



**European Symposium:
Establishing a European Teaching Network on Shoah
Education**

Rome, Italy, December 15, 2014

Remarks by Dr. Eyal Kaminka

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Yad Vashem

Ms. Stefania Giannini, Italian Minister of Education, University and Research;

Mr. Paolo Gentiloni, Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation;

Mr. Andreas Loverdos, Minister of Education and Religious Affairs of the Hellenic Republic;

Mr. Renzo Gattengna, President of the Union of Jewish Communities in Italy,



Excellencies, ambassadors, dear esteemed colleagues,

On behalf of Yad Vashem I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the government of the Italian Republic. I believe that I speak for all of us when I say that we deeply appreciate the opportunity to pursue our common goals in this wonderful capital city, under the auspices of the Italian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. It is truly an honor to take part in this special symposium and to work so closely with the Italian government, which has clearly demonstrated its strong commitment to Holocaust education and commemoration over the past two decades.

At the opening ceremony of the new Yad Vashem Holocaust Historical Museum in two-thousand-and-five, Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel spoke words that tie in closely with our subject today. "And so we go through the new museum. What shall we do – cry? No. We don't try to tell the tale to make people weep... If we decided to tell the tale, it is because we wanted the world to be a better world... The messenger has delivered the message. And what is our role? We must be the messengers' messengers."

One of the aims of our meeting today is to explore various avenues for developing an active, professional pan-European network of experts in Holocaust education. The European 'Messengers of Messengers'. But how do we do that, and first and foremost, why should we do that?



There is no need to speak of the importance of Holocaust education and commemoration for today's world to this gathering. The presence of ministers, ambassadors, professionals and colleagues from twenty-seven countries is testimony to the significance and relevance of this subject in today's world. Every generation has its own challenges, and the twenty first century presents us with many challenges, some related to political, economic and cultural forces, some related to technology, some related to ignorance (which is paradoxical in an age of vast, continual information flow, and yet we witness with worry vast ignorance around the globe).

Yet all these challenges are related to education.

Education is in the heart of everything.

It *IS* the heart of everything, especially our future. We invest a certain part of our education studying our past, our heritage, in order to learn, to improve, to know where we came from and where we want to be heading.

The Shoah is part of our *joint* heritage. This heritage is a central part of the human story and must not be ignored. Rather it needs to be faced with courage insight and skill, thus transforming it into an educational opportunity to confront the worst of times and to enrich our contemporary values, beliefs and views.



We are the 'Messengers of Messengers'. That is our role, but how can we live that role meaningfully? How can we ensure that the *Shoah* will not be forgotten or ignored, or even be reduced and trivialized into shallow generalities about the human condition.

After all, this is an increasing danger, with fewer and fewer survivors around us to offer their authentic testimonies.

You are the answer. The audience here, under the auspices of the Italian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, and the unique team of policy-makers and professional, devoted educators gathered here, is the answer, because we require both policy and governmental support on one hand, and sound pedagogical approaches and tools on the other. And we also need to work as a team, as a network.

Let me give two examples, the first is the model of Italy. On June 13, 2011, the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities, and Research signed an agreement with Yad Vashem, an agreement which we are proud to have renewed on December 2, 2013. With this agreement, Italy became one of the first countries in Europe whose education ministry accredits seminars at Yad Vashem for Italian teachers. Moreover, Italy recruits multipliers from every region in the country with the goal of facilitating age-appropriate Holocaust education in a wide range of schools. Thousands of Italian students commemorate the Shoah in their schools on January 27 as well as visit Holocaust-



related authentic sites in Europe on an annual basis. The innovative projects of many dedicated Italian educators, many of whom are also Yad Vashem's graduates, are highlighted here in the exhibition in the foyer of Pitigliani.

Clearly, policymakers have a vital role in empowering educators. Traditions and public culture, such as ceremonies related to January 27, are vital to our cause, but are not enough. The second example – the Israeli case – demonstrates this.

Every country has its own characteristics with regards to the public commemoration culture. In Israel, Holocaust commemoration is present in the public sphere, especially during memorial days. The entire country stands still for two minutes, as a siren goes off, and ceremonies are conducted everywhere. But this is not enough, especially if teachers are not educated, through professional training, to teach about the Holocaust. Therefore, in 2014, Yad Vashem and Israel's Ministry of Education have joined together to create a comprehensive age-appropriate curricular approach to introduce and teach the Holocaust for different ages. We worked with child psychologists, teachers and professionals to identify what and how should be taught, and when- not in order to make the children cry, as Eli Wiesel said, but to create genuine understanding of ourselves and to make a better world. The partnership of policy makers – who allocate budgets for teacher training and recognize the need for professionalism in the discipline of Holocaust education –



together with the field pedagogical experts, has made this innovative program a reality.

'Messengers of Messengers'.

I come here with great appreciation for Italy's leadership, and to all of you who have chosen to take an active role in establishing a European network of committed policy makers and educators – and I offer Yad Vashem's vigorous and enthusiastic support.

Working together with the highest educational authorities in Europe, Yad Vashem's mission is to train educators how to teach about the Holocaust. We seek to work in close partnership to attain this goal with every member state of the European Union, across your continent. Objective, professional assessments of our work, undertaken by external evaluators, indicate that teachers in Europe are not only interested in teaching this complex subject matter in the classroom but also express their need for more professional development and training in order to empower them to teach about it.

Since its founding in 2005, the European Department of the International School for Holocaust Studies of Yad Vashem has invested in developing professional training programs for European educators to teach the Holocaust, with a view to build networks in Europe. Yad Vashem is unique in that it has forged bilateral ties with almost all 28 EU member states as well as other European countries. It also bears noting that Yad Vashem has forged agreements with the education ministries of 18 EU



member states, as well as numerous museums, universities, teacher-training unions, non-governmental EU organizations and more, thus illustrating the value we ascribe to our work with the highest educational authorities in Europe.

Maintaining such networks is dependent upon the commitment and professional development of multipliers in the field, and their governments that support their work. We need each other. Look around you. Teachers who are responsible for educating the leaders of tomorrow about the Shoah need to continue their professional development, and be accredited and encouraged by policy makers in their own countries. We need dedication and commitment. We need to actually implement, and not just talk about, and we need to be courageous if we want to make an impact.

We ARE the 'Messengers of Messengers'. Let us take hold of this role with open eyes, with an open heart, and with a long-term view of our contribution to tomorrow's future.