

Presenter: Dan Michman, Bar Ilan University and Yad Vashem

Title: **“The Jews as a Problem for Modern European Political Logic”**

Panel: Modern History

Since the times of the crystallization of Judaism in late Antiquity, ethnic and religious belonging were considered to be one and unified: joining the Jewish collective could be done only through religious conversion. Until modern times, both in the Christian and Muslim worlds where Jews lived as a minority, this unity was accepted: being a "Jew" meant belonging to both the Jewish collective and the Jewish faith. However, with the emergence of the modern centralized nation-states and the principle of separation of state and religion, this unity was hard to digest and was not acceptable anymore: Jews should be either citizens and members of the "nation" (in the liberal interpretation of nationhood, based on the principles of the Enlightenment) with a Jewish religion (this was the cause behind the term "Israelit" which replaced the word "Jew" in official discourse in Western Europe) or a separate nation which then could not be part of the local nation as such. I.e. the modern concept of states in Europe could not cope with the different nature of Judaism. This situation was one of the reasons for the emergence of new Jewish interpretations of Judaism (such as "Germans of the Mosaic Faith"), but also served as a catalyst for anti-Jewish activities and policies. The "cameleon" Jews thus became the ultimate "other" in the European context.