

Jewish Culture n° 93. By Gilberte Jacaret.

Wannsee Conference and the "Final Solution"… From the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

... On January 20, 1942, 15 high-ranking Nazi Party and German government officials gathered at a villa in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee to discuss and coordinate the implementation of what they called the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question."

Representing the SS at the meeting were: SS General Reinhard Heydrich, the chief of the Reich Security Main Office (Reichssicherheitshauptamt-RSHA) and one of Reichsführer-SS (SS chief) Heinrich Himmler's top deputies; SS Major General Heinrich Müller, chief of RSHA Department IV (Gestapo); SS Lieutenant Colonel Adolf Eichmann, chief of the RSHA Department IV B 4 (Jewish Affairs); SS Colonel Eberhard Schöngarth, commander of the RSHA field office for the Government General in Krakow, Poland; SS Major Rudolf Lange, commander of RSHA Einsatzkommando 2, deployed in Latvia in the autumn of 1941; and SS Major General Otto Hofmann, the chief of SS Race and Settlement Main Office.

Representing the agencies of the State were: State Secretary Roland Freisler (Ministry of Justice); Ministerial Director Wilhelm Kritzinger (Reich Cabinet); State Secretary Alfred Meyer (Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories-German-occupied USSR); Ministerial Director Georg Leibbrandt (Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories); Undersecretary of State Martin Luther (Foreign Office); State Secretary Wilhelm Stuckart (Ministry of the Interior); State Secretary Erich Naumann (Office of Plenipotentiary for the Four-Year Plan); State Secretary Josef Bühler (Office of the Government of the Governor General-German-occupied Poland); and Ministerial Director Gerhard Klopfer (Nazi Party Chancellery).

The "Final Solution" was the code name for the systematic, deliberate, physical annihilation of the European Jews. At some still undetermined time in 1941, Hitler authorized this European-wide scheme for mass murder. Heydrich convened the Wannsee Conference (1) to inform and secure support from government ministries and other interested agencies relevant to the implementation of the "Final Solution," and (2) to disclose to the participants that Hitler himself had tasked Heydrich and the RSHA with coordinating the operation.

The men at the table did not deliberate whether such a plan should be undertaken, but instead discussed the implementation of a policy decision that had already been made at the highest level of the Nazi regime.

At the time of the Wannsee Conference, most participants were already aware that the National Socialist regime had engaged in mass murder of Jews and other civilians in the German-occupied areas of the Soviet

Union and in Serbia. Some had learned of the actions of the Einsatzgruppen and other police and military units, which were already slaughtering tens of thousands of Jews in the German-occupied Soviet Union.

Others were aware that units of the German Army and the SS and police were killing Jews in Serbia. None of the officials present at the meeting objected to the Final Solution policy that Heydrich announced.

Not present at the meeting were representatives of the German Armed Forces (Wehrmacht) and the Reich Railroads (Reichsbahn) in the German Ministry of Transportation. The SS and police had already negotiated agreements with the German Army High Command on the murder of civilians, including Soviet Jews, in the spring of 1941, prior to the invasion of the Soviet Union. In late September 1941, Hitler had authorized the Reich Railroads to transport German, Austrian, and Czech Jews to locations in German-occupied Poland and the German-occupied Soviet Union, where German authorities would kill the overwhelming majority of them.

Heydrich indicated that approximately 11,000,000 Jews in Europe would fall under the provisions of the "Final Solution." In this figure, he included not only Jews residing in Axis-controlled Europe, but also the Jewish populations of the United Kingdom, and the neutral nations (Switzerland, Ireland, Sweden, Spain, Portugal, and European Turkey). For Jews residing in the Greater German Reich and holding the status of subjects of the German Reich, the Nuremberg Laws would serve as a basis for determining who was a Jew.

Heydrich announced that "during the course of the Final Solution, the Jews will be deployed under appropriate supervision at a suitable form of labor deployment in the East. In large labor columns, separated by gender, able-bodied Jews will be brought to those regions to build roads, whereby a large number will doubtlessly be lost through natural reduction. Any final remnant that survives will doubtless consist of the elements most capable of resistance. They must be dealt with appropriately, since, representing the fruit of natural selection, they are to be regarded as the core of a new Jewish revival."

The participants discussed a number of other issues raised by the new policy, including the establishment of the Theresienstadt camp-ghetto as a destination for elderly Jews as well Jews who were disabled or decorated in World War I, the deferment until after the war of "Final Solution" measures against Jews married to non-Jews or persons of mixed descent as defined by the Nuremberg laws, prospects for inducing Germany's Axis partners to give up their Jewish populations, and preparatory measures for the "evacuations";

Despite the euphemisms which appeared in the protocols of the meeting, the aim of the Wannsee Conference was clear to its participants: to further the coordination of a policy aimed at the physical annihilation of the European Jews.

Germany marks meeting that unleashed Holocaust... European Jewish Press. January 22 2012

Berlin: Germany's president Friday marked 70 years since a meeting that unleashed the Nazis' mass extermination of Jews, pledging to do everything to thwart "murderous hatred" of foreigners in the country.

Christian Wulff was addressing an event to mark the conference at a villa on the Wannsee lake on the outskirts of Berlin where senior Nazis adopted the "final solution" in January 1942.

Referring to the plan to exterminate all Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe as "this darkest chapter of German history", Wulff said the site, which opened as a museum in 1992, was "a place of German shame".

"This place and the name Wannsee have become a symbol for the bureaucratically organized distinction between life that is worth living and that which is not...," Wulff said, according to a text of his speech.

He said it was "important and a national task" to never forget that this "unbelievable and inconceivable" mass killing of Jews had occurred.

Wulff also referred to the recent discovery of a neo-Nazi gang believed to have been behind the unsolved murders of 10 people, mainly shopkeepers of Turkish origin, between 2000 and 2007.

"We are filled with shame and rage," he said, calling for those who supported and helped the group to be found and brought to justice, networks destroyed and for light to be shed on the facts.

And he promised the victims' families that: "We will do everything so that terror and murderous hatred for foreigners and the unknown never again have a place in Germany."

Fifteen senior Nazis under the leadership of Reinhard Heydrich took part in the Wannsee conference, including Adolf Eichmann, who was a key organiser in the deportation and murder of millions of Jews and others during World War II.

