



Austrian National Exhibition at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum to be Closed

22 Oct 2013

On 22 October, the Austrian national exhibition at the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau (Poland) will be closed until further notice. During its closure the exhibition building, the former Block 17 – which used to house camp inmates and is subject to monument protection – will be subjected to conservational investigations, renovated, and a new exhibition developed. The National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism has been entrusted with the coordination and planning of the new exhibition. “In the previous exhibition at Auschwitz, Austria is presented as the first victim of National Socialism, which is no longer in keeping with the modern take on history,” explained Hannah Lessing, Secretary General of the National Fund. “Now, it is important to design a new, historically revised exhibition and to carry out the renovation work necessary for its installation.” As a first step, Lessing cited the renewed call to tender currently being issued for the positions of Curator and Scientific Director for this remembrance project.

The 1978 exhibition, which was designed with significant input from Auschwitz survivors, will no longer be accessible to visitors. It will be carefully dismantled and archived in Austria so that conservational investigations can be carried out. In order to do justice to its importance as a contemporary historical document and to preserve it for posterity, the previous exhibition will be documented in a photo book. Parts of the existing exhibition, such as the glass window designed by Auschwitz survivor Prof. Heinrich Sussmann, shall also be included in the new exhibition in recognition of their symbolism.

The renovation of “Block 17” shall safeguard the historical structure and be carried out in keeping with the requirements for protected monuments and following the guiding principles of efficiency, budgetary economy and sustainability.

The National Fund and the Federal Chancellery had already published a Europe-wide call to tender for a Curator and a Scientific Director of the new exhibition. The number of valid and qualified offers was not sufficient to make a competitive decision. Therefore, the procedure was revoked in order to uphold principles of competition. The National Fund, in concert with the participating Federal Ministries and the Future Fund for the Republic of Austria, has sought to implement the renewed call to tender with improved terms, in particular regarding the budgetary provision.

“Auschwitz is an important place of remembrance in Europe and forms part of an active culture of remembrance of the horrors of Nazi rule. The European call to tender is intended to pay tribute to this status and the new exhibition shall present Austria’s Nazi past as a history of victims and of perpetrators,” Ms Lessing summed up the challenges for the renewal of the exhibition.