they seem to try to impose certain attitude upon the recipients of the actions. They do not focus specifically on a long-term human rights culture, aiming at the change of the mentality of intolerance. This conclusion is further corroborated by the fact that anti-Semitic attitudes are still prevalent in Greek society as will be demonstrated by the following case.

b) Holocaust memorials in Greece

1. Misperceptions...

Holocaust memorials are inevitably interconnected with the genocide perpetrated by the Nazi regime against Jews and other individuals belonging to different ethnic and social groups. However, in contemporary society their presence can contribute to raise awareness on contemporary human rights issues that extend beyond the Holocaust legacy. Promotion of tolerance towards different religious or ethnic groups is one example. How can memorial sites link the history of Holocaust to human rights? Memorial sites are not supposed to be dead monuments. They should be actively involved in social life promoting the central idea of the UN era which is

human dignity and fundamental human rights for all as set out by the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in the wake of World War II.

A salient example of the misperceptions governing Jewish presence in Greece is the incident that took place in the city of Kavala. The Holocaust Memorial (see the image below)



was erected in the memory of 1.484 Kavaliotes of Jewish descent that were arrested by the Bulgarian occupation authorities during World War II on 4 March 1943, displaced and exterminated at the Nazi concentration camp of Treblinka in Poland. The unveiling of the memorial was due to take place on 17 May 2015 but it was postponed on a later date. The reason: the memorial bore the sign of David's Adom and was thus considered provocative for the local population's religious views according to the city's mayor. Part of the city's inhabitants reacted to this decision and organized a silent protest in front of the Memorial the day the unveiling was supposed to take place. The decision of the municipal authority was condemned by the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece³¹.

According to the mayor of Kavala, the memorial did not meet the artistic requirements and thus her intention was to erect another after proclaiming an open artistic competition. However, according to official announcements of the Jewish

³¹ http://www.kis.gr/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=574:the-response-of-the-greek-jewry-to-the-letter-of-the-mayor-of-kavala&catid=9:deltiotypoy&Itemid=32

communities in Greece, as represented in the Central Board, the Mayor asked to remove David's Adom from the monument and to leave only the commemorative text, a request that runs contrary to the religious sentiment of Greek Jews and the memory of the victims of genocide. The mayor seemed to ignore that David's Adom is part and parcel of the Jewish identity, a bitter reminder of the "yellow star" the sign that the Jews of Kavala and all around occupied Europe were forced to bear before their displacement and final extermination took place. In the words of the civil society organisations of the city that requested the review of the municipal decision: "this decision is a blatant outrage against the rights of our fellow citizens of Jewish descent and it is a blatant disregard of the democratic sentiments of the inhabitants of this city and the historical memory for the crime of all crimes that took part here by the Nazis and their collaborators".

As a response the municipal authority stated that it absolutely respects the historical memory as well as the suffering endured by the Jewish community of the city. As evidence of this interest it recalled that the city of Kavala was the first in Northern Greece to erect a monument within the Jewish cemetery in 1952 in the aftermath of World War II in the memory of 1.484 citizens of Jewish descent. Furthermore, it reassured that the unveiling would definitely take place but without specifying whether David's Adom would be removed or not. The decision met with fierce reaction by all political parties represented in the Greek Parliament except the Golden Dawn that did not react in any way.

Finally, the inauguration of the monument took place on 7 June 2015³². Sadly the monument was desecrated two weeks later, with an amount of light blue paint, despite the police guard present during the night³³.

2. ... and best practices

In spite of the anti-Semitic incidents, Holocaust museums in Greece strive to further holocaust education and link it with contemporary human rights issues, even in the absence of an official cooperation with public educational institutions. The most salient example is the revival of the Jewish community in Thessaloniki which is

³² http://www.kis.gr/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=580:inauguration-events-for-the-unveiling-ceremony-of-the-holocaust-monument-in-kavala-&catid=12:2009&Itemid=41

³³ http://www.kis.gr/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=605:desecration-of-the-newly-erected-holocaust-monument-in-kavala&catid=9:deltiatypoy&Itemid=32

supported even more by the awareness stimulated by the present Mayor of the city, Yannis Boutaris.

Survivors of the Holocaust returned to Thessaloniki and tried to revive Jewish life. In 1997, when Thessaloniki was Cultural Capital of Europe, a State Memorial was erected in memory of the 55.000 Greek Jews of Thessaloniki that were annihilated in the extermination camps. Today the Memorial stands at Liberty Square where the initial forced assemblage of Jews took place. Two Presidents of the Hellenic Republic (Constantinos Stephanopoulos and Karolos Papoulias) paid a tribute to the memorial³⁴.

The Jewish Community of Thessaloniki continues restlessly to strive for the future. Setting as its goal to disseminate Jewish culture around the world, it established the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki in 1998, which has embarked upon the digitization of the Community Archives. Symposia and Conferences focusing on Jewish life in Thessaloniki were hosted, while the Museum keeps its doors open to scholars, scientists and researchers from all over the world³⁵. The Museum has a remarkable library with texts that were printed in Thessaloniki from the 16th to the 20th century³⁶.

Another important initiative was the project carried out by the 6th Intercultural Primary School Eleftheriou-Kordeliou in collaboration with the Museum for the Macedonian Struggle in 2011-2012. Its aim was the familiarization of pupils with the notions of multiculturalism, tolerance and religion as an element of personal self-determination, through the knowledge of their city's history. The pupils visited Liberty Square and learned about the Jewish pogrom and inhuman treatment and their transferring to extermination camps. They became familiar with the history of famous buildings of the city belonging to Greek Jews, such as the Allatini and Modiano estates.

Particularly interesting was the simulation that took place in the Museum for the Macedonian Struggle. The pupils were separated in teams and played the members of the distinct communities of the city during the Ottoman period (Muslims, Jews, Christians etc.). They watched a film on the history of Thessaloniki in the 19th and 20th centuries and comprehending the importance of the monuments they had visited

³⁴ *Hagouel P.I.*, op.cit. p. 33.

³⁵ *ibid.* p. 34.

³⁶ See for analytical information the site www.jmth.gr.

previously. These activities prompted discussion in the school regarding multiculturalism and the need to find proper balances that will ensure a harmonious coexistence.

Similar activities dedicated to children have been also organized by the Jewish Museum of Greece. Education programmes for schools focus on the Holocaust trying to instil respect for each other. After the visit to the premises and an introduction into the subject of the Holocaust, the children are called to discuss on simple questions, such as: “Today, do we face groups of people with suspicion? Do we give credit to stereotypes? What would you do if you were in the victims’ place? What would you do if you saw a friend or neighbour treated this way?”³⁷

The Jewish Museum of Greece has also published two books aiming at the education of children and adolescents. The book “The wooden clogs tell their tale; a true story” presents the Holocaust through the experiences of a young boy and it is based on true testimonies from the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, while the book “The Second World War and the Holocaust of Greek Jews, 1941-1944” is meant mainly for high school students and it may serve as a tool for teachers³⁸.

On 24 July 2015 a series of commemorating events took place in the island of Kos, organized by the Jewish Community of Rhodes in the framework of “Memory Days” dedicated to the deportation of the Jews of Kos. A memorial service was held in the Synagogue Kahal Salom, located in the Medieval Town, followed by an event in the Holocaust Memorial at the Square of Martyr Jews. The events were attended by public officials and delegates of Jewish communities. The Jews of the Dodecanese were the last to be deported to concentration camps in July 1944, just a few months before the liberation of Greece. Their properties have been confiscated by the Italian state, since at that time the Dodecanese belonged to Italy (the islands were incorporated in Greece in 1948).

V. Concluding remarks

The incident in the Kavala Holocaust Memorial Site renders even timelier the need for comprehensive, coherent and lasting human rights education and the interaction of awareness raising in the field of human rights with monuments and memory sites

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http://www.jewishmuseum.gr/en/education/holocaust_education/educational_programs_holocaust.html

³⁸

http://www.jewishmuseum.gr/en/education/holocaust_education/educational_publications_hol.html

within our urban centres. The history of the Holocaust should be part of an effective human rights education as it demonstrates in the strongest possible terms the devastating effects of intolerance, hate speech and racial stereotypes. Such an initiative presupposes the cooperation of competent state institutions (Ministry of Education) with Holocaust museums and the local authorities responsible for the preservation of holocaust sites in a consistent manner. Fragmentary approaches are futile and a pure waste of energy and time. Projects connecting the history of the Holocaust to contemporary human rights issues are indispensable. Acknowledging that freedom of speech does not cover incitement to racist violence is also important and needs to be consolidated and comprehended. Understanding that peremptory norms of international law, such as the prohibition of genocide, are above all should be an inherent part of these programmes³⁹.

³⁹ See in that regard the initiatives developed by the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam: “The Anne Frank House has developed a number of basic film clips. Several relate directly to themes that are informed by the history of the Holocaust, such as: “Should neo-Nazis be allowed to march in front of a synagogue?”, “Should people be allowed to buy *Mein Kampf*?” and “Should people be allowed to deny the Holocaust on the internet?” Other films relate to human rights dilemmas less directly connected to themes informed by the Holocaust. Film clips with a national focus have also been included in the material”, Human rights education at Holocaust memorial sites across the European Union: an overview of practices, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2011, p. 22. Another innovative practice is the training of police officers at the Mémorial de la Shoah in France, *ibid.* p. 24.