

July 28, 2009

Fate of Holocaust Institute Teeters Amid Dispute

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Filed at 12:47 p.m. ET

VIENNA (AP) -- The future of an Austrian institute for Holocaust studies was in doubt Tuesday over a dispute with the city's Jewish community.

The Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies began provisional operations in January after being stymied for years by funding problems.

Its aim, among other things, is to give scholars from around the world the possibility to carry out research projects using the roughly 8,000 files of the late [Nazi hunter](#) Simon Wiesenthal and parts of a vast archive belonging to the Jewish Community Vienna.

Last week, the institute's seven-member executive committee resigned in protest, asserting that the Jewish community was blocking access to its archive, the Austrian newspaper "Der Standard" reported on its Web site late Monday.

When asked for confirmation, Anton Pelinka, the institute's chairman, said in an e-mail to The Associated Press: "Yes, we have resigned. And it is up to the Jewish Community to decide whether the Wiesenthal Institute can survive."

Numerous Austrian organizations are involved in the project, including the Jewish Community Vienna.

The disputed archive is made up of thousands of unevaluated administrative files, correspondence, card indexes and books and is the largest preserved archive of any Jewish community worldwide, according to the institute's Web site.

Jewish community president Ariel Muzicant denied that his group was blocking access to the archive, saying the lending issue was addressed in a detailed and carefully prepared contract submitted to the institute's lawyer on July 17.

"The accusation that access to the archive of the IKG Wien (Jewish Community Vienna) is being denied to the VWI (Vienna Wiesenthal Institute) does not conform to the facts," Muzicant said.

But a person familiar with the issue said it was precisely the contract that triggered the executive board resignations.

"The conditions contained in the contract are completely unacceptable," the person said on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter.

Among other things, the community wants users to request permission for each piece that is used and reserves the right to remove pieces at will, the person said. It was also unclear what exactly would be made available.

Pelinka, when asked to comment on the statement, said Muzicant had reneged on his promise, articulated in a letter dated June 10, that the institute would get the same access to the files as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The draft contract was "a complete break of this promise," he said in an e-mail.

Pelinka appeared pessimistic when asked if the institute could do without the archive -- if need be.

"The institute would become a different (much smaller) one and I am not sure if the members would agree on that," he wrote.

Wiesenthal, who lived in the Austrian capital and died in his Vienna home in September 2005 at the age of 96, was personally involved in planning the center.

Wiesenthal helped find hundreds of war criminals, including one-time SS leader [Adolf Eichmann](#), who organized the killing of millions of Jews.

On the Net:

Vienna Wiesenthal Institute: [http://www.vwi.ac.at/index\(underscore\)eng.htm](http://www.vwi.ac.at/index(underscore)eng.htm)

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