



„RECALL: A Study of Central European Places of Memory for Collective Remembrance”

2023-1-HU01-KA220-HED-000154286

Module Title: The Holocaust – Central Europe’s Darkest Hours (*Topic 7*)

Target Duration: 34 minutes (video) + 15-20 minutes (e-learning tasks)

Target Audience: University students, researchers, and history enthusiasts

This 34-minute module addresses one of the darkest chapters in Central European and global history: the Holocaust, also known as the Shoah. This event involved the genocide of Europe’s Jews and other persecuted groups by Nazi Germany during the Second World War. The module looks at the ideological roots, methods used, and regional aspects of this tragedy, as well as its lasting effects on collective memory in Czechia, Poland, and Hungary. Presented by Jiří Němec, Bożena Szaynok, and Bálint Mezei, the session follows the rise of modern antisemitism and racial ideology up to the systematic extermination that occurred between 1941 and 1945, alongside the ongoing effort to remember and convey the unimaginable.

The module begins with Jiří Němec’s introduction, which presents the Shoah as the dark underbelly of modernity. It was an industrialized, bureaucratic, and ideologically driven extermination project that exposed the breakdown of human morality during an era of progress. The discussion covers how centuries of anti-Jewish bias evolved into modern antisemitism, influenced by pseudo-scientific racism, conspiracy theories, and myths like the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. It further details the Nazi regime’s progression from discrimination and segregation to mass deportations and genocide, reaching its peak during the Wannsee Conference in 1942 and the creation of extermination camps like Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Sobibor, and Majdanek.

The Polish perspective, presented by Bożena Szaynok, focuses on Auschwitz, a site that symbolizes “the world’s failure.” Located in occupied Poland, it became the largest center of industrialized mass murder, where over one million people, including one million Jews, lost their lives. Szaynok discusses how historians, theologians, and museum experts deal with Auschwitz’s legacy. They explore how to share its story, preserve its authenticity, and convey its lessons to future generations. The narrative also considers the challenges of finding the right words, as silence and tears often take the place of speech.

The Czech viewpoint, conveyed by Jiří Němec, concentrates on Terezín, a ghetto-camp that the Nazi regime presented as a “model” Jewish settlement to mislead international observers. Most of the 88,000 held there died after being sent to extermination camps, but Terezín continued to symbolize cultural resistance and a distortion of postwar memory. It is often remembered as a site of “national suffering” rather than genocide. This section also touches on the delayed acknowledgment of the Holocaust of the Roma and Sinti in Czech public memory and the eventual recognition through memorials in Lety and Hodonín, culminating in the planned 2024 opening of the Holocaust Memorial of the Roma and Sinti in Bohemia.



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The Hungarian perspective, provided by Bálint Mezei, looks at the state's involvement in the Holocaust. From the antisemitic Jewish Laws of 1938 to 1941 and during the German occupation in March 1944, Hungarian authorities played a role in the swift ghettoization and deportation of hundreds of thousands of Jews, primarily to Auschwitz. Mezei emphasizes the role of Hungarian officials, the suffering in the Budapest ghetto, and the horrors of the Arrow Cross regime. The narrative wraps up with a look at Hungary's memory of this period, represented by the Shoes on the Danube Bank memorial and the work of sculptor Makrisz Agamemnon, which continue to express artistic testimony of human suffering and resilience.

The module concludes with Němec's reflection on “How to Speak of the Unspeakable?” He highlights that six million Jews and hundreds of thousands of Roma and Sinti were killed as a result of genocidal ideology. Total understanding may be out of reach, but remembering is a moral obligation. The Holocaust serves as a lasting reminder of how civilization can turn against itself and the importance of maintaining truth and empathy in collective memory.

Primary Goals of the Module:

- **Contextualize** the Holocaust as both a product and a negation of modern civilization, rooted in ideology, bureaucracy, and prejudice.
- **Examine** the regional dimensions of the Holocaust in Central Europe through Czech, Polish, and Hungarian case studies.
- **Explore** the evolution of antisemitism from religious intolerance to racial ideology and genocidal policy.
- **Link** historical understanding to moral responsibility and contemporary awareness of human rights and intolerance.
- **Encourage** critical reflection on memory, silence, and representation in postwar remembrance and education.

EU Key Competences Addressed in This Module:

- **Cultural awareness and expression** – Understanding how societies remember and interpret genocide through memorials, art, and education.
- **Critical thinking and digital literacy** – Analyzing historical evidence, propaganda, and testimony while evaluating contemporary representations of the Holocaust.
- **Social and civic competence** – Strengthening empathy, tolerance, and responsibility toward the protection of human dignity and democratic values.



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Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the session, learners will be able to:

- Identify the ideological, political, and social roots of antisemitism and racism leading to the Holocaust.
- Describe the chronological escalation of Nazi persecution—from discrimination and segregation to extermination.
- Analyze the mechanisms of genocide, including ghettos, deportations, and extermination camps in Central and Eastern Europe.
- Explain the specific roles and experiences of Czech, Polish, and Hungarian societies during the Holocaust.
- Evaluate the moral and logistical cooperation of local authorities and the broader complicity of state institutions.
- Reflect on the distinct forms of memory and memorialization: Auschwitz as the symbol of genocide, Terezín as deception and remembrance, Budapest as the site of rescue and murder.
- Compare the postwar remembrance trajectories of Czechia, Poland, and Hungary and their evolving commemorative cultures.
- Assess the significance of the Roma and Sinti Holocaust within European historical and moral consciousness.
- Discuss the challenges of representing and teaching the Holocaust in contemporary education and public discourse.
- Develop moral and civic awareness regarding the fragility of human rights, the dangers of hate, and the universal responsibility to remember.

The Holocaust was not a unique event disconnected from history. It stemmed from ideas, systems, and silences present in modern civilization. This module examines its Central European aspects and addresses how regular societies became involved in remarkable evil. Remembering the Shoah means honoring the dignity of its victims and recognizing the warning it brings: that normalizing hatred can lead to humanity's destruction from within. Through reflection, knowledge, and empathy, we protect the memory of those who died and maintain the moral duty to never forget.
