Luxembourg has unfinished Holocaust issues - US envoy

New working group to look for ways to solve remaining issues

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Luxembourg still has to clear some hurdles to fully compensate Holocaust victims, a US diplomat told the Luxembourg Times, and a new group cooperating with the Jewish community will set out to solve these issues.

Luxembourg in 2015 apologised for its role in persecuting Jews under the German occupation, and US special envoy for Holocaust issues Tom Yazdgerdi conceded that the country had already done a lot to come to terms with the legacy of the Holocaust.

But some work still needed to be done, including solving the issue of dormant bank accounts of mostly foreign Jewish victims, that still contain assets that have never been restituted.

When Hitler acceded to power in the 1930s, a lot of German Jews fled to Luxembourg from the Nazi regime, and many of the assets of these foreigners were taken from them, Yazdgerdi said.

"I've come here to discuss with high-level officials, including the prime minister, some of the unfinished business of the Holocaust that we're hoping Luxembourg can resolve", he said.

"There's specifically issues with dormant bank accounts that we're looking at with the government and there's a bill in parliament to resolve this."
Yazdgerdi, a career diplomat in the US foreign service, has agreed with Prime Minister Xavier Bettel to form a working group with the government, the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) and the Jewish Community of Luxembourg, to address open issues.

The group should look for a solution that the country can support, Yazdgerdi said, to bring justice to survivors and their families, "fully understanding that Luxembourg itself was also a victim of the Reich."

Community feels safe

Yazdgerdi said he had also met the president of the Consistoire Israélite du Luxembourg and the head of the Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah in Luxembourg to receive their input.

"In Europe in general there's a rising tide of antisemitism," he said. "Here the local Jewish community feels safe."

"Luxembourg has done a lot to come to terms with the legacy of the Holocaust, both in terms of memory, commemorating the Holocaust, compensating survivors and their families, and others, for this horrific historical act," he said.

A monument dedicated to the victims of Nazism in Luxembourg City last year could have come earlier, but it is was still an important signal.
Education on the topic was equally important, Yazdgerdi said, citing a recent study showcasing ignorance around the Holocaust. (https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/24/world/canada/canadians-holocaust.html)

"Every country has unfinished business, no country has resolved every aspect of their history and Holocaust-era issues. Just like Americans need to address the period of slavery or what happened to native Americans – it is never going to be perfect justice. It is some recognition of what happened and every government should share that feeling".

Yazdgerdi works as the special envoy for Holocaust issues in Europe, which is a regular appointment of the US State Department.

Luxembourg is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Association and "will assume its chairmanship in March" to advance Holocaust education, remembrance and research worldwide.

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