

# THE EAST MET THE WEST AT THE B'NAI B'RITH SEMINARY



During three days (May 13–15), B'nai B'rith Romania hosted an international seminary organized together with B'nai B'rith Europe, with an inciting and up-dated theme: "The unity of B'nai B'rith fighting against anti-Semitism and Racism". In the same time the manifestation was considered to be a good opportunity for strengthening the ties between East and West, respectively, a better knowledge of the experience and the problems confronting the Eastern European loges, which are in a more special situation. The rich activity of the Central and Eastern European loges, many of them (including the Romanian) with old traditions, was interrupted after the World War II. The fall of the Iron Curtain after 1989 witnessed the renaissance of Judaism and created the effervescence in the manifestation of the different forms of the Jewish life in these European regions. This is also the context of the resuscitation of the B'nai B'rith forums in the countries of the East and of the central part of the continent, activities that were followed up with interest by the leadership of the B'nai B'rith Europe, represented in great number at this seminary. Together with Dr. **Aurel Vainer**, president of F.J.C.R., member of the Parliament, and **José Iacobescu**, president of the B'nai B'rith Forum "Dr. Moses Rosen" Romania, **Reinold Simon**, president of B'nai B'rith Europe, **John Reeves**, vice-president B'nai B'rith International, **Joseph Domberger**, life president of B'nai B'rith Europe, **David Lévy Bentolila**, honor life president of B'nai B'rith Europe, important members of the East-West Committee meant to guide and to offer an aid to the resuscitated loges after 1989, (**Alex Faiman**, **Erika Van Gelder**, **Hans Joosten**), participated to the event. The event was also honored by the presence of Her Excellence **Rodica Radian Gordon**, ambassador of the State of Israel in Romania, **Great Rabbi Menachem Hacohen**, **Rabbi Abraham Ehrenfeld**, **Valentin Naumescu**, State Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, **Laura Mircea**, from the same ministry, other persons.

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**The new anti-Semitism approached from different perspectives**

The lecture "B'nai B'rith Europe fighting against anti-Semitism and Racism" presented by **David Lévy Bentolila** offered the occasion for ideas exchange and for debates in this very ardent field. The document, richly illustrated by examples, presented the history of the modern anti-Semitism, the social, cultural and economical roots of what the lecturer called "the new Judeo-phobia" and underlined the fact that the anti-Semitism anticipated the totalitarian regimes. The speaker analyzed the newest form of the anti-Semitism: the anti-Zionism and Israel demonization. One of the main causes of the new anti-Semitism, Bentolila revealed, was the massive apparition of Muslims in Europe, many of them with radical conceptions. 9/11 represented an important element of stimulation of the radical Islamism, the Western world discovered the violent and fanatic Islamism.

**David Lévy Bentolila** also spoke about the strategy and tactics used in the anti-Semitism promotion, the disinformation instruments, especially television and web, the publication of leaflets spreading lies about Jews, the presence of pro-Palestinian literature. He also brought a presentation of the manifestation forms of the anti-Semitism in countries as Spain, France, Great Britain, Belgium, Holland and Sweden. The debates offered the participants the possibility to analyze the concrete situation in their countries, to discuss the most efficient instruments to fight the phenomena.

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**The Eastern loges presented their activities**

The "Cooperation East-West" constituted the second interesting topic of the seminary. It included the dialogue between the B'nai B'rith Europe responsables in charge with the issue and the representatives of some of the loges from Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia, Greece, all of them sharing their experience and difficulties that are confronting them in the particular context of their activity.

"The History and the Future of B'nai B'rith", author **Joseph H. Domberger**, reviewed the goals, the means and the methods used by the organization; the speaker exploited his vast experience and offered practical advice in the field. Speaking about attracting the youth, **John Reeves**, approached the necessity of the organization extension by recruiting new members, particularly among the youth, and he offered on his turn, specific guidance on the action directions. The subject "Judaic culture and Judaic identity", presented by **Reinold**

**Simon**, raised particularly interesting debates.

The B'nai B'rith Forum "Dr. Moses Rosen" from Romania brought its contribution with two presentations: "The Jews from Romania – past and present", by dr. **Lya Benjamin**, from which the participants could learn fragments of the Romanian Jews' history and the problems they were confronted with, and "Romania – traditions and preoccupations", by **José Iacobescu**, the president of the Forum, who approached the present problems of the Jews in our country and the modality in which the Forum "Dr. Moses Rosen" is involved in the Judaic life.

This meeting East – West, as the seminary could be entitled, offered also the opportunity of initiating personal relationship. Brothers and sisters from different loges talked to each other in the pauses, they made jokes, ate and drank at the lunches offered by the organizers. The participants from Romania could meet the leaders they have only heard about till now, and the guests, most of them for the first time in our country, visited the Jewish monuments, participated at the Sabbath prayer at the Choral Temple and at the Kiddush that followed, and they were very impressed by the dimensions of the Jewish life in Romania. The leadership of B'nai B'rith Europe was so satisfied with the exceptional event organization that they think of the possibility of organizing in Bucharest the next B'nai B'rith Europe Convention in two years from now.

Important personalities of B'nai B'rith Europe – Reinold Simon, John Reeves, David Lévy Bentolila and Joseph Domberger, as well as the president of the B'nai B'rith Forum "Dr. Moses Rosen" from Romania, José Iacobescu, shared their thoughts related to this event.

**PRESS RELEASE**

**B'NAI B'RITH FORUM ON "UNITY OF B'NAI B'RITH FIGHTING AGAINST ANTI-SEMITISM AND RACISM"**

Members of B'nai B'rith from twelve European countries took part in a Forum on the unity of fighting against anti-Semitism and Racism, which took place in Bucharest, on May 13-15, 2006. The Forum was opened by Reinold Simon, President of B'nai B'rith Europe, and José Iacobescu, President of the B'nai B'rith Lodge "Dr. Moses Rosen Romania", in Bucharest. Greetings were also brought by Mr. Valentin Naumescu, representing the Foreign Affairs Ministry of Romania, Mrs. Rodica Radian-Gordon, Israeli Ambassador in Romania, Mr. Victor Babiu, President of the Romanian Chamber of Commerce and Mr. Aurel Vainer, President of the Federation of the Jewish Communities in Romania. The keynote lecture of the Forum was delivered by David Lévy-Bentolila, Honorary Life President of B'nai B'rith, on the subject "Anti-Semitism and the Crisis of the European Society". It was followed by a discussion during which the participants described the situation in a number of countries and measures which have been taken or are still necessary in order to fight anti-Semitism and racism. Issues concerning Jewish culture and Jewish identity, the development of B'nai B'rith and the strengthening of relationship between B'nai B'rith in Western and in Central and Eastern Europe were also discussed. The Forum heard lectures on the history and the present situation of Jews in Romania. The participants noted with concern that anti-Semitic feelings and anti-Semitic incidents were increasing in a number of European countries. Fighting anti-Semitism and racism should be considered as the first priority of B'nai B'rith Europe in the present situation.

The Forum expressed the strong support of B'nai B'rith Europe for the admission of Romania and Bulgaria to the European Union. It also called upon all European Governments to apply with utmost strength and energy legislation designed to prevent and to punish manifestation of anti-Semitism and racism and recommended that such legislation should be adopted in those countries in which it does not yet exist.

**Trebuie să știm să folosim succesul și credem că vom reuși**

*Urmare din pag. 1* pentru că au trebuit găsite sursele prin care seminarul s-a putut materializa, ceea ce n-a fost deloc ușor. Faptul că s-au primit scrisori de mulțumire din partea conducerii B'nai B'rith Europa, a sporit sentimentul participanților că au fost prezenți la un eveniment de anvergură. Pentru comitetul de organizare, reușita a însemnat o satisfacție care compensează, credem, eforturile făcute.

- **O retrospectivă și perspective ale acțiunilor Forumului?**

- În noiembrie 2005, la Conferința de la Madrid, am solicitat sprijinul B'nai B'rith Europa pentru intrarea României în U.E. la 1 ianuarie 2007. Datorită sprijinului primit de la președintele B'nai B'rith Europa, Reinold Simon, cetățean olandez, deputații creștin-democrați din Parlamentul olandez au votat tratatul de aderare a României la U.E. Acordarea acestui sprijin a atras mulțumiri adresate Forumului din partea autorităților de stat române. În mod cert, relațiile între B'nai B'rith Europa și B'nai B'rith România s-au consolidat și se vor dezvolta în continuare. Ne propunem o adâncire a relațiilor cu organizațiile B'nai B'rith din estul și vestul Europei. Trebuie să știm să folosim succesul acestei importante manifestări internaționale și credem că vom reuși. Dorim să atragem

**Interviu cu JOSÉ IACOBESCU, președintele Forumului B'nai B'rith „Dr. Moses Rosen” din România**



fonduri pentru conservarea patrimoniului cultural iudaic și să inițiem o serie de activități de ajutorare a fraților și surorilor noastre cu posibilități materiale reduse.

- **Un cuvânt despre relațiile Forumului cu F.C.E.R. și C.E.B.**

- Cuvântul e *mulțumesc*. Reușita acestui Seminar se datorează și sprijinului primit din partea F.C.E.R., personal, din partea președintelui, Aurel Vainer, ca și din partea președintelui C.E.B., Osy Lazăr. Mulțumesc pentru sprijinul deosebit primit din partea dnelor Irina Cajal, Lya Benjamin, Magdalena Boiangiu, a dlor Hary Kuller, Liviu Beris, Manole Iosiper, ca și din partea vice-

președintelui B'nai B'rith România, dna Ida Schottek. La sfârșit, dar nu în cele din urmă, mulțumesc Marelui Rabin Menachem Hacohen și Rabinului Abraham Ehrenfeld pentru participare și asigurarea cașrutului la mesele oferite delegaților.

- **Dominanta Seminarului?**

- Numai uniți, putem combate eficient antisemitismul și dezvoltă legături cu evreei din întreaga Europă.