

Russian Education in the Russian Federation: A Challenge to the State-Endorsed Paradigm

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Across the democratic West, remembering the Holocaust as a unique evil in twentieth century history has for over four decades been seen as a necessary part of modern citizenship. Russia, by contrast, has until recently deviated from this pattern: her memorial culture did not seek to highlight the uniqueness of the Holocaust as a phenomenon. In both the Soviet Union and independent Russia, the Holocaust had very little visibility at all; “when acknowledged, it was ultimately subsumed within a wider nationalist narrative of the ‘Great Patriotic War’, and the specificity of Jewish suffering was not emphasized” amongst the numerous atrocities committed in the region during that period. (1) This position has changed markedly since 2012, not as a result of post-Communist Holocaust memory activism from below which has long sought its recognition, but rather in order to complement the needs of the current presidency. (2) A specific Holocaust memory has developed in the Russian Federation, one which emphasises “Soviet heroism, the fascist leaning of former republics, and contemporary Russia’s supposedly tolerant, multicultural society in which the most painful periods of history are confronted.” (3)

This paper will focus on Holocaust education in Russia and how the Russian Research and Educational Holocaust Centre has helped teachers and students engage with this topic. As the leading Russian figure in Holocaust education, this institution has published materials for use in activities at schools and organised conferences, competitions and seminars in order to enhance the skills and display the work of those dedicated to the topic across Russia. This paper will assess how this institution works within the state structure and examine the state barriers, which limit the reach and impact of this institution.

(1) Sawkins, ‘Russia’s State Mobilization of the Holocaust Onscreen –Konstantin Khabensky’s Film Sobibor(2018)’, *Modern Languages Open*, 1.23 (2020), pp. 1-8 (p. 1).

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid.