

## Auschwitz/Oświęcim in the European Parliament

2009-03-09

An exhibition entitled "The Remembrance and Reconciliation Mound. From the Hell of Auschwitz to Oświęcim, City of Peace" took place on January 19-23, 2009 in the EP seat in Brussels.

This very special display was patroned by EP Chairman Hans-Gert Poettering, who also attended the opening ceremony on January 20.

The exhibition was also a major promotional event as for the first time ever Oświęcim had its very own presentation at the EP headquarters. Its opening far surpassed similar ceremonies staged here and was attended by several hundred people, which was quite unusual and showed just how much interest the display raised. Among the guests at the opening were numerous Polish MEPs, city alliance representatives from Poland, Germany and Italy, and Jeremy Smith, Secretary General of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR). Also present were five Polish Auschwitz inmates.

Opening the exhibition, Hans-Gert Poettering said he did not hesitate to take patronage over the event both as EP Chairman and a German, because Nazi Germany carried the responsibility for the hell of World War Two. He also voiced hope that the fact that Germany and so many other countries were now together in the European Union, which is built on common values, will guarantee peace for a long time to come, just as the EU founders had planned.

Today Auschwitz/Oświęcim is a city of open and industrious people whose sights are set on the future, but without forgetting the tribute due to the victims of the Nazi tragedy.

"Related to this is professor Józef Szajna's idea to erect a Remembrance and Reconciliation Mound in Oświęcim. To show that Oświęcim is a city with a future, friendly to its inhabitants and all investors and tourists. This is also what we want to show at the Brussels exhibition", said Oświęcim Mayor Janusz Marszałek.

The display was prepared by professor Szajna's son Łukasz, an artist like his father. The professor, who gave the idea for the Remembrance and Reconciliation Mound, a painter, writer, stage director, scenographer and onetime concentration camp inmate in Auschwitz and Buchenwald, said at the cornerstone-laying ceremony under his project that memories were something one carried throughout one's life. "As long as you remember you are human. If we're to live, then not in hatred but in love. Reconciliation means we should all get closer to one another regardless of differences, nationality, convictions or beliefs", professor Szajna said.

In Poland mounds are a form of memorial raised in tribute to people or events deserving special remembrance. The one in Oświęcim will stand in memory of all – Jews, Poles, Roma, Sinti, Soviet POWs and countless representatives of other nations – who perished in the Auschwitz concentration camp from the hands of Nazi executioners.

When ready, the mound will measure 35 metres. It will stand between the camp's male and female sections KL Auschwitz I and KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau. Crowning it will be an Eternal Light. Inside the memorial will house an exhibition of masonry and brick fragments from the original camp with biographical notes on their donors.

This beautiful, conciliatory idea is strongly supported not only by former Auschwitz inmates and private sponsors, but also leading political and academic authorities and local communities worldwide. Stones for the future Remembrance and Reconciliation Mound have already been donated by Erlangen, Hanover, Osnabrück, Schönebeck, Guldenfingen, Dresden, Stralsund, Auerbach, Terpen, Nuremberg, Bamberg, Gehrden, Preisach and Heitersheim in Germany, Laneuveville in France, Teresin in the Czech Republic, Hiroshima in Japan, Torino in Italy and Volgograd in Russia.

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