
WITH ANTI-SEMITISM ON THE RISE, AUSCHWITZ LIBERATION COMMEMORATED

-

27.01.2020

EurActiv (27 January 2020)

World leaders join ageing Holocaust survivors in Poland on Monday (27 January) to mark 75 years since the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp by Soviet troops, amid concerns over a global resurgence of anti-Semitism.

More than 1.1 million people, most of them Jews, perished in the camps gas chambers or from starvation, cold and disease.

Set up by Nazi Germany in occupied Poland in 1940, at first to house Polish political prisoners, it became the largest of the extermination centres where Adolf Hitler's plan to kill all Jews – the Final Solution – was put into practice.

Speaking before Monday's ceremonies, David Harris, head of the American Jewish Committee, said groups ranging from far-right white supremacists to jihadis and the far-left were fuelling anti-Semitism worldwide.

Jews in western Europe think twice before they wear a kippa, they think twice before they go to a synagogue, think twice before they enter a kosher supermarket, he told Reuters.

A 2019 survey by the US-based Anti-Defamation League showed that about one in four Europeans harbour pernicious and pervasive attitudes towards Jews, compared with 19% of North Americans.

In Germany, 42% agreed that Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust, it said. Two people were killed in a shooting near a synagogue in eastern Germany in October, in what officials called an anti-Semitic attack.

After visiting Auschwitz last week, Mohammed al-Issa, the head of a global Muslim missionary society, said governments and Muslim communities should do more to combat anti-Semitism.

European countries should have stronger and more active laws that would criminalise anti-Semitism, Al-Issa, secretary-general of the Mecca-based Muslim World League (MWL), told Reuters.

More than a dozen heads of state including German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Israeli President Reuven Rivlin will take part in ceremonies starting at 3.30 p.m. (1430 GMT) at the Gate of Death where rail tracks led trains packed with victims into the camp.

The commemorations take place as Poland seeks to highlight its own suffering during World War

Two, in which six million Poles, including three million Polish Jews, were killed and Warsaw was razed to the ground.

For many non-Jewish Poles, Auschwitz remains the place where the Nazis jailed and killed Polish resistance fighters, the intelligentsia, Roman Catholic priests and innocent civilians.

Critics say the nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) government is not doing enough to counter anti-Semitism and is instead focusing on what it sees as Polish heroism during the war and downplaying Jews claims to postwar restitution of property seized from them. PiS says the West fails to grasp the extent of the nations pain and bravery.

One survivor, a Jewish Pole, spoke about the need to remember Auschwitz.

We need to do everything possible to keep this world from acquiring amnesia, Benjamin Lesser said at the camp on Sunday. Its hard to believe civilised, cultured, educated people could become such monsters.

According to the Russian press, Poland didnt invite Russian President Vladimir Putin at the commemoration, although Auschwitz was liberated by the Soviet army. Putin however attended the 22 January commemoration in Jerusalem.

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/with-anti-semitism-on-the-rise-auschwitz-liberation-commemorated/>

Kaynak/Source: