In recent years, we have been fighting together to preserve the Auschwitz relics. We have founded the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation, which collects funds for the preservation of the former camp around the world. This matter cannot be overestimated. Let’s be honest: eyewitnesses, myself included, will be gone soon. It’s a matter of several years. Only the authentic Memorial Site will remain.

Władysław Bartoszewski, 2010
This year the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation is celebrating its 10th anniversary, which serves as an outstanding opportunity to look back at what has been accomplished so far and establish a solid strategy for the future. The need for securing the Auschwitz Memorial for next generations requires a thorough plan beyond the 75th anniversary of the camp’s liberation, which the world will commemorate on January 27, 2020.

Therefore, in order to capture the most significant thoughts of the recent 10 years, we are presenting you interviews with the Foundation’s key players, who shaped the process, facilitated the building of the Perpetual Capital on state, corporate and individual level and will continue safeguarding the Holocaust Victims’ and Survivors’ testimony in the years to come. In the course of the interviews we tried to cover, inter alia, the following aspects:

• Foundation strategy and leadership: why build an Endowment?
• Effectiveness in fundraising
• Operational management, financial transparency and investment security
• Global coalition-building for the preservation of the Auschwitz Memorial
• Conservation as a means of preserving authenticity
• Role of diplomacy in fostering memory
• Role of the Foundation in Holocaust education
• Challenges ahead

This publication also includes a timeline, project list and photos illustrating the most important events in the Foundation’s history.

In 2019 we are also commemorating the 4th anniversary of Prof. Władysław Bartoszewski’s passing. It was him who in 2010 agreed to sign the founding act of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation. And to his memory we are dedicating this publication.

Warsaw, November 2019
What is the primary task of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation at this moment?

The foundation originated with a single goal—amassing and administering assets to finance preservation work at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oświęcim. This purpose was very strictly written into the statute so that the necessary could become the possible: the continuing realization of a task that of necessity remains constant, because today’s needs will remain the needs of succeeding generations.

The truth is that the problem of maintaining authenticity has yet to be satisfactorily resolved at any genuine memorial site, neither in Europe nor anywhere else in the world. The majority of memorial sites are associated with the twentieth century and are comparatively young spaces in comparison with other landmarks like castles, cathedrals, or the pyramids. The institutions with responsibility for memorial sites were not conceived from the beginning to safeguard authenticity. This is because memorial sites were 10, 15, or 20 years old, and at times even newer. At the time, no one planned that something still so new would require preservation efforts. Nevertheless, even at that point, it could be seen with the naked eye at the former camps in Europe, for example, or in the ruins of buildings in Rwanda where the Tutsi were murdered, that the objects were aging rapidly because they were not built—like the cathedrals—for the centuries, but rather as short-term edifices of incarceration and annihilation.
In this light, it is a certain malady in all of Europe that, while we have well over a hundred institutionalized memorial sites connected with the Nazi German camp system, nowhere has a planned conservation framework been implemented to exercise stewardship over authenticity. When a current need arises somewhere, a specialist company is quickly brought in. Such firms are naturally outside contractors that concentrate on completely different monuments, such as those of eighteenth- or nineteenth-century provenance. This leads to various technical and methodological difficulties. Auschwitz-Birkenau is the first place in the world where it has been possible to overcome this deficiency, this fundamental inadequacy. Because of the dimensions of the Memorial, however, this takes gigantic financial inputs.

What sort of funding are we talking about?

We are speaking today about the need to generate up to 20 million złotych, or four to five million euros annually. This is the perspective for the next decade or two. Whether the needs will increase or not, will become clear with time. We do not know what condition the Memorial will be in technically, or what new scientific, technological, or preservationist possibilities will emerge in the coming generation. Today, this is the scale calculated to arrest deterioration and preserve those components that are most vulnerable to the aging process.

The Museum undertakes work in agreement with the general monument conservation officer and with international bodies such as the International Auschwitz Council which serves in a consultative capacity. The goal of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation is to fully guarantee the financial perspective for the conservation tasks carried out by the Museum. As a rule, these are multi-year projects and often exceed the scope of government appropriations.

The founder of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation was Professor Władysław Bartoszewski. How did this come about?

At the time, Professor Bartoszewski was chairman of the International Auschwitz Council and a minister in the Chancellery of the Prime Minister of Poland. He had an excellent understanding of the role of authenticity at the Memorial, where as it happened he had been involved in discussions on this issue since the beginnings of free Poland, following the transition in 1989 and 1990. This discussion was already underway in small circles but on an ambitious, worldwide level.

At first, he found the concept of establishing a Perpetual Capital Fund slightly intimidating. Being the son and father of bankers, he was well aware of how difficult it would be to raise 120 million euro, and that the effort would have to be calculated over a long perspective. He pointed out at that time that perhaps he should stand aside in view of his age and the long-term nature of this undertaking. He said, “I can advise, put you in touch with someone, but nothing more.” Given his favorable but very circumspect stance, I felt that the wind had been taken out of my sails to a degree because, first, I had been counting on the example of his life and dedication to this cause making it possible to present the Foundation as a holistic project strictly connected with other aspects of the memory of Auschwitz-Birkenau, and second on the Professor’s international contacts in these circles, which were of the highest order, simply opening many doors.

Władysław Bartoszewski’s refusal left me feeling slightly downcast. Of course a Foundation established by Piotr Cywiński and Jacek Kastelaniec was conceivable, but it would not be as impressive. Several weeks went by and I learned that the Professor was going to receive an award from the German Roma and Sinti in Berlin in the early winter. He would be the first recipient. I traveled there. I thought that the Professor might be in a somewhat better mood and I might be able to broach the subject again. I went up to him after he received the award and, immediately after congratulating him, reminded him that we were setting up the Foundation, and that we needed him to agree to be its patron. He replied without hesitation, “Piotr, you have already mentioned this. I’m too old. New energy, young people, a new generation are needed. It’s not for me.” He walked quickly away into the corridors of the Bundestag. At that point, Zofia Bartoszewska caught me by the arm and said in a conspiratorial tone, “Piotr, my husband and I are going to Zakopane right after Christmas. For two weeks. He’ll be bored to death there, he’ll be far away from public affairs and politics, and he’ll start looking around for something to do. Please come there under some sort of pretext, but not too soon. In the middle of the second week, so that he’ll be good and bored. Then there’ll be a chance that you can convince him.” I was left alone in the corridor and I thought that because I’d tried twice, there was no reason not to try a third time.
Somewhere around New Year I went to Zakopane on the pretext of getting the Professor to sign something. At the agreed time I walked into the ZAiKS villa. Władysław Bartoszewski was coming down the tight spiral staircase at his usual vigorous pace, and he was carrying a stack of papers. I thought that he had obviously been working on some other subjects. When he saw me, he said, “Piotr, it’s good that you’re finally here. We have a lot to talk about.” It was then that I realized that in those papers he had several proposals for the makeup of the Foundation board. It turned out that, thanks to Zofia, the third approach had done the trick. It was something very important. We sat down to work on the structure of the foundation, its bylaws, and other fundamental matters.

When we had started thinking about raising the initial funds, I met with Kalman Sultanik, a Zionist activist from New York connected with the World Jewish Congress and a former Auschwitz prisoner. In the 1990s, he had joined with Ronald Lauder in assembling certain financing for the preliminary conservation work on selected Auschwitz-Birkenau buildings. Kalman Sultanik had said back then, “Remember one thing—don’t pursue private donors. Everybody’s after them. You’ll only get into quarrels with those who have been resorting to them for a long time.” I took this to heart because Kalman Sultanik had gigantic fundraising experience.

Kalman Sultanik clearly sensed that those with the greatest interest in our idea of maintaining the authenticity of Auschwitz for decades would be states. These were the years when teaching about the Holocaust was being introduced into school curricula in many countries in Europe, in the democratic world. In connection with this, even the slow disappearance of memorials would undercut the sense of education based on tours, visits, and learning about authentic sites. This was Kalman Sultanik’s intuition, and it strongly influenced our initial choices.

For the first six or seven years, we held talks only with governments. The overwhelming majority of the fund today is money from the governments of various countries.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation has been in existence for 10 years. What has been accomplished in this time, especially in regard to preserving the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial?

I think that a great deal has been done. I try to evaluate it coldly and objectively. When we started 10 years ago, literally everyone said that either the project would fail or that it would take such a long time to raise the money that everything would fall apart in the meantime. But when Germany publicly declared in December 2009 that it was donating 60 million euros to the Perpetual Fund, we set in motion a process that is still underway today. Aside from the sum of money itself, this was proof that the project had gained an ally that believed in it. That was the first big success.

In a similarly short time, over the course of three years, we managed to create a vigorous focal point of thinking about the preservation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. At the beginning of the century, in 2004 or 2005, there were five or six full-time conservation positions at the Museum itself, thanks to the financing of a workshop by Ronald Lauder. Today there are over 30, and I am talking about certified graduate conservationists rather than artisans, workers, or contractors. Furthermore, these are people with various specializations, in stone, wood, art works, paper, and so on. Other specialists include biologists, architects, fitters, and structural engineers. There has been a thorough discussion about this team with university and academic centers, and research institutes, thanks to which it has been possible to define the conservation methods. As much as the world knows perfectly well how to conserve Egyptian papyri or mummies, no one has developed methods for conserving many objects from the mid-twentieth century that have not undergone preservation so far. I am thinking about plastic, composite material, or materials in everyday exploitation that under normal circumstances are simply replaced by new ones.
Today, a toothbrush is something that is used for a few weeks, or in the mid-twentieth century perhaps for a few months, but it is not and never has been intended for permanent use. It’s the same with buildings. No one conserves cement, you simply pour a new floor. If a brick wall is crooked, you don’t conserve it. You rebuild the wall. For Auschwitz-Birkenau, it was necessary to develop new methods. To do this, we had to bring together the best specialists, people who were ready to explore new methods.

The next stage was to ground the Foundation in reality—that is, to develop principles for investing, and procedures for conveying funding to the Museum and accounting for it. From the beginning, two things were crucial for us. First, the security of the fund is more important than yield. Even if there were no earnings in a certain period, we would not increase the investment risk and expose the Perpetual Capital to losses. The second principle is the absolute transparency of our operations. There are no subjects that will not be made public. All Foundation reports are posted on the Internet in two languages as soon as they are approved by the relevant bodies.

To sum up: we succeeded in forming a team and conservationist thinking within the Museum itself. Let me remind you that nowhere else in the world, in any former camp or similar facility, is there a comprehensive conservation workshop. Only recently has something similar begun at Majdanek. There are several people who work at Yad Vashem, several people who work at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, and there are two or three full-time positions at the prison in Phnom Penh in Cambodia. We therefore could not “piggyback” on outside expertise. We had to develop our own experience on the spot.

These were the two main tracks in the initial phase. One was very museum-centered, getting conservation off to a start. The second was creating the operational principles for the Foundation so that it could be effective and transparent, without risk-taking.

Does the Foundation cooperate with foreign organizations having related statutory goals?

Yes, with many of them. For example the Friends of Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation (now the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Foundation), an organization that was founded in the United States for the purpose of raising funds for the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation. Under the influence of Ronald Lauder and others, that conception began to grow and evolve. An enlarged committee was formed and each important contributor was invited to join. The committee met twice over the course of the year to discuss the future of the Memorial, remembrance, education, and so on.

Around this Foundation, in a natural way, a group of backers formed who were sensitive and ready to support conservation work with their resources and contacts. In many cases these were people who were active in political life and local government in the United States, Canada, and other places throughout the world.

I think that sooner or later every cultural institution feels the need for these kinds of informal or formal public bodies involved in competent discussions that lead to the evolution of certain attitudes, needs, and visions. What the future of this body will be, time will tell. It is also significant that through this organization we can also improve the cooperation between the Museum and various partners from the United States. These people play the de facto role of bridge builders, and this has a very concrete impact on many tangible things. For example, the opening of the big Auschwitz exhibition in Manhattan would not have occurred without the range of friendly partners that we have there. And it’s also that way in other countries.
What was the hardest thing for you in the growth of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation?

We all had excellent intuition, but no one knew how to do these things. Jacek Kastelaniec: had a degree in journalism, I am a medieval historian, but at the beginning there was not a single financier, not a single investment specialist. Fortunately, we met many people who advised us and were ready to commit their time. Thanks to this, the Foundation was focused on a very concrete track from the beginning. There was no trial and error.

One example here is Józef Wancer, the doyen of Polish banking after 1989, a man of enormous experience and goodwill. But there were also other specialists in investment and finance who perceived the very concrete goal of this madness and, pro bono, lent us their support.

The greatest difficulty was that the political decision makers might even have been convinced as to the goal, but this did not mean that they would make the appropriations we wanted. They are responsible for public money, from the taxpayers. They must be sure that their electorate, the citizens, understand such a decision. If the French, for instance, appropriate five million euro for this purpose, they must be able to justify not assigning that money to improving the railroad infrastructure, building schools, or renovating hospitals.

Understanding the essence of Auschwitz is the goal, and not the starting point of this project. It was necessary to undertake a series of media interviews in each of these countries to explain the gist of our project and its importance for a given society and state. We had to have a sense of the atmosphere and the tradition of solving problems of this kind in various countries, to have a feel for the divisions between various political alignments, to calculate the role of the media, to trust that journalists would treat the subject responsibly and not sensationalize it. In two years, I talked to 400 or 500 journalists. There were days when I gave two interviews per hour in various languages and, aside from one or two cases, I met with a very favorable reception that was reflected in the appropriate reporting.

I am convinced that the success of the Foundation depends on the people who created it, on those who did not place obstacles in its way, and on those who supported it with their advice. The unprecedented social and public responsibility of the journalistic community was a weighty contribution. We often think about the media in a simplistic, suspicious way, yet here it turned out that journalists did phenomenal work, avoided sensationalism, and explained why it was important.

What is the source of the success of the Foundation so far?

The audacity of the project. It had quickly become clear that the "point-by-point" experience up to that time—one barracks here, some other building there—was no overall solution. Second, the budgetary resources of the Ministry of Culture meant thinking only in year-to-year categories. At best there might be a two- or three-year government program, but that was unreliable on the scale of generations. Even the financial perspective of the European Union meant planning for a maximum of seven years. It became clear to everyone that the standard solutions offered no answer to our main problem.

When we talked to politicians and officials, we did not say that the problem was 200 hectares, 150 buildings, hundreds of thousands of objects, 300 ruins, or decades of work. We approached them with a solution and a request for support. We presented the very straightforward idea of amassing perpetual capital for long-term conservation work, and statutory and legal guarantees that the money would not be used for any other purpose. It worked.

In view of the innovative nature of the idea, people were curious and talked about our proposal to the degree that some organizations began considering whether to base their future on funding of this type. It is no coincidence that over the last decade the Holocaust Museum in Washington has also begun creating a fund to ensure the further operation of that institution. Their sources, of course, are private benefactors, not like with the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation, but then again the nature of the two places is different.
How much time passed from the idea of setting up the Foundation to the acquisition of the first funding?

A couple of months, perhaps a year. The whole idea was that we would not expand the Foundation into non-essential areas, because we really have very little time. If we created this project 30 years from now, it would be too late. Auschwitz-Birkenau would fall apart in a moment and there would be nothing left to rescue.

Aside from that, we are talking about funds from public sources, which means there can’t be any waste. If the money is public, then everything must be laid out for public scrutiny. This turned out to work wonders. There came a certain moment when, for extraneous reasons, the representative of one of the donor states attempted in 2010 to call into question our cost estimates for conservation. As it turned out, more than 20 other states participating in this project lined up unanimously behind the Foundation, because they had known from the beginning that the sums were justifiable and realistic, and at times even below the average in the European market. In a word, transparency came to our defense.

One of the principles guiding the Foundation is the security of the funds invested. Please say some more about this policy.

It was for this purpose that we established the Financial Committee as an advisory body. We agreed that safety is more important than yield, which means that we invest exclusively in securities whose rating is not lower than that of Poland. This is not wildly productive of earnings, but it avoids threats. On top of this comes the diversification of the financial instruments and currencies that the Foundation possesses. In this connection, the thresholds were established in short order. As novices we felt wary, and we wanted to make a very clear statement: “We are not going to go wild.” The safety of this fund intimidated us, and it still does. Later, it turned out that the devil is in the details and we needed experts to develop guidelines in areas we knew nothing about. They helped us choose securities, the makeup of our portfolio, foreign currencies. At first, we invested in euros and Polish zloty because these were the currencies we received donations in. Later came contributions from the United States and we had to set up a portfolio in dollars to limit the currency risk. Here, we needed some advice. It turned out that seven people from various countries, with different specializations, people already working around the clock, wanted to devote what little time they had pro bono for the sake of an idea they believed in. They joined us in creating an additional Foundation body—the Financial Committee, because this was what the nature and interests of our mission required.
I would add that further safeguards for the Foundation are the International Committee and the Foundation Council. The Committee comprises representatives of all the donor states. It meets once a year and has access to all our documentation. The majority of the states delegate their ambassadors, resident in Poland, as a cost-saving measure. This gives us a fantastic para-diplomatic platform. In short order we were on friendly terms with almost all the ambassadors, and they have full statutory rights within the Foundation.

As for the Foundation Council, it has statutory independence from any outside pressures. There are no nominees delegated by any institutions, offices, or organizations. The Council is made up of people who have been dedicated to this issue for years, and who in many cases have great authority on their own. This is exceptionally important. Security, transparency, and complete independence of any influence are the strengths of the Foundation.

What characteristics are necessary to successfully head the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation?

That’s not an appropriate question for me, because I have filled this enviable—or not-so-enviable—role from the beginning. I don’t think it’s a matter of leadership—it’s a matter of choosing the right people, in effect a small team. There are a few staffers, a few members of the board, and fewer than a score members of the Council. It’s more a matter of the interactions among these people, of their motivation and understanding of the role that each of them plays in this project, the importance of not only the material preservation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, but also, and this is the bottom line, of remembrance itself.

This is a case where no one person made the running. At the beginning, Jacek Kastalaniec and I had the entire burden on our shoulders, but then other people came along and each one of them identified with this project and realized how important it was. Each one of them realized that our work made it possible to keep the message of Auschwitz visible. The sense of this role was a very important motivational factor for these people. And it still is.

The simplicity of this idea and the clear division of internal functions meant a lot. When a team is well chosen in terms of innovation, the concept of the program, education, a certain system of values, and when the people are motivated by the essence of the issue, it feels good. You can imagine a foundation employing scores of people, with various prerogatives and bodies, that would be far more costly, far less effective, and less transparent—it would squander its trustworthiness. We opted for minimalism, and that strikes me as the key.

It’s hard to talk about leadership, all the more so because none of us were specialists in the areas we took on. At the beginning we were asked, “Who’s going to do all these things?” The very question underestimated the human capital behind the Foundation from the beginning. We haven’t heard that question for a long time. After we had been in existence for a few years, Forbes placed us third on their list of Polish foundations, and that put an end to a lot of questions.
On the basis of your experience with the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation and the Museum, you are one of the initiators of a new discipline called “The Economics of Memorial Sites.” Where does that idea come from and what benefits can this specialization contribute to the success of memorial sites?

When the foundation was up and running, we wanted to compare our experience with that of other memorial sites, especially on the basis of various models of museums, educational institutions, and monuments facing similar problems. I am thinking of underfunding and discrepancies in definitions, measurements, and administrative issues. We thought it was worth considering this in a comprehensive and analytical way, and weighing up whether there are options for improvement, change, the application of parameters, and dynamic actions by these centers, instead of waiting for more decades to pass.

I am not convinced that there will ever be more money in the memorial institution basket, and this raises questions about the effectiveness of the way existing financial resources are used—as well as trust as the basis for cooperation with educational institutions and the tourism sector. In many places, they rely on intuitive thinking. I believe that given the wealth of experience in European countries, it is worth seeking out norms and models that can enhance the effectiveness of our work. For the sole purpose of getting more out of the effort put into the operation of memorial sites, better end results for the mission. All the more so because we are talking about sites that are exceptionally significant. They determine our imagination, the future of this continent with its societies and personal interactions. I see this as a game with crucial significance. Our assets are very limited, and so for the first time in a decade it is necessary to think about optimizing the implementation of this highly responsible mission.

In what directions do you see the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation developing?

In the first place, the Perpetual Capital, as it exists today, is the backbone of the Foundation. Perhaps the Foundation can realize other projects on the basis of other resources, or other goals while remaining in this thematic area. The door is always open.

In view of the return on investments, cost trends in the conservation market, and the exchange rate, we are very seriously analyzing the size of a Perpetual Capital Fund that would make it possible, without unnecessary risk, to guarantee the safekeeping of the Memorial. At the moment when we were laying the groundwork in 2008, the situation on the financial markets was different. The Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation was the first experiment in creating a model structure for maintaining Auschwitz-Birkenau. At this moment, it is no longer the only one. There is another example in the form of the Association for the Administration of Memorial Sites. The Auschwitz-Birkenau Institute, called into existence to carry out cultural diplomacy in relation to the Memorial, is yet another uniquely valuable instrument. More structures will arise to develop the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial in a certain way, marking out new ways of thinking about reinforcing remembrance.

It must be remembered that today the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum is formally a state museum. That is one of the possible structural options, not the only one in Europe. This solution has its strong points—it appreciably raises the safety level; for example when exhibits are loaned out. It also introduces a certain freedom in adapting to new tasks. It seems to me that developing various additional instrumentalities for the Memorial, which do not derive directly from the law on museums but have become museum realities, is a very good direction. This way of thinking has been proven in practice. This method makes it possible to seek out the best specialists in a wide variety of fields, but gathered around a single mission, which in effect strengthens the coherence of the undertaking and the power of messaging. And that in turn serves the overall reinforcement of remembrance.

Furthermore, once you’ve committed to something that makes sense but is difficult, it really is better to go all the way. That’s when you know that you’re alive. And that life really does have a deeper sense.
Why did Israel decide to join the international coalition of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation?

I think it is almost obvious, because of the importance of Auschwitz-Birkenau in Jewish history as the biggest industrial machine for taking Jewish lives. Auschwitz-Birkenau also, more than any other death camp, is a symbol of the Holocaust. It is very important to preserve it as a warning for all of us, for the future, and to make it very visible. No book or film can give the experience of the actual place, this huge killing site. It would be unimaginable not to have Israel as part of the preservation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. It is the symbolic strength and uniqueness of Auschwitz-Birkenau that makes it important.

Auschwitz-Birkenau is the symbolic place of the Shoah. It is also a place of the suffering of Poles, Russians, Roma and Sinti, and others. How can the memory of the Shoah coexist with other memories?

I think that it has to coexist. Not exclusively in Auschwitz-Birkenau, because other places also require us to honor everybody killed there. It is necessary to speak about history as a whole—first referring to labor camps with all their victims, and then moving on to their transformation into extermination sites. For me it is very important to commemorate the Roma who were killed at KL Auschwitz. I think history is to be remembered as precisely as possible, and since these tragic events were part of the history of so many nationalities—first Polish prisoners, then Soviet POWs—we have to remember absolutely everything. I know the notion of the complete exceptionality of the Holocaust and partially it is correct, but then there is complete exceptionality of what happened with the Roma as well. We cannot exclude other histories, we need to keep them together.
I refuse to see them as competing narratives and I do think that is actually one of the main lessons. I don't really believe in lessons drawn from history, for example I don't use the term never again, because from my perspective the Rwandan killing was less technological but perhaps more preventable than other genocides. Certainly, the Holocaust has a special meaning, because of the particular conditions the Nazis introduced to kill the Jewish people of Europe. They used an almost theological structure of thinking about why and when each nation was supposed to be murdered, unless they belonged to the higher race. Following that logic would have meant that eventually the Slavic nations would also have to be killed. Maybe the magnitude would not have been the same as with the Jews, but doubtless the scale would have been massive. Genocides are happening and we are somehow collectively failing in preventing them.

The 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau is getting nearer—how do you see its historical meaning?

We keep repeating a very painful sentence, that every important anniversary might probably be one of the last with living survivors present. Hence the idea of letting the survivors play a central role during the commemoration is most natural and we ought to commend Piotr Cywinski for safeguarding this rule. We all wish to see all of these witnesses in good shape for as long as possible, but aging is unstoppable and somewhere in the future we will have to face our memories with a very limited number of survivors.

In this context one of the main issues when referring to human memory in its collective dimension is its limitations. Because, you see, 75 years is a lot... It is three generations and we are approaching a critical moment where we will need to stop and reconsider how to authentically preserve the memory without the voice of survivors. You see, people do forget and confronting this phenomenon is one of the central challenges of our times.

On the other hand there are younger generations. I have quite a lot of experience here because of the ceremonies organized by the Israeli Embassy for the Righteous Among the Nations: often it is the second or third generation, which decides to keep the memory alive. I vividly remember one of the ceremonies when we awarded a living Righteous Person. That sadly does not happen too often anymore. But in this case in spite of the fact that the survivor was not with us any more, it was the third generation that did all the research and made sure that this honorary title was awarded. This exemplifies that younger people feel the need to uphold the memory of their close ones.

In Israel there were many cases where the first generation did not talk about their horrific experience of the Shoah. Very recently I observed a case where the Israeli family of a survivor had barely any knowledge about his wartime fate, but with help from the second and third generations from Poland they were able to establish the facts. From my experience here in Poland I can tell that the process of unearthing stories from the past works, and that thus we are able to remember and honor those who deserve it most.

I do think that there is a very significant role for the second and third generations on all sides—the victims and the Righteous ones—as they are and should be pivotal for the future of preserving memory. This, together with the material preservation led by the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation is of foremost importance for our common future.
The Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation is taking care of the preservation of the Memorial. This is the basis for Holocaust education. How important is education and is it enough, given growing anti-Semitism, hatred and xenophobia in the world?

Well, unfortunately we don’t know exactly what we need. Education has a principal role, but the question is how to apply specific schemes in order to prevent and counteract racism. Education is the basis, but it must be balanced, smart and based on the truth. It is the same with remembering the victims of World War II. If every one of us focuses on one specific victim group, let’s say a nationality, then it will be natural that we will care only about the fate of that group’s people, what happened to them during the war, how many were murdered in camps or died as civilians. This would mean the end of an education reflecting the suffering of others, and in its most radical form it would lead to the promotion of nationalism and racism.

Auschwitz-Birkenau has an enormous role to play because of the vast number of nationalities, ethnicities and religions who were brought there in the worst of conditions and murdered. Today, we, the representatives of the next generation, must understand that each victim had the other standing or dying next to him or her. There were others as well.

Remembrance should not be exclusive. Often, you will hear Jews saying that I am banalizing our experience, but in my opinion it is possible to do wrong education on the basis of the Holocaust too. I am not an educator, but I feel that one of the things we could have done differently, is to start Holocaust education with actually going to Auschwitz-Birkenau in the first place, because when you witness a camp latrine it is enough to tell how dehumanized the people were: all the people. When you make the encounter with this terrible place and are told the story of the Holocaust there, it is then a different experience to talk about what came next. If you do not make this bridge to what’s next, it’s a pity.

Probably there are very different ways for different populations and ages to talk about this subject. In Israel the idea of having Holocaust education in preschools was brought up. In my opinion this would be too early, but then it all depends on the content. We also have to consider that in Israel every little kid is confronted at least twice a year—around January 27 and Holocaust Remembrance Day—with a lot of information about the fate of our ancestors and if we don’t offer them reasonable support, they will end up traumatized.

To me it was surprising to learn that there are cases of Congolese descendants of the victims of King Leopold’s policy who are quite anti-Semitic in their attitudes because there is a lot of anger about the fact that the Holocaust is remembered and their tragedy is not. This shows again that we should seriously start thinking how to make education open to the representatives of other genocide victims and how to share and balance their experience. Holocaust education and memory can be an important contributor here.
Anti-Semitism is on the rise again in different forms and places. Why? How can we fight it most effectively?

The political discourse is much more violent and tense these days, globally I mean. The knowledge about particular fates of the Holocaust is fading away. I think that at the top of our strategy for facing this challenge, there should be museums and education.

We should look for new technological answers. For instance the Israeli Embassy in Poland held a hackathon, under which people from Poland, Israel and other countries will try to combat antisemitism by means of new technologies. Hate speech and modern acts of violence require us to be completely open when it comes to searching for effective responses. Additionally, we need global anti-racist education. I never saw anti-Semitism on the rise and racism declining at the same time. These phenomena are interrelated and work together, and that is why they need to be tackled in combination.

Openness, new technologies, the Internet and translating historical experiences into contemporary situations are crucial for the younger generations not to fall into the trap of racism. The more effective ways we find to reach the kids, the better the chances we have to change this threatening trend.

This year in Israel there was an initiative to have a blog written through the eyes of a Holocaust survivor. The issue was fiercely debated, but I am sure that it is right to allow the following generations to have their right to interpret what happened and try to translate it into their language.

Piotr Cywiński has been managing the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum for many years now. What do you think are the main achievements of the Museum in terms of preserving memory, educating, but also managing the place?

I actually do not understand how he does it. For a normal human being this enormous territory with all its complexities—historical and contemporary ones—but also all the emotions it carries, seems impossible to manage. And yet, he does it.

First of all—how does one have more than two million visitors annually, and let all of them feel something significant? My judgment comes to a lesser degree from my own experience, because I am often there following my work or with friends who visit Poland and wish to go to Auschwitz. All of them come out of the Memorial with a certain feeling, with sorrow, which is perfectly comprehensible. Yet at the same time they all feel that they were properly received in the Museum. This is an astonishing achievement.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum faces an incredible number of challenges. I think Piotr Cywiński is doing an amazing juggling act in the way the Memorial is run. He is a very impressive leader who knows how to handle the subject of the Holocaust with compassion, and who makes this terrible historical experience accessible to people with different backgrounds. He is one of the best speakers your country has to offer.
Your father was a Holocaust survivor from Auschwitz-Birkenau. Please tell us more about his experience.

My father was held in Auschwitz-Birkenau. He went in when he was about 9 years old. Nobody knows his exact age because the birth records were destroyed. Growing up I did not really know what it meant. He had a number on his arm. I remember when I was very young, I thought, “Oh, all dads must have those numbers. That number meant he was my dad.” As I got older, I slowly realized what it meant. He didn’t talk about it a lot, but I listened very closely when he did.

I have met a lot of survivors and I think they fall into two categories. There are survivors who are heavy with pain—and understandably so—because of what they went through. My dad was the opposite. He woke up every single day of his life and he would say, “God bless America. Gail, do you know how lucky you are to be born in this country?” And I used to say, “Yes, dad. I know.” But I didn’t really know. How could I? As I got older and I started to learn more about the Holocaust and met some of his friends who were also survivors, I began to understand all that he endured. Not because he told me, but because of what I learned.

He was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau at a very young age, from Karlsruhe, Germany. When he got off the train, he was forced to stand in a line so that the SS could decide one by one where they would go. The SS took his mother and father and his grandparents, aunts, uncles to the right. He and his brother went to the left. That was the last time he ever saw his parents. He and his brother were in the camp for almost four years.
The thing is, my dad was quite rare because he was in the Sonderkommando and most of them were killed. They killed so many of them since they were the best witnesses of the horror. The SS forced my dad to pull the gold teeth from the dead bodies. That was his job. He actually got that job because when he got off the train, the guards asked him, "What did your father do?" He said, "My father is a dentist." And so they handed him a pair of pliers.

He had to do that horrific job for a long time and he saw what happened to anyone who tried to resist; they were thrown into the ovens—alive. He said he just did everything he could to do a really good job.

Near the war’s end, he made a split-second decision that—literally—saved his life. One day, as the Russians were closing in, the Nazis were leading my dad and others in one line on the way to the gas chambers. As they were walking, they passed a line of kids who were coming the other way. At the very last minute, my father decided to switch lines and hoped that no one would notice. So while the guard wasn’t looking, he switched and mixed in with the kids’ line. Days later, he was liberated by the Russians at Auschwitz.

Following the war, like so many others, he went back to Germany but could not find any family. Only he and his brother survived Auschwitz. His brother wanted to go to Israel, but my dad wanted to go to America. He tried to talk his brother out of it, but he would not listen so he went to Israel, and later died fighting in one of the wars.

My dad left Europe through an American Red Cross program and then, and this is something that is generally unknown, was drafted to fight in the Korean War. He fought in the Korean War and, upon his return, the boat left him off in San Francisco, where he built a new life and never left.

What is the perspective of a Holocaust survivor’s child? How does that influence your life, family, memory?

It’s funny. All those books you read about the children of Holocaust survivors, they tend to be quite accurate. At least for my life...

My parents were both survivors. My mother escaped to England via the Kindertransport and was raised by a Catholic family in England. My parents met in California and were not married very long. Someone thought it was a good idea to put two survivors together, which later proved to be quite opposite because they were both understandably a little broken. They were married about two years, long enough to have me. My mother’s father was my only grandparent to make it out alive. He came to California after the war and sent for my mother. My grand-father started a dairy farm in California, which offered me some of my favorite childhood memories.

Not surprisingly, my parents were unbelievably overprotective and education was extremely important to them. My dad used to always say, “Education is the one thing that no one can ever take away from you.”

Food was also always very important in my family, since my parents had so little of it growing up, and it’s probably not a coincidence that I ended up in the food industry. The way they showed people they loved them was through food—feeding someone was a wonderful gift and a way to show someone they were loved.

Being my father’s daughter has impacted me in so many ways, and obviously gives me a sense of tremendous responsibility. My sons do as well, although not as much as I do. It’s why I joined the board of the Friends of Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation and have tried to do what I could, given all that my dad went through. If you don’t do that, then all of that suffering and all of that pain was for nothing. If you don’t try and make some positive impact out of all that pain, then all those lives would be in vain and that would be the worst thing of all.

In that spirit, my dad used to speak at my sons’ school on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, where he would share his story with all the kids. I have this wonderful picture of my dad—my favorite picture of him—surrounded by all these young kids and they were treating him like he was a rock star. They wanted to touch him, shake his hand, take pictures with him and hug him. It was really amazing.

I get very sad when I think that soon there will not be any survivors left. Just recently there was a Holocaust survivor who was killed by a hit-and-run driver in Los Angeles. Not far from where I live; last week, 91 years old. It was like a knife through my heart. It was so unbelievably sad. To survive all of that and then to die crossing the street.
How precisely did you end up working for the Friends of Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation?

On our first trip back to Auschwitz, I met with Piotr Cywiński, the Museum’s director. I had called in advance to let them know that I was bringing a survivor. My boss at the time was Richard Edelman, who was friends with the chief rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich. So Michael Schudrich, who is originally from New York, introduced me to Piotr Cywiński. I met him and he helped me connect some of the dots. Richard, who was my boss at the time, asked if he could join us on the trip so that he could bring two of his daughters. I, of course, said yes and appreciated what he wanted to do because it’s what I wanted to do for my son.

During that visit someone reached out to Richard, asking if he wanted to be on the Foundation’s board, to which he replied, “You should ask Gail.” They did and I agreed immediately. It was beshert, a Hebrew word that means “meant to be.”

It was clear from the beginning that we were going to raise as much money as needed for the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation’s preservation projects. And we would do whatever it took. I remember my son Joshua and I went to the Polish Consul General’s house in Los Angeles where he was having a big fundraising event. I invited my dad. We showed a movie about my father, and my son spoke afterwards with the participants. All of these little connections started popping up. We just did everything we could to bring them together. I would have liked to do even more, but it was hard because I was raising two kids. I had a big job and a lot of responsibility. I did whatever I could, but never as much as I wanted.

Later on you became the chairperson of the Friends of Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation. What exactly were your tasks?

That was when we really were heavily into fundraising. The Foundation was not as advanced as it is today. We had a very small board—there were just four of us. I remember we were at a meeting at a law firm and Jacek Kastelaniec, who was Director General back then, came up to me and said, “We want you to be the chairperson of the Friends of Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation.” I said, “Jacek—I don’t know how to be a chairperson, but I am happy to do what I can.” He said, “No, no—we need you to do it.” You know Jacek—you can’t say no to him.

Given where I was and given where the Foundation was, we achieved quite a lot. I helped with the marketing of what we were trying to do. That was my main mission. Sometimes the problem was, not surprisingly, that the Friends wanted to do one thing but time and resources did not allow it. We had great ideas but then we could not execute upon them. When it was the time around the 70th Anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, I suggested that we could hire video crews to tell the stories of all the survivors who were packing up and going to the ceremony—to tell these amazing stories. Unfortunately, nobody had the resources to follow up.

At that time the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation in Poland was very focused on raising money from countries, which was right. That’s where the bulk of the money was going to come from. Still today, to me the biggest shame is that a majority of the population of this country has no idea what all those countries did in order to build the Foundation’s capital. That is an inspiring story. To deliver the money for such an important cause. Back then I kept banging my head against the wall—that was the challenge.

I also tried to put the Foundation together with some people I knew in a variety of countries. We weren’t always successful, because the Foundation did not have the resources to carry it out. They were very focused on getting public donors at that time. I am not saying it was a bad strategy. We could only do what the resources would allow for.
The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum is like a benchmark for other memorials. What should other memorial sites do in order to improve their social mission?

I worked in public relations and marketing before starting my own company. The opportunity is to package the work in a way that’s very easy for people to digest. It’s very dispersed, it is far away and seemingly irrelevant to many people who don’t understand why this is important. That is why memorials and museums need to stand for more than what happened. They need to stand for how they can influence us to prevent ignorance, bigotry and intolerance from happening again. That is how you stay relevant in today’s world. Every day that goes by—I love to hear that there are more people visiting Auschwitz, but we have to remember that there is also a large number of people who have never heard about the Holocaust, which is the scariest thing of all.

So how can we take all this information and all these statistics and have it mean something, have it help in some way, have it be a light for good? First, we have to be modern and relevant. It is not going to work when we only look at what happened 75 years ago. It’s going to work when we look at what happened 75 years ago and think, “My God, I better do everything I can to make sure this never happens again”.

Then, I think there are management strategies that can certainly help such as marketing. At Edelman, most of our work was for business and a few non-profits. People would always think it was much easier working for a non-profit. It’s actually much harder, because they are highly competitive for a limited amount of dollars. It is very difficult to define the value chain of NGOs, but it is also very hard to justify marketing for a lot of these organizations. It’s not always easy to justify spending on marketing, but a priority must be placed on getting out the message and standing for something. Museums and memorials must try hard to do that.

Millions of people visit Auschwitz and are moved to do something, but the question is: How are you going to keep them engaged for the rest of their lives because of one life-changing moment?

You have been working for different big companies on different levels and now you are the founder of a very successful enterprise—CAULIPOWER. Does it change your perspective on the responsibility for preserving the memory of the Holocaust and education?

It actually does. I am obviously very aware that if my day had not built that small business, CAULIPOWER would never have been born. If he had not been an entrepreneur, I would not have been inspired to follow in his footsteps. If he had not left me a bit of money when he passed, I could have never left my job to start the company. I also wanted to do something more meaningful, which is why I have an important social component at CAULIPOWER by giving a percentage of sales to help build teaching gardens in under-served schools across America. In our city schools, schools that do not have a lot of resources, we build teaching gardens so these kids can learn about the magic of growing vegetables and harvesting them.

One day, it is my hope to honor my father by making a sizable donation to the Foundation. This is why I work as hard as I do. To me, every generation around the world should be giving in some way—whether time, energy, money, resources, their voice—something to this organization.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum plays a central role in all our efforts. We care about the Museum. We want it to stay in perpetuity and we want it to be as engaging as possible. Most of all, we want the lives of all who see what happened there to be changed—forever.
Together with Professor Bartoszewski and Director Piotr Cywiński, you were one of the founders of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation. Please talk about the factors behind the decision to set up the Foundation.

One of Piotr Cywiński’s first trips upon taking the position of director of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum was to the United States. He felt that effective and responsible fundraising could support museums, which in the United States derive much of their resources, apart from government appropriations, from private sources. He concluded that it was worth attempting to introduce something similar in regard to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

Two possibilities immediately emerged. One was to base the fundraising program on professionals from the USA. That would mean big money, because their salaries run into the hundreds of thousands of dollars a year, and we would have to find the money to pay for that, or perhaps offer those people a percentage of what they raised. The other alternative followed more of an NGO model, designating a person to build the program from the ground up, based on local circumstances. After a few months, Piotr Cywiński proposed something like this to me. I was 25 years old. Piotr started from the assumption that the demonstrations, concerts, and events that I had organized for the sake of democracy in Belarus and Ukraine were proof enough that he could entrust me with raising funds for the Museum.
And how did you react to this proposal?

My first reaction was cautious. After all, I thought, I had no experience in fundraising. It was hard for me to realize that organizing a concert for a million złoty without a budget was in fact fundraising.

At that time I was a recent graduate in journalism from a French university. In the background there was also a personal aspect—almost all of my grandfather’s family perished in the Holocaust. That made me think seriously about this challenge.

Piotr Cywiński came to my 25th birthday party and immediately started talking about the job. His energy and sense of mission were infectious. He told me about the significance of the Memorial and said that he himself had not realized at the beginning that he was capable of dedicating himself to his job to that degree. When we met the next day, his passion and conviction about the exceptionality of Auschwitz made even more of an impression on me. That was the key for me, because all my previous public activity had been based on the belief that we were doing something important and necessary, and that our modest contribution sprung precisely from the will to make a difference.

We quickly got down to specifics, and it turned out that Piotr had no money for a serious salary, but that we might be able to base our cooperation on a success fee. In principle, his knowledge in this area was based entirely on the experience he had gained on his one trip to the States, and so you could hardly say it was very deep. Today when we look back on that period, we often chuckle at our beginnings.

The formal start of our cooperation was my hiring in the Museum press department. Piotr asked me to prepare a fundraising plan on the basis of discussions with the directors of the various administrative divisions of the institution. The crucial talk was with Rafał Pióro, director of preservation at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, who said, “We’re in a crisis situation! We need enormous resources, because the money that Ronald Lauder and Kalman Sultanik raised from the governments of many countries for conservation ran out several years ago, and at present Auschwitz-Birkenau, and especially Birkenau—that is, the buildings, barracks, and ruins—are in danger of collapse. You’re a godsend, and if we’re going to think seriously about preserving the Memorial for future generations, then we have to start acting in the long term.”
I very quickly came to understand that the conservation process is a loop, and that the first barracks conserved in 2010 will within a few years have to undergo the same process again. That is because these buildings were created for the moment, for carrying out the process of extermination. They had a specific purpose and their builders could hardly have ever thought that they would be preserved for all time and serve as a warning to future generations. That is precisely the real challenge—to uphold the truth that serves the education of the younger generations, but also serves in the fight against the “denial” that claims that the Shoah never happened. That is why Auschwitz must be safeguarded here and now, which means creating a mechanism making it possible to safely plan conservation with the support of the newest methods and specialists, and not only when money fortuitously comes along. From this came the idea suggested to me by Jacek Michalski, who was then employed in the Polish-American Freedom Foundation, of amassing a perpetual capital fund whose interest would underwrite the conservation program. For all of us—Professor Bartoszewski, Piotr, and myself—that was a totally innovative idea.

We calculated that it would take 120 million euro to finance the conservation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. All these years later we know that this is not enough, because every project undertaken within the framework of the Master Plan for Preservation yields more experience, but also more work to do. For example, in the course of the conservation of brick barracks, hundreds of personal items belonging to prisoners turned up. We had no idea they even existed. Every one of these artifacts had to be secured with respect for the memory of its owner. Please remember that only thanks to the funding provided by the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation could this pioneering work take place in the proper conditions, that is, without haste, in stability and with the safeguarding of continuity. I don’t know any other memorial site where conservation would take place in this way.

Janek Mencwel and I started building up a Foundation team that would be goal-directed and would function in a transparent, professional way to enlist new partners in our project, step by step.
What was the hardest thing for you at the stage when the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation was being created? What surprised you? Did you manage to overcome those obstacles?

The first challenge was convincing Professor Bartoszewski that although the idea of the Foundation might indeed be crazy, it was realistic. That was difficult. Piotr Cywiński took that task upon himself, which was crucial, because the most important thing from the beginning was credibility, and this is precisely what the Professor embodied in the eyes of Polish and foreign partners. We were very happy when Władysław Bartoszewski agreed to be a founder.

Some time later, at a meeting of the Foundation Council at the Chancellery of the Polish Prime Minister, the Professor said, “The fact that we managed to raise 100 million euro is incredible, and I must admit that I regarded this idea as crazy and unfeasible, but now I regard the idea as crazy, but feasible.” I was very proud of this. It showed that the Professor was satisfied, that he had a feeling that Auschwitz was a step closer to safety.

The next steps were equally difficult, but interesting at the same time. They showed that there was a whole set of people who were ready to support us. The Foundation statute was drafted by a friend of mine, who was then in law school. He didn’t take a fee. We asked the Weil, Gotshal & Manges law firm to help us on the legal side. This was a matter of researching how to receive money from state and individual donors in accordance with the tax code. Ronald Rewald, a partner in the Weil, Gotshal & Manges firm, was very helpful in this regard. He convinced the firm to support the Foundation pro bono. Ronald Rewald introduced me to Józef Wancer, head of the BPH bank, who helped us to organize the Foundation structure, and became an integral part of it from the beginning. His commitment and dedication to the cause were helpful at many critical moments. Wancer told me back then, “You know, this is also very interesting to me from a personal point of view. I would like you to come and see me so that we can talk about this.” And also, “I regard what all of you are doing as very important. I feel linked to this subject in a family way, and I would like to help.” As a consequence, Wancer agreed to join the Foundation Council, and he remains an incredibly active member. He organized the Financial Committee, which has met about 40 times in the course of 10 years. He never stops working, and in addition he believes in the sense of what we are doing.

We therefore had several vital ingredients: the support of Professor Bartoszewski, a good law firm, and the experience of Józef Wancer. What we lacked were an office and—this was fairly important—the money to cover our costs. The Professor threw himself into this heart and soul. He convinced Prime Minister Donald Tusk to send a letter to other heads of government, thanks to which things took on a more serious dimension. Now it was a Foundation with an important goal, with a warranty issued by the prime minister. It soon turned out that the ambassador of Israel, and Israel itself, were very seriously interested in the matter. In organizational terms we were still lost in the woods. Meetings continued to be held at the park in Stara Ochota. At that point I told Piotr, “Listen, we need an office right now. We can’t go on this way.” So we began discussions with the first countries. Signals reached us that Germany was considering a serious commitment, and in this connection it became necessary to exchange correspondence. To send a fax to the German embassy, I had to go to the post office on the corner of Filtrowa and Aryanka. Then I had to pray that the recipient would not decide to reply to the number the fax was sent from. That would have revealed that we were talking about a big undertaking, but we were a letter-box organization.
The Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation utilizes the methodologies of the world of finance and banking in carrying out its mission. How have you managed to strike a balance between corporate culture and the culture of non-governmental organizations?

The collision of these two realities is sometimes brutal. This is a hard question because, when we began this project, we did not realize that the corporate aspect is incredibly important, that above all it means effectiveness, which was something we were badly in need of. The key personality in this dimension is Józef Wancer, whom I have already mentioned. He introduced corporate-style order to the Foundation. The task for Piotr Cywiński and me, in turn, and let me add that this was difficult, consisted of striking the appropriate balance. Józef Wancer had a tendency to organize us like a bank, because his whole professional career was linked to that sector. It’s only natural. But we had a tendency to act like an NGO, to be spontaneous, without excessive formality, because that’s what the NGO world is like. We managed to fight for the Foundation to do without official stamps, which of course made our life far more complicated. One example is Russia, which conveyed a million dollars to the Foundation, but it turned out that the lack of stamps was a serious formal obstacle. The affair went all the way up to Moscow. As a result, the Russians asked us to initial every page of the documents. That was symbolic friction between the corporate world and the NGO world.

Józef Wancer supported us in the belief that full transparency and following procedures could only benefit the Foundation, that regular reporting, which might strike some as boring, is incredibly important. He always repeated that reputation means everything to an organization like ours. He stressed that it was important to donors and external bodies that oversee our operations that the procedures should be well defined and organized. Then we could concentrate on what we want to accomplish, which is preserving the authenticity of Auschwitz-Birkenau and other memorial sites, and education. The conflict was sharp at times, but it was also creative.

Please talk about receiving the first funding to get the Foundation going and open an office.

The first country that announced it was joining the Foundation was Germany. At this stage, many people knew that it was an urgent matter, that the physical substance of the Memorial demanded urgent action. That is why Chancellor Angela Merkel declared, in response to the appeal from Prime Minister Tusk, that “At the beginning we will give a million euro, and more later.” That was important, but also difficult. No one knew how to transfer these funds. We were not prepared. It was a success in the form of the first large declaration for the benefit of the perpetual capital, but we still could not cover our running costs. The Germans responded to this need by transferring almost 40 thousand euro for the cost of running the office in the first year. We managed to hire Maria Zalewska, and together with her we filed the first reports on the activities of the Foundation. At the same time, I began traveling extensively. One of my first destinations was France and the Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah. I was feeling out the territory. Did our French partners understand our perspective? At first, the meetings were difficult. They saw a kid in a poorly fitting suit talking about millions. I felt that I had to explain myself. Did I even understand what the Holocaust was, and that Auschwitz was the central site of the extermination of the European Jews? There came a moment when I said, “Please don’t explain elementary things to me, because my grandfather’s whole family perished in the Holocaust.” That broke the ice and we were able to begin building trust. As a result, the Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah donated a hundred thousand euro to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation for another year of operations. Owing to this, we could open an office at ulica Twarda 6 in Warsaw. Thanks to the support of Piotr Kadlick, we got it on favorable terms from the Jewish Community.
In the first years of the Foundation, what did the process of building a team look like?

The thing about the Foundation structure is that, from the top down, we had a fantastic Council whose members, including Professor Bartoszewski, were very active. They organized meetings and political discussions, and advised and offered their experience. Then came the Management Board, headed by Piotr Cywiński, the outstanding attorney Łukasz Rudziński, and Rafał Płońko, an exceptionally scrupulous conservator who is also a decisive manager. As a member of the Board I enjoyed the trust of the others. Finally, there was the Foundation Team, which implemented everything: Jacek Mencwel, whom I have already mentioned, Maria Zalewska, and the next employees—Anna Miszewski, Maciej Antosik, Maciej Bulanda, Anna Barbur, and Aleksandra Maj. Thanks to the Foundation Council and the Financial Committee, every- one could learn things. Everybody believed that what they were doing was enormously important and that they had to get things done.

What is your vision of leadership?

In my eyes it is an essential mixture of focusing on relations and results. The relations with the employees were on a partnership basis. Yet at the same time, there was a clear hierarchy. The boss was Piotr Cywiński, who shouldered the responsibility. This means that if there were conflicts, he resolved them on a higher level. On the other hand, if we had differing opinions on the operational side within the Team, then I listened to everyone, but I was the one who made the final decision. The Team did not always have to agree with these decisions, but I was the one who judged on the results. Everyone knew this and accepted it. Everyone shared the final goal: safeguarding the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial.

The main goal of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation is, indeed, securing the authenticity of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial. Is authenticity exclusively a historical value, or can it serve the present-day fight against anti-Semitism and xenophobia?

Preserving authenticity is both a beginning, and also a necessity that Professor Bartoszewski defined in the following way: Preserve as much as possible of Auschwitz-Birkenau and other memorial sites, and then the coming generations will be able to draw upon them. The key is education, and making use for this purpose of the Memorial and other sites of the extermination of the Jews and other nations, as well as finding instruments that make it possible to get through to the younger generations. This is also a matter of using the memorial sites as a means for creating bridges connecting history and the present, and as encouragement to reflection and action. In general terms, it is a matter of the sites preventing a repeat of history.

It was clear from the beginning that the goal is making the authenticity of Auschwitz-Birkenau accessible to further millions of visitors. Circumstances should be created for asking the most painful and difficult questions on the nature of the Holocaust and the essence of the Second World War regardless of whether the victims were Polish political prisoners, Roma, Soviet prisoners of war, or Jews condemned to extermination. This place is an astonishingly important instrument for commemorating the victims in perpetuity. I am tormented constantly by questions about maintaining the proportion between those who were murdered here and those who survived this hell. This is an overpowering challenge, because the story of those who were taken from the train cars straight to their death is a very short one. We have no facts aside from selection and the undressing room, gassing, and the crematorium. It is short. And very painful.

The most important things from this point of view are the ruins of the crematoria and the gas chambers. Despite the fact that it is necessary to use the imagination and preservationist knowledge, I experience overwhelming dejection every time I am there. After all, the ruins make it clear what happened at this specific spot. Standing face to face with the most troubling place in all of Auschwitz-Birkenau makes a shattering impression. Bricks, the place, the end of everything. I regard authenticity as crucial on this scrap of ground. Thanks to the barracks, we see how spatially gigantic the enterprise was, particularly remembering that people were there. And there were a hundred thousand people there. Things that we find unimaginable happened in this very place. Unimaginable! I do not even try to imagine it, because it will always be unfathomable.

Thanks to the preservation of the authenticity of Auschwitz-Birkenau, we can attempt to ascend to a higher level of reflection and emotion, wondering how it came to this, what anti-Semitism is, what a system of de-personalization is, what the mechanism is that decided in the course of a fraction of a second about a person’s life or death. This place should arouse more, and not less awareness, all the time, in the succeeding generations—people who are no longer going to have the opportunity to talk with survivors from Auschwitz-Birkenau, but who are going to be able to see the authentic site. It seems to me that precisely today, more than was the case 10 years ago, we need to draw upon this place in the proper way.
One characteristic of the work of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation is effectiveness in raising funds. Please say something more about the working methods.

The most important thing is that you have to be absolutely convinced of the legitimacy of the purpose you’re raising money for because, during talks with institutions or persons who do not know the details of our work, trustworthiness is the most important thing. Over the space of the 10 years that I have been doing this, no fundraising strategy could have done as much as sincerity, speaking from the depths of my heart, out of the conviction that what we are doing is simply important. I was and still am convinced that the preservation of Auschwitz-Birkenau must begin here and now. Our interlocutors could see this, because we explained effectively that without the help of this specific person we would fail. And one more thing—working from morning to night. Piotr Cywiński said at the outset, “Listen, this is the kind of job where you get up at seven o’clock in the morning and you have the impression that you’re running late. It’s the kind of job where you go to sleep at one o’clock in the morning and you have the impression that it’s too early.” He was right.

What is the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation’s main message to donors?

There are various levels. The general message must be standardized and get through to everyone, in other words transparent and clear. Auschwitz-Birkenau is a place where more than a million human beings died. It is a cemetery, hallowed ground. Auschwitz-Birkenau is a place where others miraculously survived. For them, in turn, Auschwitz designates the community of a horrendous fate. The sum of these experiences must be a lesson to us, painful but true, that permits us to stand up to hatred and xenophobia. Presenting the problem this way makes it possible for audiences all over the world to understand the Foundation’s work. That’s the basis. On top of this come tailored accents depending on the interlocutor. In my opinion, anyone who wants to be a fundraiser must have this in their blood and must have empathy. Understanding what a given interlocutor cares about, which of the aspects of the Foundation’s work are most important to a given person and concentrating on precisely this main message. I have led more than a thousand discussions on the subject of the Foundation, and I have the impression that no two of those discussions were the same. The scope of the project is so broad that you can always find the aspect that will interest a given person, and that is what you have to talk to them about.

What do discussions with state donors, especially the largest ones, look like?

It differs widely depending on the country. Sometimes it was not necessary to make any special effort to move from declarations to the transfer of the funds. In other cases the declaration itself involved a long, hard road. Let me give two examples. One is the United States. From the very start, the American side signaled that it did not see any way of donating money to the Perpetual Capital Fund. The Americans were ready to donate to projects, but not to the perpetual fund. Our embassy in Washington came to our aid. Ambassador Robert Kupiecki told me, “Mr. Director, we’ll arrange it. You have to be ready to go into action and my people must be ready to go into action. We’ll arrange it.” At the embassy, Artur Orkiś was responsible for contacts with Congress. I have been to Washington six times myself, for three to five days each time, spending a great deal of time at the Capitol talking to various assistants to congressional representatives. If we didn’t achieve anything one year, we kept on fighting the following year. The matter of appropriating money to the Foundation comprised a small element in the budgetary skirmishing between Republicans and Democrats, and we had to make sure that a donation came out of this rivalry. That went on for at least three years, and surely consumed scores of working days by the embassy and me. Everything was based on priorities and persistence. The result is 15 million dollars, more than 10 percent of the Fund.
The second example is France. Someone who was favorably inclined advised me to get in touch with Simone Veil, an Auschwitz survivor, who was the French equivalent of Władysław Bartoszewski, an authoritative figure in the field of remembrance. In the spring of 2010 my aunt, who lived in Paris, advised me to behave gallantly and kiss her hand when we were introduced. I really don't like such things, but there were times when I had to do things I didn't like. So it was this time, and it must have worked, because we had a wonderful talk for 40 minutes, heart to heart. She even said, “But how can it be that France hasn't given anything? Sarkozy owes me a favor. I supported him in his presidential campaign. I'll get in touch with him immediately, and he'll simply have to agree.” She asked me to call the next day. A volcano had just erupted in Iceland and I was stuck in France. I called from Paris on Monday and immediately heard, “When can you come?” An hour later I was at Simone Veil’s and she said, “Good. What should we write to that Sarkozy? Prepare a letter for me please, and I'll sign it. We have to act.” I wrote a letter to the president of France. The father of a French friend of mine translated it, Madame Veil sent the letter, Sarkozy said, “Of course,” and France conveyed five million euro.

Today, how do you see the development of the non-governmental sector in the protection of the heritage of Holocaust victims?

That’s a hard question. I think that preserving the memorial sites connected with the Holocaust is number one, in terms of the whole system. It seems to me that there’s still a bit of work to be done in terms of preserving all the sites. Ten years ago was the last moment in terms of Auschwitz-Birkenau, just as other sites have to be taken care of today. Not only in Poland, perhaps, but all over Europe. If we look at the magnitude of the educational challenges connected with the Holocaust, it is going to be necessary to start making use of memorial sites more intensively. They make an impression on everyone—on young people, on politicians, on adults who go there for the first time.

If we now imagine that people can visit various memorial sites, they must be prepared for doing so. It seems to me that thanks to what the Foundation has achieved, we have the ability to get through to decision makers and look after other memorial sites. It is necessary to send the greatest possible numbers of young people to those sites, but with the requisite preparation before visits and follow-up. There is a need to properly organize the educational program and the organizations involved.

Because it is a symbol, Auschwitz-Birkenau bears an enormous responsibility. That responsibility consists, among other things, of helping other memorial sites and sharing our experience with them. The Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation is capable of lending definite support and serving others. This requires the appropriate endowment, and an understanding of what kind of narration gets through to people of different ages. Events show that it is necessary to amass hundreds of millions on a multi-year scale. It seems to me that all of those who have created the Foundation share this approach. Only through spreading the word about the horrendous story of Auschwitz-Birkenau will we be able to oppose hatred effectively. It’s worth making the effort to reach that goal.
What are the origins of your involvement with the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum?

I first came to Auschwitz after my service as US ambassador to Austria. That was in November 1987, with my wife and two children. What I saw was Auschwitz literally disintegrating. I saw all the displays of human hair starting to disintegrate; I saw leather valises left by the arrivals starting to fall apart. In fact, the entire site was cracking and falling apart. I saw the first crematorium was falling apart. I saw where the gas chambers were—the bricks were just disintegrating from time, cold and heat. I realized that in 10 to 15 years there would be nothing left.

So, I decided that I wanted to do something. I looked around and I said, “What group has most experience with something like this?” It turned out that at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in the Egyptian department, there were three great conservators who had a lot of experience. I came to them and said, “Would you consider going to Auschwitz, see what you can do and try to keep it the way it looked in 1945? I do not want you to do anything more, but I want make sure that the people who will see it in 10, 20, 30 years, will see it exactly how it was then, not a pile of dust on the ground.” I did a lot of talking, explaining to them how important it was, but also let them understand that they would spend a lot of time in Oświęcim, Poland, where the Memorial is located. They went on one trip, they came back and they said, “We need 40 million dollars to do the whole thing. It will take us a year and a half.”
I met with a man called Ernie Michelle and Mr. Krakowski—two people who were survivors of Auschwitz and I said, “Let’s raise 40 million dollars. We will go to 40 countries and we will get a million dollars from each one.” So, we went from country to country, to embassies, to countries, to people, and after three months we raised 39 million. The one country that did not give us money was Italy. I put the last million dollars in. And we started the work. This was some time in the fall of 1988. I, myself, spent a lot of time there at Auschwitz. Within a year we had great success and much of what you see today is a result of those efforts. It was a great feat. I recruited somebody who was an expert on old paper, and we made sure with different original documents that they would not disintegrate. I met with another expert in photography, and he went in and made sure that all the photographs they had were not disintegrating. We went through all the different aspects of it. In the process we started to train people how to work with these objects. Today there is a laboratory that I founded, which bears my name, with experts to work on all these different objects. We even had an expert on bricks and one of the things you have today is that all the bricks were fixed up. Somebody else was an expert on cement and we had that person look into cement to make sure it would not disintegrate. With the barbed wire it was the whole question of how to keep it in place and the posts that hold the barbed wire were lying on the ground and falling apart. We pieced them back together. This was mainly in Birkenau but also obviously in Auschwitz itself. The result was that we learned a lot—technically—about how to keep leather safe, human hair, all the Jewish tallits that started to fall apart—we put them together again. I think we handled maybe 500,000 items that were fixed up. It was an amazing process. All the things like toothbrushes were saved piece by piece, too. Shoes were the hardest, because many of the shoes were very worn but we were able to save all of them. We also had a problem deciding what was on the top and what was on the bottom when stored or exhibited. We tried to put as many smaller shoes on top so that they would not crush each other. The result was that over that period of time we learned a great deal.

During the eight-month period I went back to Auschwitz at least 20 times. It’s not the easiest part of world to get to. We wanted to preserve all the things. The result was that at one time we had maybe 50 to 75 people working there. All of them were experts in different fields. We had two to four people directing them. We always did it with Polish people.

By the time we finished, what we saw was amazing. I remember that day, we all got together, we went from place to place—I think the photographs are there somewhere—and it was a quite unique view. To have people from all over—this was mainly Americans, a few Europeans and many Polish people working together. What happened was amazing. During that time one of the things we spoke about were the prisoners’ uniforms that were worn, the shoes, and we had a question: some of them had a number, we advertised for survivors and we found a lot of survivors who came back and some of them claimed them. We also went through the various bunks and saw who was there.

Several years later I went there with Elie Wiesel and Lech Wałęsa and the three of us had our tour guided by Elie. He said, “This looks exactly the way I left it.” He also said something that I will never forget. He said, “The opposite of love is not hate, it’s indifference. It was indifference that caused what happened.” It was at a time when I realized the importance of what can and must be done.

We cannot be indifferent.

On my last trip there, earlier this year, with US Vice-President Pence, I saw all the things and it was interesting. There was not one change, everything I saw was as it was in 1989, 30 years ago. Some of the original people doing this work are still there and the work they are doing is sensational. They have also invented certain machines that are in use today. It’s amazing. I think that this is fundamental for understanding what happened in Auschwitz.
Why is the Memorial important and what role does education play in counteracting hatred in today’s world?

Let me answer from a personal perspective: I came to Vienna as ambassador during the time of Kurt Waldheim. As you may remember, he was Secretary General of the UN and left in disgrace because the World Jewish Congress—the organization that I am the president of—found documents that showed him during World War II not as a lawyer living in Vienna, but as an army officer in Thessaloniki, Greece, where he was in charge of interviewing prisoners. He claimed, “I never knew that they were being killed.” Except that from his office window in Thessaloniki he could see people walking by and disappearing. In the case of Yugoslavia where he interrogated 20 different British pilots and soldiers, he had them all executed.

However, when he ran for president of Austria, he said, “During the war I did nothing different than hundreds of thousands of Austrians, I did my duty as a soldier,” meaning that they were all in this together. It was as if he was saying: If you elect me, we were OK, if you don’t elect me, we were all bad people. So the Austrians elected him and by a wide margin. As US ambassador to Austria I had to fight anti-Semitism which was, sometimes, personal. When Waldheim was inaugurated I left the country. I did not want to be there or to shake his hand. All this made me understand what anti-Semitism was and is today.

All in all it made me very much aware of the importance of Auschwitz and the importance of what we are doing. Because Auschwitz as a witness to the Holocaust is a warning for what happens when we allow indifference and hatred to be present. It is part of the same aspect of remembering.

The key question is: What effect does it have today, what effect does Auschwitz have? We have found that in many cases, for example in the USA and certain parts of Europe, 70 to 80 percent of kids do not know anything about the Holocaust because it is not taught at schools. They think Hitler was a joke, “he was a powerful man, why not follow him?” There are Nazi deniers saying the Holocaust was made up, maybe a hundred thousand Jews were killed, who knows how many? That is why the physical Auschwitz Memorial is always necessary to show and to transmit a feeling of what happened in this place, the only concentration camp where you get an authentic feeling about what happened.

I have been to many former camps, they are important, but only Auschwitz has a certain power. Auschwitz is the strongest weapon we have against anti-Semitism, because of the fact that anyone who goes to Auschwitz has to be deeply moved. When the March of the Living was initiated some 30 years ago, people started coming from Israel and all around the world, many thousands of people, and they saw things, they brought candles, and survivors spoke. This had a major effect on all of them. I regularly speak with many survivors when I am there and I know that for them the event is very important, because of the exceptional power of the place and the way the Museum is taking care of it.

Right now we are working on a new program called The Auschwitz Legacy. On January 27 throughout the world, schools will teach what happened in Auschwitz, we will have an educational package in all languages, and there will be survivors talking in their language. The teachers will have certain curricula about how to discuss the most important issues. It may be a two-hour session for every child to follow and understand. It will be at different levels for different ages, but the fact is they will learn what happened in the camp. Thanks to this initiative we will be able to bring the important mission of Auschwitz to the next generations.
The Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation: Genesis, Development and Future

Georgette Mosbacher
The Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation was established 10 years ago. Madam Ambassador, what is your opinion about the Foundation’s achievements so far?

The 10th anniversary of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation provides us an opportunity to reflect on the critically important work the Foundation has accomplished in just a decade.

The Foundation’s work has been vital to preserving the memory of the Holocaust—to serve not only as a reminder of humankind’s darkest hour, but also as an educational tool for future generations, to guard against such atrocities in the future.

America has been a leading supporter of the Foundation and its efforts to restore, preserve, and maintain the concentration and extermination camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau. We have done so to ensure that future generations can visit and understand how indifference to evil, hatred, and persecution wreak catastrophic effects on our collective humanity.

The restored and preserved camps also serve as powerful tools to show—to those who doubt or deny the Holocaust—that such unspeakable evil indeed took place, and to remind all of us to remain vigilant to the warnings signs, like restriction of civil liberties, which led to the Holocaust.
Anti-Semitism is rising all over the world, again. What should we do to fight it more effectively?

We commend the Foundation’s mission and commitment to combating anti-Semitism, bigotry, xenophobia, racism, and contempt of others, while acknowledging that its task becomes more difficult as we lose the remaining survivors of the Holocaust. It also becomes harder because of the despicable resurgence of anti-Semitism around the world.

So now, more than ever, is the time for all of us—governments, international bodies, the private sector, organizations, educational institutions, the media, and individual citizens—to redouble our efforts to preserve evidence of the Holocaust and the testimonies of its survivors.

How can we build a better future after the Auschwitz-Birkenau experience?

If we truly seek a future for our children and grandchildren that embraces openness, diversity, and acceptance of others, we must act now. We must counter anti-Semitism, condemn racial hatred, and resist all forms of bigotry. It was a solemn honor for me to participate in the March of the Living, along with five US Ambassadors and senior US government officials, to affirm our commitment to combating anti-Semitism, as we walked with thousands of students from around the world between the concentration and extermination camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

For the US diplomatic mission in Poland, a key priority is to promote our shared values and respect for human rights. We strive to promote openness and acceptance, diversity, and respect for others. We devote considerable resources to promoting memory of and education about the Holocaust, on an almost daily basis.

We do this through convening, connecting, and communicating to people a very important message: education, dialogue, and a facts-based discussion of the history of the Holocaust are vital to creating the society of tomorrow. If we do nothing, we know all too well what could happen.

What is your main message to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation for now and the future?

On this anniversary, we wish the Foundation continued success. We hope this anniversary will generate new support for your good deeds, because the Foundation’s mission is vital not only to preserving memory of the Holocaust, but for preserving our collective humanity today and in the future.

Through your mission and work, you truly turn darkness into light.
Łukasz Rozdeiczer-Kryszkowski
Why did you decide to become involved with the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation?

Piotr Cywiński called me one day to say that he wanted to meet and talk about setting up the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation. We knew each other from the board of the Catholic Intelligentsia Club, where we were both active. I had returned recently from a stay of many years in the USA, where it had become very clear to me that the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial was important not only to us Poles, but also in the international aspect to Americans and of course to Jews. In academic circles and at the World Bank, where I worked, the subject of the Holocaust came up far more often than I would have supposed before traveling to the USA. For this reason I was convinced that establishing an international foundation would be very important and necessary for Poland.

Since I worked professionally in negotiation and conflict management, it was my dream that the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation would become an institution that helped prevent the most tragic of conflicts. It was also important that what we created should outlive us all and strengthen the mission of the Memorial—so that similar crimes would never again occur, not in Poland, and nowhere else in the world.

Back then it was only an idea. We didn’t even have a statute yet, but we knew that we were creating something special that would also require a special organizational structure.
How do you remember the beginnings of the Foundation?

The beginning was Professor Władysław Bartoszewski, Piotr Cywiński, Jacek Kastalaniec, Rafał Pióro, and me. There was the idea of creating an international institution. It was a matter of much more than a Polish perspective, and so if we were to succeed, we would have to get the whole world involved, or as much of the world as we could. There was a need to create a structure that would be stable, safe for donors, and independent of politics. At that stage we already counted on some countries, including Germany, perhaps transferring serious money to the Foundation. So it was necessary to set up a structure that on the one hand would be stable and protect the Foundation against potential threats, and on the other protect the perpetual capital against human frailty, now and in the future. Regardless of who would be on the Board, the mechanism had to be predictable. We thought about that a lot. We had to create a statute and negotiate an agreement with the Germans. Those were the two most important documents we were working on at that stage.

I was then working at Clifford Chance, a large international law firm. Piotr Cywiński was working at the Museum and responsible for the Foundation on substantive matters. Jacek Kastalaniec, Rafał Pióro, and me. There was the idea of creating an international institution. It was a matter of much more than a Polish perspective, and so if we were to succeed, we would have to get the whole world involved, or as much of the world as we could. There was a need to create a structure that would be stable, safe for donors, and independent of politics. At that stage we already counted on some countries, including Germany, perhaps transferring serious money to the Foundation. So it was necessary to set up a structure that on the one hand would be stable and protect the Foundation against potential threats, and on the other protect the perpetual capital against human frailty, now and in the future. Regardless of who would be on the Board, the mechanism had to be predictable. We thought about that a lot. We had to create a statute and negotiate an agreement with the Germans. Those were the two most important documents we were working on at that stage.

I was then working at Clifford Chance, a large international law firm. Piotr Cywiński was working at the Museum and responsible for the Foundation on substantive matters. Jacek Kastalaniec was concerned with organizational matters and at the same time worked at the Museum. I was supporting on the legal and negotiation side. I was the only person on the Foundation Management Board from outside the Museum, which gave me a different view of many issues. From the beginning I worked on an exclusively voluntary basis. I never took any compensation and covered the majority of my costs out of my own pocket, as I do to this day. It was important to me, but I also put in less time than Piotr or Jacek, for whom it was a full-time job.

What is your role in the Foundation?

From the beginning of the Foundation, I have been vice-president of the Board. I am responsible to a large extent for legal matters and negotiation strategies in relation to key donors and other partners. I have also lent support on financial matters, on both the investment and cost side. These issues are congruent with my professional experience. I have the experience that I bring from the United States and England in connection with international negotiations and disputes, as well as cost optimization—in the practical dimension as an attorney in international law offices and an employee of the World Bank, as well as in a theoretical dimension as a university lecturer. When we started, I already had several years of experience as a lawyer and faculty member at the Program on Negotiation at Harvard and adjunct professor at Georgetown University.

A large part of my work in those first years, when we were raising money, was negotiations, both internal and international. At some stage I negotiated the American money, talking to senators and administration officials. Those were not easy negotiations, because it was not always obvious to the countries what we would give them in return. An example of other major and specific negotiations was my part in the legislative process around the “Law of August 18, 2011, on an Appropriation for the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation Assigned to Supplementing the Perpetual Capital,” as a result of which the Foundation received a subsidy from the Polish government to the amount of 10 million euro.

A large part of my work consisted of supporting other members and employees of the Foundation. I was also involved in legal and strategic issues that the Board was working on. Among other things, as a Board we had to analyze and decide how and where to invest the perpetual capital, and here of course it is necessary to emphasize the enormous advisory role of the Foundation Financial Committee headed by Józef Wancer. The principle of “safety over risk” guided us from the beginning. And above all transparency—there were never any problems with this.

It was known from the beginning that, as someone not connected to the Museum, I functioned in a certain sense as a watchdog observing the cooperation between the Museum and the Foundation from the outside, and if necessary I could remark on things. The two entities were complementary. The Foundation performed very strictly defined services for the Museum, but on some matters their individual interests had to be agreed on or “mediated.” This is how I have always seen my role because, not being formally connected with the Museum, I can set other priorities than, for instance, Piotr Cywiński as director or Rafał Pióro as deputy director of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. My experience as a mediator was somewhat helpful, although we have not had any serious disputes so far. But here too, as in every organization, different perspectives come into play, and so experience in mediation is very useful.
The founder of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation was Professor Władysław Bartoszewski. How do you remember your contacts with the Professor?

I met the Professor many years before the Foundation came into being. I met him the first time when I was an adviser to the secretary of state for the affairs of veterans and repressed persons, attorney Jacek Taylor. The Professor sometimes dropped in there. He evoked both delight and a certain timidity among some officials, because he always came right out and articulated his expectations. He made no secret of things, and so when he appeared there was always a great commotion. His resounding voice and the knocking of his cane could be heard in the office corridors.

I was then at the beginning of my professional career, and so I listened a great deal to what people who were older and more experienced had to say. The Professor’s great charisma could be seen, and it was wonderfully complemented by the wisdom, wit, and erudition of attorney Jacek Taylor—and so their conversation and discussions were a true intellectual feast.

I think that in their contacts with the Professor, many people had the impression that they were in the presence of an outstanding person. It’s a rare thing that when someone enters a room, you can feel the effect he has on the people and the whole space. I think that this exceptionality was additionally emphasized by the Professor’s extremely direct style. On the one hand it was a certain kind of self-confidence, and on the other hand enormous experience and the wisdom of what he said. He also knew how to listen, even to very young people.

Later, in the Foundation, we consulted strategic decisions with Professor Bartoszewski. As adviser to the prime minister he had great influence over international affairs, which were and continue to be essential to the work of the Foundation. Without him, the Foundation could never have come into existence.

From the very beginning of our operations, our liaison with the Professor was his right-hand man, the current director general of the Foundation, Wojciech Soczewica. Wojtek was very skilful at translating the Professor’s ideas and contacts into effective, prompt action, and so our cooperation was excellent.

What is the organizational setup of the Foundation like today?

Let’s begin with the structure of the Foundation. In the center is the Board, which is responsible for and conducts all Foundation business. In addition we have the International Committee made up of ambassadors representing the donor states, and the Foundation Council—eminent individuals from circles significant for the subject of the Foundation’s work, such as historians, conservators, and people involved in intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, from both Poland and abroad. Finally, there is the Financial Committee, consisting of experienced bankers and financial experts who advise on questions of investing and managing the perpetual capital. It was undoubtedly of overriding importance for us when creating and developing the organizational structure for the Foundation to be especially professional and credible, both in Poland and around the world. This explains the role of the international “oversight organ” and the contact with donors, the council of wise persons, and the committee of financial experts.

But the organizational setup is also vastly important on the level of relations between the Memorial and the Foundation. The Foundation board cooperates closely with the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and this cooperation is the core of our mission. People closely connected to the Museum, including Professor Władysław Bartoszewski and Piotr Cywiński, came up with the idea of the Foundation. At the same time, and perhaps for this very reason, it was important for both of these closely cooperating institutions to act independently and transparently from the start in order to prevent any potential conflicts of interest. During the first few years, I was the only person on the board who had no formal ties to the Museum. My role in terms of the organizational structure was, and still is, to make sure that no potential conflict between the legal entities ever turned into a real conflict, and I think I have been successful. The cooperation is smooth, so that the donor states, the International Committee, the Council, and the Financial Committee, as well as the Museum, have been satisfied over the years.
What is your opinion on the application of economic and administrative instruments in the realization of the social mission of memorial sites?

Professionally, there are two things I work on—first, negotiations and the prevention and resolution of disputes, and second, enhancing the effectiveness of companies and optimizing costs (within the framework of the Profitia Management Consultants and BATNA Group corporations). These two kinds of work have one thing in common. They concentrate on elevating the effectiveness of people and organizations, whether this is through lowering the level of conflict (and the associated transaction costs) or through the economically more effective expenditure of private and public resources. My choices and professional experience have only reinforced my conviction that in the administration of memorial sites as well, the appropriate application of economic instruments is essential to increasing the effectiveness of their mission.

I do not have any insight into how public money is spent in all areas of life, but because of my work with the Foundation and my interests, and from the work of Professor Adam Szpaderski, I know how important the application of good economic mechanisms or measures of the effectiveness of expenditures is for the financing of memorial sites and culture as such. It is an incredibly difficult task to spend these limited resources effectively in such a way as to maintain the memorial sites while simultaneously maximizing the utility of public resources. This is the issue for every organization, including every state—to spend limited resources so as to best achieve the goals.

From this perspective, there is much to do. For the sake of the effectiveness of every administrative process and improvement in effectiveness, it is necessary to adopt methods for measuring this effectiveness. This seems to be all the more true in areas—like cultural or historical remembrance—that are not easily quantifiable, and for which resources are limited. That is why the financing of memorial sites and the culture of remembrance is an exceptionally difficult task. This results in part from the values professed and supported by the present administrators of the resources, for instance out of political considerations or considerations of constructing historical memory. All the more necessary are hard economic indexes that can say: this złoty is spent 10 times better than that other złoty because 10 times more people were interested in coming to see an exhibition of a comparable standard. That’s a simple example, but it probably says a lot.

Please tell us about the principle of transparency that the Foundation observes.

The principle of transparency that we have followed since the earliest days of the Foundation is closely connected with building trust in the Foundation. It was obvious to us from the beginning that transparency is beyond discussion. Why? The thing we had to create from the beginning was trust. At the beginning there was only an idea, a resource in the form of the Memorial that is exceptional, and a few people who were trustworthy. Out of that, we had to create value.

Regardless, however, of the various forms of work and the degree of involvement, we were all convinced that we were working toward a single goal, which was greater than each of us individually and the sum of us all together. This kind of working toward a single goal also builds trust and makes our actions more transparent.
Another ingredient in trust was working out mechanisms for the effective spending of the money we transferred to the Museum. For the first 10 years, we especially concentrated on creating the organizational, personnel, and financial basis for cooperation with the Museum for the purpose of ensuring that the Museum spent the money as effectively as possible. Given the Polish law on public expenditures and in view of the highly specialized nature of conservation work, and in addition at such an absolutely exceptional memorial site, this is very difficult. In such cases there is nothing to compare it to.

Together with Rafał Pióro—as the person responsible for conservation—and the Board, we worked out a procedure for effectively allocating resources by a team specially established within the Museum framework. Our staff cooperated with this team on projects supported by the Foundation. Because my professional work involves advising on public procurement, among other things, my experience and knowledge about the best practices in the market could be of use here. This was also a matter of long-term activities such as, for example, the indirect creation of a market of suppliers who could support the Museum in a competitive marketplace, or creating resources and competence within the Museum itself.

We could also certainly call on many people of goodwill, and this is not exclusively thanks to the Foundation Board, but also to all the people who helped us: ambassadors, decision makers in various countries, the International Committee, the Financial Committee, and also our auditors, accountants, and lawyers who worked pro bono. A special vote of gratitude goes out to the Weil, Gotshal & Manges law firm, the Deloitte company, and KPMG, who have supported us very professionally for years.

The idea standing behind the Foundation created a special good, a resource, in which many valuable people wanted to join in carrying out the mission of the Foundation. It remains so to this day. We developed a climate of trust, which was crucial to building a vast international coalition that still supports the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation today, and in addition trust inside Poland on the basis of transparent procedures and effective organization. Today, the Foundation is a respected player in the arena of organizations involved in co-administering or cooperating with memorial sites. It is perhaps on this basis that we can undertake even bigger projects.
What kind of projects do you have in mind?

From the beginning of its existence, the Foundation has had an urgent, overriding goal that consists of protecting and conserving the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial in order to rescue its authenticity and safeguard it against disintegration. For me, maintaining the Memorial is not only a goal, but also the means to a greater goal, which would advance the creation of a world in which there will be fewer and fewer disputes and conflicts. As I have already mentioned, managing conflict and creating conditions for better understanding are my passions, both professionally and academically, and so this field is important to me personally.

One of the statutory aims of the Foundation’s work is “supporting research, education, and publishing . . . connected with the Mission of the Museum,” whose primary motto is “Remembrance, Awareness, Responsibility.” Creating a responsible society, aware of threats and able to cope better with conflicts, is precisely the great challenge for today’s times, and the Foundation could do still more in this regard. I think that this is where we should take advantage of our exceptional experience in broad international cooperation, part of which is the involvement of dozens of ambassadors in Foundation bodies. Thanks to this unique experience and the trust we have built up, we have a chance of creating something that would go beyond the level of individual states, research institutions, or academic disciplines. It seems to me that in today’s world, the most interesting things are happening at the interface of various scientific fields, and in international and intercultural cooperation.

Perhaps, on the basis of this outstanding cooperation, we would be able to create an institute or at least a meeting place for various academic disciplines and people who, in the shadow of Auschwitz-Birkenau, could work together with the goal of minimizing conflicts and increasing the responsibility and co-responsibility of the present and future generations. What I have in mind is benefiting from the exceptional properties of Auschwitz-Birkenau as a symbol, as the site of a monstrous crime. I get the impression that this potential has not been fully utilized.

I am thinking about action of the “prevention-building” type: working on resolving conflicts, or a place where scholars from various fields like law, economics, history, mathematics, game theory, psychology, and psychiatry could think about why the things that Auschwitz-Birkenau symbolizes happened—and what steps to take in constitutional, economic, medical, psychological, and sociological practice to minimize the danger in the future. This fits perfectly into the awareness and responsibility resulting from Remembrance, which we must build together.

What we have seen in politics over the last few years—great polarization somewhat reminiscent of the atmosphere before the Second World War, tensions, and social inequality—can lead to equally tragic consequences. Today we are facing new challenges that the democratic systems of our countries are unable to deal with effectively enough. Increasing numbers of social groups are failing to keep up with technological change. This is causing great tension and giving birth to the need for finding remedial means before it is too late. The question ought to be: On the basis of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial, could scholars from various disciplines create practices that minimize the likelihood of conflicts, disputes, and wars? How could they do so? In the Foundation, up to this point, we have built in wood and stone. I think that the time has come to build, on the underpinnings of this safeguarded substance and the awareness resulting from it, true dialogue, co-operation, and co-responsibility.
The Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation: Genesis, Development and Future

Jürgen Rüttgers
Germany is an important partner of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation, its largest donor and a strong ally. What is the idea behind this significant involvement?

It all started with Prof. Władysław Bartoszewski, an Auschwitz prisoner, diplomat and Polish-German bridge-builder. He and other outstanding members of the International Auschwitz Council knew that the aging of the post-camp remains is increasingly threatening the preservation of the Memorial. It was his idea to initiate the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation and have countries from around the world take responsibility for safeguarding the memory for future generations.

Hence a debate with the German federal and state governments started. At that time I was prime minister of North Rhine-Westphalia and I made an offer to Chancellor Angela Merkel that I would try to find a solution and try to organize the whole process. It was not a problem to convince other federal states because the question was not: Do we want to do it? It was rather: How are we going to do it? So in the end Germany decided to donate half of what was needed at that time.
From the beginning we were convinced that it is the right thing to do for the German state to participate in the preservation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. I remember that once I received a letter from a German entrepreneur who heard about the initiative to form a foundation dealing with the preservation of the former camp and he said, “I want to give money for the restoration of Auschwitz, one million euro.” The next day I wrote him back saying: “Thank you for your offer and help. I don’t want to say yes. I believe that it’s right for the German state to cover the cost of this. But I have an idea for you. If you want to do something for Auschwitz, then use your pledge for the organization of student visits to the Memorial.” So, in the end, our decision and the letters of the prime minister Donald Tusk to many heads of state and governments around the world, plus of course the Polish donation, kicked off the process that led to many countries in Europe and on a global scale getting involved in the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation. Today it is a proud number of 38 countries that have joined this strong symbolic coalition. An important achievement.

Currently at the Foundation we are debating about the problem that preservation is getting more expensive, and in order to keep the process going we must find a solution for the future, for the next generations. As a member of the Foundation Council I am here to help and if we as Germany can do something, we must do it. This place is unique and it needs to be safeguarded for the sake of the victims, survivors, and those who want to witness Auschwitz with their own eyes.

Is there any connection between the work of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation and the culture of remembrance?

The Foundation began with preserving the former camp’s infrastructure and the personal items that belonged to prisoners. I know from my discussions with Prof. Bartoszewski that the whole process would also have a political dimension in Poland. Preserving the Auschwitz Memorial was a political process and I believe it still is a political process. Securing the place is fundamental. That is what the Foundation is there for. But if we succeed, we have to think about the next steps. How do we want to shape the culture of remembrance, and what should the final result be? There is the central question about German responsibility: Why did they do it? And how can we make sure that a repetition of this horrible crime is forever impossible? It is necessary to find an answer to this question and I see a strong connection there with remembrance.

One of the solutions is through organizing visits to Auschwitz-Birkenau for pupils and students. Great Britain has a very good program for its students, for which the government is paying. Schools get subsidies to cover the travel cost. I know that in Israel it is clear that every young Israeli must visit the Auschwitz Memorial at least once. During one of my stays in Auschwitz I was there with a group of German students, and there we met a group from Israel. They heard us speaking German and you could see that this was difficult for some Israelis. I can understand this type of reaction.

We started a debate in Germany about whether all German students should perhaps also visit the Memorial during their time at school, as part of their curriculum. The process got going and was to some extent financed from private donors’ money, but it was very complex to organize, because it was not the schools who had taken the initiative, but the politicians. Now we have gathered the experience of over 20 thousand young people from Germany who went and saw the Auschwitz concentration camp. It makes sense, because when they come back, there is no discussion, no questioning and denying. The Holocaust happened and Auschwitz is the strongest possible symbol of that crime.

Another way for schools is to involve the survivors to talk to students and spread their testimony as wide as possible. A friend of mine, a wonderful woman who was in Auschwitz with her sister as a child, is 94 years old now. She is in very good shape and her sister lives in London. She visits Germany regularly, comes to speak at schools, and gets young people involved. We all remember from our school days that teachers sometimes find it hard to be persuasive or convincing, especially when it comes to topics so unimaginable in our days as the crimes of the Holocaust. But if there is a speaker who went through this very experience himself or herself, the class will listen. I have seen this many times in person.

It is essential that each generation find its way to remember. Each of my sons—one is 30, the second is 24, and the youngest is 20—needs a separate approach to consider what happened at Auschwitz-Birkenau. When we discuss the topic, they have their personal views, and although all three are interested in history, the Holocaust, Hitler’s crimes, and the German people at that time, their point of view varies. That is why we need to discuss the past over and over again, to find a common understanding.

What does all of this mean for the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum? It means that when we have severe problems in Europe, growing social tensions, nationalism, anti-Semitism and so on, we must include in our historical reflections a strong consideration of current developments. One results from the other. That is my point. It is necessary to preserve in order to work towards a better future. But we need to understand what happened in the past, so we can reach out to the younger generations. In my opinion these two things are crucial: First, it is absolutely necessary that our generation delivers on the preservation of Auschwitz: the buildings, the ruins—they are witnesses of the biggest state-organized crime in history. The Memorial is a symbol. And second, the future of remembrance must be reconsidered and I think that the coming 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau is a very good framework for that process. Time is pressing. Just look at this year’s European Parliament elections—there were many people running for office across Europe who are no longer afraid to talk the language of nationalism, radicalism, and exclusion. It is hard to believe after what happened only 75 years ago, but it is a fact that we have to face. And it is our duty, in view of the legacy of the victims, that we find ideas about how to remember actively and responsibly—on both sides of the political spectrum.
Do you think that preserving Auschwitz-Birkenau can contribute to strengthening Europe as a whole?

Certainly. We should acknowledge the meaning of Auschwitz-Birkenau as a symbolic start for the process of European reconciliation, a starting point from the vicious past. Out of it grew the desperate need for integration. Perhaps we had to look into the abyss. The question for me still remains: How could such unbelievable crimes be committed on a continent of culture, great tradition, and the Enlightenment?

For many in Germany our reunification was to a large extent also a unification of Europe. At that time, one of the most important issues was the German acceptance of its eastern border with Poland. Prior to that decision, there was an internal debate in Germany and although some of my colleagues at the Bundestag wanted to process it quickly, they had to consider that it was part of a broader decision including the USA, Russia, the UK, France, and the GDR. So the decision makers at the time had to combine the national and international aspects of it all. I remember that that was a great challenge for Helmut Kohl, but in the end Europe succeeded. The East and the West came together.

After the end of the Cold War and the fall of socialism, hyper-capitalism was on the rise, which ended badly not only for the European economies but also for the world as a whole. It turns out that neither socialism nor capitalism in its purest form have the capacity to find answers to poverty, a new future, and new technologies. In my opinion, the problem is a lack of values. How much money will I earn is not a moral question. But what I should do with the money is a moral question. I am free to decide what to do with the money available. And then, if we want to live together with other people, not only on a national level but on a wider scale, we must ask ourselves, Why do we want to live together, for what reason? Values are indispensable in this debate. And in a democracy, values need to be secured by the people; the state cannot set values without the consent of the people.

In the end, we must do more than only have good working organizations and institutions at the regional, national and European level. We need to look back at our past and secure fundamental values so that our children learn to cherish democracy; and so that they are aware that each democracy can be destroyed in a legal way. That each democracy is at risk of being destroyed as a result of a political fight, if there is no foundation for common action involving both the opposition and the government.
The legacy of Auschwitz-Birkenau is a critical element of German and Polish history. What are the lessons for Polish-German reconciliation that stem from the memory of Auschwitz?

That is a difficult question. Let us have a quick look at the last 30 years of our common history. When the Berlin Wall fell, the Germans were very happy. Their dream came true. At the same time, many Germans also wanted Germany and Poland to live peacefully as friends in a united Europe. From our perspective, we had to find a similar way as with our reconciliation with France—from the history of wars into a future of good relations. So the idea was to try the same thing with Poland, and that is how the treaty of friendship and neighborly relations came about.

At that time our Polish partners stressed that in order to function as partners, the Western institutions—NATO and later the EU—needed to remain open for accession. Germany said, “OK, we will help you.” This was important for Poland and the Baltic States, especially with NATO. Things were very complicated back then, but eventually solutions were found. These were success stories. But we made a great mistake, too. We did not start a discussion about our common past and the values we share. I believe that this is part of the reason why contemporary misunderstandings between our countries come up so easily. On both sides. It is necessary to sit together as neighbors and debate a new world order and what it means for Europe. We cannot rely on a national point of view.

Our bilateral relationship is more than a thousand years old. But Auschwitz-Birkenau and the Second World War are breaking points, which we shall never forget. Out of this tragic experience there comes a lesson for Europe, and within this for us as neighbors. I am convinced that the reconciliation process between Germany and Poland is not finished and requires new efforts from us. That, too, is a legacy of what happened 75 years ago.
How do you remember the beginnings of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation?

It all began with Roman Rewald, whom I knew from the American Chamber of Commerce in Poland. He was the one who told me that the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation was being organized and that, as the Weil, Gotshal & Manges law firm, they were helping. He added that there was a group of young people—Jacek Kastalaniec and Piotr Cypinski—who wanted to ask my advice, and who were looking for people with experience. After the first meeting, I agreed and joined the Foundation Council.

I saw how the idealistic side was emerging in the Foundation. It was obvious. Everybody—there were three or four people—was buzzing with energy, living out the idea of the Foundation, and that delighted me. It made a big impression on me, but at the same time I started having serious doubts about the long-term effectiveness of such an initiative. It seemed to me that they were totally unaware that you cannot act on the basis of dreams. That’s not enough. My doubts stemmed from the fact that when you talk about administering 120 million euro you’re dealing with serious investment, rather than even the noblest of ideas.

I stressed first that banks specializing in managing money sometimes lose money, and second that dishonest people show up in banks from time to time, and that banks have mechanisms to prevent such improprieties. This was what the Foundation urgently needed.
The Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation is a very important institution with international, Polish, and local dimensions. It’s not a startup. Beyond that, the very name Auschwitz-Birkenau summons up incredible responsibility. Back then I was still not sure of their sense of responsibility and of the trouble that could result from the lack of an appropriate method of administering this undertaking.

I have to say that Jacek Kastelaniec shocked me. I don’t know if he had a bucket of cold water thrown over him, but he asked me, “Well, so what are we really supposed to do?” And we began working on the structure. I am not thinking about the statute of the Foundation, I’m talking about rules and procedures. So I suggested that we should contact people from the bank—financial specialists, trainers, and information technologists—so that, when the money started coming in, they would be ready.

That was when the concrete cooperation began with lawyers, financial specialists, auditors, IT specialists, and with Weil, Gotshal & Manges, Deloitte, IBM, Ernst & Young, and KPMG. The question quickly arose of who was responsible for what in the Foundation. The tasks had to be assigned. When everything goes right, then everyone is the mother or father of success, but when the first mistake happens, the reaction is the same: “How was I supposed to know that it was my job to do it?”

The most important thing was to convince the world about the necessity of raising the Perpetual Capital Fund target of 120 million euro, so that everyone would know how necessary it is to rescue the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial, to rescue memory, and that it’s not about reconstruction or rebuilding. There would be no new planks or bricks. To the greatest possible degree, everything was to be preserved and authentic.

That wasn’t easy either, because in Poland there is not so much experience in that regard. Poland is full of commercial companies, there’s a basis for systematizing solutions and drawing conclusions. There are so many foundations, but of a different kind. Here, after all, we have perpetual capital. This was more or less the point at which we started analyzing who should make the financial decisions. That was when the Financial Committee arose.

Precisely. Please tell us about this.

Above all, there was a need for someone who knew about investments and cash flow. The founders did not have any dazzling experience at this, and they openly admitted it. I therefore felt there was a need to create some kind of modus operandi, some financial rules to play by, what to invest in, and what not to. How much? What limits? And so on. I took the task upon myself.

I liked that fact that from the start the Committee was intended to be international. We have two people from Germany, one each from Austria and France. Later I found two additional people—Antoni Reczek with auditing experience, who was once the head auditor of PWC, and Włodzimierz Grudziński, a banker with 30 years of experience, a former bank president. And thus the Committee came into being.

The majority of the members who came in from abroad worked in banks. Every one of them had a voice. And not only locally, from Poland, because there was still the question of where we operated in legal terms, and where we would invest. We mostly said that we would invest in Poland, through our organizational units. It was a matter of the benefactors being sure that the money donated to us was safe and that its use was predictable. If someone had said back then that we should have someone else from another country, we would surely have consented. I agreed to become the chairman of the Committee, with the approval of the Committee members.

At that time the Foundation did not have as much capital as today. We began meetings and contacts with traders—those are the people who buy and sell money in banks. They met with Jacek Kastalaniec and explained how to trade securities, what’s important, what a coupon is, and so on. They had to start with the ABCs, and it worked. The whole principle, as far as caution goes, is based on the “four eyes principle”—that no single person makes the decision; two people for every decision. A typical commercial, banking approach, which we began implementing.
What is the Foundation’s investment policy?

We invest only in those securities or companies that have a rating at least as good as that of Poland, which is currently A-. Everybody agreed with this. We established investment categories and limits. The same with currencies, in terms of the proportion of our resources deposited in a given currency. The Committee prepared a matrix to serve as the basis for talks with banks, and we used this to look for investments and transactions that met certain parameters. We rejected investment instruments that had a high return but were also high risk. Safety comes first. Such is the will of the Foundation Council. The subject of the safety of the amassed resources comes up always and everywhere. Especially in the course of the annual meetings of the International Committee, questions are always asked about what is happening with the donated capital, because countries give two, four, six and more million and ask whether they can sleep soundly at night. Our role, therefore, is to take pains over that feeling of safety.

In addition, we follow the principle of holding on to bonds until their maturity date. We don’t trade them. If it’s three-year paper, we simply hold onto it for three years and we’re sure that we’ll get two, three, or four percent. That’s the difference between a bank and the Foundation investment policy. When bankers see that things are changing in the world, they sell a given instrument on the market, counting on making additional money. We don’t do that. We never turn over money from our capital to someone and say, “There’s 20 million euro for you. Play with it. Just as long as we make some money on it.” We don’t do that. That kind of asset management never takes the responsibility for us coming out ahead.

What constitutes the principle of the transparency of Foundation operations?

Transparency with a big T. Transparency means that everyone can see what we do and how we do it. I must say that this was very well received by the team from the beginning, because in many cases when you talk about transparency, people react with suspicion—“Aha, transparency means that you don’t trust us.” We didn’t have that. Piotr Cywiński and Jacek Kastaliniec both understood that the risk is very big vis-à-vis the authorities, the regulators, and the International Committee, that it’s a special responsibility. The representatives of those bodies receive reports. They read them and ask a great many questions, at times very hard questions. To prepare that information, you have to be transparent.

Take the transparency of decision making. For instance, there is a decision that the Foundation will transfer a million złoty of the money it made to the Museum for conservation work. In what form, for what purpose? Do we understand that? Or do we simply transfer the money, and that’s the end of it? No. Thanks to transparency in decision-making, we know what the Museum’s needs result from, what the resources will be used for, and so on. The Museum has plans for the work—one barracks, two, three, five, ten. On the basis of a concrete job, they submit a request for such and such an amount of money in two or three months.

Whereas if the Foundation has more money than the Museum needs at the moment, then we automatically invest those resources. This is the investing of the investment. Financial reports are drawn up on everything and our accounting is subject to auditing.
How has the role of the Financial Committee changed over the last 10 years?

We no longer have to concern ourselves with developing procedures, organizing the office work, and so on. At present the Financial Committee rather examines expenditures and may ask questions about what is involved in a given budget item and make a decision when some large, special, non-regular investment comes up. Basically we concern ourselves with all transactions that go over the limit. The Committee also takes an interest in the financing of conservation work, and especially whether there will be money for the work in the perspective of ten or twenty years.

At the beginning of the implementation of the Master Plan for Preservation, there were not yet any investments per se. It was all theory. It turned out that these jobs could not be completed as quickly as it seemed. No one had experience in terms of the technology. This was not a matter of tearing down a whole barracks, buying bricks, and putting some kind of structure back up. Instead it meant straightening walls, conserving and numbering individual bricks, installing drains. People didn’t talk about this 10 years ago, and so the whole process required more time and more financial input than we assumed at the start.

Splendid laboratories were built, financed by Ronald Lauder, where conservation work is done and microscopic analysis carried out on mortar, wood, pigments, paper, and chemical compounds. Now we have experience about how much it costs, especially after opening two brick barracks in Birkenau to visitors—the first big project financed by the Foundation. We know how much it really costs and we can see that for securing the entire Memorial, there isn’t enough money. All the more so because the interest on capital is lower than at the beginning, therefore making it impossible to cover all the essential conservation work. The Committee, together with the Foundation Council, is taking part in preparing new action plans to deal with this situation.

One of the crucial areas in the present work of the Committee is the problem of investment quality. Four or five years ago, there weren’t many investment transactions. In view of the fact that there are now so many of these operations, the Committee checks whether we have a register of all transactions. We also monitor the macroeconomic situation and how it can influence our investing.

Why did you decide to get involved in Foundation work?

My origins and the fact that at least 85 percent of my nearest family members perished during the war, in Auschwitz, Treblinka, and the Warsaw ghetto. To tell the truth, the motivation or the interest in this subject had already arisen in me when I was eight to ten years old. We survived because we were in Russia, in the Gulag. Something awful happened. There was no trace of my grandfathers and grandmothers, there was no trace of the family; there was no furniture, nothing, no documents. The awareness that something terrible had happened grew in me gradually. To tell the truth, that motivation is based on the 70 years of my life.

When I was 18 or 19, I was strongly affected by the so-called March events in Poland and by the fact that Polish Jews were again disappearing and that the traces of the multigenerational presence of their ancestors were being erased. The historical vestiges of a thousand years were tangible, and what was left was also under threat. I remember going to one of the Warsaw synagogues with my grandfather. It struck me that people kept looking around—a little embarrassed, self-conscious because someone might see them. For many years I felt that it was frightening. I only got over that 20 years ago, when my son came to visit me from the United States. We drove together to eastern Poland, where my mother was born, in Różan on the Narew. We visited the old synagogue, and we found the old cemetery in the woods. In Lublin we were looking for where one of the oldest cemeteries was, but we couldn’t find it. My son said, “Dad, ask somebody.” But I was embarrassed. In the end I asked somebody in a hushed voice. He noticed this and said, “Dad, you’re just afraid. You’re afraid to even ask the question about where the old cemetery is or where the synagogue is, because you’re afraid of what the reaction will be. You’re afraid of getting punched in the nose. You’re afraid they’ll spit at you. You’re afraid they’ll say something. You’re afraid they’ll walk away.” And he was right. Afterward, when I asked similar questions, I almost shouted, so loud, to compensate for that fear. It turned out that nobody beat me up, nobody did anything to me.
The motivation to do something about this matter that was so important to me had been inside me for years. As a soldier in the US Army stationed in Germany I carried out investigations next to the Czechoslovakian border in search of local history from the years 1933 to 1945. Then after returning to Poland I sought out my grandfather’s grave, I rebuilt the whole pathway, I made a road. There were four or five more graves there belonging to people I didn’t know. I repaired it all. This comes in part from nostalgia, and a little bit from rage that such beautiful things existed, an incomparable culture, and that it was all destroyed and there was hardly a trace of it. And what remains is so vestigial that we are afraid to do anything about it.

The second thing is a question of humanity, the event itself, the Holocaust. How was it possible that people could inflict such a brutal fate on other people? In Japan, I studied how the Japanese behaved during the war. There, similarly, people stripped other people of their humanity. They say that the perpetrators behaved like animals. Not true. Animals don’t do that. Animals attack to satiate their hunger. Not to kill off a whole race, a whole species. It’s astounding, the awareness that something like that happened. And the question: What to do so that it’s never repeated? This is not a matter of me and my life, but of my children, grandchildren, the coming generations. At the beginning of this road I already understood that the goal is not only paying respect and honor to those who died, who perished in Auschwitz, but also those who survived. And what do you do for those who are alive now, so than nothing similar ever befalls them? From generation to generation. Here we approach the core of the matter, the question about the nature of humankind. As a species, are we evil or good? I believe that people are good, although there have been episodes when they certainly were not good. But yes, in my opinion, people per se are good.

We should behave in such a way as to prevent the rise of circumstances that summon up negative currents in society: extreme nationalism, inequality, hatred. People have a tendency to enter those realms. You cannot eliminate it, but you can try to limit it. One of the ways is memory, because if you point out ruins, people can see what was destroyed. If everything is cleaned up then there is no trace. The Warsaw ghetto is an example. When tourists come to Warsaw they ask, “Where was that famous, heroic ghetto?” They won’t see it. A piece of wall, of course. But the ghetto is gone. Why?

Another example: The Warsaw Uprising. Where are the traces, monuments aside? Why didn’t they leave a hectare, or 10 hectares, so that it would be a museum forever, so that people could see what happened? That is why, in the case of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, I am very attached to the idea of conservation, preservation. There must be authenticity, legibility, so that we can understand what happened.

We are therefore drawing near to the fact that the strongest motivation is preventing similar crimes, starting at the beginning, from the youngest years, from birth, to block the emergence of negative forces. You cannot do this work with someone who is 50 years old. It is a matter of educating in humanity, what the destruction of humanity means, and what hatred is. We can see that this is all beginning to rise again, and we are at very dangerous point where peace is under threat in many countries. Education is now the most important thing. It takes many years but it needs to be repeated, nourished, so that it grows and develops—the matter cannot be settled once and for all.
I remember one of the anniversaries of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. During one of the official speeches, someone asked, “What caused all this?” And the answer: “Unfortunately there is no good answer.” That enraged me.

I felt that of course there is an answer, but we do not analyze the reasons often enough. It’s not as if the War and the Holocaust suddenly fell from Mars. In Europe and other places around the world, nationalism has sprung up. These are the facts. Human decisions lie behind it. Incomprehension results from a lack of education. This applies not only to anti-Semitism, but to racism and xenophobia as well.

Therefore my motivation to become involved in Foundation matters is the sum of all these things. To a large degree, thanks to the Foundation, I have been able to participate in something incredibly important to me. When I was talking to my son, whose permanent home is New York, he told me, “This is something you have dreamed of all your life, to do something to prevent this from vanishing, to prevent this from being destroyed, so that people can see it because in this way they will learn and pass it on to other generations.” That is my motivation.

What does working in the Foundation mean to you?

Thanks to my activities in the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation I have drawn much closer to the Museum, and not only as a tourist who comes here and looks around. All the conservation work, the discussions with Piotr Cywiński and Rafał Pióro, the preparation of new projects, the conservation of the ruins of the gas chambers, the brick barracks, the fabrics, thanks to which I can touch something that, in a certain sense, touches my family.

I spent one night in Auschwitz-Birkenau, because I needed—for the first time in my life, of course—to come face to face with the former camp. For me, it was contact with my relatives who perished there. Of course I know that they perished not in Auschwitz but in Birkenau, but it is a matter of the symbolic dimension. That silence, that calm, everything completely dark because only the lamps on the blocks were shining.

I walked there for two hours and that permitted me to genuinely say farewell to them, to say, “Listen, we have not forgotten about you, I am here with you, but I am alive and, through me, you too are alive. I will talk to my children about you.”

The Foundation has brought me much closer to this, to make permanent the memory of this, that the heritage exists and will not be destroyed. Mainly in order to show the younger generations that it happened, that it looked like this, and it is impermissible to permit it to happen again. Neglecting the Memorial intensifies the danger, because politically everything is possible.
Please tell us about the beginnings of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation and the role of Professor Władysław Bartoszewski in the project.

That’s a very good question. Where to begin? If we take a broad view of the history of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation, and not through the prism of my own personal involvement, then it is necessary to start the story in December 1940. But if I were to limit myself exclusively to my own personal experience and recollections, then it would have to be the summer of 2006.

I’ll explain December 1940 later, and it is connected to the person we are dedicating this book to. In 2006—based on the proposal of Piotr Cywiński—I became secretary of the International Auschwitz Council, which reports to the Polish prime minister. I have to admit that the first session came as a shock to me. I was then involved in the subject of Auschwitz-Birkenau on a much lower level. I knew the history well, I knew the educational work, but I was acting out of a conviction that is shared, I think, by a great many people in this world. That means that I thought in the following way: that money from all over the world, from numerous foundations, patrons, institutions, and states, was flowing in a broad stream to a place like that, with that history, with that significance for the world. Yet at the very beginning I realized as I listened to discussions among senior and more important members that we were in a dramatic situation. I remember the reports submitted at that time by the office of the director of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oświęcim and by the conservators who said that, unless we took decisive action in the nearest future, we would irrevocably lose what remained of the former camp.

I recall the discussion on the ruins of the gas chambers and crematoria—there is no need for me to mention their significance—which were threatened by collapse within the space of a few years. They would simply disappear. Or the discussions about the brick barracks in Birkenau, or, finally, the dramatic tone of the discussion on the subject of artifacts.
We were all aware of one thing: at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum we had a group of unusually talented conservators who, in many ways, were pioneers on a world scale. Thus, we had what was most important—people. Know-how was available, but there were also a great many things that we were capable of doing ourselves, and would have to do ourselves, but there was also a shortage of money. The scale of the needs was so enormous that, even with the greatest involvement by the authorities, it simply exceeded the capacity of the Polish state.

Why do I keep describing this discussion as dramatic? Just imagine the look on the faces of former prisoners during this discussion: Władysław Bartoszewski, Israel Gutman, Kalman Sultanik, Kazimierz Albin, Józef Szajna and Marian Turski. For these people it was more than catastrophic when they heard that the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial might disappear in a physical sense. They would be gone someday, that was clear, but they believed that the site would remain, that there would be a concrete, tangible vestige. It seemed that there was no way out, because there were no good ideas about how to obtain the needed backing. People like Ronald Lauder had of course long supported the conservation work, but we knew that we needed far more, vast sums that would make it possible to carry out the Master Plan for Preservation, which would be redone every 20 to 25 years.

Before I get to the origins of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation, I will refer again to December 1940 and the figure of Professor Władysław Bartoszewski. Let me tell you about one of the most important events in his life, and everyone who knows his biography to even a small degree knows that this was a crucial moment in his life. He was a prisoner of Auschwitz from late in the evening of September 21, 1940. An eighteen-year-old boy, captured in a big roundup in the intelligentsia district, completely by chance. Totally innocent, certainly connected with the underground, and yet, encouraged by a fawning mother, a graduate of prestigious private schools. He was never a boy scout, was never at a summer camp, was a bookworm, and he landed in the lowest circle of hell. This could, of course, only end very, very badly. And in December that boy already had his whole body covered with open sores, he was exhausted, and everything indicates that he had a bad case of pneumonia. He was a physical wreck. At the beginning of December 1940, he passed out and was half-conscious when two prisoners took him under the arms and dragged him to the camp hospital. Masses of seriously ill, wounded, and beaten prisoners were milling around the camp hospital. Of course there were far fewer beds than needed in the hospital. In addition, one might ask—What kind of hospital was that? There was no medicine for Polish political prisoners, but the important thing was to get indoors during the winter months, and not go out to labor. That day, the prisoner—doctors faced a dramatic decision. They could not admit many. What did that really mean? That whoever did not get into the hospital would be sentenced to death.
None of us would want to find ourselves in that situation, bearing that responsibility. His whole life long, Władysław Bartoszewski would remember the dialogue between the two doctors standing over him. One wanted to admit him, but not the other. And each of them had his reasons, each was an honorable man. The one who did not want to admit him assumed simply, “This boy won’t make it. Let’s take someone who’s in better shape.” The other, intuitively, was inclined to admit prisoner number 4427. Seeing that he was half-conscious, he started asking him where he was from, what he did in Warsaw, why he wanted to go to university. Then one of the doctors said a sentence that Władysław Bartoszewski would remember to the end of his life, “Listen, he’s from the intelligentsia. Let’s take him. If he lives, he might tell about it.” That proved to be the decisive argument. Władysław Bartoszewski would never forget it.

That moment was the great impulse of his life. It explains dozens of things he did, and, let’s come right out and say it, all his life, Władysław Bartoszewski paid back that debt he contracted in Auschwitz.

When we are aware of this and contrast it with the dramatic condition of the remains of the camp, we start to understand that for a former prisoner the probability of the destruction of KL Auschwitz is the worst possible scenario. I remember meeting the last survivor of Sobibór, who came right out and said “There is something worse than Sobibór. Forgetting about Sobibór.” I will never forget that.

Nor will I forget—it must have been a year and a half before the establishment of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation—arriving in Oświęcim and being told by Piotr Cywiński that we should go to Birkenau, which meant a serious discussion was coming. And indeed we set out on the path I always follow, in the direction of crematorium and gas chamber number five. I feel especially connected with that place, perhaps through Henryk Mandelbaum, a former Sonderkommando member with whom I went there. Piotr started telling me about the idea of the Foundation, the idea of a perpetual fund. Today I must say quite frankly that the idea was simple and brilliant, but I wouldn’t have gone to the bookmaker’s and bet on its succeeding.

It was worth putting in every effort, but how could others be convinced? Why should countries pay? I suspected that the majority of countries would say, “Listen, Poland oversees it, and we can finance an individual project, but to pay money to a management board?” Nobody had done this on an international level, with so many partners.

I remember how Władysław Bartoszewski became involved with the idea. But again, if we try to answer the question of why he became involved, we have to return via time machine to December 1940. I also remember the last months of Władysław Bartoszewski’s life, we could see that he was growing weaker. When we talked in his office in the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, between the lines, without ever coming out and saying it, Władysław Bartoszewski kept asking, “Have I done enough, can I go in peace now?” Then, I simply said, “Professor, it’s up and running. It is. There’s still a lot to do, but the most important thing is on the right track.”

And so when I think about the Foundation and about the Professor, the only way I can see it is from the perspective I have outlined, which begins somewhere in December 1940 and then goes on through the following years. That’s how I see it.
Could you say something about the significance of the cooperation with former prisoners in the context of the work of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation?

Above all, we were perfectly aware from the start that the Foundation could not be built without the authoritativeness of former prisoners. Despite individual differences, the former prisoners constitute a group with certain shared characteristics. In the first place, their exceptional vitality and willingness to use life for something good and not wasting time. Second, these are hard-working people, down-to-earth people. Dialogue in practice, I would call it. Christians and Jews, Poles and Jews, people deeply convinced that something like an international alliance needed to be built around Auschwitz-Birkenau. That it should be a place that unites people, that unites various kinds of memory. They understand this perfectly, and that comprehension was not universal in the early 1990s.

Former prisoners were an inspiration and their authoritativeness was a help. They aided us in getting through to decision makers on various levels. I am reminded here of the figure of Józef Stós, a prisoner from the first transport whom I knew well. Former prisoners kept returning to camp subjects. In this case it was about the yard next to block 11, the place where executions were carried out. There’s a gate there and then the ground slopes slightly down to a drain with a grille over it. Near the end of his life, Józef Stós kept returning obsessively to that grille because he thought it had been replaced during some maintenance work. He kept saying, “Listen, the original grille should be here.” You might say it was absurd. A drainage grille that no one would notice. What difference did it make? He would reply that one day a Blocksperre was declared in the camp. The prisoners were confined to their blocks. Something bad was going on. He and another prisoner sneaked out of the block to see what was happening. It turned out that people were being shot at the Death Wall. Stós reported that the naked bodies of the victims were piled up and sand strewn to form a narrow channel through which the blood from those bodies flowed to that drainage grille. I remember to this day how he asked me, “Do you know what it looks like when blood flows by the liter?” “You know, it doesn’t really flow. The blood makes the impression that it is crawling, because it is clotting at the same time. It doesn’t flow like water; it’s a horrendous sight.” Later still he said, “Imagine how much blood a person has. An adult has six or seven liters of blood. Now imagine that several score victims are lying there. Do the multiplication. How many liters of blood would have to flow into that drain.”

Now I’m getting to the point, which is disturbing but illustrates the logic we have to use. Stós said, “Tell me, who will believe that story now, if they come here and I’m not around? They read my account. It’s moving, and they come here. They look at that grille and say: But that’s a new grille. Did the old man make it up? After all, we know what happens to human memory. Things get mixed up. New facts keep emerging.” “Nobody believes me, but I saw it. My friend and I were the only one who saw it. Nobody else saw it.”

From the outside you might say that we, too, are doing things that are incomprehensible to the average person. Why spend a million euro saving a hundred thousand shoes? Why? You could say, after all, that everyone knows what happened here. When we look at it that way, or from the viewpoint of the perpetrators, that shoe is the only trace of a person the perpetrators wanted to erase one hundred percent. If we let that shoe be destroyed, are we closer to the perpetrators or the victims? The perpetrators wanted to ship that shoe to the Reich as winter aid, and when it wore out there would be no trace left of the person, because there is no trace left of a person who is gassed and burned. But if we preserve that shoe, everything changes. To understand what we do it for, why we do it, you have to enter that heart of darkness. You can’t see it from the outside.

Yes, we were lucky to have those great authorities who made it possible to realize the Foundation plan, beginning with Władysław Bartoszewski and Kalman Sultanik. Those names bear repeating. We know how significant Kalman Sultanik was when it comes to the United States but also various organizations and governments in Europe. Former prisoners were the kind of people who could clear away landmines and doubts. They showed that behind the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation there are no political or financial interests, but only good will and the things that are most important. They did a lot of incredibly important work behind the scenes, face to face. No politician or decision maker could leave somebody like that waiting at their office door. They meet with them, listen to them, and they look bad if they don’t go on to take some kind of action.
You chair the Council of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation. Tell us about its role.

Władysław Bartoszewski was the first chair of the Council. After his passing away I took over the function. The Council of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation is a body that on the one hand oversees and evaluates, and on the other puts forward certain solutions, but in spite of this I would put the oversight and evaluation role first. The Council is a buffer to ensure the credibility and transparency of the Foundation’s work. This is a practical matter. I will give only one example: after Council sessions there is always a meeting of the International Committee of the Foundation, where we report in detail, in a very transparent way, on all the work of the Foundation—from financial and administrative matters to conservation work—to the representatives of almost 40 donor states together with the Foundation Management Board and the staff of the Master Plan for Preservation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

The goal of the Council’s work is for Auschwitz-Birkenau to speak to future generations. We must do everything, in line with our knowledge, experience, and conscience, to achieve this. In this world that is in conflict, and in my opinion more in conflict and riven by ideology by the year, where people have ceased listening to each other, the sessions of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Council, annual and sometimes more often, are like a breath of fresh air. This is not cheap politeness or diplomacy on my part. These are real discussions. There is respect for and trust of other people, because it is known that even if they hold a different view, they do so out of deep conviction and in agreement with their conscience because they know that we are united in concern for the Memorial. Unfortunately, to an increasing degree, such places, groups, and meetings are the exception.

I would say contrarily and perhaps disturbingly that if we cannot act together in the case of Auschwitz-Birkenau, then we have failed one of the most important examinations in our lives. On the other hand, if Auschwitz-Birkenau and especially such issues as conservation, remain immune today and over the following decades from the pressure of ongoing disputes, conflicts, and conflicts of political, ideological, and business interests, then we have accomplished something important indeed.

Auschwitz-Birkenau is the site of the extermination not exclusively of Jews but also of Poles, Russians, Roma and Sinti, and other social groups. How do you view remembrance as a space for a dialogue of different experiences?

This is where that deep wisdom that was upheld by former prisoners, often despite the resistance of many others, shined through. They were united in suffering, and united in this place, despite numerous differences. The difference between the fates of a Polish political prisoner and a Jewish child deported from a ghetto in the Netherlands or occupied Poland. They understood something that not all politicians or commentators on various sides of the barricades understand. Namely, that the various remembrances at Auschwitz-Birkenau are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary. How would it be possible to tell the story of this place honestly, forthrightly, and especially from the point of view of historical scholarship, simultaneously with respect and the moral obligation due to all victims, by concentrating exclusively on the fate of Polish political prisoners, or concentrating on the origins of Auschwitz, or on the years 1940 and 1941? It is impossible. But by the same token it cannot be done by talking exclusively about the extermination in Birkenau and beginning this story in the spring of 1942. It’s impossible. There is no methodological scalpel that can separate these stories. Former prisoners understood this. This fate can unite people.
There is a book of anecdotes about the Professor that somewhat deflates these reflections but also shows something important. The story took place during the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Everybody, the former prisoners, is waiting outdoors for the politicians, who are late. Significantly, the temperature is well below zero and these old ladies and gentlemen are literally turning into blocks of ice.

Next to Władysław Bartoszewski sits his old friend Israel Gutman, who lost almost his entire family in the Holocaust. They do not exchange a word because they are literally freezing, and then at a certain moment Gutman glances at Bartoszewski and says, "So, Władysław, we’re going to die in Birkenau after all." That of course is the kind of humor that former prisoners are entitled to, but at the same time it draws attention to the survivors’ feeling of a shared fate. Bartoszewski was a Polish political prisoner who was deported to the camp completely at random and spent 199 days there, while the story of Gutman and his family is completely different. However, these were men who were not about to squabble over this place because they had lived through too much and had acquired too much wisdom over their frequently tragic lives to descend to something like that. They understood that it’s all one whole.

The Roma are an excellent example. In the case of Red Army soldiers or victims from countries now in existence, we have to deal with various government bodies, ambassadors, posts, and state institutions that might demand that information about the fate of these former prisoners should be taken into account, but in the case of the Roma we are talking about a minority that does not have any official state representation, does not have any diplomatic apparatus to send letters demanding various things. Please note how much room there is in Auschwitz-Birkenau for the Roma, and how well-tended it is. How many reminders there are that they too were people sentenced to total extermination solely because of their ethnicity. It’s not a matter of there being 21 to 22 thousand Roma victims, and, for instance, about a million Jewish victims. It’s important to say that there were about a million Jewish victims, dedicate an appropriate amount of space to them, and not distort the history. But it’s not arithmetic. The 21 thousand do not disappear in the shadow of the one million. And who proposed the Roma exhibition? Polish and Jewish prisoners. Władysław Bartoszewski, Israel Gutman, and Kalman Sultanik made it possible for Romani Rose and the Roma Center in Heidelberg to create the exhibition. How absurd it would have been, or what a crime we would have committed if, at this most horrifying place on earth, which arose as a result of the politics of exclusion, we ourselves had practiced exclusion and employed criteria of isolation or competition in remembrance, competition among victims. It’s monstrous. Unfortunately, this is possible and often we see such efforts, but we have to protect at least this one place. We had a quarrel; someone in a great patriotic furor attacked us because it was written on one of the panels that in this place “Jews and non-Jews” perished. This is not censorship. This was a place that the majority of people associate with the extermination of the Jews, and the historians wanted to communicate in this way that people of other ethnicities also perished here. There’s nothing wrong with this.

In the case of the Foundation we of course take all of this into account, but above all we deal with conservation. Here, the criteria are different. History would nevertheless laugh, the perpetrators would laugh, if this again became a place for selection, segregation, and exclusion.
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Above all I am very impressed by the way that in education, an exceptionally sensitive field, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum has done the right things, honestly, in accord with historical scholarship and in accordance with universally acknowledged morality and common sense. This is an exceptional field. We, as the Foundation, can help here. What we conserve is not just conserved for the sake of conservation, but for purposes that include education, so that these objects can continue to speak as educational material. Yet this place must do more. It must unify.

Education has now come to the forefront, often in the form of dramatic questions. During the last sitting of the International Auschwitz Council, members of the Council from other countries said that a million euro had been pumped into education about the Holocaust in Western countries, and yet anti-Semitic attitudes were increasing rather than decreasing. How to explain this puzzle? There have been various attempts and hypotheses with some stating—among them Piotr Cywiński—that we have been speaking too historically about the Holocaust, rather than grounding it in emotional human experience. Too academically. This is connected to the fact that in the 1990s deniers were regarded as the greatest threat, and thus the accent was placed on facts. Others say that the Holocaust became something cold and distant, like the history of the American Civil War or the Polish November Uprising, or Napoleonic times. Another group is asking whether teaching about the history of the American Civil War or the Polish November Uprising, or Napoleonic times. Another group is asking whether teaching about the Holocaust should automatically be regarded as an effective instrument, but for purposes that include education, so that these objects can continue to speak as educational material. Yet this place must do more. It must unify.

How to educate effectively? Why teach? I think this can be applied to Auschwitz-Birkenau. It is worth asking, Why come to Auschwitz-Birkenau? Why? Of course, the first and automatic answer that comes up is: to remember. To know and remember. But that seems too little. You should leave this place with a certain unease, and then you can think about what to do with it. But it’s your decision, your actions. I am deeply convinced that the Museum can keep that balance, although it’s very difficult.

We must look for different methods, different paths. We cannot avoid the fact that with the passage of time and the passing away of eyewitnesses, the risk and danger of indifference grows, and from indifference it is only a step to forgetting. That’s the whole problem. We are coming back in a big arc to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation, to what we are all doing together. There can be no effective education, in my opinion, without preserving authenticity, without the possibility of touching, without standing in that place, without walking through the gate, without going inside the barracks, without holding a shoe in your hand. One-fourth of the victims of the Holocaust were children. A million and a half. Does a dry number make an overwhelming impression? Please pick up the little shoe, rescued thanks to conservation, that belonged to a child no more than three months old. Suddenly, scores of people see their own children, their own little brother. I don’t know what that child’s name was, but that shoe remains. Tiny and red. We have to rescue it. It will fall apart some day, but at the very least we must slow that process down as much as we can. We want genuine memory, and not only knowledge, and even that is fragile.
We cannot bring the murdered people back to life. The Holocaust was supposed to be total. Every trace of those people was supposed to vanish. It was a matter not only of killing, but also complete erasure, and every trace of the killing process was supposed to disappear after the Holocaust. In this sense, it was supposed to be total. We know that the perpetrators succeeded in this to an enormous degree. For instance, in terms of the physical vestiges of Sobibór, Bełżec, or Treblinka. In Auschwitz-Birkenau we had a slightly different historical situation. What I am getting at is that when we talk about the complete erasure of the memory of the people and the killing process itself, the battle is still going on. That means that we still do not know if the perpetrators’ intention will succeed, or whether the people of good will can manage to win. If we forget about Auschwitz-Birkenau, if we forget about such places, if we yield to the natural progression of erosion and the destruction of physical traces, then we will permit the perpetrators to triumph. That is not a figure of speech. As the Germans retreated they blew up the gas chambers and crematoria. They weren’t able to do it as thoroughly as at Bełżec. In 2006, the conservators said, “In a dozen years or in a few decades the earth will cover the ruins of the gas chambers and crematoria.” It would all be gone, and who would be responsible for that? Our generation. We would have been the ones who did not save them. We would have shown the children pictures in books. Would we perhaps have made an advanced 3-D visualization? Sure, but in reality it would have been something terrible to have on our conscience. In this sense we would have contributed, indirectly, to the implementation of the perpetrators’ plan. If we had not acted. When you consider it calmly, it’s not just a rhetorical figure. It’s a fact. A hard fact.

We know full well that collective memory is dynamic. Certain elements fade out of that memory and get lost in the shadows while others appear or are shifted to the foreground. We know dozens of examples. Rotmistrz Witold Pilecki. In the 1990s I knew about Rotmistrz Witold Pilecki, but if we had taken a survey on the streets of Polish cities I can assure you that there would have been one right answer in a hundred, and that’s being optimistic. Today he is one of the greatest heroes of the Second World War in Poland. But for example the memory of Jan Nowak-Jeziorański is fading. He seemed to be a man of gigantic services to Poland throughout his life. In various phases, up to the very end. In addition, his life was a Hollywood script. I propose conducting a test in Polish high schools, to raise the bar, by asking who Jan Nowak-Jeziorański was. We would find the results depressingly banal example, but it shows that memory is a very dynamic phenomenon.

When I started working in the International Auschwitz Council I really did walk around convinced that Auschwitz-Birkenau was the concern of everyone in the world. That if anything happened, some millionaire would come along and ask, “What do you need?” I suddenly encountered insufficiency and needs far beyond our resources. So we can tell ourselves that the world will never forget about Auschwitz-Birkenau. Or that we will do something together to preserve the memory. That fight is ongoing, that fight is not over.
List of all projects financed by the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation, 2012–2019

- Conservation, protection, and exploitation of the vestiges of the former KL Auschwitz: conservation and protection of the vestiges of the first camp kitchen, conservation and repair work on elements of the camp kitchen abutting on block no. 2 on the grounds of the former KL Auschwitz I (2012–2013).
- Conservation research essential to continue the implementation of the Master Plan for Preservation and the safeguarding of Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Site (2012–2016).
- Preservation and conservation of sector BI together with all associated buildings, begun in 2012.
- Preparatory work necessary for carrying out and supporting further conservation and construction work on the grounds of the former Auschwitz II-Birkenau (2013–2015).
- Modernization of storage facilities for the safekeeping of textile items in the collections of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oświęcim (2014–2015).
- Preservation and conservation of sector BI together with all associated buildings: conservation of brick barracks B123 and B124, beginning in 2015.
- Conservation and protection of the ruins of gas chambers and crematoria at the former Auschwitz II-Birkenau (2016–2019).
- Conservation of museum and archival holdings, beginning in 2016.
- Preservation and conservation of sector BI together with all associated buildings: conservation of brick barracks B91 and B141, beginning in 2018.
- Conservation of wooden buildings on the grounds of the former KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau: conservation of guard towers B-10 and B-13, beginning in 2019.

Timeline of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation

**2009**

- January 15, 2009. The Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation is founded by Professor Władysław Bartoszewski. The goal of the Foundation is to amass a Perpetual Capital Fund of 120 million euro. The income generated by the Fund will be assigned to finance conservation work on the grounds of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.
- Thanks to the support of the The Union of Jewish Communities in Poland, the Foundation opens its office at 6 ulica Twarda in Warsaw.
- In February 2009, Prime Minister Donald Tusk informs the leaders of more than 40 countries about the goals of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation and asks them to support the Foundation.
- April 23, 2009. The Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation is registered.
- In June, the Foundation signs its first agreement with the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, establishing principles for cooperation in the preservation of the Memorial.
- The first meeting of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation’s Council is held at the Chancellery of the Prime Minister in June. There are 14 members. The Council unanimously elects Władysław Bartoszewski as its chairman.
- Forty-five members of the US Congress ask President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to extend prompt support to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation.
- In September, Czechia donates 77 thousand euro to the Foundation, followed in November by the Kingdom of Norway with 239 thousand euro, and in December by the Kingdom of Sweden with 95 thousand euro and Estonia with 20 thousand euro.
- An operational grant extended by the Federal Republic of Germany foreign ministry in October makes it possible for the Foundation to hire office staff.
- In October, the Weil, Gotshal & Manges law firm and the Ernst & Young company enter into cooperation with the Foundation on a pro bono basis.
- The Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation Financial Committee is called into being in December.
- The International Committee, with an oversight and evaluation function, is constituted in January. Its members are representatives of the donor countries.
- The information folder The Preservation of Auschwitz-Birkenau – Our Responsibility for Future Generations is published. It presents the strategic directions of the Foundation’s work. It is the result of a pro bono partnership with Gutenber Network, So Design, and Puzytyw Plografia.
- Support for the Perpetual Capital Fund is extended by the Swiss Confederation to the amount of 271 thousand zloty (February), the Republic of Malta—five thousand euro (June), the city of Boulogne-Billancourt, France—25 thousand euro (November), and the Kingdom of the Netherlands—400 thousand euro (December).
- The Foundation enters into cooperation with Bank Pekao SA for the management of some of the investment accounts servicing the Perpetual Capital Fund.
- The Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation’s folder The Preservation of Auschwitz-Birkenau – Our Responsibility for Future Generations is recognized by the British Design & Art Direction organization as one of the world’s best-designed publications.
- The Foundation Council unanimously approves a strategy for the safe investment of capital on the basis of recommendations developed by the Financial Committee.
- A second grant from the German foreign ministry in June guarantees the operational budget of the Foundation through the end of 2010.
- In June, an agreement for Germany to donate 60 million euro to the Foundation is signed in Warsaw by the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany Michael H. Gerdts and the chairman of the management board of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation, Dr. Piotr M. A. Cywiński. The agreement calls for the transfer of five tranches of 12 million euro each, beginning in 2011.
- During a special press conference in Cracow in July, United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announces that the United States will support the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation with a contribution of 15 million dollars.
- In November, the foundation enters into cooperation with the KPMG company for the annual financial auditing of the Foundation on a pro bono basis.
- The Foundation office receives a donation of 100 thousand euro from the Fondation pour la Mémorie de la Shoah in December, to underwrite statutory activities in 2011.

**2010**

- In October, the Weil, Gotshal & Manges law firm and the Ernst & Young company enter into cooperation with the Foundation on a pro bono basis.
- The Foundation office receives a donation of 100 thousand euro from the Fondation pour la Mémorie de la Shoah in December, to underwrite statutory activities in 2011.
• The International Intervene Now—Auschwitz-Birkenau campaign, inaugurated in January, is directed to individual donors. The campaign is prepared with the support, free of charge, of the Edelman PR agency.

• First meeting of the International Committee of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation (March).

• The Kingdom of the Netherlands donates 400 thousand euro (February).

• Opening of registration procedures for the Friends of Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation in the United States, which will confer a tax-deductible status making it easier to raise funds for the Perpetual Capital Fund among individual donors. The registration is handled by the New York office of the Weil, Gotshal & Manges law firm.

• Jolanta Pienkowski and Leszek Czarnecki donate 100 thousand dollars to the Perpetual Capital Fund in April.

• On August 18, 2011, the Parliament of the Polish Republic passes without amendment an act on a donation to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation, designated for supplementing the Perpetual Capital Fund by 10 million euro.

• The French Republic declares a contribution of 5 million euro for the Perpetual Capital Fund (May), Australia—400 thousand euro (June), and Monaco—50 thousand euro (August).

• In September, representatives of the Foundation and the Edelman PR agency organize meetings with young people and local government officials in four Polish cities—Kolobrzeg, Pila, Wieluń, and Chrzanów. The actors Marcin Bosak and Mateusz Damięcki take part in the meetings with young people.

• The Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation is ranked third among foundations in Poland, achieving the highest earnings from capital investments. The list is compiled by the Polish edition of Forbes on the basis of financial reports for the year 2011 (September).

• Austria donates four million euro to the Perpetual Capital Fund. The relevant agreement is signed by Dr. Piotr M. A. Cywiński and Hanna Lessing, general secretary of the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism.

• On the basis of a decision signed in Paris in November, the French Republic donates five million euro to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation. The contribution will be transferred in five installments, beginning in 2012. The agreement is signed for the French side by the minister for veterans affairs, Kader Arif, and for the Foundation by its chairman, Dr. Piotr M. A. Cywiński.

• Conclusion of the process for creating the American Friends of Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation. Gail Becker becomes the head of the council of the American Friends of Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation. Polish diplomatic posts in the United States lend their support to the current activities of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation and the Friends of Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation.
2015

- A tablet honoring benefactors of the Foundation is unveiled on the grounds of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum on January 27, on the 70th anniversary of the liberation of KL Auschwitz-Birkenau. Individual donors and representatives of donor countries participate in the unveiling of the tablet.
- In February, the foundation management board approves the appropriation of 6.4 million złoty for the conservation of the Memorial.
- Professor Władysław Bartoszewski, the founder of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation, passes away in Warsaw on April 24, 2015.
- The seventh session of the Foundation Council is held at the Chancellery of the Prime Minister. Professor Władysław Bartoszewski, the founder and chairman of the Foundation Council, is remembered with a minute of silence during the meeting. Marek Zając is elected as the new chairman.
- The fifth session of the International Committee is held in October.
- The Republic of Italy donates one million euro to the Foundation in April, and the Kingdom of Spain joins the project with a contribution of 100 thousand euro in November.
- Several countries make additional payments: Turkey—an additional 50 thousand euro in January, and Ireland—an additional 10 thousand euro in June. Norway pays an additional 250 thousand euro.
- In May, the largest donor to the Foundation, Germany, makes its final payment to the Perpetual Capital Fund. The combined total of the German contribution is 60 million euro.
- The main phase of the pioneering project for the comprehensive conservation of two brick prisoner barracks begins on the grounds of the former Auschwitz-Birkenau camp.
- Poland transfers the final part of its pledged contribution to the Perpetual Capital Fund, thereby reaching a level of 10 million euro (October).
- The Council appoints Anna Miszewska as Director General of the Foundation (November).

2016

- In January, the foundation management board passes a resolution to allocate income from the Perpetual Capital Fund to the amount of eight million złoty to the Memorial for conservation.
- Ireland makes an additional financial contribution of 15 thousand euro (December).
- June 8, 2016. A traveling session of the Foundation Financial Committee is held at the Auschwitz Memorial and Museum.
- The Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation Council meets at the offices of Weil, Gotshal & Manges law firm in Warsaw on June 20.
- The conservation of one-half of a wooden prisoner barrack is completed on the grounds of Auschwitz II-Birkenau. The historical object returned to the Memorial in 2013 after more than 20 years on loan at the Holocaust Museum in Washington.
- New donors join the “18 Pillars of Remembrance” campaign, supporting the Perpetual Capital Fund with sizable donations. Among them are: Ulrika and Joel Citron, Marcy Gringlas and Joel Greenberg, Andrew Intrater, Harry Krakowski, Maukopf Family, Pines Family, Sharon Schneier and Clifford Brandes, Jerry Wartzik, In Honor of The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum dedicated by friends of the Museum, Judy and George Frankfort and The Azrieli Foundation.
- The Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation Committee, composed of donors to the Foundation, is convened at the initiative of Ronald S. Lauder. The aim of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation Committee is to support the growth of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation's Perpetual Capital Fund.
- Members of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation Council visit the Memorial on September 27.
- The sixth annual session of the International Committee is held in October.

2017

- In January, the foundation management board passes a resolution assigning income from the Perpetual Capital Fund to the conservation of the Memorial, to the amount of 11 million złoty.
- The ninth session of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation Council is held in June.
- The seventh session of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation International Committee takes place in Oświęcim in October, thanks to which representatives of the donor states can see for the first time the conservation work underway at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial.
- Discussions with Balkan countries about joining the Foundation project.
- Completion of the conservation project to secure the north and west walls of the ramps of the undressing room of gas chamber and crematorium III on the grounds of the former Auschwitz II-Birkenau camp.
- Greece decides to support the Perpetual Capital Fund to the amount of 5 thousand euro (November).
- Entry into cooperation with the Ober, Hoskin & Harcourt LLP law firm, which represents the Foundation pro bono in attaining tax-exempt status for Canadian donors.

2018

- Bulgaria joins the Foundation project, making a donation of 15 thousand euro to the Perpetual Capital Fund (March).
- Tenth annual session of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation Council.
- The Foundation management board passes a resolution in April assigning income from the Perpetual Capital Fund to the conservation of the Memorial, to the amount of 10 million złoty.
- The eighth session of the Foundation International Committee is held in October.
- The Council appoints Elwir Świetochowski as member of the Management Board of the Foundation (November).
- Ireland increases its financial contribution to the Perpetual Capital Fund by 10 thousand euro in May and Portugal by five thousand euro in December.

2019

- In January the foundation management board passes a resolution assigning income from the Perpetual Capital Fund to the conservation of the Memorial, to the amount of 12 million złoty.
- The eleventh meeting of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation Council is held in Oświęcim in January.
- The Council appoints Wojciech Szczewicz as Director General of the Foundation (January).
- In February, Canada approves tax-exempt status for donations to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation.
- On the basis of the 25-year forecast for the Master Plan for Preservation, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum and the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation estimate the financial requirements of the Perpetual Capital Fund as 176 million euro.
- The 12th and 13th special sessions of the Foundation Council are held in June.
- The four-year-long conservation of a brick prisoner barracks on the grounds of the Auschwitz II-Birkenau camp, part of the Master Plan for Preservation, is completed in June.
- In June, The International Committee of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation convenes in Oświęcim. Members take part in the memorial completion of the conservation of a brick barracks on the grounds of the Auschwitz II-Birkenau camp.
- The sum of 800 thousand Canadian dollars is donated to the Perpetual Capital Fund by individual benefactors in a Remembrance Pillar under the auspices of the Toronto Jewish Community: Linda Frum and Howard Sokolovski, Edward Sonshine, The Temmy and Albert Latner Family, The Gerald Schwartz Heather, Marya and Herman Grad, Judith and Lawrence Tanenbaum, Joel York, Henry Koscitzky, and Barbara and Jay Hennick.
- The Federal States and the Federal Government of Germany declare another contribution of 60 million euro to the Foundation's Perpetual Capital (October and November).
- Observances of the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation are held in Oświęcim and Warsaw on December 6.
The Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation: Genesis, Development and Future

Donors

The Foundation Capital was created by state, institutional, and private donors.

Countries with biggest contributions:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>60 million EUR</td>
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<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>15 million USD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>10 million EUR</td>
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<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>5 million EUR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>4 million EUR</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>2.1 million GBP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>1.07 million EUR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>1 million EUR</td>
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<td>Israel</td>
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<td>Russia</td>
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</tbody>
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Countries with donations worth over 100,000 USD:

- Australia, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Vatican City

Other donations:

- Argentina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Georgia, Greece, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Monaco, Portugal, Slovakia

Cities:

- Paris, Boulogne-Billancourt

Individual donors with contributions worth over 1 million USD – Pillars Of Remembrance:

- Ronald S. Lauder
- Melinda Goldrich and Andrea Goldrich Cayton
- Frank Lowy
- Mrs. Lily Safra and the Edmond J. Safra Foundation
- Steven Spielberg’s Righteous Persons Foundation
- Toronto Jewish Community: The Azrieli Foundation, Joseph Burnett Family Foundation, Judy and George Frankfort, Linda Frum and Howard Sokolowski, Manya and Herman Grad, The Greenberg and York Families, Barbara and Jay Hennick, The Koschitzky Family The Latner Family Foundation, Miles Nadal and Family, Heather Reisman and Gerry Schwartz, Fran and Ed Sonshine, Judy and Larry Tanenbaum
- Second Generation in Honor of the Victims and Survivors of the Shoah: Ulrika & Joel Citron, Marcie Gringlas & Joel Greenberg, Andrew Intrater, Harry Kokowski, Mauzof Family, Pines Family, Sharon Schneier & Clifford Brandeis, Jerry Wartski
- In Honor of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum dedicated by friends of the Museum

Other distinguish donors:


Outside support for statutory activities:

- Weil, Gotshal&Manges, KPMG, Deloitte, Jewish Religious Community, Edelman, Kom Ferry

Donations to the Perpetual Fund can be made directly to Foundation’s bank accounts:

Bank: PKO BP, SWIFT: BPKO PLPW
PLN: PL 14 1020 1042 0000 8102 0210 8868
EUR: PL 21 1020 1042 0000 8802 0210 8884
USD: PL 26 1020 1042 0000 8602 0210 8892

You can support the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation by sending a check to Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Foundation 481 10th Ave. Suite 425, New York, NY 10018

For donors in the USA

The Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Foundation has been formed to support the activity of the Foundation in the United States. Its mission is to make it easier for private individuals in the USA to contribute.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Foundation has acquired the 501(c)(3) status as a tax-exempt non-profit.
International Committee

The International Committee was established in order to provide the institutional donors which contribute to the Perpetual Capital with full access to information, and in order to ensure the complete international transparency of the Foundation’s operations. It is a consultative and advisory body. Its members are appointed on the recommendation of the donor countries.

Foundation Council

Marek Zając
Marcin Barcz
Eleonora Bergman
Piotr Kadcík
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Wojciech Soczewica

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