

On the 27 January 1945, the most notorious extermination camp of Auschwitz was liberated. In 2005, the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization declared the 27 January as International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

## THE HOLOCAUST

On 27 January 1945, soldiers of the Soviet Red Army liberated the notorious and most cruel Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz. In the concentration camp, the Nazis performed massive executions of Jews, Roma and Sinti, Slavs and other religious and social groups unwanted by the Nazi regime with cold, industrial efficacy and calculation. When the Red Army soldiers and the American allied soldiers after them saw the first scenes at the camp, starved and ill captives and piles of dead skeletons, they were shocked and horrified by the brutality of the Nazi crimes. Soon after the liberation of Auschwitz and other concentration camps, they revealed the Nazi atrocities to the global public.

When the Nazis took power in Germany in 1933, the situation for Jews considerably worsened. A period of worship of the new German chancellor Adolf Hitler began. He increasingly instigated intimidation of Jews and violence against them. This happened practically every day, due to this dreadful discrimination many Jewish families decided to leave Germany as early as the first years of the national socialistic government but due to increasing anti-Semitism, the majority of countries did not want to accept them. The fire of violence against Jews especially flared up after 1935 with the adoption of the Nürnberg laws. They did not solve the “Jewish question” and therefore it pervaded all key questions of the government after 1935. The feeling that “the Jews are a secondary race” became universal. The next radical move of the German “destructive anti-Semitism” was Kristallnacht in November 1938. At this time numerous synagogues in the Reich were damaged, burnt down and totally destroyed, Jewish shops were plundered and demolished, Jewish property was confiscated. Even in 1941 when the Second World War spread extensively towards the east of Europe, “the total solution of the Jewish question on European territories under German authority” was not yet formally accepted. But a “policy of destruction” was ordered, according to which “relocation” became an official euphemism for genocide. A shadow of the danger of death fell on European Jews. In autumn 1941 when bloody retribution with Jews raged in East Europe and when the notorious “Einsatzgruppen” collected groups of a thousand Jews, shoved them to ditches and pits and shot them mercilessly, a decision to deport German Jews to the East was made and in Auschwitz gas chambers were built. The plan of the total destruction of European Jews was officially finalised at the conference in Wannsee near Berlin on 20 January 1942. At the conference, Reinhard Heydrich made it clear that “the final solution” will include transport and death of all Jews, incapable of forced labour. The remaining ones will be sentenced to labour until death. The Nazi policy of race hatred that spread with propaganda of hatred and with massacres culminated in the extermination of European Jews and their culture. “The final solution” began to be carried out methodically with a mechanically, technologically and bureaucratically cold and lethally efficient system of massive killings employing gassing. The largest death camps on the Nazi maps of “ashes and death” were Auschwitz-Birkenau or Auschwitz II, Belzec, Chełmno, Majdanek, Sobibór, Treblinka etc. The Holocaust destroyed six millions Jews, including more than 1.2 million Jewish children.

The Holocaust is an episode in history of total dehumanization that, due to its unparalleled circumstances and extension of its consequences, radically changed not only historiographic and sociological views and theories about humanity but also all protocols of historical commemoration and the meaning of the preservation of historical memory for living and future generations.

## THE HOLOCAUST AND SLOVENIAN JEWS

Before the Second World War, the largest Slovenian Jewish population lived in Prekmurje. In several Slovenian cities, tribute to Slovenian victims of the Holocaust is paid on the 26 April, the anniversary of the beginning of massive deportations of Jews from Prekmurje.

After medieval expulsions of Jews from Slovenian lands (in 1496/97 from Styria and Carinthia, in 1515 from Carniola), a stronger presence of Jews on present-day Slovenian territory can again be traced by the second half of the 18th century. One third of them lived in Murska Sobota, one third in Lendava and one third in villages where they were merchants, butchers and innkeepers. In 1889 in the Prekmurje area lived as many as 1107 Jews. They fostered the development of numerous branches and enabled the building and development of industrial plants, trade and wholesale business, as well as typography in Murska Sobota and Lendava. They were carriers of many cultural initiatives and contributed to the progress of the landscape alongside the river Mura.

In both of the largest cities, Murska Sobota and Lendava, they significantly contributed to economic development and progress. In Lendava, they played a crucial role in the development of economy, as well as industry and financial business. In Murska Sobota, they were carriers of the development of trade (including wholesale business) and crafts (typography, as well). In both cities, they fostered cultural development; some of them exercised white-collar professions. As a matter of interest one should mention that they generally did not expose themselves in the sphere of politics. After the First World War, the number of Jews in Prekmurje decreased. Some of them left due to the annexation of the landscape to the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, since they were fiercely attached to Hungary. Between both world wars, Slovenian Jews were first annexed to the Zagreb religious community, however, in 1929 they annexed to Israelite religious community of Murska Sobota, which demonstrates the influence of the Jewish community in Prekmurje. According to the population census in 1931, in the area of Yugoslav Slovenia (Drava Banate) lived 820 Jews, 269 of which lived in Murska Sobota and 207 in Lendava.

After the attack on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia by axis powers in April, the Jews of Prekmurje experienced a short German occupation and afterwards lived under the Hungarian occupational government. In April 1941, the members of Kulturbund and Germans plundered their property for a short time. After the allocation of Prekmurje to Hungary the situation quietened down somewhat. However, it changed radically after the occupation of Hungary by the Germans on 19 March 1944 when the Nazis took power and started to perform the most systematic cleansing of the Jewish population yet on the territory occupied by Hungary, i. e. in Prekmurje, as well. Determined and fatal cleansing of the Jewish population in Prekmurje started in spring 1944. On 26 April 1944, the largest group of Jews of Prekmurje was collected in Lendava and Murska Sobota and transferred first to Čakovec and to Nagykanizsa afterwards, from where the Nazis conveyed them by waggons to Birkenau which represented the assembly centre for the largest camp of death – Auschwitz. They arrived there at the end of April and beginning of May. This, first and largest transport of Jews of Prekmurje comprised 367 people. The majority ended their lives in Auschwitz on 21 and 22 May 1944. The second, somewhat smaller wave of deportations happened in autumn 1944. According to the data collected so far, 392 Jews from Prekmurje were killed. Only a handful survived Auschwitz.

After the end of the Second World War, only 65 Jews of Prekmurje returned home. This was only a reminder of the once powerful and socially influential Jewish community that had gradually totally vanished. Today Prekmurje is a landscape without Jews, only historical memory of them has remained and it fortunately returns to the consciousness of the population living there. What reminds us of the once powerful and recognizable Jewish community in the landscape alongside the Mura is the renovated synagogue in Lendava along with the Museum of the Holocaust, arranged Jewish cemetery in Dolga vas near Lendava, a memorial in Murska Sobota where a synagogue demolished in 1954 stood and the renomination of the memorial park in Murska Sobota back to the Jewish Cemetery, Murska Sobota.

On the eve of the 2 August 1944, the Nazis abolished the “Zigeunerlager” (“Gypsy camp”) in Auschwitz-Birkenau and in one single night killed several thousand Sinti and Roma in gas chambers. In individual countries, the 2 August is marked as International Genocide of the Roma Remembrance Day.

## THE GENOCIDE OF THE ROMA

The Roma and Sinti are still waiting for complete acknowledgement of the suffering that the Nazi regime caused to them. Officially Germany paid tribute to the memory of Roma and Sinti, killed in the Nazi genocide that is in various Romany dialects referred to as Porrajmos, Pharrajimos, Samudaripen, Kali Trash, Mariben, Holokosto etc., as late as 2012. In 2010, the Council of Europe, that has endeavoured to make the 2 August Roma Genocide Remembrance Day, published a special declaration in the memory of the Roma and Sinti killed on 2 August 1944 in the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp and wrote that “we must never allow the painful memories to fade”. The long-standing silence about the Genocide of the Roma during the Second World War has deep roots that extend to the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century when in the majority of European countries laws against “Gypsies” were adopted and helping the members of this ethnic community was an illegal action. The silence about the “Gypsy” suffering during the war spread through the long post-war years, all the way to 1979. And in many a place it still lasts, as if we were not ashamed of the killer’s bloodstained hands from Auschwitz, Jasenovac, Danica near Koprivnica, Sajmište, are we?

Between 1939 and 1945, the Nazis killed almost 500 thousand Roma, according to recent estimations approximately 600 thousand or even up to one million and a half. The genocide against the Roma started to be massively exercised especially after 16 December 1942 when Heinrich Himmler ordered the deportation of all “Gypsies” of the Roma and Sinti lineage that lived in the territory of the Third Reich. Heinrich Himmler, one of the main organizers and executors of the Nazi genocide, the head of the Nazi concentration camps and a great fighter against the “Romany plague”, unremittingly invented anti-Romany laws and decrees for a massive destruction of Roma. On 16 December 1942 he published that Roma, as well, had “matured” for “Sonderbehandlung”, i. e. a “special treatment”, which meant deportation into death camps. The majority ended up in the concentration camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Chełmno, Jasenovac, Mauthausen, Buchenwald, Dachau and Bergen-Belsen. In the Auschwitz death camp, Roma had to wear a dark triangle and were given the letter Z tattooed onto their arm. On 15 November 1943, Himmler officially paralleled the Roma with the Jews and thus “the final solution of the Romany question” began. The historical truth that discrimination of the Roma (and the later genocide against them) in Germany began before the discrimination of Jews is often forgotten, whereat numerous discriminatory documents referred to the “new sciences of the racial characteristics of people and other living beings” that appeared already in the 18th and 19th century. According to these racial theories, “alien blood species in Europe are only Jews and Roma”. The Holocaust against Jews is not a questionable historical fact, while the Genocide of the Roma is still the “Forgotten Holocaust”.



Sector B11e: the "Gypsy camp" at Auschwitz-Birkenau; Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum archives

# STONE TEARS

Between 1939 and 1945, the Second World War is supposed to have claimed approximately fifty million deaths, indeed according to recent estimations even as many as 60 million; 15 million of the victims were supposedly soldiers, while others were among the civilian population. When speaking about victims of the war, one must make particular mention of the tragedy of the Holocaust commanded by the Nazis to exterminate the whole of the Jewish race. In concentration camps – death factories, Jews, as well as Roma and Sinti, members of Slavic nations, political prisoners, prisoners of war, Jehovah's witnesses, homosexuals, physically and mentally impaired people and other individuals considered unacceptable by the Nazi regime were exposed to all kinds of psychological, moral and physical violence. In their perverted concern to find the most effective and cheapest methods of mass killing, they used especially gas chambers and crematorium furnaces. The consequences of the Nazi destructive policies were fatal for approximately 6 million Jews and for 500 thousand to one and a half million Roma and Sinti. The Holocaust and the Nazi Genocide of the Roma belong among the cruellest crimes against humanity in all history.

Unfortunately, even seven decades after the end of the Second World War we still do not have a perfect and totally clear picture about its victims. With various research projects, programmes of Holocaust and also recently the Genocide of the Roma commemorations and with education about both forms of genocide, numerous organizations and individuals have endeavoured to spread knowledge of this dark episode in European and world history that interfered with the fundamental values of our civilization and especially fatally marked European post-war society. To learn about the Holocaust, to get to know its leverages, understand them and deliberate their consequences means at the same time to preserve the memory of its victims and to develop a sensibility for all forms of genocide, ethnic cleansing, racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and massive human rights violation, especially among young generations.

The *Stone Tears* project, designed in 2014 by the Center of Jewish Cultural Heritage Synagogue Maribor in cooperation with partnering organizations is a multi-year international programme. Within its framework, strategies for a permanent commemoration of three remembrance days have been developed: International Holocaust Remembrance Day (27 January), the Slovenian Victims of the Holocaust Remembrance Day on the occasion of the beginning of massive deportations of the Jews from Prekmurje (26 April) and, outside Slovenia, remembrance days connected to historical events that irreversibly sealed the fate of the persecuted Jewish population in individual countries in the time of national socialism and the Second World War, and the International Genocide of the Roma Remembrance Day (2 August). The aim of the project is to raise the level of awareness and socio-political support for Holocaust and the Genocide of the Roma Remembrance Days in the area of the former Austro-Hungarian monarchy and to outline conceptual frameworks for the commemoration of three remembrance days at national as well as international level in cooperation with partnering and participating organizations. In this context, within the framework of the project, we offer numerous suggestions for the creation of thematic programmes like documentary exhibitions, lectures, round tables, scientific meetings, audio-visual tools, memorial and other cultural events and on the basis of a presentation of selected examples of good practice, encourage other research, educational and cultural institutions and creators to actively shape Holocaust and the Genocide of the Roma remembrance and educational programmes about both forms of genocide.



Monument of the victims of the Holocaust at the Jewish cemetery in Dolga vas near Lendava; CJCH Synagogue Maribor archives, photograph by Maja Toš

## STONE tears

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# STONE tears