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Remember Mémoire Mémoire Rem  
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# Education Newsletter

Special issue on "Remembrance" ... Lest we forget



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Gabriele Mazza and Elie Wiesel

## Editorial

The "Teaching the Holocaust" seminar at Cracow University was arranged to coincide with the "March of the Living" from Auschwitz in order to lend special gravity and solemnity to the occasion.

This solemnity was borne out by the impressive array of politicians representing member states and the high standard of the speeches by prestigious guests, in particular Elie Wiesel, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, Marek Edelman, last survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto, and Cardinal Lustiger, to name but a few. Their words conveyed both their intensely moving experiences and a concern for the future and were in perfect harmony with the firm commitment expressed by the politicians present, in particular the Polish Minister of Education, and the views of the philosophers and historians asked to consider how cultural heritage could be used to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive. The scale and horror of the tragedy were brought home to those who attended the seminar.

## Street song of the Jewish resistance in the Warsaw ghetto "mir zeimen do" - "we are here"

All too often, seminars and colloquies take place in an unreal atmosphere that is quite unsettling. In this case, the 15 000 people taking part in the March of the Living, the railway lines and the crematoria ruins brought to life the underlying importance of the Council of Europe's work in this field.

We saw an attempt at the development of a new approach to heritage, the idea being to use it to prevent the Holocaust from sinking into oblivion. This approach involves neither commemoration nor forgetting, but using vestiges of the past for the benefit of future generations, ensuring that the message is faithfully transmitted today. The Holocaust should be remembered naturally, not in a mechanistic or ritual way, since it is something which is alive, a memory kept up by our own generation so that this never happens again.

The task incumbent on the Council and all those in positions of responsibility in every country is a weighty one, not just in educational and cultural terms but in all respects. It does not, however, relieve individuals of their own share of responsibility: the onus is on each one of us, as human beings, to play our part. The Council is already considering new forms of action and welcomes the suggestions it has received.

Our hope is that this site, the symbol of horror, will be the last of its kind.



Message inserted in the Visitors' Book at the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp to mark the seminar.

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## Emotion and reflection

Scenes of remembrance, scenes of transformation ... at a time when the last witnesses of the greatest tragedy of the 20th century are passing on, the question facing anyone with a conscience and a sense of responsibility is how to prevent the horrific, scientifically programmed mass extermination of human beings from happening again.

All kinds of contributions and actions have a part to play in this undertaking, including documented historical studies and works of art, with all the tension that can arise when creative endeavour and the sacred sphere come together.

To tread the soil of Auschwitz and Birkenau is to commune, if only for a fleeting moment, with the sacred. The word will not, of course, have the same meaning for the believer and the atheist, nor for different generations, but they will all be affected.

There is a strangeness and poignancy to the March of the Living on the desolate soil of Birkenau, along the "Juden Rampe", the railway line that took the Hungarian Jews to the foot of the crematoria chimneys, where in a few hours they would go up in smoke.

It is impossible to describe Auschwitz and Birkenau and recount what happened there. Nor, sixty years on, were we able – as if the site were marked out as a place where communication is not possible – to recite the Kaddish in front of the sheds while the heavy tread of former deportees echoed the martial step of young people from all

*Near the death wall*



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over Europe. The bemused look on certain faces contrasted with the fierce determination on others, as all of them, their thoughts with those who suffered in that place of absolute evil, moved uncertainly in search of a meaning that will for ever escape us.

The forests of intermingled Polish and Israeli flags, the mixture of tongues, the people, known and unknown, all stripped down to their basic humanity – it all brought home to each individual what the seminar participants were trying to put across in other ways.

### In their words:

*Ms Mary Hanafin,  
Minister of Education of Ireland*

"Remembrance is a blend of sensitivity and reason. Victims are honoured, and a sense of responsibility is aroused in all generations, through significant and unforgettable events.

To the witnesses of the cruellest hours, we, Ministers of Education of the 48 signatory States of the European Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe, give our assurance that they will never again be alone or abandoned. Here in Birkenau, and Auschwitz and so many other places in Europe, we are overcome by the echo of the heart-rending laments of so many. Men, women and children cry out to us from the depths of the horror they knew. We must heed their cry. We must never forget, nor ignore what happened. No one can diminish its scale. Our task is to remember"



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*... their final journey*

*Monseigneur  
Jean-Marie Lustiger*

"So I saw the anti-Jewish propaganda, horrible and cruel, that was displayed everywhere on posters, in newspapers and by any other available means. One day the younger of the boys, very proud of his Hitlerian Youth uniform, said to me, showing me the knife on his belt: "We will kill all the Jews". From that moment on I knew what they intended to do, and I was sure that if they could, they would.

So how could civilised men want to exterminate a group of their own kind for no reason?

Why the Jews?

Deep down I already suspected I knew the answer. This was how I saw it: the Jewish people, whatever the qualities and shortcomings of each of its members, is the bearer of a message that concerns the essence of human dignity

We must unmask the origin of the evil that can fascinate the fragile freedom of men. We must help young people recognise that some things that may entice them lead them away from this high ideal of humanity and respect for the freedom and rights of all. Or even more, show them that this ideal of humanity is essential to their happiness."

# The future and hope

The fundamental task facing people of goodwill is to provide their children with a better world than the one they themselves inherited.

This concern lies at the heart of all the Council of Europe's efforts to foster, meeting after meeting and conference after conference, an international awareness of the absolute need for tolerance of others. 250 years after Voltaire and his commitment to tolerance, the fight goes on.

This tenacity has borne fruit: the idea of a Day of Remembrance and Holocaust instruction in every country has come a long way and, over the years, the number of countries involved has grown steadily. The seminar at Cracow University, attended by ministers and representatives of the member states, was an opportunity to take stock of the wealth of measures taken and the projects under way.

The memories and concerns of such key witnesses as Cardinal Lustiger and Marek Edelman, the last survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto, find an echo in the efforts made on all sides to ensure that the experience of the past serves to bring peace in the future.

In all modesty, it can be said that the Council of Europe's reputation is greatly enhanced by events such as these, and this is a source of satisfaction for us. Recognised by Yad Vashem as



Polish and Israeli flags to counter the perversion of words

a fully-fledged partner for teacher training seminars, the Council has been asked by numerous delegations



Ms Mary Hanafin

to help them consider ways of enabling the public, in particular young people,

to find out more about the Holocaust. These requests, while they reflect recognition of our efforts, mean that we must constantly review our activities and consider extending them geographically.

The problems involved in teaching people about the Holocaust and preventing humanity's evils change over the years: today the task is to convince a public who often spontaneously rebel against any attempt to evoke ills that do not strictly concern their own community.

Lastly, we must make it clear to everyone that the Holocaust is neither a Jewish nor a German problem: it is not even a European problem. It is a paradigm for the ultimate and most criminal form of exclusion, such as may affect anyone, anywhere. The very essence of the human condition hinges on our concern for humankind as a whole.

Two emblematic figures of humanity, Marek Edelman and Jean-Marie Lustiger



## DECLARATION

We, the ministers of education gathered on the occasion of the seminar "Teaching remembrance through cultural heritage" held in Cracow and Auschwitz-Birkenau from 4 to 6 May 2005, in the framework of the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education, at the invitation of the Polish authorities, and under the auspices of the Polish Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe,

1. Sincerely touched by the very moving hours spent on the site of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and extermination camps and by our participation in "The March of the Living", calling to mind the atrocities suffered here by men, women and children and remembering that at this time in May the last of the death camps strewn across Europe by Nazism were liberated;
2. Recalling that the European Cultural Convention (ETS No. 18), whose 50th anniversary we are honouring, instituted as one of its principles the prevention and combating of all forms of intolerance;
3. Reiterating with profound anxiety the finding in the Wrocław Declaration (December 2004) that there is a resurgence of racism, anti-Semitism, extreme nationalism, xenophobia, intolerance, exclusion, terrorism, extremism and even warfare;
4. Expressing our concern about the emergence and development of new forms of intolerance such as Islamophobia;
5. Recalling the texts which we adopted earlier on the teaching of remembrance, in particular:
  - the declaration issued here in Cracow in 2000 at the 20th session of the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education, in which we agreed "to institute in schools a 'Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust and for the Prevention of Crimes against Humanity', chosen with regard to the history of each member state";
  - the declaration issued in Strasbourg in October 2002 at the first ministerial seminar dealing with the Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust and for the Prevention of Crimes against Humanity;
6. Having taken note of the conclusions of the workshop on "Teaching remembrance through cultural heritage" held on 4 May;
7. Having exchanged information on the activities organised in the context of the Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust and for the Prevention of Crimes against Humanity and shared the lessons learned from the experience of its implementation;
8. Acknowledging the creation by young Europeans from diverse backgrounds of a sculptural work symbolising unity and peace;
9. In this auspicious year 2005, proclaimed "European Year of Citizenship through Education", stress the importance of a style of teaching about the Shoah and other examples of genocide and crimes against humanity through various disciplines. This teaching also affords a grasp of how to be a citizen in present-day Europe, a central concern of education systems generally;
10. Consider it expedient, now that the last direct witnesses of the Holocaust are dying one by one, to make the transition from remembrance to vigilance, and from knowledge to civic action;
11. Share a broader conception of the notion of cultural heritage, perceived as an expression of values, beliefs, wisdoms and traditions, and discern in this heritage a means to gain knowledge of the past, mutual understanding and dialogue favouring conflict prevention;
12. Reaffirm our resolve to develop and enhance initial and in-service teacher training on remembrance and the prevention of crimes against humanity;
13. Support the proposed establishment at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum of an education centre to develop the teaching of remembrance and invite the centre to co-operate closely with the Council of Europe;
14. Invite the Council of Europe to consider ways and means of establishing, in conjunction with existing bodies, an Internet portal concerned with different aspects of Jewish life, past and present, to serve as a resource bank for educational activities in this area;
15. Ask the Council of Europe – which possesses the appropriate know-how and expertise – to pursue the following action directed at trainers and teachers in the 48 European Cultural Convention signatory states, specifically as regards the preparation and implementation in schools of the Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust and for the Prevention of Crimes against Humanity:
  - devising training tools or modules that aid lesson preparation and educational projects on the subject;
  - on the basis of the observations of existing successful teaching methods registered at the European seminars already held, devising training modules that lend themselves to application or adaptation in relation to these themes in the member states;
  - preparing outreach publications that provide teachers with a body of common resources in the realms of history, culture and other art forms (plastic arts, literature, music, architecture, etc.);
  - organising European training seminars in the member states to raise awareness of these issues;
  - strengthening co-operation with international and regional organisations in the Mediterranean region in the domain of intercultural dialogue, leading to joint activities on the teaching of remembrance drawing on a range of different forms of cultural heritage to encourage mutual understanding of cultures.
16. Present this declaration to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe with the request to transmit it to all Council of Europe agencies concerned, in particular the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI);
17. Convey the appended message to the Ministers' Deputies of the Council of Europe and ask them to forward it to the 3rd Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe to be held in Warsaw on 16 and 17 May 2005.

## MESSAGE

The ministers of education of the signatory States of the European Cultural Convention (ETS No. 18) of the Council of Europe,

Gathered in Cracow and Auschwitz-Birkenau from 4 to 6 May 2005 for the seminar "Teaching remembrance through cultural heritage",

1. Recall their fundamental commitment to mutual tolerance among peoples and citizens;
2. Reaffirm that Europe is built on the rejection of exclusion, violence and crimes against humanity whose mark on the 20th century was both bodily and spiritual and whose consummate horror endures in the Shoah;
3. Appeal for a living remembrance of this tragedy, looking to the prevention of fresh outrages to humanity;
4. Stress the indispensable and essential value of history teaching for fulfilling the fundamental ambition to educate citizens for the prevention of evil;
5. Recall that the horror of the camps was the culmination of many forms of intolerance and exclusion;
6. Urge the Heads of State and Government to exercise special vigilance as regards all discrimination, whatever its nature;
7. Reaffirm their support for the fundamental principles of the Council of Europe as set out in the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5), as the sole possible basis on which persons of all backgrounds and beliefs can live harmoniously together;
8. Invite the Heads of State and Government to adopt these conclusions and make them a reality by using every means at their disposal to support the educational action of information and prevention carried on for many years by the Council of Europe.



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under the direction of Dr Carole REICH  
Secretary to the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education  
Head of Division "European Dimension of Education"  
Council of Europe – Strasbourg  
carole.reich@coe.int / Bulletin.Education@coe.int

