

SPEAKING POINTS Robert-Jan Smits at the occasion of the EHRI Conference of 20 May 2014

Introduction

- I would like to start by thanking the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI) organisers for their invitation. It is my great pleasure to be here tonight and an honour to participate in this international conference on Holocaust Documentation in Eastern Europe.
- The Holocaust is one of the most tragic, dark and sinister periods in the history of Europe and of mankind and it is essential that it is never forgotten. Archives of the Holocaust therefore need to be preserved, museums supported, education projects encouraged and research activities fostered and communicated.
- Tonight, I would like to raise four to five points in relation to the EHRI project.

1. Importance of investments in R&I

- First of all, from the side of the European Union we recognise the need and importance to continue the investments in Research and Innovation on this awful period of the European history.
- The current financial support is with a grant to the EHRI project of €7 million, out of the Seventh Framework Programme. We continue to do so notably because of the need to keep the memory alive and to develop new knowledge in this field by joining research efforts.
- Investigative work undertaken into the Holocaust collections led so far already to the identification of over 1,780 institutions holding Holocaust-relevant archival materials. That is impressive.

2. Added value of cooperation in this field

- Secondly, the EHRI project has shown that this subject really requires cooperation between the European Union Member States and countries beyond the EU, even overseas. That is why we are so pleased to see that also the United States of America and Israel joined the project. This is and will be a true added value to the project.
- Related to this and good to mention in this context, we are also pleased to hear that the opening of many archives in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe offers many

new opportunities to the research in this field. We know that the majority of the Holocaust victims came from Eastern Europe. Therefore, we can only encourage the integration of available material for research from and improved accessibility to key collections in these Eastern European countries.

3. New tools and techniques to be developed

- Thirdly, carrying out research on the holocaust requires the development of new information technology tools and new techniques, for example to deal with big amounts of data. These developments will facilitate research significantly.
- In this context, I am very pleased that EHRI has already joined forces with another prestigious EU research infrastructure project called DARIAH (Digital Research Infrastructure for the Art and Humanities), which is aimed at supporting the integration and preservation of research data and digital practices in the arts and humanities in Europe.
- By connecting to widely used concepts and standards, EHRI promises to connect easily to this new European digital research infrastructure for the Humanities, which will in turn hopefully ensure the long term sustainability of EHRI's results and access to the user communities.

4. Importance of outreach

- Fourth, as I mentioned earlier in the EHRI newsletter, it remains so important to show the results of these research efforts to our citizens. Besides work on the Holocaust related material and collections, EHRI includes a convincing programme of fellowships, scholarly publications, and provides researchers with new opportunities to engage with the wider scholarly community. But I am sure more is possible.
- The outreach to societies is essential and will require more importance in the coming period. Not only scientists, teachers and students will need access to this unique and reliable source of Holocaust material. I am confident that EHRI will also provide an invaluable service to the Holocaust education of future generations in general and to the study of democracy and human rights. We have to make it clear that nationalism, xenophobia and racism are not the way forward.

5. Towards the future of EHRI

- Then, last but not least, a couple of messages towards the future of EHRI.
- As proof of our continuous support to research and innovation in the field of the holocaust, we have inserted a call in the Work Programme 2014/2015 of our new European funding programme Horizon 2020, with an invitation to come up with a proposal for the follow up of EHRI. In particular we would like to see the expansion of EHRI's activities and the widening of its partnership in Eastern Europe. All this of course in order to include new material on the Holocaust and enable an integrated approach to the history of the Holocaust as a European phenomenon.
- And as mentioned before, we would like to see more attention to outreach activities, novel techniques; EHRI research results are now clearly highly visible in the interested research and memorial community via the EHRI website, which ensures that the project reaches all its stakeholders and target groups. But we can go further.

Let me conclude by saying this is a very timely Conference. I am looking forward to its discussions and outcomes. I wish you all every success over the coming day.

Many thanks!