

## **Speech by Minister János Lázár**

(Tuesday, June 9, 2015)

Excellencies,  
Dear guests,  
Dear Hosts,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

We are Hungarians, the land where we live connects us and the language that we speak connects us. And I think that we are also already forever connected by the inevitable and fateful memory of the Holocaust, the Shoah.

This is a painful burden of responsibility and grief, which we cannot put down and which we have to carry together until the end of time.

I am saying this in terms of humanity, but also in terms of the preservation of identity. The Holocaust has forever become part of our self-identity and belongs to our Hungarian identity.

To understand why, it is enough to have common sense and a pure heart.

Because 70 years ago the lives of hundreds of thousands of our fellow countrymen were extinguished by a raging hatred. Because everyday security, peace and happiness were destroyed by murderous intolerance.

There were all sorts of people - just like us gathered together here today. There were believers and non-believers, poor and rich, old-fashioned and modern, there were some who identified as Jews and some others were forced to identify themselves to be Jews.

But what was common among them was that they were Hungarians, living in this city or in another one, going to this synagogue or to another one. They paid their duties to the state, which claimed to be Hungarian, they paid their share with money and with blood as well.

Because how many from Budapest who pass by Wesselényi Street on their daily errands would know that inside that small Synagogue is the Temple of Heroes, thus named because Hungarian Jews wanted to pay tribute to their ten thousand war heroes: for the ten thousand Hungarian Jews who lost their lives in World War I, fighting for their country. Because Hungarian Jews were present and played their part in all the important shard battles in our national history - in revolutions, freedom fights and wars. They were there, shoulder to shoulder with all their compatriots, together with whom they formed this multicolored and still integral community, the Hungarian nation.

The truth is however, that they were not supported by anyone 70 years ago - or rather just a very few brave and real patriots, whose minds and hearts were in the

right place even in bad times. A handful of people who saved the lives of others, and who also saved, or at least defended, the honor of the nation. Apart from calling the sins and sinners by name, calling up the victims and the prosecuted, we must spend time placing in our national remembrance those people who saved the lives of others to the proper place that they deserve, even if they were so painfully few. The likes of Sára Salkaházi, János Esterházy, Margit Slachta and Gábor Sztehlo.

I would like to make it clear that in our national history Hungarian Jews and Jewish Hungarians were together in good times and in bad times with all the other Hungarians.

Sometime with their brains, sometimes with the work of their two hands or their achievements in sports, or with their courage they contributed to making the Hungarian nation and the Hungarian fatherland a prosperous, proud and successful community.

Therefore those, who look at the Holocaust and see it only as the general and human fate, are wrong. Those are wrong who think that the Shoah or discrimination is simply an inhuman or anti human period. We do not think like that. Because the Holocaust, apart from being un-Christian and inhuman, it was also high treason. And Hungarian anti-Semitism was an unpatriotic act, because it was targeted against such compatriots who do not only deserve tolerance but who deserve respect as well. Without the fraternity of the Jews the Hungarian people could not have delivered those achievements that it did during the past centuries - without each other we would be poorer and fewer.

Therefore exclusion for us Hungarians is like self-mutilation. So it is important to have all those events like this one now, when we can make it clear that we never ever let any self-mutilation to be executed on the Hungarian people. We are one nation and we protect each other.

I would not like to make a rude mistake in the protocol nor do I intend to offend our high ranking invited guests when I say that tonight the most important guests are the students.

The students of the Roma Jesuit Dormitory, the Saint Gellért Grammar School and Lauder Javne Secondary School, and the representatives of Hungarian secondary school students who are here tonight.

Not simply because of their age however, that is also an important aspect, because the future of Hungary and that of Europe will be as they make it, or rather as they let it to be shaped.

It is because of their „job“. As I am convinced that education is what matters here: learning - in the direct and in the indirect sense of the world.

At events like this we keep reiterating that the biggest responsibility of the education after Auschwitz is, that what happened 70 years ago should not happen again. Therefore, firstly we have to know what happened 70 years ago. We have to know about everything, the whole of the Holocaust history must be disclosed as long as we can still do it, while those eye-witnesses are still among us who were there in the Shoah.

We have to make efforts to know about everything, about every person's history, as it is a special feature of genocides and mass murders executed on ideological basis is, that the death of each and every individual is a little bit the death of the community and the death of the nation as well. Seventy years ago, - and this should be remembered very well - the Hungarian nation died 600 000 times in cattle wagons, concentration camps and on the embankment of river Danube. And it cannot be revived as long as we don't do our best to research the history of all our 600 000 compatriots who perished or at least write their names on the leaves of the Emánuel Memorial Tree or the walls of the Páva Street Memorial Centre, where empty glass tables commemorate the anonymous victims. We have to make efforts to know everything about the Holocaust, but also, and this is our responsibility, so that we not only know everything, but everybody should know about it. We want to have a country where no one can grow up without knowing about the real history of the Holocaust.

It is vital for all of us to organize a Hungary where nobody can become a voting citizen, a father or mother, in a word, a Hungarian adult without knowing about the history of more than half a million Hungarian compatriots, and what was the role of the government of that time, and what was the role of us, Hungarians in it. It is not only important to know, what happened, and everybody should know about it, but also to understand what it was exactly what happened. This is all the duty of education and learning - not only a duty, but an obligation.

Education, we know very well, is made up by two parts - what we bring from home, and what we get at school. What the generations of young Hungarians hear and learn at home about the Holocaust, is something that the state cannot influence too much, or rather indirectly.

In this sense the arts, literature, music or films play a more important role - like *Fateless*, the Klezmer Band, or the *Son of Saul*.

But what a Hungarian student learns about the Holocaust at school, from the kindergarten to the university as we put it, is the responsibility of the Hungarian

state. We have assumed this responsibility among others by establishing the Páva Street Holocaust Memorial Centre in 1999, a public institution which is dedicated exclusively to Holocaust remembrance, and in 2000 we introduced the mandatory Holocaust subject education in our National Curriculum.

As you probably know not so long ago the Pázmány Péter Catholic University made it obligatory to have Holocaust studies for their students, which means that we have a high level educational institute in Hungary, which claims that the knowledge about the Holocaust is a prerequisite of a university degree.

In the last generation the history of Hungarian Jews were full of force and coercion. The most extreme expression of it was the period of the world war which was started by the Jewish laws and ended in the Holocaust. The majority of the society or the establishment acting on behalf of that majority told it who they considered to be Jews and who they don't. And they also told, what those Hungarian citizens who were considered to be Jewish can do and what they cannot do. This thinking still has its consequences and impacts even today. We know Hungarians who speak of themselves as forced Jews, because their environment forces them to have a different identity, than they would freely chose.

And even where there are good intentions, Ladies and Gentlemen, a consequence of this same coercive attitude is that there are historians and other specialists working in the field of policy for remembrance who say that in 2015, when creating a museum dealing with the Holocaust – and, within that, with Jewish Hungarians and the tragedy of Hungarian Jews – which is devoted to showing past reality, it is possible or even permissible to do so without consulting organizations representing victims' descendants. I think that no such building can be created without agreement from organizations representing victims and their descendants.

And even if they or I were to do such a thing in good faith, this would mean that the state was forcing Hungarian Jews or Jewish Hungarians into a particular way of thinking about themselves.

The Prime Minister and the Government think that the state may not take the place of others in saying such a thing, and on this basic principle – as well as in many other aspects – we completely agree with our respected guests, members of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

Thank you for your kind attention.