

Resolution needed on post-Holocaust restitution in Europe, urges European Parliament President

European Shoah Legacy Institute Study receives strong support from MEPs

European Parliament President Antonio Tajani on Wednesday April 26 endorsed the return of property and possessions seized from Jewish communities and victims during the Holocaust, saying it was a “fundamental element to restore justice after the Holocaust”.

Declaring that restitution across Europe was still challenged by legal and technical problems, leaving victims without their property, President Tajani said: “Restitution, together with remembrance and reconciliation, is a fundamental element to restore justice after the Holocaust.”

“The European Parliament has called on the Commission to develop common principles on restitution. Member States authorities should assist victims and their families during the complex legal proceedings. Progress has been made over the last years. Some countries have done a lot and have even developed best practices. Others should do more.”

President Tajani spoke as he officially opened an international conference, Unfinished Justice: Restitution and Remembrance, at the European Parliament in Brussels which examined the current state of post-Holocaust restitution in Europe.

The conference – attended by representatives from over 30 countries - discussed the findings of a major report (Immovable Property Restitution Study), commissioned by the European Shoah Legacy Institute, that shows many countries have failed to fulfil their commitments under the 2009 Terezin Declaration to enact workable restitution legislation, and support Holocaust survivors. EU should address the issue of restitution as a moral commitment and to support the Member states in taking action.

Members of the European Parliament used the conference to encourage the European Commission and all member states to each appoint Special Envoys for Holocaust Related Issues, including restitution, to accelerate activities aimed at securing justice for victims.

Mr Tajani told the conference, which included Holocaust victims fighting for justice: “I will support you, not only today, but every day.”

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, H.E. Nikola Poposki, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, H.E. Igor Crnadak and Former Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Natan Sharansky was among MEPs, diplomats, leaders of international Jewish organisations and European Jewish communities at the conference.

In 2009, 47 countries, including all 28 current members of the European Union, endorsed the Terezin Declaration, which recognizes ‘the importance of restituting or compensating Holocaust-related confiscations made during the Holocaust era between 1933-45.’ More than 70 years after the Holocaust (Shoah), however, only a small fraction of private and

communal immovable and movable property illegitimately seized from Jewish victims has been returned or compensated, according to the ESLI Study.

Meanwhile, there are just 500,000 survivors alive today, with up to half living in poverty, according to the World Jewish Restitution Organization.

Launching the ESLI Study at the conference, Anežka Nekovářová, Director of the European Shoah Legacy Institute, said: “During the Second World War, over six million Jews were systematically murdered and millions were imprisoned or exiled. Entire families and communities were destroyed or completely wiped out. Today, more than seventy years later, many victims and their families are still awaiting justice. The devastation of Europe’s Jewish communities is even more outrageous when you consider the fact that the looted personal and immovable property contributed to their own death.”

Following the conference, organisers urged the European Union to agree “to provide technical advice and support to assist and monitor various restitution processes in Member States and to encourage the implementation of the Terezin Declaration.”

MEPs were also asked to formally declare their ‘enduring commitment to the provision of adequate and immediate social welfare support for Holocaust survivors, the demarcation, protection and preservation of Jewish cemeteries, mass graves and other burial sites, the preservation of Jewish heritage sites, and the promotion of Holocaust education, research and remembrance.”

The conference was organized by the European Shoah Legacy Institute, European Alliance for Holocaust Survivors, a coalition of Members of the European Parliament committed to issues impacting Holocaust Survivors, and the World Jewish Restitution Organization, together with the European Jewish Congress and B’nai B’rith International. Also supporting the conference are the Permanent Missions of the State of Israel, the Czech Republic, and the United Kingdom to the European Union and their respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs.

Notes to Editors:

ESLI was created in 2010 to establish international solutions for the restitution of immovable property, art, Judaica and Jewish cultural assets stolen by the Nazis; social welfare for Holocaust survivors and other victims of Nazism; and the promotion of Holocaust education, research and remembrance.

A full copy of the report as well as an overview and an executive summary can be found on the European Shoah Legacy Institute website at <http://shoahlegacy.org/>

The ESLI Study was completed by a team led by Michael Bazylar, professor of law, author and The 1939 Law Scholar in Holocaust and Human Rights Studies, and included assistance from Terezin governments, stakeholders, pro bono attorneys, and experts in the field of property restitution.

The Study is 1265 pages long, including Executive Report, Country reports and governmental responses.

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