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APPEAL ON THE OCCASION OF THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE START OF WORLD WAR II

Zagreb, Thursday, April 6, 2023

Rewriting history, reducing or increasing the scale of crimes and distorting the facts about the Second World War, especially during the last thirty years, remains a great challenge. Due to the distortion of facts and rewriting of history, we have already lost generations that were educated and grew up in the independent Republic of Croatia.

Today we present selected proposals for more effective opposition to the rewriting of history, distortion of facts about the Second World War, improvement of education about the Holocaust and better protection of the cultural heritage of anti-fascism. Initiatives publicly presented by anti-fascists, memorials, heirs of victims of the Holocaust and other genocides and human rights activists over the past years, are important in opposing revisionism, especially in the year when Croatia presides over the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. Competent governmental institutions and the public found interest and understanding for some of the proposals, but there is still no interest in some others, such as the ban on the public use of Ustasha symbols.

The rise of historical revisionism can also be seen among the young people. This is particularly visible as an increasing trend over the past 10 years according to the data obtained for the preparation of the planned new and complete curricular reform, but also from more recent research in that period.

According to research at the time, young people in Croatia have little knowledge of history, especially the Second World War, are inclined to military dictatorship, perceive the period of Independent State of Croatia as the third most important event, and adopt attitudes towards historical events mostly from parents, friends and via Facebook, and not enough at school and from the media. Bad school programs and ways of teaching history are largely responsible for this. In our schools, there is revisionism in the history of the 20th century, there is too much mythology, and teaching is more oriented towards "cramming" and factography, than understanding historical events, causes and consequences.

Of particular concern is the research data obtained as part of the project "Hate speech in Croatia" carried out during 2017/2018., according to which 45% of citizens would ban the Ustasha salute "For homeland – ready!", but an almost equal number, 44% of them, would not do so. In contrast, symbols associated with the People's Liberation Struggle, such as the red star, would be banned by as many as 61% of citizens. The research was conducted by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Political Sciences.

PROHIBITION OF THE PUBLIC DISPLAY OF USTASHA SYMBOLS AND THE USE OF THE USTASHA SALUTE

The public debate on the banning of Ustasha symbols has been going on for a long time, initiated by Ognjen Kraus, president of the Coordination of Jewish Municipalities of the Republic of Croatia. We

will see if the proposal to amend the misdemeanor law will be adopted. It will only be seen in practice whether the sanctions will discourage everyone who now writes Ustasha graffiti and uses the Ustasha salute in public.

RENAMING OF STREETS NAMED AFTER MEMBERS OF THE USTASHA MOVEMENT AND OFFICIALS OF THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF CROATIA

The World Jewish Congress, *Documenta* and numerous other scientists, interested individuals and institutions have requested cities and municipalities to rename streets named after members of the Ustasha movement and Independent State of Croatia officials. Paying tribute to Ustasha officials can be understood as a glorification of the criminal movement, not acknowledging the suffering of all victims of Ustasha terror, as well as denying the crimes against Jews, Serbs, Roma and political dissidents during the Second World War. We believe that it is completely inappropriate to give recognition to the members of the Ustasha movement. The original foundations of the Constitution, in which the establishment of Croatian statehood was written „against the declaration of the Independent State of Croatia (1941) in the decisions of the National Anti-Fascist Council of the National Liberation of Croatia (1943)“, oblige us to oppose the glorification of the criminal regime of the Independent State of Croatia. The World Jewish Congress conducted a survey of street names and street squares on the territory of the Republic of Croatia under the title "Examples of historical revisionism in Croatia". After requests sent in January 2021, one street was renamed in Slavonski Brod, and several other cities announced changes. We are asking for the renaming of all streets named after members of the Ustasha movement and Independent State of Croatia officials.

STRONGER SUPPORT FOR THE JASENOVAC MEMORIAL SITE

Our only institution fully dedicated to the memory of suffering in the Second World War preserves the memory of the 1.337 days of the existence of the Ustasha camp Jasenovac. As colleagues from the Memorial Site say, „Jasenovac victims are not just numbers. They are children, men and women with their own names and personal life stories.“ So far, they have collected data on 83.145 victims. 39.570 men, 23.474 women and 20.101 children under the age of fourteen died in the Jasenovac concentration camp, of which 47.627 were Serbs, 16.173 Roma, 13.116 Jews, 4.255 Croats...

We are asking for more allocations for the Jasenovac Memorial Site, for the expansion of the museum and the preparation of a new exhibition, which is extremely important for the education of new generations. The curators of the Memorial Site have been preparing small exhibitions for years with the current modest funds. With only minor additional investments, it is possible to prepare traveling exhibitions that could be offered to the municipalities and cities from which former detainees came, as well as to schools that do not decide to come to Jasenovac due to the long distance. Also, it is important to allocate funds for additional research on the fate of the victims, which researchers of the Memorial Site have been working on for decades, but they cannot speed it up with the current capacities. This is especially important because the revisionist controversies about established facts about the camp inmates are not abating either in Croatia or in the neighboring post-Yugoslav countries. We expect that the budget decisions for 2024 will significantly increase the funds allocated for the work of the Jasenovac Memorial Site. The Ministry of Culture and Media is on the move.

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH SUPPORT

Additional research is needed that would address the biographies of individual inmates and other important but less researched topics, so that the subject of the suffering of individuals, not only in Jasenovac but also in other Ustasha camps, would be brought closer to all generations. It would be important for the Ministry of Science and Education to encourage scientific research on the Second World War, because in the past decades only a small number of graduate, master's and doctoral theses,

as well as scientific research projects on these topics, were made. It would also be important to intensify research on post-war executions.

SUPPORT AGAINST THE DISTORTION OF FACTS AND THE REWRITING OF HISTORY

It is very important that the Ministry of Science and Education allocated funds for visits to Jasenovac intended for interested primary and secondary schools. It would be important to foresee this possibility for interested universities as well. To illustrate the progress, we state that in 2019, the total number of school groups from Croatia that visited the Jasenovac Memorial Site was 17, in the pandemic 2020, 10 groups did so, in 2021, 12 of them, while in 2022, 36 groups visited the Memorial Site.

Information programs for all generations are needed. Public debates, exhibitions, publications and films are also needed, so we ask that public tenders by foundations and ministries, especially the Ministry of Science and Education, include these topics.

PROTECTION OF NOW NEGLECTED PLACES OF SUFFERING

The most urgent is the protection of the former Stara Gradiška camp, partly within the Memorial area and partly owned by the municipality. There is an urgent need to protect the abandoned buildings there, which served as part of the repressive apparatus of various political regimes and ideologies for a period of almost 200 years. Protection is necessary for the now collapsed Tower (Kula), where Serbian and Jewish women and their children were imprisoned during the Independent State of Croatia. Within the camp there was also a section intended only for children whose mothers were sent to forced labor in Nazi Germany. Although in the Second World War the fortress first served as a prison for political opponents of the Independent State of Croatia, communists and members of the League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia (mostly Croats), Stara Gradiška was turned into a camp in the first half of 1942. The prison building where political prisoners served their sentences during the SFR Yugoslavia should also be protected. At the initiative of Jasenovac Memorial Site and the municipality of Stara Gradiška, an application for the conservation of the entire complex was once prepared. It is extremely important that the Ministry of Culture and Media includes the protection of the Stara Gradiška fortress among its priorities and prepares a protection plan, along with an application for European Union funds.

We also point out the complete neglect of the former Ustasha concentration camp Slana on the island of Pag. „Slana bay has been a cultural monument since 1983. For the purposes of marking the memorial site of Slana, the Pag municipal committee ordered construction documentation that will cover the entire area of former camps and graves. In 1988, it was planned to build a road that would lead from the village of Metajna to Slana, parallel to the road that was built by the inmates with their bare hands. A few years later, the memorial was destroyed. Representatives of the Jewish and Serbian victims restored the memorial plaque on two occasions, in 2010 and 2013. Both times, shortly after the commemoration and ceremonial opening of the replica, the monument was destroyed by one or more anonymous perpetrators.“, it is written in the publication "Slana – radical landscape", which accompanied the exhibition organized by the Serb National Council. We are asking for marking the memorial area.

COMPLETION OF ALREADY LAUNCHED INITIATIVES

We expect that two very important long-term initiatives will be completed during the Republic of Croatia's presidency of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

We expect that the reconstruction of the Memorial Cemetery in Kampor on the island of Rab will be completed, in cooperation with the Republic of Slovenia. The Italian fascist camp was located in the bay between Kampor Bay and Saint Euphemia. From July 29 to August 9, 1942, transports of men,

women and children arrived at the camp almost every day. Of the 5.941 who had arrived by that date, two thirds were Slovenians, and the rest of the people were from Gorski kotar and Primorje. The State Commission for Determining the Crimes of the Occupiers and Their Helpers and the National Commission for Slovenia state that around 13.000 and 14.000 people passed through the camp. According to official Italian data, 1.267 internees died in the camp. Other reliable sources report 4.641 deaths.

We expect that in cooperation with the Herman Foundation and other post-Yugoslav countries, the renovation of the first floor of the Yugoslav Block 17 in the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum will be completed and an exhibition about the suffering of Jews, Roma and partisans and their sympathizers in that Nazi camp will be set up. The first meeting of experts and representatives of post-Yugoslav countries on the status of the exhibition space of the former Yugoslavia in the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum was held in 2012 under the auspices and coordination of UNESCO. The participants then confirmed the readiness of all the former Yugoslav republics not to divide the exhibition space of Block 17 and to prepare a joint permanent display of the exhibition. The lineup has not been opened to date.

PROTECTION OF THE ANTI-FASCIST CULTURAL HERITAGE

We have started consultations on the protection of anti-fascist heritage with representatives of anti-fascist organizations, museums, cities and schools. Consultations were held in Pazin and Opatija, and consultations are to come in Rijeka and Pula. Without the involvement of all actors, the heritage will deteriorate, so we invite everyone to initiate similar consultations at the local and national level and foresee investments in the protection of monuments, new museum installations, and the development of educational-cultural-tourist routes.

APPROPRIATE COMMEMORATION OF THE VICTIMS IN POST-WAR EXECUTIONS

Among the memorial days in the Republic of Croatia, there is still the Day of Remembrance of Croatian Victims in the Struggle for Freedom and Independence, which is still celebrated on the Saturday and Sunday closest to May 15, under the auspices of the Croatian Parliament. It is up to government institutions to find a more appropriate way of commemorating the suffering of those killed in post-war executions. We are calling for a public consultation on a more appropriate way of commemorating them, in the spirit of opposing the rewriting of the history of the Second World War.

Documenta – Center for Dealing with the Past