

The Choice to Save Lives. Diplomatic Rescue During the Holocaust



International academic conference

Warsaw, 19–21 October 2021

The genocidal policies of the 20th century posed an extreme challenge for the diplomacy and diplomats of many nations around the world. The persecution and extermination of Jews, planned and carried out by Nazi Germany before and during the Second World War, provoked a humanitarian crisis on a hitherto unprecedented scale. The diplomatic missions of countries both in Europe and beyond were inundated with appeals for rescue from their own citizens, foreigners and stateless persons alike. As wave after wave of refugees continued to arrive, diplomats faced dilemmas far removed from the more traditional issues linked with consular protection and confronted situations of life and death.

Revoking Jewish citizenship, separating them from the state and denying them legal aid and status were key elements of the Nazi German plan for the Holocaust. In this situation, the only means for the persecuted groups to have their legal status reinstated and their survival chances increased lay with diplomatic missions. Passports, visas, confirmations of other religious affiliations than Judaism – these were the tools that would save their lives, and the diplomats of various states sought them out in different contexts in order to aid the Jews.

The aim of the conference is to present and discuss the results of research on rescue operations undertaken in the face of the Holocaust by diplomats and diplomatic missions and their governments around the world. The intention is to present the broadest possible spectrum of such campaigns. By juxtaposing and comparing different cases and taking into account the various circumstances, we will recreate the fullest possible picture of the diplomatic efforts to help Jews. At the same time, we hope to offer a deeper general reflection on the role of diplomacy in the face of genocide.

Deserving particular attention is the issue of the relationship between diplomacy and the state. Does the matter concern only dispersed and sporadic efforts by individuals, specific diplomats acting against or in violation of instructions from their supervising ministries? Or perhaps the contrary is true, that the actions of diplomatic missions, the tools of the state, testify to the various attitudes of political communities regarding the Holocaust? Is it even possible today to distinguish between the actions of diplomats undertaken as part

of their official duties and those resulting from a sense of moral imperative or ethos of a government official?

We invite scholars representing various disciplines, focused on the history of the Second World War and the Holocaust – and especially researchers of the history of diplomacy, mass migrations and the attitudes of national governments and societies in the face of the Holocaust – to take part in the conference.

The following issues will be discussed during the conference:

1. The deprivation of Jewish citizenship and legal personality as an element of Holocaust politics and the role of diplomacy and diplomats in restoring that legal status.
2. Who were the diplomats who tried to rescue the Jews, and which countries did they represent? What were their motivations? What network of contacts did they use in their rescue operations?
3. What was the significance of the governmental stances of the states represented by diplomats involved in aid operations? These included representatives of the Axis powers and collaborators with the Third Reich, members of the anti-Nazi Allied coalition and neutral states. Some represented countries with all their traditional potential, others acted on behalf of destroyed and occupied nations, whose structures survived in exile or underground.
4. What forms of assistance were undertaken? When was the decision to forge documents (including those of third-party nations) taken, and how was it done?
5. What were the contacts between the various levels of the ministries of foreign affairs of individual countries with regard to aid for Jews? Were missions supported by their ministries? Did the ministries receive the support of their government, major political forces or their individual representatives?
6. What role, if any, was played in the missions' aid operations by intelligence services? What was the intelligence's attitude to these actions?
7. What contact was there between the missions saving Jews and the representative offices of other countries? Who was aware of the true purpose of the project and the details of the operation?
8. What was the role of the Jewish diaspora in the rescue operations? Did the diplomats cooperate with Jewish organizations and communities? Did they only respond to requests for help, or did they reach out to those in need themselves? How?
9. What role did the diplomacy of the Catholic Church play in saving Jews, with particular emphasis on the activities of the Holy See?

10. How effective was the relief operation? What did its success depend on? Where did the diplomatic services fail?
11. Do we have any data on the number of the rescued and those who were included in the rescue operation? What kind of sources can provide such information? To what extent is it possible to verify the data contained therein? Finally, how and in what fields can the results of archival queries devoted to this issue be completed?
12. How did the perpetrators of the Holocaust react to these diplomatic actions? Did the services and agencies of the Third Reich know about the rescue operations? Did they try to counteract them and how?
13. What was the fate of the rescued individuals and the diplomats involved in the operations?
14. Is the analysis of diplomatic rescue operations helpful in reflecting on the attitudes of states and societies towards the Holocaust?
15. What does the commemoration of aid operations look like today? Do they exist in the social consciousness, culture of memory and education of the countries involved in individual operations and in other countries?

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Prof. Daniel Blatman (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

Stawomir Dębski PhD (Polish Institute of International Affairs)

Prof. Patrizia Guarnieri (University of Florence)

Mordecai Paldiel PhD (Yeshiva University and Touro College in New York)

Applications: in Polish or English

Conference language: Polish and English; simultaneous interpretation will be provided

Abstract: no more than 1,000 characters

Key words: no more than 5

APPLICATION PROCEDURE

- ✿ all applications should be submitted via the attached form to:
diplomats@instytutpileckiego.pl
- ✿ the deadline for applications is **30 June 2021**
- ✿ you will be notified of acceptance by **12 July 2021**

A post-conference publication is also planned.

The format of the conference depends on the situation regarding the global pandemic and will either be traditional or online. A hybrid version is also being taken under consideration. Should the conference take the more traditional form, we guarantee to cover a part of the cost of accommodation and transport.

