

The Holocaust and its Perception in the International Community between 1961 and 2018

My name is Sophia Klenova and I am a student of Altai State University. The issue of the perception of the Holocaust and other genocides in the modern world set the conditions for the formation of the “image of the other” and can lead to the adoption of such inhuman behaviours and terrifying events.

The study of the Holocaust and its perceptions in public communities is important for preserving historical memory in the context of the development of neo-Nazism, terrorist Islamism, xenophobia etc. It is necessary to build a society on the principles of humanity and talk about such historical cases as negative examples. By studying the causes of intolerance among some groups to others, it is possible to identify something in common and use the gained knowledge to prevent genocides.

The rethinking of the Holocaust and the study of the past is a modern process, which received the most widespread discussion with the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961 associated with the end of the “silence” on the Holocaust.

This was difficult to comprehend due to the mass consciousness in post-war Germany, on whose shoulders lay a share of guilt for the commission of such a crime. Germany took a decisive step and admitted to “collective guilt” for the Holocaust. The policy of Willy Brandt in the early 1970s was an open critical political discussion of past events. In 1985, the Federal Law “On lies about Auschwitz” was passed, according to which Holocaust denial is prosecuted. It became a symbol of recognition of the criminal past and regret for it.

The period from the 1960s to the 1990s became a springboard for a critical discussion of the Holocaust in academic and political circles, as well as an awareness of the role of everyone in this tragic event. Nevertheless, across Europe, numerous studies of the Holocaust began to take place, exhibitions were opened. In the USA, the attitude towards the Holocaust as a “non-American” problem began to change. The UN General Assembly adopted a number of resolutions: in 2005, commemorating the Holocaust, and in 2007, on Holocaust denial.

In the USA and Canada there was an opposition to Holocaust denial (the well-known cases of J. Keegstra and E. Zundel). Anti-Semitism in the Arab countries also has intensified. In 2006, the International Conference on Holocaust Denial was held in Tehran, where, in the background of the Arab-Israeli conflict, it was claimed that the State of Israel exists only because of a “false Holocaust”.

The official position of the USSR and the countries of the socialist camp continued the ambiguous course of “silence” on the Holocaust: it did not stand as a separate issue, and Jewish victims

were replaced euphemistically as “civilians”. A significant example is the creation of a monument in Babiy Yar. In the 1950s, a residential area was planned for the site ; in 1961, Yevtushenko’s poem “Babiy Yar” attracted public attention, and a monument was only erected in 1976 in an area that was not related to the mass shootings of the victims of the Holocaust. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Holocaust Research and Education Center was created in Moscow. An active study of the Jewish genocide began, books on this issue were published, various conferences were held.

After the 1990s, the geography of Holocaust research and memorialization has expanded. In Japan, ties with European memorial centers were strengthened, monuments erected and new museums opened, especially commemorating Japanese diplomat Chiune Sugihara, who saved about 6,000 Jews during the Second World War. In China, the Holocaust was linked to the Nanjing massacre.

In East and South European countries, there seems to be an ambivalence in the perception of the Holocaust. Despite a high level of anti-Semitism, new monuments and museums were opened, with the active support of Yad Vashem.

The Holocaust has become a case study to test the degree of intolerance of one person to another, it could become a real trauma, not only for the Jewish people, but for the whole world. It happened in a modern civilized society. The extermination of an entire ethnic group is an inhuman precedent, a manifestation of extreme cruelty, destruction for the sake of destruction, which contradicts one of the basic principles of a democratic society - humanity.