

**Holocaust Memory and Antisemitism in Central and Eastern Europe. Comparative Issues**, Bucharest, Publishing House of the “Elie Weisel” National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, 2008.

## ***Introductory Remarks***

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*We are opening today, with the support of the German Embassy in Bucharest and of the “Friederich Ebert” Stiftung (special thanks to its president, Mr. Alfred Pfaller), an international scientific reunion devoted to improve the understanding of the Holocaust as a historical event and of its place in the contemporary memory of the countries of East-Central Europe. We are grateful for the presence at our workshop of distinguished guests, renowned for their expertise in the field, from Germany, Hungary, Poland, Israel, Russia, and of course, from Romania. Some of the invitees are not present here but they have sent their contributions and we will be glad to publish them soon.*

*The topics which will be discussed in our workshop are connected not only with the history of the tragedy of the Holocaust during the Second World War but also with the contemporary phenomena of intolerance and antisemitism, racism and xenophobia in the countries of this part of Europe, which resemble those that 65 years ago were not promptly annihilated and produced “the final solution” and “ethnic cleansing” on a huge and unprecedented scale.*

*There are present here, alongside experts and specialists in the field, representatives of state institutions and NGOs, ambassadors and representatives of different embassies in Bucharest. We are honored to salute the presence of the ambassadors of Russia and Israel in Bucharest and of diplomats of the embassies of Germany, Ukraine, Hungary and Italy.*

*Our reunion today takes place at a peculiar moment from the international perspective. Three weeks from now Bucharest will host the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's High Level Conference on Combating Discrimination and Promoting Mutual Respect and Understanding (June 7, 2007) organized by the Spanish Chairmanship of the OSCE. This conference is a follow-up of the 2005 Cordoba Conference on Antisemitism and Other Forms of Intolerance and will underline the implementation of existing OSCE commitments by member countries in the field of tolerance and non-discrimination and will also identify new areas in which further action is to be applied. It is not without interest to note that the decision on the topic and format of our meeting was made following a visit to Bucharest this January of Mr. Gert Weisskirchen, Personal Representative of OSCE Chairman-in-Office on Combating antisemitism, member of the German Parliament. Unfortunately, Mr. Weisskirchen, who planned to be present in Bucharest today to attend our workshop and is in the program as one of key-note speakers has been forced, due to urgent family commitments to cancel*

his visit. He conveyed a message of support and sympathy and we like to express our gratitude for his involvement in this event.

Our meeting today will address a very important area of the OSCE Conference's topic, namely how the Holocaust is perceived today and what forms of antisemitism affect societies which are experiencing transitions from Communism to liberal democracies. And more importantly, we will address this issue using the comparative methodology and covering a large continental area which comprises several countries. I am convinced that the debates that will follow will foster a lively exchange of ideas and will be an opportunity to single out areas of special interest for research and also for political action.

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A few words about our Institute. The "Elie Wiesel" National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania was established by the Romanian Government in August 2005 to implement the recommendations in the Final Report of the International Commission on The Holocaust in Romania, which was officially assumed by the Romanian highest authority, the president, at the end of 2004. Since the creation of the institute, its small team of experts has carried out scientific and research activities. It organized international conferences, workshops, roundtables, and training seminars for teachers involved in teaching Holocaust issues in the national education system. Among these actions I mention the international conferences "Violence and Terror in the Recent History of Romania - 65 Years from the Bucharest Pogrom", January 23, Bucharest (with the participation of the representatives of foreign diplomatic corps in Bucharest); "The June 28-30, 1941 Iassy Pogrom: Prologue of the Holocaust in Romania", June 28-29, Iassy (having as special guests: Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu, the Ambassador of Israel to Romania, H.E. Mrs. Rodica Radian Gordon, and the Ambassador of the USA to Romania, H.E. Mr. Nicholas Taubman); "The Fate of Romanian Jews living in France During the Second World War", conference held by Mr. Serge Klarsfeld (Fondation de la Shoah, Paris) on the occasion of commemorating the Holocaust Day in Romania, October 9; "Teaching Holocaust History and Memory in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Europe", November 9, Bucharest (organized with the support of Swedish Institute from Stockholm and the Embassy of Sweden to Romania and with keynote speakers from Sweden); "Roma Survivors Searching Out the Truth", organized in cooperation with "Ion Cioabă" Roma Socio-Cultural Foundation, October 6-7, Sibiu; "Fate of the Jews from Basarabia, Bucovina and Transnistria Between 1940-1944", organized in cooperation with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum from Washington and "Ion Creangă" State Pedagogic University from Kishinev, October 16, Kishinev (Republic of Moldova).

The "Elie Wiesel" Institute has an ambitious plan for scientific research, and it already published several books and studies concerning the Holocaust in Romania. At the same time, our researchers are deeply involved in educational activities connected to the Holocaust issues, attending also numerous conferences and workshops abroad and in Romania. Recently, we have launched a comprehensive program of projects aiming to clarify unsolved issues of this tragic episode of our recent past, the Holocaust.

*I will not insist in presenting you all the activities of the Institute, but I have presented some information in order to advance the conclusion that following the Final Report of the above-mentioned International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, the educational activity in this field and generally the awareness of Romanian society concerning these dark pages of the recent past have visibly increased. It was due, of course, not only to the existence of our Institute, but also to the efforts applied in the field by numerous centers of Jewish and Roma studies or NGOs with recognized expertise in the Holocaust issues and associations of the Holocaust survivors whose representatives are present here today. Continuing these efforts, I am convinced that soon we will reach a critical mass which will allow us to say that we have registered a clear fundamental change in confronting our recent tragic past.*

*I will conclude my rather long introductory remarks by expressing my conviction that our reunion today will have a special impact in improving the knowledge regarding the Holocaust and will energize our efforts to promote tolerance and to fight antisemitism, racism and xenophobic trends.*