

ESLI may exhausted its potential, the goals of Terezin Declaration are still alive!

Handout on the conclusion of activities of ESLI and what may come further

Prague, 22nd August 2017

Summary

At the end of August 2017, the European Shoah Legacy Institute (ESLI) is going to be wound up after almost eight years of its existence. Due to most recent developments in the realm of its activities tackling a wide spectrum of post-Holocaust issues (lingering material and intangible consequences of the Shoah and WWII), it has turned out that ESLI services as an umbrella organization are no longer in demand.

While the work of ESLI has concluded, the Holocaust agenda continues, including above all improving the care of Holocaust survivors and other victims of Nazi persecution, deepening Holocaust education and remembrance as stated in the Terezin Declaration.

The dissolution of ESLI reflects the fact that the Holocaust agenda requires a more specialized approach and, therefore, need to be addressed on other levels, quite specifically on the:

- European level (European Parliament and the Coordinator on Combating Antisemitism and Anti-Muslim Hatred)
- Intergovernmental level (Special Envoys for Holocaust Issues of some select countries that have them)
- Transnational level (international Jewish and other organizations)
- Local level (NGOs and grass roots organizations operating in individual countries)

Evaluation of ESLI Activities

During its eight-year existence, ESLI was striving to become a supporting platform for all the aforementioned levels and, at the same time, to bring the most important topics of its agenda on the European level.

ESLI has facilitated international dialogue, sharing of best practices, and tenaciously advocated fulfilling the moral obligations relating to post-Holocaust justice contained within the Terezin Declaration:

- A landmark study of the property restitution record of all 47 Terezin Declaration states was launched in April 2017 during an international conference “Unfinished Justice: Restitution and Remembrance” in the European Parliament co-organized by ESLI. The conference was opened by the European Parliament President Antonio Tajani,

attended by representatives of European Commission and it culminated in a Declaration signed by 70 members of the European Parliament;

- The International Social Welfare Conference in Prague saw the launch of the ESLI Social Welfare Database in 2015;
- A series of five workshops known as the Provenance Research Training program focused on developing analytical and methodological tools between 2012 – 2014;
- In 2012 the Interview Property Review Conference attended by 39 countries reviewed the progress made since the endorsement of the Terezin Declaration;
- In the field of Holocaust education and remembrance, ESLI co-organized international poster competitions for students of art and design;
- In 2010 ESLI published its practical Guidelines and Best Practices for the Restitution and Compensation of Immovable Property, subsequently endorsed by 43 countries.

Although ESLI succeeded in many of its tasks, due to divergent expectations of various stakeholders, which may have resulted also from ESLI's broadly defined mandate, its potential was gradually reduced to that of a rather service organization.

Despite its challenging situation, ESLI has nevertheless managed to come up with structured outputs of all its main research activities that are now available without any access restrictions on its website shoahlegacy.org.

The Legacy of ESLI

As indicated, anyone who may wish to resume ESLI's mission defined by the Terezin Declaration or to use the results of ESLI's research efforts for the sake of their own work is invited to do so.

Even after ESLI as an organization is officially dissolved, ESLI web archive will remain in operation, providing unrestricted access to all data and information which may inspire further research and monitoring activities as well as the development of fully functioning databases and completion of broader comparative studies.

We believe that all this is instrumental for finding more effective remedies to the sore problems of the remaining Holocaust survivors and other victims of Nazi persecution. Ultimately, we also believe that resolving lingering property issues can greatly contribute to finding much-needed resources for education about the Holocaust and all related topics of racially, nationally, politically or otherwise motivated hatred and intolerance.

Word of Thanks

ESLI expresses its gratitude and thanks to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, and the Governments of Israel and the United States of America for their

unrelenting support and cooperation over the past seven years. ESLI also extends its appreciation to all the governments and organizations that have supported its activities and participated in its work.

Words from ESLI partners

Special Envoy for the restitution of Holocaust Era Assets at the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Joël Lion: “I wish to commend the Czech government for its leadership, the moral and political support it has provided to the ongoing international efforts for restitution of Jewish property and promotion of the rights of survivors. It was a proud day when under the Czech presidency of the European Union the Terezin declaration was adopted by 47 countries. The excellent collaboration between the State of Israel, the Czech Republic and ESLI together with the European Alliance for Holocaust Survivors brought about a successful conference under the auspices of the President of the European Parliament. ESLI played an important role in launching the process of gathering valuable information in the field of restitution and rights of survivors and raising the issue both on national and European levels. At this critical juncture the time has come for ESLI to hand over the baton to a broader European body such as the European Parliament under the leadership of the EAHS. In order not to lose the momentum of the tremendous strides that have been made to date, I hope and I am certain that the Czech government and all partners involved in ESLI will agree to support the continuation of the work and spirit of ESLI through WJRO and EAHS”.

Coordinator on Combating Antisemitism of the European Commission, Katharina von Schnurbein: “The legacy of the Holocaust is a European legacy. It is incumbent on us to take responsibility for ensuring that its lessons are never forgotten and that they are passed on to future generations. The European Commission supports the Europe-wide network of Holocaust researchers by funding the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure. This project, comprising 24 archive and research institutes, makes a major contribution to preserving the memory of the Holocaust on a scientific basis for future generations, and for all of us today.

With more and more survivors passing away, including Simone Veil, Auschwitz survivor and first president of the European Parliament, who died recently, we have to become the teachers of the future in our diverse Europe. Tragic events across the continent are poignant reminders of the pressing need to counter antisemitism, racism and xenophobia that continue to haunt Europe today. Only by remembering where hatred and antisemitism can lead, can the next generation be made resistant to these evils.

The European Shoah Legacy Institute has made a substantial contribution to this task, and we, the European Commission, very much share this responsibility. ESLI has succeeded in putting the importance of restitution, as laid down in the Terezín Declaration, on the political agenda. We acknowledge that restorative justice is a step towards making peace with the past and

contributing to reconciliation and friendship in the future. Funds made available annually through the Europe for Citizens Programme support education and remembrance of the Holocaust in all 28 EU Member States. EU staff is also provided with specialised training courses on Holocaust Remembrance and fundamental rights. Unfortunately, even today there are still people who question the scale, or, indeed, the very fact of the Holocaust. The European Union is equipped with legislation that prohibits denying, condoning and trivialising the Holocaust so as to incite people to hatred and violence.

We thank ESLI for all its work and efforts.”

Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, United States of America, Ambassador Thomas Yazdgerdi: “The United States thanks the Czech Government, the Israeli government and others with whom we have worked since the founding of ESLI. ESLI’s important contribution was to focus efforts on providing a modicum of justice to Holocaust survivors and their families. We now look forward to carrying on this crucial work with our Terezin Declaration partners.”