

**The Address by Michal Klíma,  
Chairman of the Foundation for Holocaust Victim's Board of Trustees,  
On the Occasion of  
The Day of Holocaust Remembrance and Prevention of Crimes against Humanity  
Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic,  
27th January 2022**

As the years have passed since the liberation of the Auschwitz Birkenau concentration camp, which we commemorate today, the importance of this commemoration has increased. According to the annual reports on anti-Semitism in the Czech Republic prepared by the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic, the number of anti-Semitic manifestations is growing, although it does not reach the same intensity and forms as in some Western European countries. At the same time, we are witnessing the disparagement of the symbolism of Jewish persecution, with various misinformed opponents of vaccination and anti-pandemic measures pinning on yellow six-pointed stars to create the impression that they are being persecuted and to liken their situation to that of the Jews during the Nazi period. Not every act of ignorance and foolishness can be punished by law, but it is good that most of the society condemns such behaviour.

Two years ago, from this place, I drew attention to the scandalous sale of merchandise - mugs and T-shirts with portraits of Nazi leaders. A little later I filed a criminal complaint against the publisher of a calendar with portraits of the same. I am pleased to have the opportunity to say that much has changed in two years. The prosecution was initiated by the law enforcement authorities, the charges, the indictment, and the verdict were brought. This is a fundamental change in the approach of the system of justice, which until now has rather tolerated such manifestations. And not only that. A few days ago, a verdict was handed down in the case of another publisher of publications denying or belittling the Holocaust.

However, that's not the only good news.

As of the beginning of this year, an amendment to the Czech Criminal Code has been in force that now explicitly prohibits the support and promotion of movements aimed at suppressing human rights and freedoms, even if such actions, i.e., the production, import, and circulation of items with symbols and slogans, are defended by representatives of such movements on the grounds of commercial intentions - i.e., profit. Let us recall that this was the main argument of the perpetrators of such activity - that they do not commit it out of conviction, but for money. And the courts have repeatedly accepted this reasoning in the past.

It is often debated whether the criminalization of such publications is not an interference with the right to freedom of speech. Given our country's recent totalitarian history, it is important to engage in this debate. Every person should have the right to express his or her opinion freely. But denial of reality and lies are not expressions of opinion, they are just denials of reality and lies. It is not an expression of opinion when someone says that a house that is on fire is not on fire, or that there is

no danger of flooding when a flood wave is rolling in. It is a sign of the strength of democracy, not its weakness, if it can define freedom of speech in such a way that no one is restricted from expressing his or her opinion, and, at the same time, that there is no punishment for spreading lies, misinformation, and hatred of a certain group of people because of their race, faith, or beliefs.

Having this unique opportunity to speak on the floor of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, a venue where politicians usually speak, I would like to thank the politicians who led the initiative in the legislature to amend and refine the Czech Criminal Code. It should be appreciated that there was an initiative group from almost all political parties. I would also like to thank the media, which gave the cases in question a lot of space and thus helped to gain public support for the search for a solution. It is important that journalists, who are concerned about freedom of speech in the first place, see the importance of not allowing freedom of speech to be abused to spread hatred and deny reality.

Thank you for your attention.

Michal Klíma

Chairman of the Foundation for Holocaust Victim's Board of Trustees

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