

# POWER OF PERSONAL STORIES IN CONFRONTING OBLIVION

**DESK RESEARCH**

**ON DENIAL AND DISTORTION OF  
THE HOLOCAUST AND OTHER  
WWII GENOCIDES**

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**CROATIA, GERMANY, ITALY  
ROMANIA, SLOVENIA, SPAIN**



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## **ABOUT THE PROJECT “POWER OF PERSONAL STORIES”**

The project „Power of Personal Stories in Confronting Oblivion” aims to strengthen the practices of remembrance of the Holocaust and other genocides committed during WWII, in the partner countries (Croatia, Germany, Italy, Romania, Slovenia, and Spain) and the European Union. For this reason, the year 2025 is particularly important, as it will mark the 80-years anniversary of the end of WWII, the liberation of different concentration camps and other locations, and the anniversary of the liberation of many European cities from Fascist and Nazi occupation.

“Power of Personal Stories” also focuses on combating Holocaust and other genocides denial, countering distortion, and trivialization of historical facts, by sharing accurate information, organizing public debates on the best practices of confronting distortion, and creating new materials and methods based on personal stories and biographies of time-witnesses, victims, and survivors - as well as stories of resistance and/or organized opposition.

The project is founded by the European Union through the programme CERV.

## **THE DESK RESEARCH**

The Desk Research (R1) aims to give an historical context and develop a summarized overlook on denial and distortion of the Holocaust and other WWII genocides and mass crimes in the partner countries; as well as to reflect on current practices that combat these phenomena.

This publication is a starting point to detect shared challenges among the interested countries and provide examples of good practices.



# CROATIA

## 1. Historical Context

The legacy of the Ustaša movement continues to trouble contemporary Croatian society. According to the scholarship from the fascism studies the Ustaša movement was one of the only three fascist (1) movements which managed to establish a fully-fledged fascist regime in Europe, the other two being Nazism in Germany and Fascism in Italy (2). One of the key aims of the Ustaša regime was the creation of an ethnically cleansed state, which was in practice pursued by the genocidal politics towards Serbs, Jews and Roma. The genocide against all three groups was autonomously planned and implemented by the Ustaša regime (3). While there are many similarities in the treatment and persecution of these three groups since they were exposed to legal, social, political and economic discrimination and mass murder, there were also significant differences in the implementation of violence towards them. While Jews and Roma were defined as racial "Others," Serbs were exposed to racism, but not to the same types of race laws. Moreover, while Jews and

1) In order to differentiate between Italian Fascism which is spelled with a capital 'F', I use fascism with a small 'f' for the idea of generic fascism. For further elaboration on the issue of generic fascism see Constantin Iordachi. "Comparative fascist studies: an introduction," and Roger Eatwell. "The nature of 'generic fascism': the 'fascist minimum' and the 'fascist matrix'" in *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

2) Roger Griffin. *Fascism* (Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2018): 5.

3) Tomislav Dulić, *Utopias of Nation: Local Mass Killing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1941 - 42*, Studia Historica Upsaliensia 218 (Uppsala: Univ, 2005); Tomislav Dulić, "Mass Killing in the Independent State of Croatia, 1941-1945: A Case for Comparative Research," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 3 (September 2006): 255-81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520600949981>; Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2001); Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust u Zagrebu* (Zagreb: Novi Liber, 2001); Alexander Korb, *Im Schatten Des Weltkriegs. Massengewalt Der Ustaša Gegen Serben, Juden Und Roma in Kroatien 1941-1945*, (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2013); Alexander Korb, "Understanding Ustaša Violence," *Journal of Genocide Research* 12, no. 1-2 (June 2010): 1-18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2010.508273>. Lovro Kralj, "The Evolution of Ustasha Mass Violence: Nation-Statism, Paramilitarism, Structure, and Agency in the Independent State of Croatia, 1941," in *Fascist Warfare, 1922-1945: Aggression, Occupation, Annihilation* (Palgrave Macmillan, n.d.), 241-68.

Roma were defined as racial “Others,” Serbs were exposed to racism, but not to the same types of race laws. Moreover, while Jews and Roma were mainly killed inside the concentration and death camps, Serbs were additionally exposed to mass murder in the countryside.

The Holocaust in the Independent State of Croatia was launched in the middle of 1941, with first mass deportations already starting in May 1941. The Holocaust was launched mainly on the Ustaša initiative and there is no proof that the Germans ordered, pressured or requested such course of action from the Ustaša during mid-1941. By the time the majority of Croatian and Bosnian Jewry was already imprisoned or killed by the Ustaša regime, Jews were also deported to nazi controlled concentration camps, mainly Auschwitz in August 1942 and in 1943. Nonetheless, the absolute majority of WWII Croatian Jews were murdered by the Ustaša perpetrators, approximately 75% of them died in Croatia, and 25% in German controlled camps (4). The Ustaša also produced a network of concentration and death camps, the most infamous being Jasenovac – the largest concentration camp outside of the German supervision. The results of the Holocaust were devastating for the Croatian Jewry, out of approximately 39,000 Jews residing in the Independent State of Croatia only 9,000 survived the war which brings the destruction rate to almost 77% of the pre-war Jewish population (5).

4) Muzej žrtava genocida, Beograd and Dragan Cvetković, “Geostatistička Analiza Ljudskih Gubitaka u Koncentracionom Logoru Jasenovac,” *Istorija* 20. Veka 37, no. 1/2019 (February 1, 2019): 93–120, <https://doi.org/10.29362/ist20veka.2019.1.cve.93-120>.

5) Ivo Goldstein. *Holokaust u Zagrebu* [The Holocaust in Zagreb] (Zagreb: Novi Liber, 2001): 636.

## 2. Denial and distortions today: challenges

The legacy of the NDH is a prominent part of memory politics in contemporary Croatia. One of the most recent examples is the exhibition titled “Some were neighbors” that was cancelled in the last moment in winter 2023. The exhibition was planned in the Croatian capital Zagreb, and it was set to be held during Croatia’s presidency of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). In addition to showcasing the history of the Holocaust, the concept of the traveling exhibition aimed to include the specificities of local contexts, such as those in Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Croatia. However, the collaboration between the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum based in Washington, D. C., and different Croatian institutions was hindered because the Croatian side, coordinated by the Ministry of Culture and Media, rejected any scenario in which the genocide committed against Serbs in the WWII Independent State of Croatia was acknowledged. Consequently, the American partners refused to take part in setting up an exhibition that was clearly marked by revisionist tendencies of the Croatian side. As reported on by the investigative journalist Hrvoje Šimičević, this international scandal was facilitated by the government of Prime Minister Andrej Plenković and the Ministry of Culture and Media led by Nina Obuljen-Koržinek, as well as Matea Brstilo Rešetar, the director of the Croatian History Museum and president of the Management Council of the Jasenovac Memorial Site (6).

The relativization and normalization of the NDH’s official salute “Ready for the Homeland” (*Za dom spremni*) has been another consistent element of revisionist

6) See, for instance, one detailed report published on the online Portal Novosti: <https://portalnovosti.com/zatajeni-susjedi>. See also the following blog post: [https://ostblog.hypotheses.org/6762#footnote\\_0\\_6762](https://ostblog.hypotheses.org/6762#footnote_0_6762). The intrusion of Jasenovac into regionalist nationalist politics during the first half of 2024 in particular has included the resignation of the director of the Jasenovac Memorial Park, Ivo Pejaković, as well as the resolution in the Montenegrin Parliament according to which Jasenovac, Mauthausen, and Dachau were declared genocidal. The resolution was denounced by the Croatian government as a divisive attempt at political interference. See <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/07/04/croatia-must-stop-downplaying-the-genocidal-crimes-of-the-ustasa/>, as well as <https://www.politico.eu/article/holocaust-vote-montenegro-eu-accession-world-war-2-death-camp-jasenovac-croatia-milojko-spajic/>.



tendencies. The salute was banned in socialist Yugoslavia but resurfaced during the 1990s Croatian War of Independence, when it was popularized by right-wing politicians and groups and used to evoke the legacy of the NDH (7). In addition to being relativized by different political actors, the salute was not regulated during the war, which contributed to its appropriation by right-wing politicians and groups as the alleged symbol of the 1990s war. The salute, however, is considered as hate speech advocating radical right positions by many in Croatia and neighboring countries (8).

The Ustaša salute has been utilized by various individuals and in multiple settings, particularly to advance political agendas and mobilize voters. It appeared on a memorial plaque near the WWII Ustaša concentration camp at Jasenovac (9), was chanted by high school graduates in the city of Rijeka, which was accompanied by the defacement of the town's Liberation Monument. Additionally, it has been sold on T-shirts and stickers at the store Patriot Hrvatska and was shouted at concerts by musician Marko Perković Thompson, among other instances. Thompson, one of the most prominent nationalists in Croatian popular culture, gained fame in the 1990s with his song "Bojna Čavoglave" (Čavoglave Battalion), which begins with the salute and declares that Serb enemies will not invade his village as long as Croats exist. In the summer of 2020, the High Court of Misdemeanors in Zagreb determined that Thompson did not disrupt public order or breach the peace by using the salute in his song (10).

The salute and other insignia associated with the Ustaša regime are not explicitly

7) See Velimir Veselinović *Hrvatska stranka prava od 1990. do 2011. Na izvoru desnoga radikalizma i populizma*: <https://historiografija.hr/?p=14804>.

8) See Damčević Katarina (2023), „Semiotics of hate speech and contested symbols: the 'Za dom spremni' Ustaša salute in contemporary Croatia“: <https://dspace.ut.ee/items/c7a2a081-96a5-4be2-9a48-2b9e9cde6a55>.

9) For a more detailed account see Hrvoje Cvijanović, On Memory Politics and Memory Wars: A Critical Analysis of the Croatian Dialogue Document, in: *Croatian Political Science Review*, 55(4): 109-146, 2018, and the article Cultural texts, enemies, and taboos: autocommunicative meaning-making surrounding the “Ready for the Homeland” Ustaša salute in Croatia, in: *Social Semiotics*, 33(3): 470-496, 2023 (published online 09 February 2021).

10) See <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/06/03/croatian-court-rules-thompson-song-did-not-break-law/>.

banned in Croatia. Based on Article 325 of the Croatian Penal Code, a person can be charged for inciting hatred and/or offending people based on their national or ethnic belonging when using the salute. However, this is rarely applied in practice. In April 2023, a proposal was made to amend the “Law on misdemeanors against public order and peace”, calling for a significant increase in fines (up to 4000 euros) for “the performance, reproduction of songs, music and texts, or carrying or emphasizing symbols, texts, pictures, drawings”. The Ustaša salute is not explicitly referred to, but it is implied that the amendment is aimed at mitigating its use. Minority representatives requested an amendment to the Law to regulate the salute in the Croatian Penal Code, but this has been unsuccessful.



### **3. Recent positive developments and good practices**

A recent positive development in relation to Holocaust research and education is the establishment of the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Research in Southeast Europe at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (University of Rijeka, Croatia). This signifies an important moment in the commitment to advancing knowledge, fostering academic collaboration, and preserving the memory of historical events that have profoundly shaped our world. The vision of the Center is to facilitate local, microhistorical, comparative, interdisciplinary, as well as transnational approaches. The Center also aims to serve as a hub for rigorous research and careful reflection. Its ultimate mission is to bridge the gap between local and global Holocaust and Genocide research and to increase the visibility of scholarship from Southeastern Europe.

# GERMANY

## 1. Historical Context

With the beginning of the Second World War, National Socialist Germany significantly intensified its violent measures. Right from the start of the war, thousands of people with disabilities were murdered as part of the so-called "euthanasia" programme. This process involved the systematic registration and murder of people who were categorised "unworthy of life". Six killing centres were set up on the territory of the German Reich, where the victims were mostly murdered using carbon monoxide. These murders were not secret; despite attempts to cover them up, they were increasingly denounced by relatives of the victims and a few church authorities, which led to a supposedly official, but only temporary, halt to so-called "adult euthanasia" in 1941. The murder practices developed as part of Aktion T4 later served as a model for mass extermination in the Polish occupied territories, particularly in the extermination camps. (Cf. Wildt, 2012)

More hazardous measures were also taken against Jewish Germans at the beginning of the war, ranging from the confiscation of radios to labelling with the „Jewish star“/star of David and the establishment of ghettos. In addition, Schutzstaffel (SS), Sicherheitsdienst (SD) and police task forces carried out mass shootings of Jewish people. The Wannsee Conference in January of 1942 marked a decisive organisational step in the systematic murder of European Jews, in which the

deportation and murder of Jews was coordinated under the leadership of Reinhard Heydrich. Millions were then murdered in the extermination camps. The extermination policy also extended to other groups such as Sinti and Roma. (Cf. Wildt, 2012)

At the same time, the concentration camp system was expanded massively. In addition to political opponents, Jews, Poles, clergy, Sinti and Roma, alleged homosexuals and people who were called „anti-social“ by the National Socialist were also interned there. The mass murder was accompanied by ruthless exploitation of labour, extreme living conditions and high death rates among the prisoners. Mass transports determined at the Wannsee Conference led Jews directly to extermination camps such as Belzec, Chelmno, Lublin-Majdanek, Sobibor, Treblinka and Auschwitz-Birkenau. Pseudo-medical claimed additional victims. As the Allies approached the camps, Himmler ordered the traces of the mass murders to be destroyed and the SS began deporting the prisoners to the west. These so-called death marches claimed many more victims.. (Cf. Wildt, 2012)

Resistance to National Socialism was diverse and was organised by only a very small minority who acted for a variety of motives, including political, religious and ethical convictions. Resistance was shown individually, for example by refusing to give the Hitler salute, supporting forced labourers or hiding persecuted people. Well-known examples include Georg Elser, who carried out an assassination attempt on Hitler in 1939, as well as organised groups such as the Kreisau Circle, the White Rose Movement and a group of military officers around Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg. . The labour movement also conducted acts of resistance f. ex. through sabotage, as did prisoners in concentration camps and Jewish resistance groups. (Cf. Tuchel & Albert, 2016)



## **2. Denial and distortions today: challenges**

- **Right-wing extremism in schools:**

The number of right-wing extremist offences at schools has risen nationwide in recent years, particularly noticeably in 2023. In Brandenburg, reported incidents tripled to 180 cases in the 2022/23 term, and in Saxony, the number of cases rose significantly from 90 in 2022 to 149 in 2023. A third of right-wing offences involving underage suspects between 2018 and 2021 took place in school settings. (Cf. Dinger & Kraetzer, 2024)

- **National Socialism and political education in the federal system:**

The federal sovereignty of education in Germany makes it difficult to standardise the teaching of remembrance culture and Holocaust education, as each federal state has its own curriculum. This leads to major differences in implementation, as is the case with memorial site trips, which are not compulsory in every state. In Bavaria, almost 70% of high school students visit a concentration camp memorial, but only 10% of students with special needs and 30% of students from secondary school. The number of history and politics lessons also varies noticeably, with Bavarian high school students receiving one eighth fewer lessons in political education compared to other federal states. (cf. Gökbudak et al., 2020, p. 17.). The subject "Politics and Society" is only taught at Realschulen and Gymnasien from the 10th grade onwards. National Socialism is represented to varying degrees in the history curricula of the federal states and is not dealt with until the 8th grade at the earliest, although it is considered essential for dealing with Anti-Semitism (cf. Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland et al., 2021). In addition, the emphasis on abstract structural history (cf. Kocka, 1980, p. 135 f.) has neglected the perspective that history is made by people who have room for manoeuvre in decision-making. (cf. Herbert, 2021).

- **Forgotten victim groups:**

It was not until the 1980s that the persecution and non-recognition of the victims of the National Socialists, who were labelled „homosexual“, "anti-social" and "career criminals", was increasingly addressed. For a long time, these groups were marginalised in debates about "forgotten victims". Only in recent years there have been increased research initiatives, particularly by concentration camp memorials.

### **3. Recent positive developments and good practices**

- **Political recognition of forgotten victims**

In February 2020, the government majority in the Bundestag decided to officially honor the prisoners labelled as "career criminals" and "anti-socials" as victims of National Socialist tyranny and promoted public remembrance through exhibition projects and research funding. However, this recognition did not end in monetary or other compensation, but was more symbolic. (Cf. Stigmatised for life: marginalised victim groups, n.d.) These victim groups are also only discussed marginally and very superficially in most curricula.

- **Digital storytelling:**

Under the hashtag #WhatMovesMeMost, the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial has asked its employees to describe places or objects from the exhibition or the archive in a personal way in short videos.

In 2020, it also handed over its account to two experts as part of an Insta Takeover under the hashtag #prideuntold, who presented biographies of queer operas of the National Socialists and ended the series with a live discussion. (see Groschek, 2024, p. 165f.)

- **Further development of the memorial work:**

The Saxon Memorials Foundation is currently running a project at the Pirna-Sonnenstein memorial site with AWO Sonnenstein gGmbH, in which an inclusive educational programme in plain/easy language has been designed for the memorial site together with people with disabilities and the project participants are being trained as visitor advisors. They inform visitors about the victims of so-called "euthanasia". (See: [AWO Peer-Referenten VL2 180720.pdf](#))



The Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial has been active on TikTok since 2021. The basic communication concept from the first year consisted primarily of peer-to-peer communication: the young volunteers of Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste spoke about their work, their thoughts and their growing knowledge of history, addressing their peers directly. In this way, topics could be broken down into short units without trivialising them and without them being emotionally overwhelming. Volunteers shared their thoughts, drew attention to objects or manageable topics and contextualised them. The account now has more than 28,000 followers and the most viewed video has generated more than 2.7 million clicks. (Cf. Groschek, 2024, p. 169)

- **History in Dialogue**

The "History in Dialogue" project is a collaboration between the Center for Humanistic Education in Akko/Israel, the Flossenbürg Concentration Camp Memorial and the Max Mannheimer Study Centre. The aim is to develop new methods for open and dialogue-based history education. The cooperation began in 2014/2015 with the aim of giving educational and freelance staff the opportunity to rethink their work and try out new moderation techniques that enable participants in tours and seminars to develop their own questions and views on the history of National Socialism and its aftermath. (Cf. Max Mannheimer Study Centre, n.d.)

- **Learning with digital tools:**

In the Munich project "LediZ" (Learning with digital testimonies), interactive 3D testimonies of survivors of National Socialism are created, colloquially known as "holograms". At the Leibniz Supercomputing Centre of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and Humanities, users can familiarise themselves with the life stories of Holocaust survivors such as Abba Naor and have conversations with these interactive holograms . The technology is based on around 1000 recorded answers. The use of these digital testimonies in an educational context is being researched in a variety of ways, with the personal relevance of the question "What does this have to do with me?" always taking centre stage. However, it must be borne in mind that this will not be able to replace interaction with contemporary witnesses and that the questions asked by interested parties may also change in the coming decades. (Cf. Interactive Digital Testimonies\_EN - LediZ, n.d.)

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# ITALY

## 1. Historical Context

On 10 June 1940 Italy entered the war on the side of Germany, declaring war on France and England. The head of the Italian government is the fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, who after the violent seizure of power in 1922 closed the opposition newspapers, outlawed left-wing parties, sent opponents to exile, to prison or murdered them. During the war against Ethiopia in the mid 1930ies Italy committed huge war crimes. 1938 antisemitism became to be official State theory. During the Second World War, Italy committed very serious crimes against civilians in occupied countries, particularly in Yugoslavia and Greece. The Italian army and the fascist militias burned villages and killed thousands of civilians, deported more than a hundred thousand people to concentration camps. After September 8, 1943, when Italy asked the Allies for an armistice, a fascist government, always headed by Benito Mussolini, was formed in Northern Italy. The Italian Social Republic, this is the name, actively collaborated with the Nazis in the deportation from Italy of Jews and opponents to the concentration and extermination camps of the Third Reich. At the same time, in this last phase (September 43 – April 45) a movement of armed resistance to fascism and Nazism developed in Italy which made a great contribution to their defeat.



## **2. Denial and distortions today: challenges**

We can say that democratic Italy, which emerged from the Second World War, has never really come to terms with its responsibilities linked to the fascist dictatorship. In general a plenty of public initiatives in recent decades in memory of the events related to the Second World War are from our point of view very controversial. We are referring to the law that established the Day of Remembrance in memory of the so-called foibe and the Dalmatian Istrian exodus. A law that preferred to completely ignore the context in which those events took place and remember the victims of only one side of that conflict.

Even the law that recently established the Day of Military Internees in German Prisoner Camps (20 September) has chosen to remember the Italian military only as victims and not also as invaders of enemy countries (in practice, the history of the Italian army seems to have begun only on 8 September 1943). Even more problematic is the choice of the Italian parliament to establish the "National Day of Remembrance and Sacrifice of the Alpini". The date chosen, January 26, in addition to being particularly inopportune so close to Holocaust Remembrance Day, celebrates a battle fought in 1943 in retreat from the Russian campaign, a war in which the Italians were the invaders, certainly not the victims.

In particular, in the last two years, with the centre-right government led by Giorgia Meloni (at the head of an extreme right-wing party), we are witnessing not only a re-evaluation of the fascist past (in particular of all the values linked to the concept of Fatherland and Nation), but also new project of law that try to stem dissidence (prohibition of expressing one's dissent even peacefully, for example, by making a road block). In addition, during several demonstrations of extreme right-wing militants, symbols and gestures that refer to historical fascism were exhibited; journalists were physically assaulted while documenting these meetings. All this without the right-wing parties in government in Italy condemning such gestures and distancing themselves from the reference to historical fascism and Nazism.

### **3. Recent positive developments and good practices**

Among the few positive elements of recent decades (but it dates back to the year 2000) we can point out the institution of Holocaust Remembrance Day, January 27. Since then, there have been many initiatives in memory of the Shoah.

Even the persecution and extermination of the Roma and Sinti – although they do not have a day of remembrance dedicated to them – obtained their first public recognition in January 2018 on a meeting organized at the Senate. Despite this, it should be emphasized that prejudice and racism towards Roma and Sinti is still very present in Italy and used as political argument by far-right parties like Lega Nord of Salvini.

Nothing has therefore been done in recent decades by Italian political institutions to remind them of the responsibilities during the twenty years of the fascist dictatorship. On more than one occasion, but without any result, it has been proposed by associations and scholars to establish a day in memory of fascist crimes. A bill that wants to remember the fascist concentration camps has been stuck in the Senate Culture Committee for more than a year, is buried in the sand.

However, our association Topografia per la storia, as well as a few other realities, is trying to promote knowledge of fascist crimes in particular through training courses aimed at teachers. For example, this year the second edition of the training course will take place at the memorial of the Italian concentration camp on the island of Rab (now Croatia) which will be attended by 30 teachers from all over Italy.

# ROMANIA

## 1. Historical Context

During WWII, Romania was a dictatorship, led by the Army leader Ion Antonescu, who seized power and aligned Romania with Nazi Germany in 1940. Already in 1938, King Carol II had dissolved the democratic institutions, established a Royal Dictatorship and enacted antisemitic laws that striped a quarter of the Jewish population of their citizenship and restricted their access to certain professions and the possibility to own businesses. Violent antisemitic actions were perpetrated by the Iron Guard, a local fascist paramilitary organisation, culminating to the Bucharest Pogrom in January 1941. From 1941 to 1944, Romanian authorities implemented a series of coordinated actions aimed at exterminating large proportions of the Jewish and Roma populations. In June 1941, the Iași Pogrom resulted in the massacre of over 13,000 Jews. Following its decision to join Germany in attacking the Soviet Union, with the aim of recuperating territories annexed in 1940, Antonescu's government initiated mass persecutions in these territories and nearby regions in Romania, and deportations of Jews to Transnistria. In 1942, approximately 25,000 Roma from all over Romania were deported to Transnistria. In 1944, following a coup by King Michael, Romania switched sides and joined the Allies, halting the deportations. It is estimated that 280,000 to 380,000 Jews and around 12,000 Roma were killed in that period in the territories under the control of Romanian authorities. Moreover, around 135,000 Jews from the territories in Northern Transylvania, administered by Hungary at that time, were killed in 1944.



## **2. Denial and distortions today: challenges**

During the communist regime, with the exception of the first years after the war, as well as in the 1990s, Romanian authorities promoted a complete denial of any responsibility of Romanian authorities for crimes committed during the Holocaust. The systematic persecutions and extermination attempts aimed at the Jewish and Roma populations were ignored in the historic and public discourse and, when they Holocaust was mentioned, it was exclusively blamed on Nazi Germany. This has changed in 2003, when, under international pressure, the President of Romania, who made explicit statements denying the Holocaust in Romania, decided to establish the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania to research the actual history of the Holocaust in Romania and make specific policy recommendations. The Commission, was led by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Elie Wiesel, survivor of the Holocaust born in Romania, and published in 2024 a comprehensive report confirming the responsibility of Romanian authorities.

Starting in early 2000s, legislation was gradually passed to prohibit hate speech, the use of fascist symbols, the cult of historical figures convicted of war crimes, and the denial of the Holocaust. The first legal document explicitly focused on Holocaust denial and distortion was adopted in March 2022. However, there were numerous challenges in the implementation of this legislation, especially regarding Holocaust denial and distortion. In the 1990s and early 2000s, monuments and names of streets or public places were honouring Antonescu, members of his government, or people associated with the Iron Guard as national heroes, often presenting them as anti-communists. Most of them were removed during the last two decades, with few controversial exceptions remaining. Among the latest myths remaining from that period was the fact that the Romanian Army was not involved in crimes. This was proven wrong during the last few years, with systematic research performed, among others, by Army specialists.

### **3. Recent positive developments and good practices**

Based on the EU Council Conclusions from December 2018, Romania adopted its first National Strategy for Preventing and Combating Anti-Semitism, Xenophobia, Radicalisation, and Hate Speech, in May 2021, preceding the European strategy, adopted by the European Commission in November 2021. The strategy covered the period 2021-2023. The second Strategy was adopted for the period 2024-2027 and it is now under implementation.

Since the school year 2023-2024, a new compulsory subject call "The History of the Jews. The Holocaust" was included in the curriculum for all XI grade high-school students.

The National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust "Elie Wiesel" is publishing periodic reports on antisemitism and Holocaust denial and distortion, supports research and develops also educational activities. The "Olga Lengyel" Institute, a US-based organisation, has been organising seminars for teachers for over a decade.

There are several other organisations, including the Intercultural Institute of Timisoara, providing teachers with training and educational resources to address these topics.

Public statements are made annually by public institutions and activities are organised in schools on the occasion of the International Day for the Commemoration of the Holocaust. Different organisations also organise awareness-raising activities on other significant dates for the persecutions of Jewish and Roma people in Romania.

Universities from Bucharest, Cluj, Iasi, Timisoara and Sibiu have courses dedicated to the Holocaust and the topic is also addressed by several academic research centres on Jewish Studies.

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# SLOVENIA

## 1. Historical Context

With the occupation of the Slovene ethnic territory in 1941, there were five different border areas and borders in Slovenia: border between Germany and Hungary, border between Hungary and the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), border between Germany and the NDH, border between Italy and German, and border between border between Italy and the NDH. Despite the formal incorporation of the Province of Ljubljana into Italy, the so-called Rapallo border still remained, separating the Slovenes of the Littoral region from the rest of the country. Today's Slovenia covers 20,271 square kilometres and has 2,095,861 inhabitants, while Slovenian territory before WWII measured 15,849 square kilometres and had 1,227,358 inhabitants. In this small territory, there were 640 kilometres of occupation borders, stretching from the swampy basins of the rivers Mura and Drava to the top of mount Triglav, from the rivers Sotla and Kolpa to Peč nad Ratečami, from the suburbs of Ljubljana, which became a border town between Italy and Germany, through the Polhograjsko hills and the valley of the Sora to Idrija and beyond. All occupiers enclosed part of their territory with borders separating the different zones of occupation. Borders were protected by barbed wire, bunkers, watchtowers and minefields, cutting through villages and even estates. The erection of all these borders was accompanied by war violence, deportations, and escapes from one

occupation zone to another. All this has, of course, caused many traumas and disrupted traditional patterns of migration, farming, industry and trade.

The ethnocidal and genocidal dimensions of the occupiers' practices were visible in forced migrations and deportations to labour and concentration camps, as well as in other forms of violence: 21,234 Slovenes were interned in German concentration camps, 36,200 in Italian concentration camps, 688 in Hungarian concentration camps and about 400 in Croatian concentration camps (total number of Slovenes in concentration camps: 58,522). Moreover, about 20,000 Slovenes were confined or sent to forced labour, and further 80,000 were imprisoned. Particularly tragic was the fate of some 600 stolen children, taken from their parents, who were shot as hostages or taken to concentration camps, and given up for adoption or imprisoned in children's camps. The Germans intended to deport between 220,000 and 260,000 Slovenes to the Ustasha NDH, to Serbian quisling formation led by General Milan Nedić, and to Germany, as part of a plan to completely ethnically cleanse Slovenian territory. They succeeded to deport 63,000 Slovenes, while about 17,000 managed to escape across the German-Italian border into the Italian occupation zone. Some of the 10,000 people deported from the German occupation zone to the NDH also fled to the Italian occupation zone or crossed the border through legal channels. From the Italian occupation zone, 17,000 Gottscheers (German settlers of the Kočevje region, Slov. 'Kočevarji' or 'kočevski Nemci') were resettled to the emptied Slovenian places along the Croatian border, which became the southern border of the German Reich, and smaller groups from eastern Europe were also moved to Gorenjska region. In the German occupation zone, around 60,000 men were forcibly mobilised, while forced military and labour mobilisation was also carried out by the Hungarian occupiers. The Germans and Italians shot 2,949 hostages. Among the first victims of Nazi occupation were around 600 people, who were at the time kept in special institutions for physically and mentally handicapped – they all have been euthanised. The war and occupation in Slovenia (including casualties from inter-Slovenian



conflicts and post-war reprisals) claimed almost 100,000 victims, or 6.6% of the population. In addition, more than 50,000 people were injured and disabled. During the war, most of the infrastructure was destroyed, and dozens of settlements were burnt down by the occupiers, either in war operations or in revenge.

The Jewish community on Slovenian territory was relatively small as their number decreased even before WWII due to antisemitism, WWI and the new international borders that were established after the Great War. According to the 1937 census, 778 Jews lived at that time in the Drava Banate (the census was, however, not quite accurate since the religious affiliation was used as the official criterion). Several hundred Jews fled to the Italian occupation zone also from the NDH. Very few of them survived the war – namely, after the capitulation of Italy in September 1943, the Home Guard administration of Leon Rupnik in the Province of Ljubljana, that was set up by the Germans, was distinctly hostile to them as well. The Prekmurje region was the only region in Slovenia with significant concentration of Jewish population, but even there the number of Jews was since the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire rapidly declining. According to the 1941 census conducted in Prekmurje by the Hungarian occupation authorities, 438 Jews were living there. Although many anti-Jewish regulations, introduced during the Hungarian occupation, heavily discriminated the Jews, their lives in Prekmurje were for the most part not endangered (a similar situation also applied to the Italian occupation zone).

The arrests of the Jews began soon after the German occupation of Hungary: the first arrests were made on 26 April 1944. The following day, some 280 arrested Prekmurje Jews, which have been rounded up in the synagogues in Murska Sobota and Lendava, were deported in two transports – on 2 and 21 May 1944 – via Čakovec and Nagykanizsa (Velika Kaniža) to Auschwitz. Those who arrived on the first transport were part of the first ever transport of Jews from what was then Hungary to Auschwitz. The reason for such a rapid destruction was the possibility that at least some of the Prekmurje Jews might have saved themselves by joining the partisan



forces.

The fate of the Slovenian Roma during WWII was in a way similar to the fate of the Jews. Roma were sent to concentration camps and forced labour or were shot as hostages.

The most massive was the deportation of 77 Roma men and women, adults and children, from Novo mesto to Auschwitz, of which none survived the war. They arrived in Auschwitz on 2 December 1943, where a large part of the group was apparently killed on 2 August 1944. Hence, the date of the International Genocide of the Roma Remembrance Day is particularly appropriate for Slovenia as well. Well-known is also a case of six Roma who were shot by the Hungarian occupying authorities in February 1945 in Turnišče. It is estimated that altogether more than 100 Roma were killed by the occupiers. Unfortunately, the partisans too were suspicious of the Roma, fearing that the Roma were betraying them, and consequently killed several Roma families.

The loss of life, health, future, and happiness can only be scantily illustrated by the cursory figures and data provided in the above paragraphs. Despite all the violence, the people of Slovenia managed to survive the war and, as part of the anti-fascist coalition, contributed much more to its victory than could have been expected given their numbers, the size of their territory and the conditions in which they found themselves. The war was total in Slovenia too, encompassing the entire population and the entire territory, and has had terrible consequences, probably the worst in the entire Slovenian history (1).

1) Source: Repe, B., et al. Uvod k slovenski izdaji. In: *Priporočila za poučevanje in učenje o holokavstu*. IHRA. 2019, 2022 (Slovenian language version). The original text was partially revised for this document.

## 2. Denial and distortions today: challenges

After WWII, Slovenia was a part of Yugoslavia, in which the Communist Party of Yugoslavia took over the political power. The new authorities built and implemented the country's political system in line with their ideology, and, among other things, steered public education accordingly. In the field of history teaching, with reference to WWII, much emphasis has been placed on the national liberation fight and its importance for the liberation of Yugoslavia from the hands of the occupying powers, and the subsequent creation of a new state based on socialist foundations. At the same time the post-war authorities have glossed over and concealed their treatment of the losers of WWII, especially domestic collaborators, and political opponents. After Slovenia's independence and the change of the political system in the newly formed state, the initially totalitarian and later authoritarian character of the former Yugoslav politics gradually began to reveal itself.

For the first time, the Slovenian public was openly informed about the post-war killings of alleged Nazi and fascist collaborators and their families (a fact that was first mentioned by writer Edvard Kocbek in 1975 and that was otherwise known as a "public secret"), and more and more field research was carried out to locate the sites of the killings, to collect the remains of the murdered and to identify them, and to ensure that they were given a decent burial. At the same time, a new phenomenon has emerged, namely the attempt to revise the history of WWII on the territory of today's Slovenia. Revisionism was promoted in particular by political parties on the right, seeking to minimise the importance of the partisan movement, while at the same time reinterpreting the role of the Slovenian "White Guard" (orig. 'Prostovoljna protikomunistična milica' or derog. 'Bela garda', 1942–1943) and Home Guard (orig. 'Slovensko domobranstvo' or colloq. 'Domobranci', 1943–1945) units, which were documented to have collaborated with the occupiers. Slovenian politics has so far failed to unite on such issues, and revisionism is particularly present whenever there is a change of political power.



Notwithstanding the controversies between the various Slovenian parties, it is fair to say that the teaching of the history of WWII on the territory of today's Slovenia is more objective than it was in the past. Furthermore, it also includes teaching about the Holocaust and the fate of the various minority ethnic and religious communities and other social groups that were persecuted by the Nazis and the fascists. Individual teachers try to bring the topic of the Holocaust history closer to their pupils through various additional pedagogical activities, such as planting yellow saffron bulbs (the Crocus Project) or preparing and holding school cultural events commemorating the victims of the Holocaust. Considering the extent of such pedagogical activities, which often take place in cooperation with the Synagogue Maribor, we can estimate that Slovenian schoolchildren's knowledge of the Holocaust is solid, although this cannot be confirmed with certainty, as no official survey has been conducted at the national level in recent years to confirm our assessment.

In 2008, the Slovenian government declared the International Holocaust Remembrance Day (i.e. 27 January) as the national Remembrance Day. Since then, many cultural and commemorative events have been organised every year to recall the horrors of the WWII and the fate of the people persecuted under Nazism and Fascism. Slovenian media generally cover these events well, helping to raise public awareness of the Holocaust, its causes and consequences. However, there are also cases of antisemitism in Slovenia and, in particular, of Holocaust distortion, which appear mainly on social media, as well as occasionally in local media. The number of cases mentioned has increased recently in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and the accompanying measures taken by Slovenian State to combat it, and since the outbreak of the war between Israel and Hamas on 7 October 2023. The problem is that antisemitic beliefs and opinions that distort the facts about the Holocaust are spread on social networks especially in closed groups, making them difficult to detect and monitor.

A similar situation can be observed in regard of Roma issues, where anti-Roma sentiment increases markedly especially when there is media coverage of criminal acts allegedly committed or committed by members of the Roma community. In such



cases, it can be noticed that the general public almost as a rule mirrors the actions of individual Roma to the Roma community as a whole, which is a consequence of the persistent perceptions of Roma in the majority society.

Article 297 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Slovenia defines the criminal offence of public incitement to hatred, violence and intolerance, and determines among others that “The same punishment shall be imposed on a person who, <...>, publicly disseminates ideas on the supremacy of one race over another, or provides aid in any manner for racist activities or denies, diminishes the significance of, approves, justifies, derides, or advocates genocide, holocaust, crimes against humanity, war crimes, aggression, or other criminal offences against humanity, <...>.” But the relatively small number of such cases handled by both the police and the courts nevertheless seems to make such acts more difficult to prove. Accordingly, in recent years – in order to reinforce the endeavours of preventing the hate speech, antisemitism and antigypsyism – the Slovenian Government adopted the Strategy on Combating Antisemitism for the period until 2033 and the National Programme of Measures for Roma for the 2021–2030 period, as well as formed the Strategic Council for the Prevention of Hate Speech, while a similar governmental council for monitoring of the implementation of the Strategy on Combating Antisemitism will be appointed in the upcoming months.

### **3. Recent positive developments and good practices**

In 2008, the International Holocaust Remembrance Day has been declared as the national Holocaust Remembrance Day in Slovenia as well. Ever since, numerous organizers across Slovenia organize cultural and commemorative events, symposia and scientific meetings, exhibitions, diverse pedagogical programmes, etc., dedicated to honour the Holocaust victims and survivors and also other groups and individuals who were during WWII persecuted by the Nazis and the Fascists. In the last decade or more, all these commemorative and educational programmes have been promoted under the umbrella of the “Shoah – Let Us Remember” project that is coordinated by the Center of Jewish Cultural Heritage Synagogue Maribor (hereinafter: Synagogue Maribor).

In addition to commemorating the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the Synagogue Maribor endeavours with its project “Stone Tears” to also promote commemoration of the 26 April as one of the sad milestones in Slovenian history. Namely, on that day in 1944, mass deportations of the Jews from Prekmurje region to Auschwitz-Birkenau begun resulting in almost complete destruction of Jewish life and presence in Slovenia. Diverse commemorative events are being organised around this date, especially in Maribor, Murska Sobota, Lendava, Ptuj and Ljubljana.

The Roma victims of the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis and Fascists have been commemorated in Slovenia by various Roma organizations, such as Romani Union Murska Sobota and the Slovene Romani Association, since 2014 annually also by the Synagogue Maribor and its<sup>1</sup> partnering organizations. Each year, on 2 August or around this date, at least two commemorations of the Genocide of the Roma are being held in Slovenia: the event “The Night That Silenced the Violins” in Maribor, and a commemoration in Murska Sobota. These events are reported mainly at the local media and in the Roma TV show “So vakeres?” (What are you speaking?) at the Slovenian national TV.

Although no specific academic programmes on the Holocaust and/or Genocide of the



Roma exist in Slovenia, there have been on-the-job professional trainings for educators in elementary and high schools in Slovenia. In the past seven years two international seminars were organised with Yad Vashem – in April 2018 (24 participants) and due to the COVID-19 pandemic virtually in October 2021 in four terms for 35 history teachers. Then, several further trilateral international seminars for Slovenian history teachers were organised with Memorial de la Shoah from Paris as well: the first seminar was held in July 2018 in Ljubljana, the second in June 2019 in Trieste. Due to COVID-19 situation, in 2020 and 2021 two online webinars have been organized, too. These seminars relate to so called “sensitive issues” of the 20th century history on the Holocaust, genocides, international and cross-border conflicts. Participants were from three countries (Italy, Slovenia, Croatia) – 13 or 14 teachers from each country. Another two seminars were organised with Austrian teachers (one online and one “live” in Klagenfurt, Austria in September 2021). The programmes were very similar to the previous seminars as mentioned above. The last two seminars for teachers from Slovenia, Italy and Croatia were held in Zagreb in March 2022 and in Ljubljana in March 2024. Finally, several teacher trainings and workshops have been organized in close collaboration of the National Education Institute Slovenia and the public institution Synagogue Maribor in the past few years (2).

Slovenia also participates in two prominent international projects – Crocus and Stolpersteine. The Crocus Project, coordinated by the Holocaust Education Ireland, is a project involving the planting of yellow saffron bulbs and various other educational activities to educate young people about the Holocaust and raise awareness of the dangers of racism and discrimination. In the school year 2024/25, 168 Slovenian school will take part in this project that is at the national level coordinated by the Synagogue Maribor. The Stolpersteine project is a project by German artist Gunter Demnig, within the framework of which special commemorative paving stones are being laid in various cities and towns across Europe to commemorate the victims of

2) Source: <https://holocaustremembrance.com/countries/slovenia> (23 Sept. 2024). The original text was partially revised for this document. (23 Sept. 2024). The original text was partially revised for this document.



Nazi persecution during WWII. So far, more than 100,000 Stolpersteine have been laid in Europe. In Slovenia they can be found in Maribor, Ljubljana, Murska Sobota, Lendava and Šalovci. The laying of the Stolpersteine, as well as other commemorative events are often visited by the president of the Republic of Slovenia as well as by other governmental representatives.

In recent years, Slovenia has adopted several new strategies and national programmes (for example the Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia on Combating Antisemitism (2023–2033) and the National Programme of Measures for Roma for the 2021–2030) to strengthen the fight against antisemitism and antigypsyism. In addition, a new media law, which will also include stricter approach to counter hate speech, is being prepared by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia.

# SPAIN

## 1. Historical Context\*

When the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, there were only few thousand Jews in Spain. The conflict pitted Republicans against Nationalists. Although antisemitism was not a principal tenet of the last, Franco consistently pointed to a Judeo-Masonic-Bolshevik conspiracy as the root of Spain's dysfunction.

Together with the aid of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, the nationalists soon defeated the Republicans. Spain represented a staging ground for the world conflict which will take part some months later with the invasion of Czechoslovakia and later Poland. Spain stood officially neutral at the beginning but soon would become "non-belligerent" but sharing all the basic characteristics of a generic fascism very closed to her allies. The Spanish Falange was in line with Nazism, a combination of force, ideology and the promise of material rewards, with an exception to its adherence to the Catholic dogma. The Franco regime must be viewed as supporting or collaborating with the Axis cause in both its rhetoric and its actions during the

\* This Historical Context is based on the Research Project: *Sites of Tension: Shifts in Holocaust Memory in Relation to Antisemitism and Political Contestation in Europe* and the book: Brenneis, S. J., & Herrmann, G. (Eds.). (2020). *Spain, the Second World War, and the Holocaust: History and Representation (Vol. 49)*. University of Toronto Press.



Second World War. Collaboration occurred at several levels: the provision of raw materials, sending Spanish workers to Nazi Germany and through the Blue Division, a Spanish army unit integrated into the Wehrmacht to fight on the Soviet front. The divisioners, although they were not witnesses per se to the Holocaust, many of them expressed anti-judaic sentiments and became somehow bystanders if not collaborators, seeing both the prologue to the Nazi genocide and its aftermath in territories where Jews had been murdered in masse.

But at the same time that Jews from all over Europe were journeying south to escape the Nazis, half million Spanish Republicans were fleeing Franco by crossing north to France after the Republic's defeat. After France occupation by the Nazis, thousands of Spanish refugees found themselves caught in Vichy's regime. Franco's government denied them recognition as citizens, and around ten thousand of them were deported to Nazi concentration camps, being the most lethal, Mauthausen, which has become a memory symbol to remember their fate.

Finally, few words, concerning the position of Spain and the Holocaust. Although hatred of Jews was not codified in Spanish law during the Second World War, Antonio Marquina has argued, the Nationalist slogan that "Communists, Jews and Masons" were enemies of Spain and prevalent anti-Judaism among government ministries and in the Falange fuelled the larger public's perception of Jews during the war. As seen, Franco actively favoured Hitler during the early part of the war, but in later concessions to Allies he burnished his false reputation as a protector of Jews while at the same time limiting the number of Jewish refugees permitted to remain and enter in Spain at any one time. Still, at least 15.000 Jews illegally or legally were able to move through Spain into Portugal and on safety in the Americas or Palestine. Many of those were aided through diplomatic means largely independent of Madrid which were used later on to depict the image of Spain as a rescuer of Jews, polished by television documentaries, miniseries, commemorations, etc. which has blinded Spaniards to far more complex and often contradictory regime positions and individual official decision-making that determined whether Jews would escape Nazi terror or would be murdered.



## **2. Denial and distortions today: challenges**

The Spanish case once we approach denial and distortions has to be related with how memory and representation of Spain's role in the Second World War and the Holocaust has been constructed. In words of Alejandro Baer: "the weakness of the link between Spain and the memory of the Holocaust is not historical but cultural". He argues that in a country known for its poor reception of the history and memories of the Holocaust, one must interrogate the omissions and prejudices that continue to mould ideas and knowledge of the Holocaust in Spain alongside more constructive representations.

During the Spanish transition to democracy from 1975 to 1982, 592 the various political forces agreed to leave the legacy of the civil war and dictatorship out of the political debate. This "pact of silence" consisted in actively forgetting Spain's recent past for the benefit of the public good, placing the need for peace above that of memory or of justice. There was neither reparation nor justice for the Franco dictatorship's victims, and no recognition for the victims of Nazism. Successive Spanish Governments did not revise their narratives of deportation, involvement in WWII, or of the nature of the Civil War. The 1990s signalled the beginning of change. Among other events, the lawsuit of Violeta Friedman, an Auschwitz survivor and Madrid resident, against León Degrelle, a Belgian Waffen SS who lived comfortably in Spain and who belonged to Spanish neo-Nazi movements. It gave rise to a significant controversy and several trials until the Constitutional Court accepted Friedman's claims in 1991.

During the 1990s there was an explosion of public interest in the civil war and Francoism. Several civil society movements fighting for the recovery of these memories spearheaded greater interest in the Holocaust. The significance of Spain's relationship with Nazi Germany and its responsibility for and actions regarding

persecuted Jews and Spanish Republicans was emphasized; this in turn led to a Spanish Historical Memory Law (Ley 52/2007). This law did not establish any criminal procedures or truth commissions and only declared that the hundreds of thousands of judicial convictions against republicans were “unfair.”

However, the manner in which historical facts are highlighted, omitted, or interpreted differently according to each ideological position is undoubtedly political. Not only is this because antagonistic Holocaust interpretations in Spain align with existing political fault lines dividing Spanish society. It also references how supranational Holocaust memory discourses are reinterpreted in the country and how these interact with Spain’s internal memory conflicts. One example is the omission or non-specification of the relationship between the Franco Government and Nazi Germany. Insofar as the politics of history in general, and the Holocaust in particular, have become a discursive battlefield in Spain, the globalized Holocaust memory culture has also led “to the restoration of old myths and the emergence of new counter-myths”(Baer and Correa).

In order to exemplify the way that distortion occurs in Spain, it would be used one example strengthennigs Baer’s (2012) thesis of primary antisemitism and (dis)memory of the Holocaust, the “Holocaust” Carnival Parade during the Carnival Festivities that took place on February 25, 2020 in Campo de Criptana, a small town in Ciudad Real near Madrid. It took an unexpected turn when one of the parades featured dozens of people in full Nazi-style regalia and others wearing the striped pyjamas worn by concentration camp prisoners. Children were dressed in the yellow Star of David. Notably, the Spanish media covering the event mostly referenced Israel’s condemnation and did not refer to the trivialization or distortion of the Holocaust.

Another example, is the way that rejection, envy and instrumentalization of the Holocaust are evident in many discussions wherein different political parties remember and use the Holocaust or references to Nazism to promote their own political agenda.

Despite the new Democratic Memory Law, the relationship between Francoist Spain and Nazi Germany continues to be downplayed and pushed aside. The far left continually “universalizes” the memory of the Holocaust by mentioning it together with other mass atrocities, typically that of the Roma genocide. They do so, however, mostly without trivialization or distortion.



### **3. Recent positive developments and good practices**

In recent years, several new initiatives have taken place in Spain. The Centro Sefarad-Israel has enabled more than five hundred teachers throughout Spain to receive training at Yad Vashem and also organized courses about the Holocaust for over 200 teachers, educators, and administrative personnel in Barcelona between 2013 and 2019. Distance-learning courses have been taking place at the UNED Foundation, training over ninety additional educators. Additionally, a significant number of working groups of Education about the Holocaust (EaH) educators exist, although they are not always active. For example, the DEMD (Exile, Deportation, and the Holocaust) working group in Catalonia was launched in 2010 by a group of secondary school teachers, scholars and researchers under the umbrella of the Department of Education of the Generalitat of Catalonia and the Memorial Democràtic. This group organizes the International Holocaust Remembrance Day together with the Parliament of Catalonia and has a programme of talks by descendants at Schools. The group compiles materials for teachers and students and collaborates with the central EaH venues in Europe.


Concerning higher education and EaH, there has only been one elective course on the Holocaust offered at university level since 2012 (at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid). However, several nongovernmental organizations have been providing training for students, first among them the Amical de Mauthausen, which organizes activities through Mai Més (Never Again), a network dedicated to the preservation of memory and the prevention of fascism. In recent years new non-governmental organizations, such as EUROM (European Observatory on Memories) have organized specific educational activities in EaH and Memory, together with several European partners.

Other projects, while not conducted in the context of formal education, have nevertheless contributed to knowledge about the Holocaust in Spain. One example, a project titled "Persecuted and Saved," has aimed at recovering the memories of 120,000 people who crossed the Pyrenees to escape the Nazi terror. Many of them were Jews. Another example, driven by civil society and local activism, is the Stolpersteine (stumbling-stones) project, commemorating homes of deported victims of the Nazis – mainly Spanish political prisoners – in cooperation with secondary schools. Finally, one of the most recent projects is Storiesthatmove, led by the Anne Frank House, which since 2023 has been expanding and translating into Spanish and Catalan the on-line tool against discrimination, which focuses on the Holocaust.

In sum, in recent years progress has been made in the number of groups – personal and collective initiatives – that support more robust knowledge about the Holocaust. Nevertheless, political engagement is somewhat ambiguous and intermittent. This is apparent in the fact that a university level department of Holocaust Studies in Spain still does not exist, and that the impact of actions to reclaim the historical memory of the Holocaust and the Republican deportation in Spain has not been studied.

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*Note:* Due to today's situation in Israel due to the attack on 7th October 2023 and its terrible consequences, it would be of much interest to carry on a new research to see how today's situation has effect both Distorsion and Denial and also positive developments.





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