

## **Commemoration of World War II in Bologna**

Author: Michaela Merli

20.03.2016

### **Memory and legacy of WWII in Italy and Bologna**

When it comes to collective memory, Italy tends to blame others for what happened during conflicts. However, Mussolini and Fascism were active contributors to the terror of the Second World War: Italy was an ally of Germany in The War and therefore took part in the deportation of Jews and other people to the concentration camps, even setting up its own camps in the Balkans.

Despite that, most of the Italians tend to blame only Germany for the Holocaust, even if Italy and its government actually had an active role in it.

In Italy, the memories about the Second World War are mostly linked, on the one hand, to the victims of the Holocaust and more generally of the concentration camps, and on the other hand to the movement of resistance against Fascism and Nazism, and thus to the Liberation War that ended with Liberation Day on April 25<sup>th</sup>, 1945.

In Italy, like in other European countries including Germany, the date of January 27<sup>th</sup> is now officially recognized as a 'Day of remembrance for Holocaust victims', because it marks the day when the advancing Soviet army liberated the largest Nazi death camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau, in Poland. In Italy the 'Day of Memory' was established on July 2000 with Law 211; relatively recently but even so, five years ahead of the official proclamation by the UN General Assembly of the 27<sup>th</sup> of January as the International Holocaust Remembrance Day (as occurred in 2005). On this day, every year, Cities and Municipalities organise several events, ceremonies and cultural initiatives, as well as collective moments -especially in schools of all levels- for the

narration and analysis of facts about the Shoah and the fate of political and military deportees who ended up in Nazi camps. The aim is to preserve the memory of this tragic and dark period in Europe and in Italy, so that similar events can never happen again.

In the City of Bologna, in particular, the City Council holds a solemn session on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January every year, inviting some outstanding personality to hold a keynote speech and also inviting many students of different schools of Bologna to take part in the session.

In year 2012, for example, we were honoured to receive the Mayor of the City of Mauthausen, known during WWII for being the seat of one of the largest labour camp complexes in the German-controlled part of Europe, as a guest of the City Council and he gave a keynote speech in the presence of many associations and groups of ex-deportees and many classes of students.

There are of course many other initiatives in town around the 27<sup>th</sup> of January, also promoted by representatives of the civil society and/or by other organisations.

This year, to celebrate the 70th anniversary of Remembrance Day, Bologna's Jewish Community in partnership with the Union of Italian Jewish Communities and the City of Bologna (among others) have launched the 'Bologna Shoah Memorial Competition'; a design contest with the aim to create a 'Shoah Memorial' to be located at a significant site in the city. This Competition invites artists and designers from all over the world to take part.

Also worth to be mentioned is the initiative organised this year by YouNet in partnership with the Municipal Library Salaborsa, i.e. a session of the 'Human Library', where witnesses and parents of victims of WWII became 'living books' available for the public, narrating the personal experiences they lived in those hard and dark years .

On the other hand, the most important events related to WWII in Italy are those connected with the Liberation War of the partisans, the so-called Resistance, where many Italians started fighting for something they truly believed in.

In Italy, the 25<sup>th</sup> of April is Liberation Day (Festa della Liberazione) and it's declared a national holiday.

Just because of the big role the resistance movement had in the liberation of Italy this date is also called Anniversary of the Resistance (Anniversario della Resistenza), and it commemorates the end of the Second World War and the end of Nazi occupation of the country in 1945.

In Bologna, in particular, the American troops entered the city on April 21<sup>st</sup>, 1945, finally freeing it. The new mayor of the city, Giuseppe Dozza, put great effort in the reconstructing of all the destroyed buildings.

### **The role of Bologna in WWII**

During The War, Bologna paid a high prize for the alliance of Italy with German Nazis: the city was bombed many times by the Allied Forces because of its strategic position and its connection with railways and roads. Important monuments and historical buildings were hit, 43% of houses damaged or destroyed and over 2,200 civilians died.

After the armistice on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September, 1943, a strong movement of partisans developed in Bologna and the Province, under the leadership of the National Liberation Committee.

Many battles were fought between the partisans and the Nazis / Fascists, and one of the most famous was the Battle of Porta Lama, on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1944, which took place near one of the big gates of Bologna's city walls (Porta Lama) and was one of the most important battles in any urban centre in Italy in that period.

This is why, every 7<sup>th</sup> of November, the City of Bologna commemorates the Battle of Porta Lama with ceremonies on the venue of the battle; today in Porta Lama stand two statues of partisan soldiers in memory of the many who died in the battle.

Among the many, there is one even more famous event that occurred in the Province of Bologna and it is the slaughter of Monte Sole, when the whole population of two villages (Marzabotto and Grizzana Morandi) was killed by Nazi troops.

In Marzabotto and Monte Sole, a museum was built in which the atrocities of the slaughter are remembered and every year on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April a commemoration ceremony is held.

At the end of the war, over 14,000 fighting partisans and 2,000 dead civilians were Bologna's tribute to its liberation. For such a high number of victims, the Town standard (flag) was awarded a gold medal for Bologna's resistance against the Nazis and Fascism, i.e. for Bologna being one of the leading cities in the Liberation War.

And this is a reason of great pride for all the citizens of Bologna.



### **Further reading**

<http://concorsi.archibo.it/shoahmemorialcompetition/home>

<https://www.facebook.com/events/394336890746664/>

Text by Michaela Merli  
translation from Italian – Michaela Merli  
Proof reader English: Artemis Nikolaidou-Vichou

### **Contact for further informations:**

#### **YouNet Association**

[www.you-net.eu](http://www.you-net.eu)

Tel: +39 3336846684



## **BRIDGING GENERATIONS**

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission through the EUROPE FOR CITIZENS programme of the European Union.

This research paper reflects the views of the author of this document. The Lead partner and the European Commission cannot be held responsible for any of the information contained in the document.

### **Lead partner**



### **Jugend- & Kulturprojekt e.V.**

Bautzner Str. 49  
01099 Dresden  
Germany

Tel.: +49 351 8104766  
Fax.: +49 351 89960544  
E-Mail: [info@jkpev.de](mailto:info@jkpev.de)  
[www.jkpev.de](http://www.jkpev.de)  
[www.facebook.com/jkpev.de](https://www.facebook.com/jkpev.de)