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Call for entries: Simon Wiesenthal Prize

17 Aug 2021

Submission period closes on 30 September 2021; the prize will be awarded for the first time and is annually endowed with 30,000 €.

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Vienna (PK) - The Simon Wiesenthal Prize initiated by National Council President Wolfgang Sobotka and resolved by the National Council, which will be awarded annually, was announced today in Parliament at the Hofburg. National Council President Sobotka, Jewish Community (IKG) President Oskar Deutsch and Hannah Lessing, Secretary General of the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism, provided information on the details and context of the prize.

The National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism, established at the Austrian Parliament, is inviting individuals and groups from civil society to submit entries for the Simon Wiesenthal Prize. As a sign of Austria's responsibility in the fight against antisemitism, the National Fund will award the Simon Wiesenthal Prize to up to three individuals or groups for outstanding civic engagement to combat antisemitism and promote Holocaust education. It is endowed with a total of 30,000 € each year. For 2021, it is possible to submit an entry or nominate a candidate from now until 30 September using the online entry form on the Simon Wiesenthal Prize website www.wiesenthalpreis.at, available in German and English.

Simon Wiesenthal (1908-2005) has shaped the worldwide reckoning with the crimes committed under Nazism like hardly any other. From the moment he was liberated from Mauthausen concentration camp, he made it his life's work to preserve the memory of the victims of Nazi terror. The prize aspires to honour the memory of the architect, publicist and writer Simon Wiesenthal.

Sobotka: Calling civil society to step into the spotlight

Simon Wiesenthal was one of the most outstanding figures of Austria's Second Republic and set the standard in the fight against antisemitism, emphasised National Council President Sobotka. The Austrian Parliament deems it imperative that democracy fight injustice and the suppression of historical truths, and feels duty-bound to critically examine the history of the Second Republic. For this reason, it was befitting to honour the prize with Wiesenthal's name.

Civic engagement is needed to help combat antisemitism, Sobotka stressed. The Simon Wiesenthal Prize aims to shine a light on civil society and provide backing for its projects, also internationally, said the President of the National Council.

According to Sobotka, the jury comprises the following members: Katharina von Schnurbein, Antisemitism Commissioner of the EU Commission since December 2015, Monika Schwarz-Friesel, full professor at the Institute for Language and Communication at the Technical University of Berlin, Brigitte Bailer, lecturer in Contemporary History at the University of Vienna, Barbara Stelzl-Marx, university professor for European Contemporary History at the Karl Franzens University of Graz, as well as Ariel Muzicant, who was appointed as representative by Simon Wiesenthal's family, and Jewish Community President Oskar Deutsch.

Jewish Community President Deutsch emphasised the importance of the award, both as a tribute to Wiesenthal and for commitment to combatting antisemitism. With antisemitism on the rise, a strong civil society was needed to counter this development – something that required courage and strength, as had also been demonstrated by Wiesenthal.

Hannah Lessing, Secretary General of the National Fund, highlighted the international dimension of the prize. Antisemitism concerns everyone, and the broad entry criteria reflects this – also in order to shine a light on civil society activities.

Resolution by the National Council, prize awarded in two categories

A bill introduced by the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), Austrian Social Democratic Party (SPÖ), the Greens and the New Austria and Liberal Forum (NEOS) on 17 June 2020 and passed in the National Council on 7 July 2020 laid the foundation for the Simon Wiesenthal Prize.

The Simon Wiesenthal Prize will be awarded in two categories: civic engagement to combat antisemitism (7,500 €) and civic engagement to promote Holocaust education (7,500 €). In addition, a main prize of 15,000 € will be awarded for outstanding civic engagement to combat antisemitism and/or promote Holocaust education.

In keeping with these categories, the goals of the work of the potential prize winners are: to actively foster, consolidate and impart knowledge and awareness about the Holocaust, to increase understanding of the mechanisms and consequences of antisemitism, and to raise awareness of the dangers of antisemitism in the present. Understanding and sensitivity should be fostered in areas where a critical attitude towards antisemitism should be particularly encouraged.

The Board of Trustees of the National Fund, chaired by the President of the National Council, decides on the basis of shortlist compiled by a six-member jury. The jury is composed of the President of the Jewish Religious Community in Austria, a representative appointed by the Wiesenthal family, as well as other recognised figures from public or cultural life in Austria or abroad or persons with an academic reputation in the field of contemporary history or in another relevant academic field. The prize winners shall be chosen by the end of November, the award ceremony is planned to take place in a ceremony at the Parliament in December.

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