

# Belgian initiatives concerning the Holocaust (1997 - 2009)



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# AN OVERVIEW OF THE BELGIAN INITIATIVES CONCERNING THE HOLOCAUST (1997 – 2009)<sup>1</sup>

## **I. Introduction**

This brochure gives an overview of the most important actions and relevant initiatives undertaken by the Belgian authorities and institutions concerning the Holocaust. These initiatives are described in three subdivisions, namely the initiatives concerning material and financial compensation, moral compensation and social welfare programs and those in the areas of Holocaust education, remembrance and research.

In the part concerning the initiatives undertaken in the area of material and financial compensation, a special section is devoted to spoilt cultural goods and judaica as the restitution and research in this area is not yet finished.

For further information and as a guide for the interested and concerned reader, at the end of this brochure an overview of all relevant addresses of Belgian administrations, institutions and services is included.

## **II. Overview of the initiatives taken by the Belgian authorities and some Belgian institutions since 1997 concerning the Holocaust**

Since 1997, the Belgian authorities have taken and implemented various measures aimed at identifying, restoring and indemnifying the assets despoiled to the detriment of Holocaust victims, at promoting the welfare of Holocaust survivors as well as safeguarding the duty of remembrance with regard to that appalling tragedy.<sup>2</sup> These initiatives may be placed within an international perspective. The opening of a series of archives (e.g. concerning the fate of stolen gold) resulted in a worldwide search for unreturned Jewish assets. At Belgian level, the National Committee of the Belgian Jewish community for restitution (CNCJBR) asked the government of

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<sup>1</sup> This brochure was updated to January 1, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> The examination of the initiatives is limited to those subsequent to 1997. The various efforts made by the Belgian authorities in the aftermath of the war are not explicitly mentioned.

the time to take the necessary steps. The Belgian public authorities have always closely involved the Belgian Jewish Community, represented by the CNCJBR, in this entire process.

#### **A. In the area of material compensation**

##### *1. The Study Commission into the fate of the Belgian Jewish Community's assets which were plundered or surrendered or abandoned during the 1940-1945 war*

In July 1997, a Study Commission into the fate of the Belgian Jewish Community's assets which were plundered or surrendered or abandoned during the 1940-1945 war was set up in Belgium, as part of a constructive dialogue between the Belgian Jewish Community (the CNCJBR being more specifically the initiator) and the Belgian authorities. That Commission was assigned the task of "investigating the fate of the Belgian Jewish Community's assets appropriated, lost or abandoned in those circumstances" (Art. 1 of the Royal Decree of 6 July 1997 concerning the founding of a Study Commission into the fate of the Belgian Jewish Community's assets which were abandoned at the time of their deportation during the 1940-1945 war, *M.B.* 12 July 1997).<sup>3</sup>

The Study Commission conducted investigations in the following areas:

- the financial sector;
- real-estate assets;
- life insurance;
- businesses;
- the diamond sector;
- art objects and cultural assets;
- furniture and domestic possessions (overall investigation).

The investigations conducted in these sectors (with the exception of furniture and domestic possessions) made it possible to locate and identify despoiled and not restored assets within insurance companies, financial institutions and the Belgian State.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See also the Act of 15 January 1999 concerning the Study Commission into the fate of the Belgian Jewish Community's assets, which were plundered or surrendered or abandoned during the 1940-1945 war, *M.B.* 12 March 1999.

<sup>4</sup> The Study Commission's final report may be consulted on the website: <http://www.combuysse.fgov.be/index-olddsite.html>



## ***2. The Indemnification Commission for the Belgian Jewish Community's assets that were plundered, surrendered or abandoned during the 1940-1945 war***



As a result of the findings made by the Study Commission, contained in its final report of July 2001, the Act of 20 December 2001 (*M.B.* 24 January 2002) set up the Indemnification Commission for the Belgian Jewish Community's assets.<sup>5</sup> At the outcome of the negotiations conducted with the CNCJBR, recognized by the legislator as being the representative of the Belgian Jewish community, the amounts identified by the Study Commission were paid by the State, the banks and the insurance companies. Those payments, which represented a total amount of € 110.6 million, were payments in full discharge for the bodies concerned, which meant an extinguishment of the right to submit any other indemnification claim for the material assets and financial losses affected by the Act. This amount was paid into the special account opened at the Belgian National Bank and placed at the disposal of the Indemnification Commission.

The Indemnification Commission then began the individual indemnification procedure. The claims could be submitted until 9 September 2003. Any person residing in Belgium at any time whatever during the period from 10 May 1940 to 8 May 1945, whose assets had been plundered in Belgium as a result of anti-Jewish measures or anti-Semitic acts committed by the occupying German authorities, was considered for indemnification.<sup>6</sup> When the despoiled person was deceased, a rightful claimant, in the first, second or third degree, could submit a claim.

The Act of 20 December 2001 identified the assets that would be taken into consideration for indemnification, namely the assets and possessions looted or abandoned of which restitution had not been made by the State, financial institutions or insurance companies. Those assets could neither have already been the object of any compensation, indemnification or reparation and should have been identified by the Study Commission or the Indemnification Commission (cf. Art. 6 of the Act). In view of the special circumstances, mainly the fact that the records were not complete, the Commission chose in all fairness to award lump sum indemnification when there were sufficient indications making it possible to identify despoilment, but no proof or trace of the assets could be found on a frozen account (Art. 8 of the Act).

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<sup>5</sup> Act of 20 December 2001 relating to the indemnification of the Belgian Jewish Community's assets, which were plundered, surrendered or abandoned during the 1940-1945 war, *M.B.* 24 January 2002, amended by the Acts of 8 April 2003, *M.B.* 17 April 2003, 9 July 2004, *M.B.* 15 July 2004, and 20 July 2006, *M.B.* 28 July 2006.

<sup>6</sup> The Act did not therefore lay down any nationality requirement. 42% of the claims came from abroad.

For its investigations, the Commission based itself on the findings of the Study Commission, the results of additional research carried out in the records and the information provided by the claimants themselves. The Commission examined each claim in a constructive spirit and openly and even automatically added all the complementary data that emerged from the examination.

All in all, the Indemnification Commission processed 5,220 despoilment files, with the total amount of individual compensation amounting to € 35.2 million. It closed the examination and the processing of the files on 31 December 2007.<sup>7</sup>

### *3. Cultural goods, works of art and judaica: a continuous study*

As mentioned above, the Belgian Study Commission, in accordance with the conclusions of the Washington Conference and more specifically with the agreement on the Washington Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art, investigated the lost, plundered and abandoned cultural property and works of art having belonged to members of the Jewish community in Belgium, more specifically to victims of the Holocaust. Simultaneously a historical study was undertaken to clarify the cultural losses suffered by Jewish owners and organisations, and the ways these cultural goods were plundered and disappeared during and after World War II. The Belgian Study Commission also studied and investigated indirectly, in a more general way, the plundered cultural property of religious communities and associations in Belgium.

The Indemnification Commission, as mentioned above, depended for the examination of the individual claims which concerned or might concern disappeared cultural goods on the constant expertise of the unit Restitution of Looted Jewish Cultural Goods of the Federal Public Planning Service Science Policy. On the basis of the data provided by individual claimants and the restudying of the Belgian and German sources, about 160 reports were drawn up regarding disappeared or lost works of art and cultural goods. These detailed reports led to financial proposals of indemnification which the Commission followed. Two historical clocks from the Royal Museums of Art and History and one book from the Royal Library of Belgium were restituted in 2002 to the heirs and claimants who had submitted an individual claim.

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<sup>7</sup> The Indemnification Commission's final report may be consulted on the website: <http://www.combuysse.fgov.be/>

i. Cultural goods and works of art in general

The Study Commission studied the procedures and ways in which Jewish cultural property was despoiled in Belgium during the Holocaust. A profound investigation was also made of the Belgian restitution efforts after WWII. The *Office de Récupération Economique* (ORE) was nationally and internationally responsible for the Belgian recovery of cultural goods from the public domain and from private individuals and associations and was also responsible for the liquidation of Nazi material. Their activities were seriously hampered by the chaotic situation after the liberation and difficult working relations with other services, claims for repossession by (Jewish) owners and the quartering of Allied troops and material.

From 1999, an important search for lost Jewish cultural property was undertaken in cultural institutions and museums in Belgium, in locating works of art and cultural goods transferred by the ORE after World War II, by which the unclear and unidentified provenances were investigated. The approach used is comparable with the one used to investigate MNR-works<sup>8</sup> of art in France and NK-works<sup>9</sup> in the Netherlands. On the basis of two written inquiry lists, details were demanded of all acquisitions, deposited works of art and the handled or restituted cultural goods by the ORE. By consulting the available archives and correspondence written during the war and after the war years, a clear picture was established of the involvement of the cultural institutions and museums in the despoilment and restitution activities. This investigation was carried out in full cooperation with the Communities, responsible for the cultural domain in Belgium. After the inquiry in 24 cultural institutions and museums, a total of more than 300 cultural objects were discovered with an unclear, unidentified or a Jewish provenance, linked to World War II.

The provenance of the approximately 300 cultural goods from 24 cultural institutions and museums, listed in the final report of the Study Commission, will be further investigated. This investigation will make it possible to restore goods to their rightful owners or their heirs. If necessarily, when the provenance remains unclear, further inquiries will be undertaken and international attention will be drawn to these cultural goods by Federal Public Planning Service

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<sup>8</sup> "The 'MNR', meaning the '*Musées Nationaux Récupération*', refers to the national museums recovery programme. It has a database of works of art retrieved in Germany at the end of the Second World War but never claimed by their rightful owners. Those works were entrusted by the *Office des biens privés* (Office of private goods – OBIP) to the custody of the Department of Museums of France pursuant to the decree dated 30 September 1949." (source: <http://www.culture.gouv.fr/documentation/mnr/pres.htm>).

<sup>9</sup> NK-works: NederlandsKunstbezit-collectie. "The NK collection constitutes the remainder of the works of art retrieved in Germany in particular. This collection is managed by the public authorities and was entrusted to the custody of the Instituut Collectie Nederland (Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage - ICN)." (source: <http://www.herkomstgezocht.nl/nl/nkcollectie/woordenboek.html>).

Science Policy. In the next years, a comprehensive study of the history of the cultural spoils and post-war restitution policies in Belgium, including complete lists of the cultural goods, will be made available for the public on the internet. Secondly Belgian Federal Public Planning Service Science Policy will continue to provide information free of charge to victims, their heirs and their legal representatives concerning their cultural losses, and also to auction houses and to cultural institutions, in pursuance of the *Washington Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art*. Thirdly an awareness campaign, in cooperation with the Communities, will be organized to widely inform all cultural actors of the Washington Principles and the Terezin Declaration.

ii. Judaica



© Jewish Museum of Belgium

During the Easter Weekend of 1941, one public incident occurred, which proved to be an isolated event in the history of the persecution of Jews in Belgium. A small anti-Semitic mob invaded the Jewish quarter of Antwerp breaking dozens of windows and displays and setting fire to two synagogues and the house of Rabbi Markus Rottenberg. The Torah scrolls, sacred books and furniture were openly burnt in the streets and the buildings were set on fire. National-socialist services were present and did not intervene. Jewish religious buildings were desecrated and plundered by Nazi services and individual thieves.



In 1940, shortly after the occupation of Belgium, the *Sicherheitsdienst* had targeted and ransacked Jewish and Zionist organisations. After the liberation of Belgium, the local Jewish community was partly compensated by the Ministry of Reconstruction for material damage and the synagogues were re-consecrated.

In 2001 and 2002, Belgian 'Trophy' archives, after successful Belgian-Russian negotiations, were returned by the Russian Federation. The archives, mostly military documents from the Belgian Ministry of National Defence contained 14 dossiers from Jewish organisations (such as the *Alliance Israelite-Committee Antwerp* and the editorial board of *Hatikva*, newspaper of the *Fédération Sioniste de Belgique*). Those 14 dossiers together with 74 dossiers belonging to leading Jewish personalities were returned to the rightful organisations and owners. The reason for the small amount of documents, less than 1% of the total of the Belgian 'Trophy' archives, was that the main objective of the Nazi services, such as the *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg* in Belgium, was primarily the confiscation of library material. Most of those books and libraries remain until now unrecovered.

The Belgian Study Commission made a profound investigation of the Nazi spoils and the Belgian restitution efforts after WWII and an inquiry and research for lost Jewish cultural property were conducted in the most important cultural institutions and museums in Belgium. Special attention was given to the provenance of religious objects and silverware collections. The investigation in the Belgian cultural institutions showed that, besides the discovery of some objects, that those silver objects were not registered or deposited in Belgian cultural institutions in mass. The findings were published in the final report of the Study Commission. The Jewish Museum of Belgium discovered in the nineties, 450 books written in Hebraic script in an attic which had been confiscated by the "Anti Jewish National Agency for Wallonia and Flanders" during the war years.

More importantly, the Jewish Museum of Belgium, active in the research of lost cultural Jewish property, was one of the first international Jewish museums to fully cooperate in the provenance research, stipulated by the Washington Conference.

As a conclusion, it is apparent that more attention and more in-depth research into the (personal) religious Jewish objects and the cultural property of associations have to be made, to fully understand the devastating despoilment during the war years in Belgium.

#### ***4. The Belgian Judaism Foundation***

As stipulated in the Act of 20 December 2001, the financial balance remaining after the Indemnification Commission had concluded its work, was transferred to a public utility foundation, namely the Belgian Judaism Foundation. Justified collective restitution is thereby guaranteed.

The statutes of the Belgian Judaism Foundation were published in the *Moniteur belge* dated 30 July 2004.

In those statutes, it is stipulated that the Foundation is formed with the aim of gathering together Jewish assets plundered or abandoned on the territory of Belgium between 1940 and 1945 for which no rightful claimant was able to be found.

The Foundation's mission is also set out in the Statutes, i.e. the management of the Foundation's intangible capital and the periodic distribution of the interest from that capital so as to make it possible for the Belgian Jewish Community to ensure its continuity. Applications for subsidies must also meet certain conditions. It is mentioned that the projects must concern Shoah remembrance, social issues, in the widest meaning of the word, education, worship and everything related to it, culture, solidarity and support for the Jewish victims of the Second World War, in particular for Shoah survivors, including those who settled in Belgium after the Liberation, solidarity with persons, such as Gypsies, who, like the Jewish Community, were the victims of discriminations, racist persecutions or 'racial' deportation during the Second World War, solidarity with persons outside the Jewish Community, among whom the Belgian Righteous among the Nations, the combat against anti-Semitism and intolerance, scientific and historical research into Jewish subjects or subjects relating to the Second World War, etc.

One of the initiatives of the said foundation is the "Solidarity 3000" action. The Belgian Judaism Foundation was anxious to guarantee personal compensation of at least € 3,000 for the despoilment of their material assets to each victim of anti-Jewish persecutions. That sum is awarded to those persons who have not already been personally indemnified (and received at least € 3,000) under the German Reparation Acts or the Belgian Indemnification Act. If necessary, the Foundation makes up the difference between the € 3,000 and the compensation received.

The Foundation also grants allowances and subsidies to organisations and/or persons meeting the required conditions.

## **B. In the area of moral compensation – Welfare programmes**

### *1. Welfare Programmes - Federal Public Service Social Security Directorate- General War Victims*

In Belgium, victims and survivors of the Holocaust can benefit from a series of general measures aimed at improving the welfare of those who suffered from the Second World War and from specific measures adopted on their behalf.

Recently the legislator adopted several Acts containing new measures in favour of Holocaust survivors. The Act of 26 January 1999 created the status of a child hidden during the Second World War and the status of Jewish political prisoner for those who did not have Belgian nationality during the Second World War. This recognition is an honorary recognition of their status. The Royal Decree of 19 April 1999 established the creation of the medal of Jewish political prisoner.

In 2003, the legislator devoted a whole series of new measures in favour of victims from the Jewish and Gypsy communities particularly concerning deportees, the orphans of deportation and children and adults in hiding. The lifelong annuity for the orphans of deportees, adults and children who were in hiding as well as the compensatory pensions, annuities and fixed rate compensation for deportees may be mentioned. The Act of 11 April 2003, making provision for new measures on behalf of war victims, substantially complements the assistance provided to the various categories of persons, victims of anti-Jewish persecution at that time, as well as to their children, children in hiding or orphans.

### *2. The Belgian Judaism Foundation*

The Belgian Judaism Foundation (see above) is a foundation devoted to Holocaust remembrance and provides its support to the Belgian Jewish community in the social and psycho-medical-social fields and in the areas of education, culture and worship. The Foundation began its activities in 2004.

### **C. In the areas of Holocaust education, remembrance and research**

## *1. In general*

Belgium is an active member of the *International Task Force for Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research* (referred to hereafter as the 'Task Force').<sup>10</sup> This network represents a prime international platform for the exchange of educational projects, experiences and material on the Holocaust. Belgium's participation is based on a joint effort between the Federal government and the Communities that together decided to submit this country's candidacy. Belgium will hold the presidency of the Task Force in 2012. That presidency (*inter alia*) will coincide with the opening of the new Museum in Mechelen (see below).

Belgium is firmly committed to the principles of the Stockholm Declaration, which have been transposed into Belgian legislation, and are reflected in educational syllabuses. At the federal level, two main government bodies are working in cooperation with NGOs on Holocaust-related projects:

- the National Institute for Invalids of War, Veterans and Victims of War (INIG) has developed activities which preserve and remember the Holocaust, other Nazi crimes and acts of Resistance. For example, the Institute organised a meeting with 2000 young people and Veterans from all over Europe at the Buchenwald Concentration Camp in April 2008. 450 participating young people from Belgium went to this meeting by a special train travelling from Brussels to Weimar;
- the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism launched a pilot project aiming at mapping, developing and consolidating actions in the educational field of democracy through the study of the historical reality of the Second World War in Belgium (with an emphasis on Holocaust and Resistance).

## *2. Teaching – Remembrance education*

Considerable progress has been made in recent years in the area of Holocaust **education** in school curricula. All three autonomous Communities (which are competent for education policy) promote the teaching of the history of the Holocaust in schools, in classes such as history, literature, ethics or religious classes.

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<sup>10</sup> Website: <http://www.holocausttaskforce.org/>



In 2005-2006, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps, the “Schools for Democracy” pilot project was launched. This initiative put together three groups of 200 schoolchildren in the 6th year of primary school and three groups of 170 students in the final year of high school, to make them familiar with notions such as identity, respect, participation and openness to the world, concluding in two main visits: the Nazi camps of Breendonk and Auschwitz. The educational aim was to invite students to make a link between history and the moral choices they have to make in their personal lives.

Another project was the “A Classroom of Difference” program, aimed at helping teachers overcome the difficulties of teaching Holocaust history at school. This project concluded with a final seminar for teachers from the three Belgian Communities at Yad Vashem in March 2008.

*i. In Flanders*

Remembrance education is firmly embedded in the Flemish education system, not only in history classes but also in other development goals and final attainment levels (world orientation, cross-disciplinary attainment levels that deal with good citizenship, etc.). Historical facts must be held up before us as a reflection for our future. This is why in history not only is there an emphasis on reproducing imparted knowledge but also on acquiring understanding and applying knowledge and views or teaching a ‘historical attitude’. History also seeks explanations of power structures and other social areas of tension. Historical education leads to a realization of the underlying dangers that they may conceal. This is necessary because history is often abused and young people must learn to distance themselves from false representations and preconceptions so that they are able to develop a well-reasoned opinion.

The knowledge of and the empathy for the testimonies of victims that survived the concentration camps ensure a lasting remembrance of the inferno of the Holocaust. This human failure in history remains an insistent appeal to our subconscious as a collective trauma.

Remembrance education is a permanent social mission for us all, not least for the teachers. In the updated cross-disciplinary final attainment levels, recently approved by the Flemish Parliament, the starting points for ensuring that remembrance education works are even more explicit.

For their actions on remembrance education, schools can appeal to one of the many organizations with a range of educational support on the themes of peace education, remembrance education, civic education, democratic thinking, and so on.

The very diverse and elaborate range of support gives schools the opportunity to select the media most appropriate to their concrete context and which best meets their needs. It allows teachers to introduce their students to a variety of opinions and principles. And it offers schools the possibility of working on remembrance education in their own city or region, starting from the immediate living and experiential environment of the students.

The extensive field of support in peace education and remembrance education therefore clearly offers practical and didactic advantages. But it also introduces problems such as finding something suitable for young children. Consultation with several experts in addition to information on the relevant needs in the field of education has made it clear that there is an urgent need for making the Belgian field of remembrance education more transparent for Flemish schools.

For this reason, the Flemish government has, in this respect, decided to attribute a central role to the vzw Kazerne Dossin (Barracks) to ensure the coordination of remembrance education in the Flemish teaching system. The role assigned to the Kazerne Dossin fits within the framework of the expansion of the current Jewish Museum for Deportation and Resistance and its conversion into a new site with a memorial, museum and documentation centre. Kazerne Dossin takes on this task in cooperation with other actors who work on remembrance education like, for example, the Fort van Breendonk, the Auschwitz Foundation and “In Flanders Fields” Museum, and with the educational guidance departments from the various educational networks and the Education Department. Together they form the Special Committee for Remembrance Education or BCH (Bijzonder Comité voor Herinneringseducatie).

The coordination task of the BCH further involves implementing structural consultation between the various providers of remembrance education material. A significant concrete result of this consultation is the website [www.herinneringseducatie.be](http://www.herinneringseducatie.be), a user-friendly overview of all study days, workshops, activities, teaching packages and initiatives dealing with remembrance education. Teachers can find a great deal of inspiration on this site but can also offer colleagues their own initiatives and suggestions. The website and other initiatives of the Special Committee clearly offer a valuable contribution to increasing the quality of the support that is offered in remembrance education: support that meets the diverse needs and requirements of schools and helps schools to work with remembrance education in a qualitative manner.

ii. The French Community

The Government of the French Community is working on intensifying citizenship education in school so as to raise pupils' awareness of the issues of active citizenship for a better understanding of society and increased involvement.

A mechanism was developed (by Decree dated 12 January 2007) which is structured around three complementary subject areas:

- the creation and the dissemination of an abstract entitled "Contributions to future citizenship development";
- the implementation of cycles or levels of interdisciplinary activities concerning citizenship;
- the generalisation and the recognition of representative structures for pupils within the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> years of primary education and pupils attending standard and specialised secondary education (class representatives and pupils' councils).

This mechanism additionally strengthens the practices already developed within schools with the direct support of the French Community or through partner associations.

One of the specific tasks of the "Democracy or barbarity" educational coordination unit, founded in 1994 and currently attached to the General Secretariat of the French Community, is to coordinate citizenship and human rights education matters together with issues related to work in the area of history and remembrance. It is aimed at all the networks and systems of education, primarily at secondary level. In 2008, it published the Citizenship memento in the French Community (*Mémento de la citoyenneté en Communauté française*), which provides an inventory of more than 200 institutions and associations proposing information, resources and activities to teachers.

In addition to these structural measures, the French Community actually supports the initiatives by School partner associations and develops with them projects in step with young people and topical issues, whether they concern the defence of Human Rights and democratic values, the combat against racism, work in the area of remembrance and equal opportunities, awareness of cultural diversity or even active involvement in local democracy.

The French Community strengthened its action in the area of genocide remembrance and education, including Holocaust remembrance, with the Decree of 13 March 2009 concerning the passing on of remembrance of crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes and

acts of resistance or movements that resisted the regimes that perpetrated such crimes<sup>11</sup>. Article one sets out the purpose of the Decree mainly aimed at the passing on of knowledge of some tragic political and social events of history, primarily among the young generations, with a view to the development of responsible citizenship and the promotion of democratic values. The Decree emphasises the educational dimension of the activities organised by the approved centres and within the framework of the selected projects.

Since 2008, the French Community has been sending out a circular inviting institutions from all levels to organise activities within the framework of the International Remembrance Day in memory of Holocaust victims. Publications that can be used in this context are made available to teachers.

For instance, on 27 January 2009, on the occasion of the International Remembrance Day, all the schools in the French Community received tools intended for their pupils to encourage reflection on the matter. The CRECCIDE (Regional and Community Crossroads for Citizenship and Democracy) has developed an awareness-raising tool dedicated specifically to the Holocaust entitled "For an educational approach to the Holocaust for 10 to 14 year olds". That tool could be downloaded from the sites [www.creccide.org](http://www.creccide.org) and [www.enseignement.be](http://www.enseignement.be). A part of that tool analyses the work "Lieneke's notebooks" by Jacob Van der Hoeden. It is composed of 9 notebooks, which can be a focus of classroom reflection in small groups. The educational development proposed concerns pupils from 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> years of primary school. For pupils in the first years of secondary education, the schools received the work "I was a child in the Warsaw ghetto" by Larissa CAIN.

On the initiative of the educational coordination unit, "Democracy or barbarity", schools received the DVD "Modus Operandi", intended for pupils in the upper forms of secondary school, accompanied by an educational booklet containing the entire content of the film in the form of questions and answers. The "Democracy or barbarity" team also provided reference works to help the teachers to initiate the discussion with the young people. In addition, at the schools' request, Hugues Lanneau, the director and/or Willy Perelsztejn, the film's creator and producer regularly attended discussions after the showing of the film.

In January 2010, the *Map of the camps and other Nazi places of detention* published by the National Institute for Invalids of War, Veterans and Victims of War (INIG) was distributed in all establishments of secondary education, while a file entitled *The realisation of a project with the*

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<sup>11</sup> See below (pp. 19-20) the description of the content and the objectives of this Decree.



*Shoah as its starting point* could be downloaded from the CRECCIDE site for pupils in primary education.

Representatives of the French Community take an active part in the modules, seminars and workshops organised by the Council of Europe within the scope of the Pestalozzi programme. This is particularly the case, at the present time, for the training module for teacher trainers entitled *Education in the prevention of crimes against humanity*.

Lastly, in 2009, "Democracy or barbarity" published "Words of stone. Traces of history" (*Paroles de pierres. Traces d'histoire*), a tool for teachers devoted to places of history and remembrance of the two world wars in Belgium, including those of the Holocaust.

### iii. The German-speaking Community

With approximately 75,000 inhabitants, the German-speaking Community is the smallest of the three communities in Belgium. Unlike the rest of Belgium, the 'Eupen-Malmedy Region' or 'New Belgium', as it used to be known, was not occupied, but a territory annexed directly by the German Reich. Contemporary history and also the Holocaust of the Jewish citizens who lived here as well as dealings with Nazi opponents accordingly took a different course here than in the other Regions of Belgium.

In the German-speaking Community, the Holocaust is not broached exclusively in history instruction. It is often also dealt with in mother tongue classes, religion and ethics, in the first and second stages of secondary education. This is done through visits by witnesses to schools, lectures by authors, shared book readings or project-oriented work. All secondary schools in the German-speaking Community organise regular visits for the students to the Kazerne Dossin (Barracks)-Jewish Museum of Deportation and Resistance (JMDR) in Mechelen and the National Fort Breendonk Memorial.

Various adult education institutions in the German-speaking Community organise lectures, seminars and excursions on contemporary history and the Holocaust as part of their 'life long learning' programmes.

All these institutions can use the material on offer at the German-speaking Community's "GrenzGeschichteDG" [Border History] ([www.grenzgeschichte.eu](http://www.grenzgeschichte.eu)). This department at the Autonomous College of the German-speaking Community in Eupen is the centre for regional research in contemporary and social history, for remembrance work and Holocaust education in the Eastern part of the country and in the Meuse-Rhine Euregio.

As part of the multidisciplinary political education programme, GrenzGeschichteDG involves witnesses from the region - Survivors of the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes, resistance fighters, persons who helped escapees. As such people are unfortunately becoming fewer and fewer, GrenzGeschichteDG secures the legacy of these witnesses through professionally conducted life-story interviews and partially also through documentary film productions. These works are designed so that they can be used as is for teaching purposes.

In addition to testimonials and contemporary history lectures, GrenzGeschichteDG also organises tours of escape, resistance and persecution locations in the Dutch-German-Belgian and the Luxembourg-German-Belgian border areas. For these visits, schools can also use audio guides in French and German that can be downloaded from the website.

Eminent domestic and foreign writers read from their works on the Holocaust before local students and partly a wider audience as well.

To commemorate the 25th anniversary of the German-speaking Community, GrenzGeschichteDG organised, on behalf of the Community government and Exil-PEN (writers in exile), an international event from 1 to 4 April 2009 on the topic: "Stille Retter – Menschen retten Menschen während der NS-Zeit und der Besatzung" [Silent Rescuers – People rescuing people during the Nazi era and the occupation]. Survivors, scholars and committed citizens reported on their personal fate and rescue situations in the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Switzerland, Austria and Hungary. A film of that event is currently being produced and will be available for use in teaching as from the summer of 2010.

For the 65th anniversary of the attack on the 20th deportation train from Belgium, with the support of the City of Eupen, the government and the Belgian rail board, GrenzGeschichteDG hosted a photo exhibition by the Mechelen Jewish Museum of Deportation and Resistance on the only train transporting Jews in Europe that was stopped to free the prisoners, entitled "1200 Gesichter – Erinnerung an Transport XX" [1200 Faces – Remember Transport XX] from 8 to 31 May 2008 at the Eupen train station. The high point of the opening ceremony was the speech by Régine Krochmal, now 91 years of age, who managed to escape from the train on her own. In the run-up to the presentation, she arrived in Eupen already on 27 February 2008, and was able to tell some 200 students her life story and to urge them to take an active part in this project. GrenzGeschichteDG is currently in serious negotiations to acquire one of the few preserved cattle trucks from 'Transport XX' which were used to deport Jews. The aim is to present it as an extracurricular learning and remembrance venue in the German-speaking Community.

Under the motto "Then persecuted – now forgotten", a Euregional event on the Holocaust remembrance day was held for the first time on 27 January 2001 at the Father Damian secondary school in Eupen. Representatives of different groups of victims – Jews, political prisoners, Jehovah's witnesses, homosexuals – from Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands participated in

the inter-generational dialogue with students from these three countries who presented projects on the topic.

Euregional further education courses for teachers on such topics as “Nazis, occupation and the war”, “The history of Jews in the borderland”, or contacts with ‘witnesses’ have already been organised on several occasions.

The “Crocus Project” was geared to students in upper primary schools and the first two years of secondary education. This project is being carried out for the first time in the German-speaking Community too this coming winter, and the first schools have come forward to host it. Developed by the Holocaust Educational Trust Ireland ([www.holocausteducationaltrustireland.org](http://www.holocausteducationaltrustireland.org)) it has since been disseminated worldwide. The trust makes yellow crocus bulbs available which are planted by students in autumn to commemorate the one and a half million Jewish children who died in the Holocaust. This is certainly one way to give upper primary school students a first insight into the Holocaust and to warn them of the dangers of discrimination, prejudices and intolerance.

Attention to remembrance education, in this case holocaust education, is also integrated into the framework of Belgium's membership of the “Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research”.

### 3. Remembrance

In continuity with holocaust remembrance education projects, the following initiatives are also worth pinpointing in the area of **remembrance**.

In December 2004, the Belgian Government designated January 27 as “Remembrance Day of the Genocide committed by Nazi Germany”. The remembrance ceremony in Auschwitz on 27 January 2005 was attended by H.M. King Albert II and the Prime Minister at the time, Mr. G. Verhofstadt. In 2006 Belgium, in its capacity as Chairman in Office of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), organized an OSCE Holocaust Remembrance Day in Brussels to which representatives of all 56 participating States were invited.



National Monument to Belgian Jewish Martyrs in Anderlecht. © Jewish Museum of Belgium.



Model of the new Museum, Memorial and Documentation Centre for Holocaust and Human Rights in Mechelen. © Jewish Museum for Deportation and Resistance.

1,537 Belgian citizens were awarded the title of “Righteous among the Nations” for having saved the lives of thousands of Jews.

In the French Community, a Decree aims to promote the passing on of remembrance of the crimes of genocide, and the Holocaust in particular, but also crimes against humanity, war crimes and acts of resistance<sup>12</sup>. The purpose of this Decree is to further the emergence of initiatives aimed at encouraging the passing on of that remembrance and perpetuating the existing projects.

In concrete terms, the Decree organises support for:

- Resource Centres: they must set up platforms the purpose of which is to provide the target groups with transversal or comprehensive information about the historical facts forming the subject of the Decree. They are recognised for five years.
- Accredited Centres: They may be on a smaller scale than the Resource Centres. They have to comply with a more limited number of requirements to receive support and are recognised for two years.
- organisations or schools answering calls for projects: every year, three types of calls for projects are launched.

The first type of call for projects aims at gathering, enhancing, exploiting or preserving evidence in relationship with the subject of the Decree.

A second type of call for projects aims to organise visits to places of remembrance and seminars intended for teachers, in relationship with the subject of the Decree.

A third type of call for projects is aimed at projects in relationship with the subject of the Decree but neither concerns evidence nor visits to places of remembrance.

The Council for the passing on of remembrance, set up within the framework of the Decree and composed of representatives from the academic world, from civil society and from the Ministry of the French Community, was established on 30 June 2009. In addition to its role in the procedures for the recognition of centres and calls for projects, it gives opinions to the Government of the French Community, either on its own initiative or when requested to do so, concerning any matter relating to the purpose of the Decree.

The educational coordination unit “Democracy or barbarity” coordinates and monitors the actions supported by the French Community within the framework of the Decree. It is also assigned to collect and disseminate information about the issues affected by the Decree.

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<sup>12</sup> Decree of 13 March 2009 relating to the passing on of the remembrance of crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and acts of resistance or movements having resisted the regimes that aroused those crimes.



Furthermore it may be mentioned that in Belgium, more than 40 monuments are dedicated to the remembrance of the victims of the Holocaust. Among the best-known are the National Monument to Belgian Jewish Martyrs in Anderlecht and “Les Territoires de la Mémoire”, an educational centre in Liège, which adopts an educational view geared towards the future. Likewise, the *Union des Déportés Juifs en Belgique- Filles et Fils de la Déportation* (Union of Jewish Deportees in Belgium – Sons and Daughters of Deportation) organises an annual ceremony that takes place at the abovementioned Monument in Anderlecht, also in the presence of a hundred or so children from Jewish and non-Jewish schools. That ceremony is devoted to the Shoah – “Yom Hashoa” - to the rising of the Warsaw ghetto and to the attack on the 20th transport headed for Auschwitz. This Union is also responsible for the annual pilgrimage in front of the Dossin Barracks in Mechelen which takes place in the first weeks of September. His Majesty, King Albert II together with the Prime Minister at the time, Mr Guy Verhofstadt, have already attended this commemoration and every year the federal government is represented.

The Dossin Barracks, formerly the Jewish Museum for Deportation and Resistance (subsequently referred to as the Kazerne Dossin-JMDR) is located in Mechelen in the *SS-Samellager* of the period, once called ‘the Waiting Room of Death’ due to the central role it played in the deportation of 24,908 Jews and 351 Gypsies to Auschwitz in 1942-1944. As it emerges from the foregoing, it is a major place of remembrance. Plans and the construction of a refurbished museum “Kazerne Dossin. Memorial, Museum and Documentation Centre on Holocaust and Human Rights” in Mechelen are making good progress and will be completed in 2012. The funding for this project is provided by the Flemish Government. In February 2009 the JMDR published a 4 volume series of 18.522 portraits of the 25.000 deportees from Mechelen to Auschwitz. It was the achievement of 10 years work in archives and of 3 years scanning. This unique memorial to the deportation was sponsored inter alia by the European Commission, the Claims Conference and the Belgian Judaism Foundation. The Flemish Government purchased a copy of it for all its public libraries.

Finally, the JMDR is in charge of the exhibition project of the Belgian wing in Auschwitz.

The State Archives of Belgium, active in the Belgian ITS (International Tracing Service) network, have in the recent years focused special attention on safeguarding, preserving and making accessible the archives of World War I and World War II, especially the archives of the Belgian authorities on the German spoils and the Belgian restitution and indemnification activities. Among these archives are the very rich individual files of the former Foreigners’ Police, an invaluable source for the relatives of deported foreigners and for the historical study of the impact of the Holocaust in Belgium. These 40,000 or so files are currently being digitised by the

Kazerne Dossin-JMDR. Yearly, they allow the State Archives of Belgium to answer accurately hundreds of inquiries from deported persons or their rightful claimants.

Through cooperation between the Federal Public Service Social Security Directorate-General War-Victims, the Study Commission, the Indemnification Commission and the Kazerne Dossin-JMDR, many documents and personal belongings (referred to as 'relics'), which had been confiscated from the deportees at the Dossin barracks in Mechelen, were restored to families.

In 1992-93, the Belgian authorities granted subsidies, via the non-profit making organisation *Sauvegarde d'Auschwitz a.s.b.l.*, for the purpose of the preservation of the buildings and land in Auschwitz-Birkenau. In 2005, they took the initiative of revamping the Belgian permanent exhibition of Auschwitz, since Holocaust remembrance should never fade. That project, implemented in 2005, was managed by the JMDR and the required subsidies were granted by the National Lottery and the Judaism Foundation. The Minister of Defence also provided a material contribution. Furthermore, every year, the Museum in Mechelen receives subsidies from the public authorities intended for the upkeep of the Belgian permanent exhibition.

The Jewish Museum of Belgium was relocated in a new and larger space in the heart of Brussels, with financial support from the Belgian authorities and other partners. The Jewish Museum of Belgium offers permanent and temporary exhibitions, educational services and different activities showing the richness of Jewish culture and history.

#### ***4. Research***

In addition to the abovementioned research concerning, *inter alia*, cultural property, the following elements can be mentioned in the area of Holocaust **research**.

The Centre for Research and Studies on the History of the Second World War was founded in 1969 and was later to be known as the Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society (CEGES). Many archives are preserved at the Centre illustrating the persecution of Jews in Belgium. As a result of the studies devoted to the despoilment of Jewish assets and to the collaboration of the authorities of the city of Antwerp, there was increasing support within the Jewish community for an in-depth study to be conducted into the possible involvement of the Belgian authorities in the persecution and deportation of the Jewish population during the Nazi occupation of Belgium. The result was a research project conducted

by the CEGES at the request of the Belgian Senate on behalf of the Federal authorities. The latter also funded the project. The report was presented to the Senate in 2007.<sup>13</sup>

The Foundation for Contemporary Remembrance (*La Fondation de la Mémoire contemporaine – De Stichting voor de Eigentijdse Herinnering*) was founded in 1994. Its activities are supported by the Ministry of Defence and the Belgian Judaism Foundation. The research work of this Foundation is structured around two key notions: ‘remembrance’ and ‘vigilance’. For instance, the Foundation conducts historical research into the Belgian Jewish community in the 20th century and collects evidence. It conserves that evidence and those essays and archives together with photographic material. Every year, it also publishes the review “*Les Cahiers de la Mémoire contemporaine*” (The Contemporary Remembrance Notebooks), many articles of which are devoted to the tragedy of the Holocaust.<sup>14</sup>

Since 2000, theses and monographs have been published on: the escape of Jewish deportees from the XX<sup>th</sup> convoy and Jewish members of the Belgian Resistance; the assistance to Jews (Jewish children) and post-war problems of the return of these children to their community; the “Association of the Jews in Belgium”, founded by the Nazis; the Belgian diamond trade and the Jewish educational system during the occupation; Belgian ‘Jew hunters’ and the re-establishment of the Jewish community in Belgium after WWII.

In conclusion it is worth mentioning that many political leaders and parliamentarians in Belgium expressed their interest and concern in this area. In the past, public apologies were made on several occasions on behalf of the Government and on behalf of Belgium for the suffering that the Jewish Community endured, while stressing the duty of the Government and each citizen to never forget the tragic events of the Holocaust.

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<sup>13</sup> The same year, the findings of the research project were also published in book form: ‘La Belgique docile : Les autorités belges et la persécution des Juifs en Belgique pendant la Seconde Guerre Mondiale’, Rudi Van Doorslaer (ed.), Emmanuel Debruyne, Frank Seberechts, Nico Wouters, with the cooperation of Lievens Saerens, Meulenhoff|Manteau and CEGES, 2007, 1163 pp.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.fmc-seh.be/>

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##### **Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation**

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##### **Federal Public Service Social Security Directorate-General War-Victims**

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**The Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism**

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**The State Archives of Belgium**

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**Kazerne Dossin. Memorial, Museum and Documentation Centre on Holocaust and Human Rights**

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