

Address of Ambassador Jovan Tegovski, Macedonian National Coordinator for the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance at the Seminar on Progress after the International Conference on Welfare in Prague 2015,  
Brussels, 13 October 2015

***“Partnership between State Institutions and Civil Society in Providing Care to the Holocaust Survivors”***

Respected Vice-Chairs of the EP Delegation for relations with Israel  
Ms Sehnalova and Mr. Belder, Distinguished MP’s,

Honorable Rabbi Avi Tawil,

Dear Mss Senyk and Nekovarnova, colleagues, representatives of the NGO’s

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, allow me to express my sincere gratitude to the European Shoah Legacy Institute for the invitation to address this important event and to our hosts from the European Parliament for their efforts to organizing the seminar.

The very dynamic era of globalization and rapid developments we are living in - to mention just the current refugee crises with the human beings fate in its center - preoccupies our daily attention and the focus of our activities. In such an environment, very often we do forget or put aside important issues from the past, issues which have a direct impact on the lives of persons who went through an unprecedented tragedy. Therefore, the ESLI initiative to putting and keeping the issues of the welfare of the Holocaust survivors and other victims of Nazi persecution high on the agenda of different stakeholders, including the EU institutions, is of utmost importance.

The recent news from the first EC Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights in the EU regarding the appointment of two coordinators - one for anti-Semitism and one for Islamophobia - are encouraging developments. The next important step in this context should be the inclusion of the holocaust issues in the mandate of the Coordinator for anti-Semitism.

The civil society as representative of the general public interests that provides social power of its networks of people and serves as a bridge between governments and citizens is certainly another very important stakeholder to addressing appropriately these issues. The prominent role the civil society has achieved at local, national and international levels does not allow the governments to ignore it. Thus, their ideas, information, services and expertise should be used to press forward the interests of people by seeking to influence the state. Consequently, the best practices and experience of the NGOs and civil society as providers and supporters of the care to different vulnerable groups of our societies such as the elderly population could also be applied to the Holocaust survivors and the victims of the Nazi persecution. The practical implementation of this approach would be a valuable contribution to securing better and decent life for this category of people.

The Conclusions of the Prague Conference, as we all are aware of, have stressed the need for an appropriate and efficient partnership between international, national, regional and local stakeholders with the NGOs and civil society. As each of them has comparative advantages over the others, the effective partnership could mutually reinforce each other's work. And, we should invest our efforts to achieving this goal. But, at same time we must be aware of some challenges. In certain countries the relationships between governments and the civil society are different - sometimes they are sensitive, sometimes it is more a question of attitudes and prejudices that prevent valuable collaboration, sometimes there is a lack of sufficient financial support.

In view of the current circumstances and the goals we do want to achieve, I join the appeals about the need to supporting NGOs financially; to facilitating their cooperation at national and international levels; to securing EU funding for civil society organizations involved in the provision of welfare services for survivors.

Dear colleagues,

Let me say few words on some of the subjects of the seminar from the perspective of the Republic of Macedonia. Although the Jewish Community in my country is relatively small (around 300 people), the Government has been actively engaged in many Holocaust related issues and has implemented different measures in the areas of compensation of the Jewish property, remembrance, education. Even, prior to the adoption of the Terezin declaration, the Government has took concrete measures regarding the Holocaust (Shoah). The most important legal act in this area was the 2000 Denationalization Law and, in particularly it's Special Provisions. This act was followed by signature of Compensation agreement in December 2007 and payment of the amount of 21,1 mil Euro (in form of state bonds), a process that started in

June 2009 and shall be finalized in June 2018. Up to date 15,6 mil Euro has been paid. A special Fund for the Holocaust of the Jews from Macedonia was established and one of the major results was the construction of the Holocaust Memorial Center of the Jews from Macedonia officially opened in 2011. Here, I would like to underline the excellent cooperation between the state institutions and the Holocaust Memorial Center, as well as with the Jewish Community from Macedonia on many Holocaust issues, in particularly those related to the commemoration and education. In my view, this is very good example of efficient partnership between the state institutions and the civil society.

Coming to the very subject of the seminar, I would like to stress that the Macedonian Minister for Labor and Social Policy took part at the International Conference on Welfare in Prague 2015, thus confirming the Government's interest about all issues that were subject of this important gathering. The actual number of the Holocaust survivors in the Republic of Macedonia is very small - only seven persons - and the domestic legislation in force do not provides specific benefits or allowances for this category of people. However, taking into account the Conclusions of the Prague Conference, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has initiated a process of internal consultations with the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Health, Jewish Community of Macedonia and the Holocaust Fund of the Jews from Macedonia with the aim to discussing the possibilities of finding solutions related to medical and social programs/mechanisms and other benefits for this group of our citizens. Our intention is also to explore the modalities to establishing a partnership and close cooperation with the civil society by involving in this initiative some of the local NGO's.

Thank you!

