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CONCEPTUALIZING HUNGARIAN NEGATIONISM IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE: DEFLECTION AND OBFUSCATION¹

Introduction

More than a decade has passed since I first published a long article that attempted to present taxonomy of post-Communist Holocaust denial in East-Central Europe. That article was eventually transformed in a book and was reprinted at its original form in two edited volumes.² Twelve years on, I still consider the classification then-suggested valid, as I consider valid the remark that “revisionism”—a widely-used term depicting attempts to distort the Holocaust—is an improper word that should be replaced by “negationism.” After all, I was then noting following Deborah Lipstadt and two other American scholars, revisionism is not only legitimate, but should be the task of every historian who verifies the claims of his or her predecessor.³

I was differentiating then between a) Outright Negationism; b) Deflective Negationism, which is “a specific form of ‘externalization of guilt’”, and which in turn includes three subcategories: b1) deflecting guilt onto the Nazis, b2) deflecting it onto the “marginal fringe”, and finally b3) deflecting it onto the Jews themselves;

¹ The author gratefully acknowledges the support extended through a grant of the Romanian Ministry of National Education, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-II-ID-PCE-2012-4-0620. He is also indebted to his friends, Eric Beckett Weaver, Associate Professor at the Debrecen University and Zoltán Tibori Szabó, Associate Professor at the Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, for reading the manuscript and for pertinent remarks that improved it.

² Michael Shafir, “Between Denial and ‘Comparative Trivialization’: Holocaust Negationism in Post-Communist East Central Europe.” *ACTA. Analysis of Current Trends in Antisemitism*, no. 19, 2002, Jerusalem, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, The Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism; republished in Randolph L. Braham (ed.), *The Treatment of the Holocaust in Hungary and Romania During the Post-Communist Era*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2004, p.43-136, and Robert S. Wystrich (ed.), *Holocaust Denial. The Politics of Perfidy*, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, and Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2012 under the title “Denying the Shoah in Post-Communist Eastern Europe,” p.27-65. For the extended book format see Shafir, *Între negare și trivializare prin comparație: Negarea Holocaustului în țările postcomuniste din Europa Centrală și de Est*, Iași, Polirom, 2002.

³ Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*, New York: The Free Press 1994, p.2; Michael Shermer and Alex. Grobman, *Denying History: Who Says the Holocaust Never Happened and Why Do They Say It?*, Berkeley: California University Press, 2000, p.XV-XVI.

c) Selective Negationism, which was described as a breed between Outright Negationism and Deflective Negationism amounting to a “country-specific outright negationism” that does not deny the Holocaust as having taken place elsewhere, but excludes any participation of members of one’s own nation in its perpetration; and, finally, d) the Comparative Trivialization of the Holocaust, including several forms of counter-competitors designed to demonstrate that the Holocaust was neither unprecedented as a genocide in history nor the most murderous among twentieth century atrocities. Among the latter, the Gulag and its local derivate occupy a prominent spot in post-Communist comparative trivialization, I was then showing. Since then, most of my work has been focused on what I term the Holocaust-Gulag “competitive martyrdom”.⁴

Meanwhile, a new concept has emerged in professional literature: Holocaust obfuscation. We owe it to Dovid Katz, a Yiddish literature scholar who had returned to Lithuania, the land of his forefathers, where he was shocked to witness how the Holocaust was transmogrified to serve the purposes of post-Communist political and intellectual elites.⁵ For the time being, Katz has paid the price of his audacity not only by being dismissed from the Vilnius University, but also by being described by academic collaborationist colleagues as an “activist,” rather than a scholar.

Holocaust obfuscation cannot be understood unless one is familiar with the notion of Double Genocide, also called by some as the “Symmetric Approach.”

⁴ See, Shafir, “Rotten Apples, Bitter Pears: An Updated Motivational Typology of Romania’s Radical Right’s Anti-Semitic Postures in Post-Communism,” *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, vol. 7, no. 21 (2008), p.171; *idem*, “Nuremberg II? Le mythe de la dénazification et son utilisation dans la martyrologie compétitive Shoah-Goulag,” *Revue d’histoire de la Shoah*, vol. 94 (2011), p.557–582; *Idem*, “Political Antisemitism in Romania: Hard Data and its Soft Underbelly,” *Studia Politica*, vol. 12, no. 4 (2012), p.598; *idem*, “Istorie, memorie și mit în martirologia competitivă Holocaust-Gulag.” In Sergiu Gherghina, Sergiu Mișcoiu, (eds.), *Miturile politice în România contemporană*, Iași, Editura Institutul European, 2012, p.297–358; *idem*, “Questions and Answers on the Holocaust-Gulag ‘Competitive Martyrology.’ In *Defending History*, 24 October 2013, <http://defendinghistory.com/questions-and-answers-on-the-holocaust-gulag-competitive-martyrology/60066#more-60066>; and “Wars of Memory in Post-Communist Romania.” In Oto Luthar (ed.), *The Power of Memory. Post-Socialist Historiography Between Democratization and the New Politics of History*, forthcoming, Budapest: CEU Press. In utilizing “competitive martyrdom” I follow Jean-Michel Chaumont, Alain Besançon, and Alan S. Rosenbaum. See Jean-Michel Chaumont, *La Concurrence des victimes: génocide, identité, reconnaissance*, Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 1997; Alain Besançon, *Nenorocirea secolului: Despre comunism, Nazism și unicitatea Shoah-ului*, Bucharest: Humanitas, 1999, p.138 (translated from the French original *Le Malheur du siècle: Sur le Communisme, le Nazisme et l’unicité de la Shoah*, Paris: Fayard, 1998; Alan S. Rosenbaum, “Introduction to First Edition.” In Alan S. Rosenbaum, (ed.), *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide*, 2nd ed., Boulder: Westview, 2001, p.2.

⁵ Dovid Katz, “On three definitions: Genocide, Holocaust Denial, Holocaust Obfuscation.” In Leonidas Donskis (ed.), *A Litmus Test Case of Modernity. Examining Modern Sensibilities and the Public Domain in the Baltic States at the Turn of the Century*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2009, p.259-277, as well as his “Prague’s Declaration of Disgrace,” *The Jewish Chronicle*, 22 May 2009, <http://www.thejc.com/comment/comment/prague’s-declaration-disgrace>; “Halting Holocaust Obfuscation,” *The Guardian*, 8 January 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jan/08/holocaust-baltic-lithuania-latvia>; “The Seventy Years Declaration and the Simple Truth,” *The Algemeiner*, 2 February 2012, <http://www.algemeiner.com/2012/02/03/the-seventy-years-declaration-and-the-simple-truth/>.

The theory was first pioneered in Lithuania, spreading to its Baltic neighbors Estonia and Latvia, and eventually echoed all over the former Communist countries, Hungary included. For this purpose, the totalitarian “model” has been resurrected and is utilized axiomatically.

As Omer Bartov recently remarked, the Baltic States “have a particular penchant for employing the totalitarian model as a mean of contextualizing the Nazi genocide of the Jews with the larger framework of Soviet crimes against indigenous Baltic populations.”⁶ The roots of the equalization, Bartov remarked in an earlier work⁷, lead back to the publication in 1997 of the *Black Book of Communism* edited by French historian Stéphane Courtois and his questioning of what interests might be served in avoiding acknowledging that the crimes of Communism were allegedly far greater than those of Nazism.⁸ “Latvian history textbooks,” according to Bartov, “tend to juxtapose the ‘Latvian genocide’ by the Soviets with the Holocaust,” while “specific details of the latter are often omitted and local hostility to the Jews is ascribed to alleged Jewish treachery.” The situation is no different in Estonia, where “segments of Estonian public opinion seem to concur that the implication that Jews try to exaggerate the extent of their victimization by Germans and Estonians in order to divert attention from Soviet-Jewish crimes against Estonians.”⁹ The post-Communist revival of the *Žydokomuna* legend that strives to justify local collaboration with the Nazis, once more turning perpetrators into victims, thrives nearly all over East Central Europe, and, what is more, is extended to present days, as we shall yet have the opportunity to remark in the Hungarian context. It is, however, in Lithuania, “genocide” has been officially “redefined to include victims of Soviet deportations” and where the NKVD and the KGB were “officially declared to be criminal organizations, thus bringing them in line with the Nuremberg tribunal’s definition of the SS”.¹⁰ In Hungary, according to the same author, members of the radical Right “have argued since the 1990^s that Jewish presence in the repressive postwar communist security apparatus balances out the murder of hundreds of thousands of Jews with the collaboration and active participation of Miklós Horthy’s regime and the fascist Arrow Cross Party”.¹¹

According to Katz, Holocaust obfuscation involves several consecutively interconnected objectives: “Deflate Nazi crimes; inflate Soviet crimes; make their ‘equality’ into a new sacrosanct principle for naive Westerners who like the sound of ‘equality’; redefine ‘genocide’ by law to include just about any Soviet crime; find ways to turn local killers into heroes (usually as supposed ‘anti-Soviet’ patriots);

⁶ Omer Bartov, “Conclusions.” In John-Paul Himka, Joana Beata Michlic (eds.), *Bringing the Dark Past to Light. The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2013, p.667.

⁷ Bartov, *Mirrors of Destruction. War, Genocide, and Modern Identity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p.71-73.

⁸ Stéphane Courtois, “Introduction. The Crimes of Communism.” In Courtois et al, *The Black Book of Communism. Crimes, Terror, Repression*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999, p.1-31.

⁹ Bartov, “Conclusions,” p.667-668.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.668.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.668-669.

fault victims and survivors, especially those who lived to join the anti-Nazi resistance”.¹² It was, however, Efraim Zuroff, the well-known Nazi-hunter, who summarized quite clearly the purpose of Holocaust obfuscation by calling it “an attempt to turn everything topsy-turvy”:

“If Communism equals Nazism, then Communism is genocide, which it is not. If Communism is genocide, then Jews committed genocide because among the Communists, some of them were Jews. If Jews committed genocide, then obviously it does undermine the arguments of Jews against the peoples in Eastern Europe, who helped the Nazis mass-murder the Jews. In other words, this is designed to deflect the criticism of Nazi collaboration in Eastern Europe, which was far more lethal than Nazi collaboration anywhere else.”¹³

The concept of Holocaust obfuscation does not, I believe, replace my earlier taxonomy. But Comparative Trivialization is much enriched by it, as I intend to demonstrate below.

1. Squaring the Circle in Freedom Square

I spent New Year’s Eve in Budapest unaware of how ominously 2013 had ended. My Hungarian is rather rusty and the last thing I intended to do was trying to make sense of some local TV newscast. As it turned out, on the last day of that year, a dispatch of the official MTI agency announced the intention of the government to erect a memorial marking 19 March 1944 as the day of Hungary’s loss of sovereignty in the wake of its occupation by Nazi German troops. This was officially confirmed on 17 January 2014. Most countries celebrate victories, not occupation and the loss of sovereignty. Even less do they do so by placing monuments in a central square of their capital city, not far from the building that embodies precisely sovereignty—namely the Parliament.

Soon after, the Federation of the Jewish Communities of Hungary (*Magyarországi Zsidó Hitközségek Szövetsége* – MAZSIHISZ) distanced itself from the decision, pointing out that it had been taken without any prior consultation with it as an umbrella community and largest Jewish organization in the country, which “raised worries in the Jewish community at home and abroad”.¹⁴ This reaction marked the beginning of a long tug of war between MAZSIHISZ and the cabinet headed by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

Hungarian politicians, but also representatives of international Jewish organizations, as well as the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)

¹² Katz, “The Seventy Years Declaration and the Simple Truth,” *The Algemeiner*, 3 February 2012, <http://www.algemeiner.com/2012/02/03/the-seventy-years-declaration-and-the-simple-truth/>

¹³ Cited in Michel Zlotowski, “EU Halts Move to Downgrade Shoah,” *The Jewish Chronicle*, 29 December 2010, <http://www.thejc.com/news/world-news/43123/eu-halts-move-downgrade-shoah>

¹⁴ Cited in Eva Balogh, “The End of Hungarian Sovereignty on March 19, 1944?,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, 2 January 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/01/02/the-end-of-hungarian-sovereignty-on-march-19-1944/>

of which Hungary has been a member since 2002, also became involved in the dispute, whose essence rests in Budapest's attempt to deflect on the Nazis responsibility for the participation of Hungarian authorities in the perpetration of the Holocaust against Jews and Roma. Viewed from this perspective, however, the outburst of the conflict does not really mark its beginning. As Hungarian-born Dr. Eva Balogh, a Yale-trained historian put it in her daily blog, it is rather "the final straw" in a long list of steps linking the ruling FIDESZ – Hungarian Civic Alliance (*Fidesz – Magyar Polgári Szövetség*) party with similar endeavors.¹⁵

What is more, within a brief period of time, two other issues of contention emerged: that of the Veritas Historical Research Institute (*Veritas Történetkutató Intézet*) and that of the planned House of Fates –European Educational Center (*Sorsok Háza – Európai Oktatási Központ*). Indeed, on 9 February, the MAZSIHISZ leadership adopted an unprecedented resolution, stating that it would stay away from participating in state-sponsored events planned for the year 2014, unless the government changed its position vis-à-vis three issues suspected of intention to falsify historical facts: the planned monument for Freedom Square; the planned new museum House of Fates, dealing with Hungarian-Jewish relations, without the consultation of MASZIHISZ experts and deliberate ignoring of calls to clarify its concept; and the dismissal of historian Sándor Szakály as Veritas director for statements showing he was professionally unsuitable for that position (see *infra*).¹⁶ The 9 February resolution, furthermore, said MASZIHISZ would use the grants it received from the government's Civil Fund for the planned 2014 memorial events "only if the Hungarian Government changes its attitude toward the memory and research of the Holocaust".¹⁷ Each of these three issues warrants separate treatment. Before proceeding to them, mention should be made of the fact that on 30 April 2014 a meeting between the MAZSIHISZ leadership and a delegation of the government headed by Premier Orbán himself (later to be described as the "first

¹⁵ Eva Balogh, "Retreat or Another 'Peacock Dance' by Viktor Orbán?," *Hungarian Spectrum*, 9 September 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/09/09/retreat-or-another-peacock-dance-by-viktor-orban/>

¹⁶ Randolph L. Braham, "The assault on the historical memory of the Holocaust," *Hungarian Spectrum*, 22 March 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/03/22/randolph-l-braham-the-assault-on-the-historical-memory-of-the-holocaust/> Note that this is a revised version of his article "Assault on Historical Memory: Hungarian Nationalists and the Holocaust," in Randolph L. Braham, *Studies on the Holocaust: Selected Writings*, New York: Columbia University Press, Vol. 2, p.197-224.

¹⁷ "Hungary's main Jewish umbrella votes to boycott state Holocaust commemorations," *JTA*, 2014, <http://www.jta.org/2014/02/09/news-opinion/world/hungarys-main-jewish-umbrella-votes-to-boycott-state-holocaust-commemorations>. The 1.5 billion forint (some \$6.8 million at the then rate) fund was created in 2013, and 300 million HUF were added to it in early 2014 (Braham, "The assault on the historical memory of the Holocaust.") Soon after, different Jewish foundations announced they would return the money received for the purpose, and so did several non-Jewish NGOs and individuals. In April, Jewish and non-Jewish organizations headed by MAZSIHISZ launched a fund-raising campaign to help financing commemorations independent of governmental funding. See "Groups to forgo govt Holocaust funds," *politics.hu*, 18 April 2014, <http://www.politics.hu/20140418/groups-to-forgo-govt-holocaust-funds/>; Ruth Ellen Gruber, "Boycotting government Holocaust commemorations, Hungary's Jews forge new path," *JTA*, 10 June 2014, <http://www.jta.org/2014/06/10/news-opinion/world/boycotting-government-holocaust-commemorations-hungarys-jews-forge-new-path>

roundtable”) discussed all three issues. It ended in a stalemate, diplomatically dubbed a “frank discussion”.¹⁸

1.1. A contentious memorial

The intention to erect the memorial was initially presented as being part and parcel of events marking the 70th anniversary of the deportation of Hungarian Jews to the Auschwitz death camp, where some 430,000 of them perished in a very short time span between 15 May and 15 July 1944.¹⁹ The decision to mark that anniversary was taken in 2013 – possibly to counter numerous reports in the international media about growing and officially condoned antisemitism in Hungary. What is more, Hungary had been designated to be the rotating IHRA chair in 2015 after having already chaired the bi-annual meetings of this organization in 2006. Budapest’s renewed offer to take over the chair (which involves substantial costs for the host country) might have been similarly intended to demonstrate that those reports were without foundation. Although the offer was approved, as head of the Romanian delegation at IHRA at that time I can testify that several delegations suspected that the Hungarian government might intend to utilize the organization for endorsing its oblique negationism. And this is precisely what turned out to be the case, as represented by the contested monument. Protests both at home and abroad led, first, to postponing its inauguration from 19 March to sometime after the elections scheduled to take place in early April, and then to “after 31 May”, and finally to its being set up in place in secrecy under the cover of the night and police protection in July.²⁰

¹⁸ “Orbán has talks with Jewish community, refuses to budge on WWII monument,” *politics.hu*, 1 May 2014, <http://www.politics.hu/20140501/orban-has-talks-with-jewish-community-refuses-to-budge-on-wwii-monument/>; and Eva Balogh, “Viktor Orbán shapes the Holocaust Memorial Year,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, 1 May 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/05/01/viktor-orban-shapes-the-holocaust-memorial-year/>

¹⁹ Braham, “Assault on Historical Memory”, p.198. The same author remarks: The magnitude of the crime committed by the Nazis and their Hungarian accomplices is dramatically illustrated by the following comparative statistical data. Three transports arrived in Auschwitz-Birkenau with nearly 12,000 Jews from Northern Transylvania on June 6, 1944. Better known as D-Day, this was one of the most magnificent days in the annals of military history, when the greatest multinational armada ever assembled under one command stormed the beaches of Normandy. By the end of that day, the number of invading Allied troops killed was about half that of the Hungarian Jews murdered during the same period. While the Allies’ killed-in-action figures declined dramatically after the toehold had been gained on Normandy later that day, the Hungarian Jews continued to be murdered at almost the same high rate day after day until July 9, continuing the awesome daily massacre rate that began on May 16. In the end, the wartime losses of Hungarian Jewry significantly exceeded those incurred by the military forces of the United States in all theaters of war, just as they also significantly exceeded the combined military and civilian war deaths of the British, a nation that bore much of the German military onslaught. These comparisons are cited not to minimize the sacrifices or diminish the heroism of the Western Allies but simply to underscore the magnitude of the Holocaust in Hungary. *Idem*, p.201.

²⁰ Marton Dunay, “Hungary delays war memorial until after April vote,” *Reuters*, 20 February 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/20/us-hungary-jews-memorial-idUSBREA1J1LS20140220>; Erik d’Amato, “Government makes midnight move to finish controversial WWII memorial following court decision,” *politics.hu*, 20 July 2014, <http://www.politics.hu/20140720/government-makes-midnight-move-to-finish-controversial-wwii-memorial-following-court-decision/>

Designed by sculptor Imre Párkányi Raab, the 7.5 meters (24.6 feet) tall construction represents the Archangel Gabriel (symbolizing an innocent and virtuous Hungary) being attacked by the German imperial eagle.²¹ As Párkányi Raab explained it, unlike archangel's statue that stands on a column in the middle of Budapest's Heroes' Square with widespread wings and surrounded by statues of legendary kings, in his own composition "a culture, its wings are broken, is being crushed by a greater power... The Imperial Eagle is an assemblage of mass produced icons and symbols. It sweeps in flight across the world. Soon it will reach us and engulf Hungary, putting its inhabitants in chains."²²

But which inhabitants? The statue aims precisely to obscure any difference between those who suffered as a result of the German invasion and bystanders, profiteers of despoliation²³ or active collaborators. Its inscription reads: "The German occupation of Hungary, March 19, 1944, in memory of the victims"—as Viktor Orbán himself emphasized in a letter addressed to US members of Congress who had protested against monument's ambiguity. The construction, the premier wrote, was not a Holocaust memorial. It was intended to "remind us all that the loss of our national sovereignty led to tragic consequences".²⁴ "Memorializing the victims of Nazism in general", a reporter for *The Jerusalem Post* observed, "it omits specific mention of the Jewish people".²⁵ Viewed from this perspective and paradoxically for a government that perceives itself as fighting the remnants of Communism, the monument thus falls in line with the Communist policies that had transformed the Jewish victims of the Holocaust into "anti-Nazi freedom fighters." But what is more, it is part of a longer series of museum and commemorative attempts at demonstrating that rather than having been Nazi Germany's last ally, Hungary was its last victim.²⁶

²¹ "Statue of limitations," *The Economist*, 1 February 2014,

<http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21595515-row-about-statue-reignites-controversy-over-nazi-occupation-statue-limitations>;

²² Cited in by Krisztián Ungváry, "Az élő borzalom," [The living horror], *Heti Világgazdaság*, 21 January 2014, English translation in *Hungarian Spectrum*, 24 January 2014,

<http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/01/24/krisztian-ungvary-on-the-memorial-to-the-german-occupation-of-hungary-the-living-horror/>

²³ "The German invasion did not put the country in chains. Rather, it opened the way for the country's right-wing elite to redistribute the possessions of some 800,000 people. Very many people received some share of the spoils, and for that reason they are unlikely to have felt oppressed." Ungváry, "Az élő borzalom". For further details see: Kádár Gábor and Vági Zoltán, *Hullarablás. A magyar zsidók gazdasági megsemmisítése* [Robbing corpses. The economic annihilation of Hungarian Jews], Budapest: Hannah Arendt Egyesület–Jaffa Kiadó, 2005, and Gábor Kádár and Zoltán Vági, "The Economic Annihilation of the Hungarian Jews, 1944–1945." In Randolph L. Braham and Brewster S. Chamberlin (eds.), *The Holocaust in Hungary: Sixty Years Later*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2006, p.77–88.

²⁴ Balogh, "An Exchange of Letters between U.S. Congressmen and Viktor Orbán," *Hungarian Spectrum*, 5 June 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/06/05/an-exchange-of-letters-between-u-s-congressmen-and-viktor-orban/>

²⁵ Sam Sokol, "Study: Up to 1/5 of Hungarians 'extreme anti-Semites'," *The Jerusalem Post*, 5 March 2014, <http://www.jpost.com/Jewish-World/Jewish-News/Study-Up-to-15-of-Hungarians-extreme-anti-Semites-346454>

²⁶ Braham, "Assault on Historical Memory," p.208.

In fact, the Hungarians were not breaking new ground. After all, in defiance of all evidence and record, official neighboring Austria had rather successfully claimed for many years to be Hitler's first victim. Symbols are easily prone to manipulation. Post World War II Austria incorporated the victim narrative into its state symbol by placing on its flag the unchained eagle representing its "foreign occupation" between 1938 and 1945.²⁷ It was now the eagle's turn to represent Hungary's occupation by swooping down on Archangel Gabriel.

Just as the Austrian Monument against War and Fascism in Vienna's Albertinaplatz does not draw any distinctions between the victims of racial persecution, fallen Austrian soldiers, or the victims of Allied bombings²⁸, the Hungarian Monument in Freedom's Square places all victims in the same melting pot. If one is to believe Orbán, this community of victims is part and parcel of his "policy of unifying the nation which I started during my first term as Prime Minister, in 1998".²⁹ However, such "unification" amounts to a deliberate misrepresentation of what happened both before and particularly during World War II. The edifice avoids mentioning that there were precious few victims among Christian Hungarians as a result of the Nazi occupation, resistance being scarce, ineffective and involving mostly Communists³⁰, and that those who fell in battle did so either on the Eastern front or while resisting the Soviet siege of Budapest in 1945.³¹ Hungary-born historian István Deák of Columbia University, New York, described it as "a monument of self-pity and self-justification".³² As Omer Bartov wrote: "Self-perception as victim often immunizes individuals and nations from seeing themselves as perpetrators."³³

In actual fact, the physical destruction of Hungarian Jews began before the Nazis had come to power in Germany itself.³⁴ By early 1944, i. e. *before* the

²⁷ Heidemarie Uhl, "Das 'erste Opfer': Der Österreichische Opfermythos und seine Transformationen in der Zweiten Republik," *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft*, 30 (2001), p.2.

²⁸ David Art, *The Politics of the Nazi Past in Germany and Austria*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.125.

²⁹ Balogh, "An Exchange of Letters."

³⁰ Even before the German invasion, Communist resistance to the Horthy regime was meager and "the Communists, being insignificant in number, achieved nothing with their calls for sabotage and armed struggle against the 'feudal/capitalist/fascist' domestic oppressors," writes István Deák in "A Fatal Compromise? The Debate over Collaboration and Resistance in Hungary." In Jan T. Gross and Tony Judt (eds.), *The Politics of Retribution in Europe. World War II and Its Aftermath*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, p.60.

³¹ Historian Krisztián Ungváry puts the number of victims of the Budapest battle at 160,000, of which 38,000 were civilian population never evacuated from Budapest, a similar number of casualties being German and Hungarian military personnel and 80,000 Red Army soldiers – a total of nearly 160,000. See his *Battle for Budapest. 100 Days in World War II*, London and New York: I. B. Tauris, p.XV.

³² István Deák, "A monument of self-pity and self-justification" In *Hungarian Spectrum*, 31 January 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/01/31/istvan-deak-a-monument-of-self-pity-and-self-justification/>

³³ Bartov, "Conclusions," p.668.

³⁴ Hungary was world champion in legislation against Jews, the first law dating back to 1920 and introducing a *numerus clausus* for Jews in universities. See Randolph L. Braham, *Politica Genocidului. Holocaustul din Ungaria* [The Politics of Genocide. The Holocaust in Hungary], Bucharest: Hasefer, 2003, p.20-23 for a brief review of this and the four follow-up anti-Jewish laws introduced starting with the year 1938. See also Shafir, "The Politics of Public Space and the Legacy of the Holocaust in

invasion, some 64,000 Jews had perished due to Hungarian actions.³⁵ Despite claims to the contrary made by defenders of the monument, after the 19 March invasion the Germans did not impose a change in the government's structure. With the exception of premier Miklós Kállay, who was replaced by Döme Sztójay and his Interior Minister Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer (both arrested by the Gestapo) all former ministers under Horthy-appointed governments were free, and nine of them served in the Sztójay government, overseeing the anti-Jewish spoliation, ghettoization and deportation.³⁶ Finally, Hungarian gendarmes impressed even the SS advisers with the enthusiasm they displayed in the ghettoization and concentration of Hungarian Jews before deportation, and occasionally also participated in their extermination.³⁷ In a book published in 2013³⁸, historian Krisztián Ungváry wrote that the Germans had asked the authorities to prepare one transport a day, totaling 3,000 Jews. Instead, the Interior Ministry sent six transports, which were reduced at German request to four transports a day. Ungváry calculated that if the Hungarian authorities had stuck to the quota the Germans initially proposed (3,000 a day), 267,000 people might have survived the Holocaust.

“Apologists for Austrian innocence”, Robert Edwin Hertzstein writes, “had a clever response to the mention of the murder of 65,000 Jews: So long as Austria was left alone, no Jew suffered harm.”³⁹ And this is precisely how pro-government Hungarians represent the treatment of the Jews by successive

Postcommunist Hungary,” *Zeitgeschichte-online*, 2004, http://www.zeitgeschichte-online.de/zol/rainbow/documents/pdf/asm_oeu/shafir_asm.pdf (ISSN 1612-6041), p.3.

³⁵ According to Braham, “Approximately 40,000 to 45,000 of these were labor servicemen; 17,000 to 18,000 so called ‘alien’ Jews who were deported in the summer of 1941 and murdered near Kamenets-Podolsk; and the remainder victims of the massacres in and around Újvidek in early 1942.” Braham, “Assault on Historical Memory,” 217 n. 4. Újvidek is the Hungarian name of Novi Sad. See also *idem*, “The Kamenets-Podolsk and Délvidék Massacres. Prelude to the Holocaust in Hungary.” *Yad Vashem Studies*, 9 (1973), p.133–156. Délvidék is the Hungarian denomination for the Vojvodina region; *idem*, *Politica Genocidului*, p.29-51; on the deportation of ‘alien’ Jews and their fate in Kamenets-Podolsk see also Zoltán Tibori Szabó, “The Holocaust in Transylvania” Paper presented at the conference “The Holocaust in Hungary – Seventy Years Later,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington DC, 19 March 2014.

³⁶ Ungváry, “Az élő borzalom”; Deák, “A monument of self-pity and self-justification.”

³⁷ The German SS team headed by Eichmann was very small indeed (60-80 men, including auxiliary staff such as drivers) and could not accomplish its mission without the enthusiastic support of the Hungarian authorities – central and local authorities, police and gendarmerie. Krisztián Ungváry wrote his article “Az eleven borzalom” that Eichmann was thrilled by his experience in Hungary, observing that the Hungarians must surely be descended from the Huns since nowhere else had he seen so much brutality “in the course of solving the Jewish question.” See also Balogh, “German-Hungarian cooperation in the destruction of the Hungarian Jewry,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, 3 January 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/01/03/german-hungarian-cooperation-in-the-destruction-of-the-hungarian-jewry/> and *idem*, “Krisztián Ungváry on the memorial to the German occupation of Hungary: ‘The Living Horror’”, *Hungarian Spectrum*, 24 January 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/01/24/krisztian-ungvary-on-the-memorial-to-the-german-occupation-of-hungary-the-living-horror/>

³⁸ In *A Horthy rendszer mérlege: Diszkrimináció, szociálpolitika és antiszemitizmus* [The Balance of the Horthy Regime: Discrimination, Social Politics and Antisemitism] (Budapest: Jelenkor Kiadó, 2013).

³⁹ Robert Edwin Hertzstein, “The Present State of the Waldheim Affair.” In Gunter Bischof, Anton Pelinka (eds.), *Austrian Historical Memory and National Identity*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, 1997, p.118.

governments that served under Regent Horthy, whose autocratic rule lasted from 1920 to 1944, ignoring all historical evidence to the contrary.

Undersecretary of State Gergely Pröhle, who at that time headed the IHRA Hungarian delegation, tried to convince international experts at the May 2014 bi-annual meeting in London that this was precisely the case of Hungary as well. “No German invasion-no deportation”, was the argument. According to Pröhle, MAZSIHISZ’s criticism of the House of Fates project (see below) stemmed from the fact that “Jews support the Left.” Whether Hungarian or Jews in general was left unexplained. This sounded quite recognizable to those experts familiar with Dovid Katz’s “Holocaust obfuscation.” For good reason, as we shall see.

1.2. A constitutional matter

Having won in 2010 a crushing victory that ensured it of a parliamentary supermajority of more than two-thirds of the seats⁴⁰, the Orbán regime changed Hungary’s basic document, whose preamble reads, among other things:

“We date the restoration of our country’s self-determination, lost on the nineteenth day of March 1944, from the second day of May 1990, when the first freely elected body of popular representation was formed.”⁴¹

Passed in June 2011, the basic document thus places outside both legality and national responsibility any crime committed between 19 March 1944 and the end of Communist rule in May 1990. That is strengthened by another sentence in the same preamble, stating:

“We deny any statute of limitations for the inhuman crimes committed against the Hungarian nation and its citizens under the national socialist and the communist dictatorship. We do not recognize the communist constitution of 1949, since it was the basis for tyrannical rule; therefore we proclaim it to be invalid.”

It is important to note that the constitution not only deflects responsibility, but also places the Nazi and Communist regimes on equal footing, thus implicitly embracing the Double Genocide approach. In 2014, Hungary’s example was emulated by Latvia, also in a constitutional preamble. The preamble condemns both “the Communist and Nazi totalitarian regimes”; furthermore, it honors Latvia’s “freedom fighters,” by which are meant those who fought in the Latvian Legion as

⁴⁰ It would require a separate article to explain the reasons of that overwhelming performance. Putting it in a nutshell, however, the main reason rested in the corruption of the hitherto ruling coalition headed by the Socialist Party (*Magyar Szocialista Párt*, MSZP) combined with uninspired brutal intervention by police against demonstrators supporting the opposition. This allowed FIDESZ a free hand in passing undemocratic legislation, including an electoral reform aimed at liquidating opposition to FIDESZ “for the next twenty years” and silencing criticism in the mass media. Zoltán Tibori Szabó, “Hungary under the Orbán Regime,” unpublished paper cited with author’s permission. Combined with a number of populist measures passed before the elections, this ensured FIDESZ a nearly similar victory in the 2014 scrutiny, resulting again in a two-thirds majority in the legislature.

⁴¹ “The Fundamental Law of Hungary (25 April 2011),” <http://presidentactivism.wordpress.com/2011/03/28/full-english-text-of-the-new-hungarian-constitution/>

part of the *Waffen SS*.⁴² In the course of the 2014 dispute over the Budapest Freedom Square monument, defenders of the regime's decision pointed out that FIDESZ might hardly be suspected of negationist motivations, since it was under the Orbán government that legislation forbidding the denial of the Holocaust has been passed in February 2010. This is correct, but, only a few months later that legislation was extended to cover "the genocides committed by national socialist or communist systems" omitting specific reference to the Holocaust.⁴³ Consequently, the placing of the memorial in Freedom Square may be considered to be part and parcel of a Holocaust obfuscation effort now inscribed in the constitution. Other former Communist countries also approved legislation placing denial of both the Holocaust and Communist crimes on the same footing.⁴⁴ Hungary, however, is the only one to have "sanctified" this aspect of Holocaust obfuscation in its basic document.⁴⁵

Analyzed from this perspective, it is not irrelevant to mention that at the other end of the square stands a monument whose removal has been repeatedly demanded by hard-line nationalists and which has been defaced on several occasions; it commemorates Soviet soldiers who perished in the battle for the liberation of Budapest and it bears the inscriptions: "Glory to the liberating Soviet heroes" and "In memory of the Soviet soldiers who fell in the battle against fascism." In early April 2014, i. e. after the Gabriel *cum vulture* monument began to stir public opinion, the demand for removing the Soviet memorial (reminiscent of the disputes over the Victory Memorial in Riga and the statue of the Bronze Soldier in Tallinn⁴⁶) was heard again, this time around being enounced by the youth wings of Jobbik and by the young generation organization of the Christian Democratic People's Party (*Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt*, KDNP), which is the ruling associate

⁴² "Latvian president promulgates Constitution's Preamble," *The Baltic Course*, 8 July 2014, <http://www.baltic-course.com/eng/legislation/?doc=93760>

⁴³ Ben Cohen, "Jobbik Leader Remains a Holocaust Denier, Says Jewish Journalist and Holocaust Survivor," *Algemeiner*, 6 December 2014, <http://www.algemeiner.com/2014/12/15/jobbik-leader-remains-a-holocaust-denier-says-jewish-journalist-and-holocaust-survivor/>

⁴⁴ These are the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova and Poland. See Gabriel Andreescu, "Interzicerea negării crimelor comuniste pe plan european: norme, ideologie, drepturi." In *Noua Revistă de drepturile omului*, nr.1, 2011, p.41-58; Vladimir Socor, "Moldova Condemns Communism at Long Last," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 9, p.135, 12 July 2012, http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=39633&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=587&no_cache=1#.VJV0CZ0BUk

⁴⁵ As early as January 2014, in a letter addressed to the MAZSIHISZ leadership that had made public its first apprehensions, Prime Minister Orbán drew attention to the basic document's preamble. Sam Sokol, "Hungarian PM defends controversial WWII memorial," *The Jerusalem Post*, 22 January 2014, <http://www.jpost.com/LandedPages/PrintArticle.aspx?id=339040>

⁴⁶ See "WWII veterans call for removal of Soviet monument in Riga," *The Baltic Times*, 22 January 2007, <http://www.baltictimes.com/news/articles/17185/>; AFP, "WWII Victory Day still an issue in Latvia," *The Gulf Times*, 9 May 2012, http://www.gulf-times.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=504607&version=1&template_id=39&parent_id=21

Meike Wulf, „The Struggle for Official Recognition of ‚Displaced‘ Groups in Post-Soviet Estonia.” In Michal Kopeček (ed.), *Past in the Making: Historical Revisionism in Central Europe after 1989* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2008), 235-238.

of FIDESZ, running on the same joint lists since 2006.⁴⁷ The Orbán government would probably like to oblige, but a Russia-Hungary agreement of 1995 stipulating mutual protection of monuments and cemeteries apparently prevents that; and this despite the fact that the hammer-and-sickle displayed on the monument has been an illegal symbol in Hungary since mid-2010. The extremist, ultranationalist, antisemitic, and anti-Roma Jobbik (*Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom*, Movement for a Better Hungary) has long demanded that the monument be replaced with one in memory of Trianon.⁴⁸ Part of this demand has been now satisfied – but at the other end of the square.

1.3. Detour to the Banks of River Danube

To complete a more extended “tour” of the Freedom Square and its vicinity, one might as well walk to the main building of the Corvinus University, situated on the left bank of the Danube. In January 2014, Bence Rétvári, KDNP deputy chairman, called for the removal of a statue of Marx from the main hall of the university and a favorite spot for students to have their photo taken after graduation. The authorities obliged in September.⁴⁹ A lot of other statues dating back to Communist times had been removed to Memento Park in the vicinity of Budapest and the event might have gone unnoticed, were it not for Rétvári’s public declaration about his motivation. In an open letter to faculty and students he called Marx a racist and an antisemite who hated the Slavs, as well as an advocate of forcing women into prostitution. According to Rétvári, Marx was also a Social Darwinist and thus a forerunner of Nazism. Above all, it is due to him that the 100 million victims of Communism should be traced.⁵⁰ It was not the sheer incomprehension of Marx (discussed by quite a few scholars with whose writings Rétvári was obviously unfamiliar), but Rétvári’s plagiarism that was amusing.

He “quoted” from Marx to demonstrate, as it were, that the founding father of Communist thought was on top of all his other sins, a Holocaust advocate. Part and parcel of the Holocaust obfuscation effort spreading over East Central Europe, this contention is to be traced back to “The Soviet Story” – a highly popular “documentary” produced by Estonian director Edvins Snore in 2008.⁵¹ In it, an alleged British specialist in Marx cites him, as it were, as calling for a “revolutionary

⁴⁷ Zoltán Csipke, “Jobbik and Christian Dem youth wing ask for removal of central Soviet war memorial,” *politics.hu*, 5 April 2012, <http://www.politics.hu/20120405/jobbik-and-christian-dem-youth-wing-ask-for-removal-of-central-soviet-war-memorial/>

⁴⁸ “Jobbik calls for dismantling of Soviet war memorial,” *politics.hu*, 10 February 2010, <http://www.politics.hu/20100210/jobbik-calls-for-dismantling-of-soviet-war-memorial/>

⁴⁹ “Marx statue taken away from Corvinus University entrance hall,” *politics.hu*, 15 September 2014, <http://www.politics.hu/20140915/marx-statue-taken-away-from-corvinus-university-entrance-hall/>

⁵⁰ Eva Balogh, “One statue comes, another one goes. Maybe,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, 20 January 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/01/20/one-statue-comes-another-one-goes-maybe/>

⁵¹ The documentary can be watched on Youtube, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oVZjvyAE-78>. For a demonstration of other fallacies than those discussed in this article, and above all of the alleged Soviet-Nazi collaboration in the perpetration of the Holocaust, see Alexander Dukov, “‘The Soviet Story’ – The tissue of Lies,” *Das russische Portal in der Steiermarkt*, 13 April 2011, <http://rugraz.net/index.php/ru/istoricheskoe-dostoinstvo/mifi-o-rossii-iccpc/1009-alexander-dyukov-the-soviet-story-the-tissue-of-lies>

Holocaust”. Were it only for the fact that the notion of “Holocaust” could not have been used as did not exist at the end of the nineteenth century, the hoax calls for examination of sources. It turns out that the contention was fabricated by combining two articles written at the span of several years, not one, and that furthermore, the articles in question were written by Engels, rather than Marx.

Why, then, use Marx for the purpose of falsification? Because, as part and parcel of Holocaust obfuscation, Snore must attribute the call for the atrocities to one with Jewish origins. Rétvári, however, was obviously in agreement – so much in agreement that he went on to plagiarize Snore’s ideas. Besides giving vent to an opinion that is as old as it is widespread in Hungarian society: the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism and the belief that Jews are “monopolizing” suffering.⁵² Long before Rétvári, journalist Zsolt Bayer, a founding member of FIDESZ and a close friend of Orbán, on 23 July 2000 told listeners on the Kossuth state radio talk show *Vasárnapi Újság* (Sunday News): “I abhor the fact that many people ... dare say explicitly that of all the things that ever happened here, only the Holocaust was a crime, or that everything the Communists did in the world and in Hungary was nothing compared to the Holocaust.”⁵³

1.4. FIDESZ, Jobbik and Horthy: A common perception

The explanation has been repeatedly advanced⁵⁴ for the rigid⁵⁵ governmental position on the monument that elections were scheduled for spring 2014 and that the ruling FIDESZ worried that adopting a more malleable position vis-à-vis MAZSIHISZ and other opponents of the project might play into the hands

⁵² See André Geritz, *The Myth of Jewish Communism: A Historical Interpretation*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2009; Paul Hanebrink, “Transnational Culture War: Christianity, Nation, and the Judeo-Bolshevik Myth in Hungary, 1890-1920.” *Journal of Modern History* 80, no. 1 (March 2008), p.55-80; Eliza Ablovatski, “The 1919 Central European revolutions and the Judeo-Bolshevik myth.” *European Review of History*, 17, no. 3, 2010, p.473-489. In an article published in 2013, Hanebrink wrote: “Invoking the specter of Judeo-Bolshevism was one way to establish a dubious moral symmetry and radical rightists like István Csurka often pointed out in the 1990^s that leading communists like Mátyás Rákosi and Ernő Gerő, as well as important figures in the communist security apparatus, like Gábor Péter... had been Jews.” Hanebrink, “The Memory of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Hungary” In Himka, Michlic (eds.), *Bringing the Dark Past to Light*, p.274. As will yet be shown, this by no means stopped at the 1990^s.

⁵³ Cited in András Gerő, László Varga, Mátyás Vince, *Antiszemita közbeszed Magyarországon 2001-be: Jelentés és dokumentáció* [Antisemitic Discourse in Hungary in 2001: Reports and documentation], Budapest: B'nai B'rith Budapesti Közösség, 2002, p.169-172.

⁵⁴ Sam Sokol, “Hungarian P. M. defends controversial WWII memorial”; Charlotte McDonald-Gibson, “The Holocaust Whitewashed? Hungary’s Jews step back from memorial year they say has been hijacked for political gain,” *The Independent*, 9 February 2014, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/the-holocaust-whitewashed-hungarys-jews-step-back-from-memorial-year-they-say-has-been-hijacked-forpolitical-gain-9117846.html>

⁵⁵ Despite repeated meetings of government officials with the leadership of MAZSIHISZ, Orbán refused to budge and at one of these meetings simply told participants that there was “no room for maneuvers” around the decision concerning the monument. See JTA, “Design of Nazi occupation statue etched in stone, Orbán tells Jews,” 1 May 2014, http://www.jta.org/2014/05/01/news-opinion/world/no-room-for-maneuvers-on-nazi-occupation-statue-hungarian-pm-tells-jews?utm_source=Newsletter+subscribers&utm_campaign=178e32aabf-JTA_Daily_Briefing_5_1_29_2014&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_2dce5bc6f8-178e32aabf-26654549; “Orbán has talks with Jewish community.”

of Jobbik. If so, calculations were certainly mistaken, for Jobbik scored its thus far best electoral performance, garnering 20.3 percent of the vote and becoming the second-largest parliamentary party.⁵⁶ I believe that the assumption itself was wrong.

The FIDESZ-Jobbik relationship is more than ambivalent, as indeed was that between FIDESZ and Jobbik's extremist predecessor, the Justice and Life Party (*Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja*, MIÉP) led by István Csurka.⁵⁷ Both FIDESZ and Jobbik make use of coded nationalist and antisemitic language, though Jobbik frequently utilizes explicit language to call a spade Jew or Roma (or rather a Gypsy) as well. During his first tenure as premier (1998-2002), Orbán often courted and emulated MIÉP for both political and ideational reasons. He has continued to do the same in an exacerbated form with Jobbik. The difference rests in the fact that Jobbik's electoral performances (16.6% in 2010 and 20.3% in 2014; 14.7% in the 2009 scrutiny for the European Parliament and 14.6% in 2014) turned it into a visible threat nationally and internationally, which MIÉP never matched. Hence, whenever convenient, FIDESZ may also point in Jobbik's direction to claim that anti-democratic trends in Hungary come from its supporters alone. Yet there has been mutual support and collaboration with both parties. A few examples will suffice.

Both FIDESZ and MIÉP-Jobbik denounced the Trianon Treaty, perceiving it as an expression of the international conspiracy that dismembered Greater Hungary at the end of World War I. Three statues commemorating Trianon in this light were erected in Hungary between 1998 and 2002.⁵⁸ In May 2010, the date of 4 June, on which the Trianon Treaty was signed in 1920, became "Day of National Unity" in what can only be termed as transparent revisionism and was so interpreted by officials not only in neighboring Romania and Slovakia, but also in the Czech Republic. Although the bill was initiated by FIDESZ, it had been first suggested by Jobbik.⁵⁹ By that time some might have forgotten that during his first

⁵⁶ On Jobbik see in this volume the joint contribution of Anita Kurimay and Rudolf Paska, and the contributions of András István Túrke and of Marius Turda. See also Paul Lendvai, *Hungary. Between Democracy and Totalitarianism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 179-94; András Kovács, "The Post-Communist Extreme Right: The Jobbik Party in Hungary." In Ruth Wodak, Majid Khosravi-Nik, Brigitte Mral (eds.), *Right Wing Populism in Europe*, London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, p.223-234.

⁵⁷ On MIÉP see Laszló Karsai, "The Radical Right in Hungary." In Sabrina P. Ramet (ed.), *The Radical Right in Central and Eastern Europe Since 1989*, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999, p.133-146. See also Ivan T. Berend, "Jobbra At! [Right Face!]. Right-Wing Trends in Postcommunist Hungary." In Joseph Held (ed.), *Democracy and Right-Wing Politics in Eastern Europe in the 1990s*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, p.105-134 and Eric Beckett Weaver, *National Narcissism. The intersection of the nationalist cult and gender in Hungary*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006. In the elections of 2006 Jobbik, MIÉP and the Independent Smallholders, Agrarian Workers and Civic Party (*Független Kisgazda, Földmunkás és Polgári Párt*, FKGP) ran on joint lists, but failed to obtain any seat. MIÉP ran independently in the 1998 elections, garnering 5.47% and 14 parliamentary seats.

⁵⁸ Shafir, "Hungarian Politics and the Post-1989 Legacy of the Holocaust." In Randolph L. Braham, Brewster S. Chamberlin (eds.), *The Holocaust in Hungary: Sixty Years Later*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2006, p.263.

⁵⁹ "Fidesz to declare Day of National Unity," *politics.hu*, 20 May 2010, <http://www.politics.hu/20100520/fidesz-to-declare-day-of-national-unity>; "Parliament declares Trianon anniversary Day of National Cohesion," *Ibid.*, 1 June 2010, <http://www.politics.hu/20100601/parliament->

term as premier and after having lost his majority in parliament in September 2001 due to a split with the Small Agrarians, Orbán and his FIDESZ relied on MIÉP's support to survive in power till the end of the mandate. MIÉP's leader István Csurka had given the Nazi salute in a televised interview between electoral runoffs in 2008.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, shortly before his death in February 2012, Csurka was appointed as intendant of the prestigious Budapest New Theater by his friend and admirer György Dörner, a second-class actor-propagandist for Jobbik, best known for dubbing in American films, who had been appointed the theater's director by the FIDESZ Mayor of Budapest István Tarlós.⁶¹

His appointment was interpreted "as a gesture by Fidesz to far-right voters that it will look after their interests".⁶² Protest in front of the theater and internationally forced the authorities to annul Csurka's appointment⁶³, particularly after the MIÉP leader went amok with yet another attack on magnate George Soros, writing that the billionaire's projects in Hungary "only serve to keep a well defined section of the Jewish community in power." Nonetheless, Dörner immediately announced plans to stage "The Sixth Coffin," a play authored by Csurka and dealing with the fate of Hungarians after Trianon. Dörner thus showed he intends to apply his program of "cutting in on the leftist and Jewish-dominated theater scene."⁶⁴ The New Theater has since staged almost exclusively plays with Christian and nationalist themes, described by a Budapest journalist as "classical and boring". What is worse, it has also staged a play by Transylvanian Hungarian writer József Nyirő, a fascist who served both the Horthy and the Ferenc Szálasi regimes (see *infra*).⁶⁵

[declares-trianon-anniversary-day-of-national-cohesion](#); dpa, "Hungary declares national day to mark Trianon treaty," *Earth Times*, 31 May 2010, <http://www.earthtimes.org/articles/show/326486.hungary-declares-national-day-to-mark-trianon-treaty.html>; *Idem*, "Hungary laments lost territory on 'Trianon' day," *Ibid.*, 4 June 2013, <http://www.earthtimes.org/articles/show/327331.hungary-laments-lost-territory-on-trianon-day.html>; Keno Verseck, "Blurring Boundaries: Hungarian Leader Adopts Policies of Far-Right," *Der Spiegel*, 30 January 2013, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/ruling-hungarian-fidesz-party-adopts-policies-of-far-right-jobbik-party-a-880590.html>

⁶⁰ Shafir, "Hungarian Politics and the Post-1989 Legacy of the Holocaust," p.277-278.

⁶¹ Philipp Oehmke, "Revanchism in Budapest: Hungary's Right-Wing War on Culture," *Der Spiegel*, 16 December 2011, Spiegel.de, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,803865,00.html>; Brigitte Salino, "La scène hongroise rongée par l'hydre nationale," *Le Monde*, 28 January 2012, http://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2012/01/28/la-scene-hongroise-rongee-par-l-hydre-nationale_1635892_3246.html#ens_id=1276800

⁶² "Remembering 1956: They don't like the system," *The Economist*, 24 October 2011, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/eastern-approaches/2011/10/remembering-1956>

⁶³ "Budapest mayor asks theater director to reconsider hiring of Csurka following anti-Semitic screed," *politics.hu*, 15 December 2011, <http://www.politics.hu/2011/12/15/budapest-mayor-asks-theater-director-to-reconsider-hiring-of-csurka-following-anti-semitic-screed/>. Among those who protested was German conductor Christoph von Dohnányi, grandson of Hungarian national composer Ernő (Ernst von) Dohnányi, who cancelled a guest appearance at the State Opera in Budapest.

⁶⁴ Ani Horvath, "Anti-Semitism takes the stage in Hungary," *Global Post*, 2 April 2012, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/europe/120329/anti-semitism-takes-the-stage-hungary-echoes-hitler-pt-1>

⁶⁵ Yigal Schleifer, "Statue of Limitations," *Foreign Policy*, 7 July 2014, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/07/07/statue_of_limitations_budapest_hungary_orban_right_wing_anti_semitism

During Orbán's first tenure as premier, FIDESZ did nothing to distance itself from MIÉP's then Deputy Chairman Calvinist Pastor Lóránt Hegedűs Jr., who on 16 August 2001 published in MIÉP's Budapest 16th district local newspaper *Ébresztő* (Reveille) an article using crude anti-Semitic language. In that tract, Hegedűs wrote: "The Christian Hungarian state would have warded off the [ill effects] of the Compromise of 1867, had not an army of Galician vagabonds arrived, who had been gnawing away at the country which, despite everything, again and again, had always been able to resurrect from its ruins the bones of its heroes." And the kindred pastor went on to say:

"If their Zion of the Old Testament was lost due to their sins and rebellions against God, let the most promising height of the new Testament's way of life, the Hungarian Zion, be lost as well... Since it is impossible to smoke out every Palestinian from the banks of the Jordan using Fascist methods that often imitate the Nazis themselves, they are returning to the banks of the Danube, now in the shape of internationalists, now in jingoistic form, now as cosmopolitans, in order to give the Hungarians another kick just because they feel like doing so."

Hegedűs concluded:

"So hear, Hungarians, the message of the 1000th year of the Christian Hungarian state, based on 1000 ancient rights and legal continuity, the only one leading you to life: *Exclude them! Because if you don't, they will do it to you.*"⁶⁶

Some time earlier, Hegedűs had delivered a Nazi-like speech in parliament, with neither FIDESZ parliamentary speaker, the future President János Áder nor FIDESZ's then parliamentary group leader József Szájer uttering a word of protest. Hegedűs went on to become a deputy chairman of Jobbik, and his wife Enikő is a parliamentarian representing that formation. He is also known as an admirer of British Holocaust denier David Irving⁶⁷ and as one of the main promoters of the Miklós Horthy cult. On 3 November 2013, a bust of Admiral Horthy was unveiled in front of the Reformed Church where Hegedűs serves as pastor. It is visible from the Archangel's monument.⁶⁸ The day had been carefully chosen, as it marked the 75th anniversary of the Hitler-Mussolini-Horthy 1938 accord under which territories incorporated in Czechoslovakia in 1920 (The First Vienna Award for Hungarians, The Vienna Diktat for Czechs and particularly Slovaks⁶⁹) were returned to Hungary. The Church stands at the edge of Freedom Square (nr.3, *Szabadság tér*), and thus adds to circling the square of recent Hungarian history.

⁶⁶ Cited in Gábor Schweitzer, "'Exclude Them, Or If You Don't...'" In Gerő, Varga, Vince, *Antiszemita Közbeszed Magyarországon 2001-be*, p.227-228. Emphasis in Hegedűs's original).

⁶⁷ András Schiff, "Hungarians must face their Nazi past, not venerate it," *The Guardian*, 11 December 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/11/hungarians-must-face-nazi-past-not-venerate-it>

⁶⁸ Keno Verseck, "'Creeping Cult': Hungary Rehabilitates Far-Right Figures," *Der Spiegel*, 6 June 2012, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/right-wing-extremists-cultivate-horthy-cult-in-hungary-a-836526.html>

⁶⁹ The Second Vienna Award (Diktat), also arbitrated by Germany and Italy, granted Hungary northern Transylvania at the expense of Romania on 30 August 1940.

How did FIDESZ officials react to the event? Parliamentary group leader Antal Rogán (who was also mayor of the Budapest district where the bust was unveiled) somehow managed to deflect the blame onto the Jews. Though he called the event a “provocation” that harms Hungary’s international image, neither Hegedűs nor Jobbik were mentioned as its authors. “This provocative action will obviously give the western European left-wing press an excuse to cry antisemitism and paint a malicious picture of Hungary,” he said.⁷⁰ Orbán’s then chief of staff János Lázár said any racism and antisemitism must be condemned, but added that the 24 years of Horthy’s rule were a complex period that should be debated by historians rather than by politicians. This was precisely the argument of Romanian negationist historians, such as Gheorghe Buzatu, when referring to the Antonescu period.⁷¹ Furthermore, Lázár added in a typical example of “trivialization”: “The [deportations of Jews] in 1944 were clearly despicable, while other aspects of the era, like the creation of the social security system, were decent and were worthy of being continued.”⁷² He might have said as well that under Hitler, trains ran on time and highways were constructed.

The first (life-size) Horthy statue in post-Communist Hungary was unveiled in May 2012 in the southwestern village of Kereki, near Lake Balaton. Just a few days later, Reformed Bishop Gusztáv Bölcseki unveiled a restored marble Horthy plaque at the Debrecen University of Reformed Theology. A fortnight on, on 1st June, Freedom Square (again!) in the town of Gyömrő some 30 kilometers southeast of Budapest, was renamed after the admiral. In fact, this was a restoration of some sorts, since between 1937 and 1945 the square had been called Horthy Square.⁷³ During the same month, another monument (a bust) honoring Horthy was erected in the village of Csókakő, Fejér County, where a medieval castle is located. FIDESZ mayor György Fűrész said on the occasion that despite the fact that Horthy never hunted in the area and never visited the region, he was one of the greatest Hungarian politicians, which justifies the decision. The initiative belonged to several ultranationalist organizations, such as the local branch of Jobbik, its paramilitary group Hungarian Guard (see below) and the revisionist Sixty Four County Youth Movement. The latter’s local leader, László Toroczkai, told audiences that it was not

⁷⁰ Marton Dunaj, “Hungarian far-right sparks protests as it commemorates wartime leader,” Reuters report printed in *The Star Online*, 3 November 2013, <http://www.thestar.com.my/News/World/2013/11/04/Hungarian-farright-sparks-protests-as-it-commemorates-wartime-leader.aspx>

⁷¹ See Gheorghe Buzatu, “Istoriografia și izvoarele” [Historiography and its sources] In Dinu C. Giurescu (ed), *Istoria românilor. România în anii 1940-1947* [History of Romanians. Romania between 1940-1947], Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2008, p.XXXVII-LXX.

⁷² “Amid protests, Hungarian far-right party unveils bust of Nazi-allied wartime leader,” *Haaretz*, 7 November 2013, <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/jewish-world-features/1.556891>

⁷³ “Hungarian WWII leader sparks new emotions,” *France 24*, 31 May 2012, <http://www.france24.com/en/20120531-hungarian-wwii-leader-sparks-new-emotions>. However, the town reversed this decision in May next year, under unelucidated circumstances. See “Town regrets decision to honor Horthy,” *politics.hu*, 8 May 2014, <http://www.politics.hu/20140528/town-regrets-decision-to-honour-horthy/> and “Hungary Town Won’t Name Square for ‘Quisling’ Leader Miklós Horthy. Gyomro Will Switch Honor for Nazi Ally,” *Forward*, 28 May 2014, <http://forward.com/articles/199015/hungary-town-wont-name-square-for-quisling-leader>

enough to erect Horthy statues. “We have to continue pursuing his policy as well and demand the revision of the Trianon Dictate; we have to put the slogan ‘no, no, never’ and ‘everything back’ on our banners.” Indeed, hand in hand with the bust’s inauguration it was announced that the former Bánya Square would henceforth be called *Nagy-Magyarország* (Greater Hungary).⁷⁴ Meanwhile, Jobbik has called for unveiling a Horthy statue in Budapest’s historic Gellért Square, on the hundredth anniversary of the admiral’s entry into Budapest in November 1919.⁷⁵ On the occasion of the 95th anniversary of that event, as every year, Jobbik organized a march in the capital. Hegedűs told a crowd of supporters: “As long as they can publicly defame the memory of Admiral Horthy with impunity, they can do this with the entire Hungarian nation.”⁷⁶ No one asked who “they” might be, since it was clear: Jews and the Leftists who march to their tune.

There might be differences between FIDESZ and Jobbik on the means, but not on the goal of pursuing the rehabilitation of Horthy. For FIDESZ, the admiral is the symbol of National-Christian conservatism. For Jobbik and earlier, for MIÉP, he is above all the politician under whose rule rabble hatred against aliens has been given vent to (in fact, both MIÉP and Jobbik are closer to the *Nyilas*, or the fascist Arrow Cross of Ferenc Szálasi). Both FIDESZ and the extreme nationalists revere Horthy for having stood up against the Trianon national trauma.⁷⁷ “There would be no Hungary today had it not been for Horthy,” FIDESZ Minister of Rural Development Sándor Fazekas said in late 2014.⁷⁸

Horthy thus became the emblematic figure that unifies the entire Rightist spectrum, from Hungary’s first post-Communist Premier József Antal’s Hungarian Democratic Forum (*Magyar Demokrata Fórum*, MDF) to MIÉP and Jobbik via FIDESZ. Indeed, the rehabilitation of Horthy as a historical figure dates back to the Antal years. Under his tenure as premier, in September 1993, the earthly remains of Horthy were brought to Hungary and reinterred in his native small town of Kenderes. Antal did not personally attend the ceremony, though he visited the grave shortly before his death in December 1993. Prominent ministers in his cabinet, however, did attend “as private citizens”. Among these, some (his successor as premier, Péter Boross and his Defense Minister Lajos Für, for example⁷⁹) would

⁷⁴ “A new Horthy statue was unveiled in Csókakő,” *hungarianAmbiance.com*, 18 June 2012, <http://www.hungarianambiance.com/2012/06/new-horthy-statue-was-unveiled-in.html>

⁷⁵ “Jobbik commemorates anniversary of Horthy’s 1919 Budapest entry,” *politics.hu*, 16 November 2014, <http://www.politics.hu/2014/11/16/jobbik-commemorates-anniversary-of-horthys-1919-budapest-entry/>

⁷⁶ Csaba Tóth, “Jobbik commemorates Miklós Horthy’s 1919 march on Budapest,” *Budapest Beacon*, 17 November 2014, <http://budapestbeacon.com/news-in-brief/jobbik-commemorates-miklos-horthys-1919-march-on-budapest/>

⁷⁷ In fact, while Horthy acquiesced to Trianon, it was precisely Béla Kun’s Communists that refused to accept it. I am grateful to Eric Beckett Weaver for this pertinent remark. Yet as is well known, historic memory easily renders itself to manipulation.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ See Braham, “The Reinterment and Political Rehabilitation of Miklós Horthy.” In *Slavic Almanach*, 2 (1993), 137-40, Henrietta Mondry and Paul Schweiger (eds.). (Johannesburg: University of the Witwaterstand). Horthy’s reinterment was modeled on the 1906 reburial of Ferenc Rákóczi, and would later serve as model for Antal’s own funeral in 1993. See Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies. Reburial and Postsocialist Change*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, p.16-17.

eventually evolve to positions close to those of the Far Right. In a series of interviews the week preceding the reburial, Antal called Horthy a “Hungarian patriot” who “should be placed into the community of the nation and the awareness of the people”. And he added that if it were not for Horthy, many more Hungarian Jews would have been killed.⁸⁰ The oblique reference was to Horthy’s decision of July 1944 to halt the deportation of Budapest Jews. But as historian Krisztián Ungváry would point out, rather than exonerating Horthy, this demonstrates that he was powerful enough to have opposed the deportations from the beginning of the German occupation. Which he did not.⁸¹ Antal’s handling of Horthy (as well as his insistence that in studying the Hungarian Holocaust, emphasis should be laid on rescuers rather than perpetrators⁸²) would be assimilated by Viktor Orbán and his court historians as well.

Péter Boross’ tenure as premier (December 1993 – July 1994) was short. Yet according to Randolph L. Braham, he “emerged as one of the most vocal supporters of the Holocaust-denigrating drive not only during his administration but also during the tenure of Viktor Orbán as prime minister”.⁸³ He is currently head of the advisory board of Veritas (see *infra*). On the Freedom Square monument, his position was unambiguous: “In the spring of 1944, the German armed forces took over power in Hungary and after 1945 another barbaric power determined the fate of the nation.”⁸⁴ What this amounts to is not mere deflection of guilt on the Germans for the Holocaust. It is, above all, equating Nazi with Soviet crimes – the main backbone of Holocaust obfuscation.

Lajos Für led on 25 August 2007 the swearing-in ceremony of the first battalion of the paramilitary Hungarian Guard (*Magyar Gárda Mozgalom*). This was noticed in the international media; but less noticed was the presence of FIDESZ parliamentary deputy Mária Wittner, who also delivered the main speech.⁸⁵ Wittner, who participated in the 1956 revolution, was never sanctioned by her party and was reelected to the legislature in 2010. The Guard was officially banned in June 2009. Nonetheless, at the swearing-in ceremony of the newly elected legislature in 2014, Gábor Vona, its commander and the leader of Jobbik, threw off the jacket he had

⁸⁰ Jane Perlez, “Reburial is Both a Ceremony and a Test for Today’s Hungary,” *The New York Times*, 5 September 1993, <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/09/05/world/reburial-is-both-a-ceremony-and-a-test-for-today-s-hungary.html>

⁸¹ Ungváry, “Az élő borzalom.”

⁸² Karsai, “The Radical Right in Hungary,” p.142.

⁸³ Braham, “The assault on the historical memory of the Holocaust.” On Boross, the author relies on A Szabad szemmel vendége volt Boros Péter volt miniszterelnök [Ex-PM Péter Boros was the guest of The Naked Eye (an ATV talk show)], 3 February 2014, <http://www.atv.hu/videok/video-20140203-a-horthy-rendszer-rehabilitalasa-zajlik> and László Bartus, “Boross,” *Népszava/Szabadság*, New York, 14 February 2014, p.10.

⁸⁴ “Political elite should help Hungarian interests abroad, says Kövér,” *politics.hu*, 29 September 2014, <http://www.politics.hu/20140929/political-elite-should-help-hungarian-interests-abroad-says-kover/>

⁸⁵ “The World from Berlin: Neo-Fascist Magyar Garda Is ‘Hungary’s Shame’,” *Der Spiegel*, 27 August 2007, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/the-world-from-berlin-neo-fascist-magyar-garda-is-hungary-s-shame-a-502184.html>; William Totok, “Rechtsextremisten rüsten auf,” *Tageszeitung*, 27 August 2007, <http://www.taz.de/!3685/>

worn during the ceremony and displayed the guard's fascist-like uniform.⁸⁶ Not only was he not penalized, but the Jobbik representatives in the FIDESZ-dominated legislature were granted the positions they were entitled to according to electoral results, including one of deputy-speaker.⁸⁷ Since its disbandment, the Guard has unsuccessfully attempted to re-register under the name of Hungarian Guard Foundation. Members of the Guard or people closely associated to it are suspected to have participated in the 2008 and 2009 murder of Roma minority members, but the suspicion was not proved in court, which sentenced three of the murderers to life in prison and a fourth to 13 years in 2013.⁸⁸

To be sure, the Hungarian Guard is not the only organization to march the streets of East Central Europe in uniforms reminiscent of the Nazis. Estonian *Waffen SS* veterans march annually being referred to as "freedom fighters." Latvian veterans of the former Latvian Legion parade in Riga every year on 16 March (Latvian Fighters Day) parade, while in Lithuania admirers and apologists of the Lithuanian Activist Front march twice a year in Kaunas and Vilnius to commemorate their predecessors' wartime defense against the USSR.⁸⁹ But these are either very old people or handful of members of the young generation – not a paramilitary organization engaging in regular training. Still, they enjoy the support of some political parties and prominent politicians, which is both shameful and worrisome.

2. In falso Veritas

Some Hungarian wines are excellent. If one is to believe the Romans, wine unchains tongues and under their influence many a truth is uttered that would otherwise remain unsaid. *In vino veritas*. Not in Budapest, however, where in an Orwellian reverse, "truth is a lie". Military historian Sándor Szakály, who has a long history of Holocaust trivialization and cleansing of its perpetrators, heads the Veritas institute, inaugurated on 2 January 2014. This record made the MAZSIHISZ leadership, in its 9 February 2014 address to the authorities, refer to him specifically. To no avail.

⁸⁶ Erich Follath, "Budapest Experiences a New Wave of Hate," *Der Spiegel*, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/europe-s-capital-of-anti-semitism-budapest-experiences-a-new-wave-of-hate-a-722880.html>

⁸⁷ He is Tamás Sneider. The opposition did not support the nomination. See "Parliament elects Jobbik MP as one of its deputy speakers," *politics.hu*, 7 May 2014, <http://www.politics.hu/20140507/parliament-elects-jobbik-mp-as-one-of-its-deputy-speakers/>

⁸⁸ Keno Verseck, "Neo-Nazis Get Life for Roma Murder Spree," *Der Spiegel*, 6 August 2103, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/neo-nazis-in-hungary-receive-life-sentences-for-roma-murder-spree-a-915163.html>; András Vágvyölgyi, "On Roma murders in Hungary," *Open Democracy*, 5 September 2014, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/andras-b-vagvyolgyi/on-roma-murders-in-hungary>

⁸⁹ Shafir, "A Present *Chiaroscuro*," *Yad Vashem Studies*, 42 (2), 2014, p.225-250.

Szakály started his career⁹⁰ working in the Hungarian Institute and Museum of War History (*Hadtörténeti Intézet és Múzeum*), whose director he became during the first Orbán administration. In 2001 he joined the staff of Duna Television, a channel established by late premier Antal for the Hungarian diasporas for influencing members of the Hungarian minorities in neighboring countries. Szakály soon rose to vice president of the station, but after FIDESZ lost the elections in 2002 the good days seemed over. He was an independent researcher without full employment for a while, and landed a professorship at a university that grants degrees to gymnasium teachers – the same institution from which former President Pál Schmidt received his “doctorate” in 1992. Szakály’s fate was less cruel than Schmidt’s, who was forced to resign in 2012, in the wake of the scandal produced revelations that he had plagiarized his dissertation. The historian became a full professor after Orbán’s return to power in 2010, teaching at the Gáspár Károli Calvinist University and by 2011 was a department head. Moreover, in 2013 he was appointed vice president of the newly created National Civil Service University (*Nemzeti Közszoigálati Egyetem*), which also includes the former Hungarian Military Academy. His appointment as Veritas director was a signal that he was in the government’s grace.

Yet Szakály is not a FIDESZ member. His political views apparently are further to the right, and according to some reports are closer to Jobbik’s (he used to be a contributor to Jobbik’s official publication *Barikád* [Barricade]).⁹¹ If so, the appointment is just one more piece of evidence on the commonalities of the two formations.

Appearing on Duna TV’s ultranationalist program “Inheritance” (*Hagyaték*) shortly after his appointment as Veritas director, Szakály said the Hungarian gendarmerie had been the best in the whole world. The 12,000 gendarmes were the most disciplined force in the country, he said, and their main task was the prevention of crime. They were friends of the people but enemies of the criminals.⁹² Needless to say, no mention was made of the gendarmerie’s role in the deportation of the Jews.

Be that as it may, Szakály’s televised admiration of the gendarmes was not a novelty. In a documentary with Szakály’s participation as “expert historian” shown on national TV in early December 1998 and titled *Híven, becsülettel, vitézül* (Faithfully, With Honor, Bravely, which was a part of the Horthy gendarmerie’s

⁹⁰ On his professional past and political affiliation see Balogh, “Sándor Szakály, the new head of the Veritas historical institute, is embarking on rewriting Hungarian history,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, 17 January 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/01/17/sandor-szakaly-the-new-head-of-the-veritas-historical-institute-is-embarking-on-rewriting-hungarian-history/>; *Idem*, “Sándor Szakály: Portrait of an historian,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, 12 July 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/07/12/sandor-szakaly-portrait-of-a-historian/>

⁹¹ Balogh, “Sándor Szakály, the new head of the Veritas;” *Idem*, “Neo-Nazi-Jobbik programs on Duna TV: The Orbán government has no objection,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, 12 January 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/01/12/neo-nazi-jobbik-programs-on-dunatv-the-orban-government-has-no-objection/>

⁹² Balogh, “Neo-Nazi-Jobbik programs on Duna TV.”

logo) he ventured what Braham calls an “obscene argument”: Horthy’s gendarmes, he claimed, did not have to use force in rounding up the Jews, because the Jews were law-abiding citizens who voluntarily surrendered. This quite original version of negationism by deflecting the guilt onto the Jews themselves, however, paled when compared with other “expert assessments,” according to which the alleged “humane” treatment of the Jews by Horthy’s gendarmes was an indication of anti-Nazi resistance.⁹³ In collaboration with two other Horthy-cleansing historians, Tamás Stark and Péter Szabó, in 1992 Szakály joint-authored a long article printed in the pro-government daily *Magyar Nemzet* (Hungarian Nation) where the claim was made that the Jews inducted as labor servicemen during the war had benefited from equitable treatment and the literature dealing with this aspect had exaggerated their losses.⁹⁴

That was definitely not against the spirit of Horthy’s “re-evaluation” that had started soon after FIDESZ’s first electoral victory of 1998. In 1999, Zsolt Lányi, a member of junior coalition partner FKGP and chairman of the parliamentary Defense Committee, unveiled in Budapest’s Museum of War History headed by Szakály a plaque honoring Horthy’s notorious gendarmes.⁹⁵

Two aspects, nonetheless, had intensified since: first, the transmogrification of Horthy’s Hungary into a community protecting its Jews. At the third session of the new Veritas institute in 2014, for example, former Prime Minister Boross told the audience that antisemitism was “simply unknown” in the Hungarian countryside before the German invasion of March 1944. Claims to the contrary, he said, were merely products of “Marxist historiography”. The anti-Jewish legislation introduced by premiers Pál Teleki and László Bárdossy, he said, had no effect whatsoever on the attitude towards Hungarian Jews among the gentry living in the countryside.⁹⁶ The second aspect was less novel, but nonetheless knew a spectacular intensification. I have in mind the substitution of Horthy’s yester-enemies by Orbán’s present political adversaries. Former MDF leader Sándor Lezsák, for example, who is currently a deputy parliamentary speaker representing FIDESZ in the legislature, told a gathering marking twenty years since Horthy’s reinterment: “The reburial was a historic compensation, but we cannot stop there. Even after twenty years we must say that the hypnotic Socialist-Communist four decades of toxic lies is not a thing of the past.”⁹⁷ The Stalinist (and, incidentally, post 1958 non-Kádárist) division into “us” and “them” (whereby “who’s not our

⁹³ Braham, “The assault on the historical memory of the Holocaust.”

⁹⁴ Tamás Stark, Péter Szabó, Sándor Szakály, “Második világháború: A magyar munkaszolgálat” [The Second World War: The Hungarian Labor Service], *Magyar Nemzet*, 20 February and 28 February 1992, cited in Braham, “The assault on the historical memory of the Holocaust.” See note 35 *supra*.

⁹⁵ Shafir, “The Politics of Public Space.”

⁹⁶ Csaba Tóth, “Rewriting Hungary’s history, Veritas holds third conference this year,” *Budapest Beacon*, 7 December 2014, <http://budapestbeacon.com/public-policy/rewriting-hungarys-history-veritas-holds-third-conference-this-year/>

⁹⁷ “Quotable: Sándor Lezsák on the reburial of Miklós Horthy and the legacy of the Communist era,” *politics.hu*, 2 September 2013, <http://www.politics.hu/20130902/quotable-sandor-lezsak-on-the-reburial-of-miklos-horthy-and-the-legacy-of-the-communist-era/>

friend is our enemy”) is particularly pronounced among those pursuing admiral Horthy’s rehabilitation.

Szakály makes frequent appearances on the *Hagyaték* program, whose producer is Sándor Lezsák’s son in law, Zoltán Moys. In turn, Moys is the founder of *Börzsöny Akciócsoport*, a group that (among other things) organizes in Budapest tours commemorating the “breakthrough” through Soviet lines of some 700 German and Hungarian troops surrounded by the Red Army on 11 February 1945.⁹⁸ In line with his 1998 deflectionist argument, in September 2013 he again turned Jews into their own victims. Speaking on a radio program, Szakály claimed that the labor servicemen who were burned alive in a barn in the Ukrainian village of Doroshich on 30 April 1943 had been victims of their own negligence⁹⁹ (in actual fact, they had been torched at the orders of Hungarian commanders during the retreat from the Soviet Union). These labor servicemen (some 800 of them) were infested with lice, typhoid and other disease caused by lack of hygiene and medical care as Hitler and his allies retreated. First isolated to quarantine, they were later torched at the orders of superiors opting for a “radical solution” to avoid the breakout of epidemics. Szakály was reiterating the version circulated by Defense Minister General Vilmos Nagy shortly after the event.¹⁰⁰

In an interview with the MTI news agency on 17 January 2014, Szakály referred to the deportation of Jews to Kamenets-Podolsk in summer 1941 as a “police action against aliens”. A perfectly legal act, as it were. In fact, most of the deported Jews had belonged to Greater Hungary and lost their citizenship as a result of Trianon. The Vienna awards, and the subsequent occupation of Carpathian Ruthenia had brought them back into Hungarian fold. According to the awards, they should have received Hungarian citizenship automatically. After the war broke out, they were brought to Kamenets-Podolsk and then pushed over to German-occupied territory, where most of them were annihilated, being victims of the Holocaust by bullets.¹⁰¹ Szakály was not engaging in anything new; the statement was part and parcel of the same long effort to cleanse the record of the Horthy regime by transforming mass murder into mere legitimate “police action.” In view of MAZSIHISZ’s immediate reaction of the same day (see *supra*), Szakály made a half-hearted apology, saying his intention was not to offend anyone when he had used “historically correct terminology”, and in subsequent occasions attempted to demonstrate the indemonstrable. He told the ATV commercial television channel on

⁹⁸ Balogh, “The siege of Budapest: Neo-Nazis remember the ‘breakthrough’ of February 11, 1945,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, 8 February 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/02/08/the-siege-of-budapest-neo-nazis-remember-the-breakthrough-of-february-11-1945/>

⁹⁹ Szakály spoke in the radio roundtable discussion, “The Royal Hungarian Army, Gendarmerie, and the Holocaust” on 8 October 2013. An abbreviated transcript of the discussion was published in the online issue of *Népszava* (Budapest) and is cited in Braham, “The assault on the historical memory of the Holocaust.”

¹⁰⁰ See Braham, *Politica genocidului*, p.44.

¹⁰¹ See note 35 *supra* and Benjamin Novak, “‘Veritas’ director Sándor Szakály apologizes for calling deportation a ‘police action against aliens’,” *Budapest Beacon*, 20 January 2014, <http://budapestbeacon.com/public-policy/veritas-director-sandor-szakaly-apologizes-for-calling-deportation-an-immigration-procedure/>

19 January he saw no reason to heed the MAZSZIHISZ demand to resign as head of Veritas. “I do not have a guilty conscience, because I do not think I did anything wrong,” he said, adding: “Perhaps I made a mistake.”¹⁰²

Szakály was a key-man in one of several attempts to force the Jewish community in Hungary to dance to the government’s tune during 2014. Ominous signs went back to the attempt to re-design the Hungarian exhibit in Auschwitz (see *infra*) and to the visit paid in 2011 by András Levente Gál, state secretary in the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice, to the Páva Street Holocaust Memorial and Documentation Center (*Holokauszt Emlékközpont*, HDKE).¹⁰³ The HDKE had been established in 2002 under the first Orbán administration and was inaugurated in April 2004 under the auspices of Socialist Prime Minister Péter Medgyessy. It is financed from governmental funding. Convinced, as Eva Balogh formulates it, that “who pays the Gypsy can order the music”¹⁰⁴, the official voiced publicly his displeasure with some features in the HDKE’s permanent exhibition. He was particularly angered by witnessing the mention in the exhibit of Horthy’s alliance with Hitler and Hungary’s subsequent participation in the dismembering of neighboring states. He claimed that these had no relevance whatever for the Holocaust. Yet, as Paul Shapiro, Director of the U. S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM)’s Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies said on 19 March 2013 in his testimony before the U. S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) [the so-called Helsinki Commission], “it was precisely the Jews of the regions that Hitler restored to Hungary who were the first targets of the Hungarian gendarmerie and police as they drove to create a country ‘cleansed of Jews.’” Gál also proposed “to sanitize the record of Hungarian participation in the ghettoization and deportation of the country’s Jews and placed full blame for the destruction of Hungarian Jewry on Germany.”¹⁰⁵ Coming under criticism, Gál defended his positions by saying it was time “to go beyond well-established Communist history.”¹⁰⁶ Although the plan to sanitize the permanent exhibition was dropped, the grander design was maintained. In an apparent attempt to force the hand of the HDKE’s employees, budget allocations were stopped for several months in 2013; this forced the HDKE to fire staff and the wages of remaining personnel went unpaid for several months.

¹⁰² Novak, “‘Veritas’ director Sándor Szakály apologizes.” In view of the controversy stirred by his statement, he nonetheless cancel his participation in an upcoming conference on the 70th anniversary of the Hungarian Holocaust, at which he was scheduled to speak.

¹⁰³ Braham, “The assault on the historical memory of the Holocaust”; Balogh, “The Budapest Holocaust Memorial Center publishes its ‘professional communiqué’,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, 10 February 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/02/10/the-budapest-holocaust-memorial-senter-publishes-its-professional-communique/>

¹⁰⁴ Hungarian proverb.

¹⁰⁵ “The testimony of Paul A. Shapiro, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, 20 March 2013, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2013/03/20/the-testimony-of-paul-a-shapiro-u-s-holocaust-memorial-museum/>

¹⁰⁶ Rabbi Andrew Baker, “Country Visit: Hungary. Report of the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chair-in-Office on Combating Anti-Semitism,” 21-23 March 2012, <http://tandis.odihp.pl/documents/07237.pdf>

On 26 April 2014 Szakály and the Center's Chairman of the Board György Haraszti (appointed by the government shortly after the 2010 elections) signed an agreement in line with which the Center would cooperate with Veritas in organizing conferences and joint research.¹⁰⁷ The agreement was inked by Haraszti, who is close to Orbán circles, without the knowledge of Center Director Szabolcs Szita, whose term ended in May without a replacement being announced. As Eva Balogh observed¹⁰⁸, the agreement's language spoke miles about its intentions. Instead of employing "liberation" (*felszabadulás*) when referring to the Soviet Union, as would be normal for an institution specialized on the Holocaust and Jews, it spoke of "occupation" (*megszállás*) – thus demonstrating not only that the Veritas approach is to prevail, but also that Holocaust obfuscation is to go ahead full steam. Once more, the MAZSIHISZ reaction was swift. Haraszti was forced to resign his professorship at the *Országos Rabbiképző – Zsidó Egyetem*, the rabbinical school and Jewish university that is functioning under the organization's supervision.

When pressure did not render satisfactory results, the government tried its hand at the old tactics of *divide et impera* (divide and rule). And it did so with some success. For many years (1992-2014), Gusztáv Zoltai had led MAZSIHISZ. On several occasions he had expressed criticism of the government's intentions to erect the contentious monument in Freedom Square.¹⁰⁹ When he resigned in April 2014 and was replaced by András Heisler, the resignation was attributed by the Jewish umbrella organization to mental strain "closely connected" with the dispute. Zoltai "and all Holocaust survivors," Heisler said in an interview on ATV, "are frustrated by what is happening in public life". In the same interview, Heisler denied that his predecessor had been in fact forced out following the discovery of some financial irregularities. The allegation had been published in the Budapest Jewish weekly *Szombat* and was later confirmed by the pro-FIDESZ conservative weekly *Heti Válasz*. According to the latter publication, Zoltai's colleagues placed two envelopes in front of him and told him to choose: one was a letter of resignation and the other one announcing officially MAZSIHISZ's intention to press charges.¹¹⁰ Be that as it may, in September Zoltai literally as well as figuratively crossed to the other end of the "roundtable" of negotiations between government officials and MAZSIHISZ,

¹⁰⁷ "Hungary Jewish federation objects to university's agreement with Veritas institute, professor to resign," *politics.hu*, 1 May 2014, <http://www.politics.hu/20140501/hungary-jewish-federation-objects-to-universitys-agreement-with-veritas-institute-professor-to-resign/>

¹⁰⁸ Balogh, "Viktor Orbán shapes the Holocaust Memorial Year."

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, Agence France Press, "Hungarian Jews mark 70th anniversary of Nazi Germany invasion," *The Raw Story*, 19 March 2014, <http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2014/03/19/hungarian-jews-mark-70th-anniversary-of-nazi-germany-invasion/>, which cites him as saying "the Nazis met little resistance when they invaded Hungary."

¹¹⁰ "Mazsihisz exec resigns over monument row," *politics.hu*, 10 April 2014, <http://www.politics.hu/20140410/mazsihisz-exec-resigns-over-monument-row/>; "Hungarian Jewish leader resigns," JTA, 10 April 2014, http://www.jta.org/2014/04/10/news-opinion/world/hungarian-jewish-leader-resigns?utm_source=Newsletter+subscribers&utm_campaign=1e973f6e8a-JTA_Daily_Briefing_4_10_; Balogh, "Gusztáv Zoltai, former CEO of MAZSHIHISZ, is now János Lázár's adviser on Jewish affairs," *Hungarian Spectrum*, 11 September 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/09/11/gusztav-zoltai-former-coo-of-mazsihisz-is-now-janos-lazars-adviser-on-jewish-affairs/>

being appointed governmental adviser on Jewish affairs. The step was met with astonishment on the Jewish side. Zoltai, Heisler said, “destroyed his life’s work – that wasn’t immaculate to begin with”.¹¹¹ Judit Csáki, a journalist and a leader of the protests in Freedom Square, formulated it even more bluntly: “Betrayal. That’s the only way to call what Zoltai has done;” and “Zoltai gave his name and his face to a classic divide-and-conquer tactic designed to break up the Jewish community for its criticism of the government.”¹¹² But it was possibly young Rabbi Zoltán Radnóti, head of the Beith Shalom synagogue in Budapest, who was the most astute in his comments: “The man knows everything, every little dirty secret about every community leader, past and present,” he said, and added: “That he could share this knowledge with his new employers is very frightening to them. I know the government likes this, and I think Zoltai enjoys seeing them shake with fear.”¹¹³

More and more intellectual personalities added their voice in protest of the government’s now obvious plans to indulge in the negationist reconstruction of Hungary’s recent past. In January, twenty-three prominent Hungarian historians and other experts on the Hungarian Holocaust (among them Viktor Karády, László Karsai, János Kenedi and Mária M. Kovács) signed a joint protest. Among other things, they wrote: “By presenting both the victims and perpetrators of the Holocaust together as the sole victim of the Germans, the planned memorial dishonors the memory of those half a million victims who were killed in the Holocaust in Hungary.” They went on to emphasize: “The Hungarian Holocaust took place with the active participation of the Hungarian authorities. But the planned memorial places all responsibility solely with the Germans and the German army’s ‘Arrow Cross subordinates.’ In truth, the Arrow Cross had nothing to do with the mass deportations which took place in the summer of 1944.”¹¹⁴ Also in January twenty-five prestigious Holocaust scholars from all over the world signed a letter in support of their protesting Hungarian colleagues in which they emphasized that

“As important as it is to point to the destructive impact of the German occupation in 1944-45, the most tragic consequence of that occupation – the murder of about 500,000 Jews from Greater Hungary–was also the result of the actions and attitudes of many Hungarians, officials and others. Hungarian troops committed atrocities abroad. While there were also non-Jewish Hungarians victimized by German occupation forces, it is historically grossly inadequate to present all Hungarians as a community of victims, minus the Arrow Cross Party. We call on the Hungarian authorities to stop plans for a monument of such a design.”

¹¹¹ An apparent reference to the fact that Zoltai had served as a secret police (AVO) airport border guard in the early 1950 and after the 1956 revolution had joined the Workers’ Guard set up by the Kádár regime to suppress the resistance of the former revolutionaries. See Cnaan Liphshiz, “Hungary Jewish Leader Gusztav Zoltai Denounced as ‘Traitor,’” *Forward*, 6 November 2014, <http://forward.com/articles/208655/hungary-jewish-leader-gusztav-zoltai-denounced-as/>

¹¹² Cited in Liphshiz, “Hungary Jewish Leader Gusztav Zoltai.”

¹¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁴ Cited in Balogh, “The Orbán government’s war on multiple fronts,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, 22 January 2014, <https://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/01/22/the-orban-governments-war-on-multiple-fronts/>

The signatories (including, among others, Yehuda Bauer, Donald Bloxham, Randolph L. Braham, and Christian Gerlach) added in what might have been a most sensitive point for authorities in Budapest: “we ask diplomatic representatives of foreign countries to reconsider their participation in sessions of the Hungarian Commission for the Holocaust Memorial Year 2014.”¹¹⁵

Yet no protest had an impact stronger echo¹¹⁶ than that separately launched by the most important living historian of the Hungarian Holocaust, the uncontested nonagenarian Randolph L. Braham. In an open letter addressed to György Haraszti and Szabolcs Szita, Braham, who was born in Bucharest, Romania but grew up in Dej, Transylvania, and was conscripted into the Hungarian labor service during the war, requested that his name be removed from the HDKE’s Documentation and Information Center (*Téka és Információs Központ*). “I reached this decision with a heavy heart, having followed the recent developments in Hungary with great concern”, he added, specifying in what read as an indictment of Hungarian obfuscation negationism pursued under Viktor Orbán:

The history-cleansing campaign of the past few years calculated to whitewash the historical record of the Horthy era, including the changes in the constitution that “legalized” the sinister measures that were subsequently taken to absolve Hungary from the active role it had played in the destruction of close to 600,000 of its citizens of the Jewish faith, have left me, and I assume many others, stunned. The straw that broke the camel’s back in my decision was the government’s resolve to erect a national statue relating to the German occupation – a cowardly attempt to detract attention from the Horthy regime’s involvement in the destruction of the Jews and to homogenize the Holocaust with the “suffering” of the Hungarians – a German occupation, as the record clearly shows, that was not only unopposed but generally applauded.

Finally, he added that he is returning to the HDKE leadership the Medium Cross of the Order of Merit received from former President Pál Schmidt in October 2011 “with the request that you forward them to the appropriate Hungarian authorities”.¹¹⁷ A few days earlier, Braham had told the Budapest daily

¹¹⁵ Cited in Balogh, “Two short statements about the Hungarian Holocaust Memorial Year,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, 3 February 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/02/03/two-short-statements-about-the-hungarian-holocaust-memorial-year/>.

¹¹⁶ For example: AFP, “Professor returns award over Hungary holocaust ‘whitewash,’” *Times Live*, 26 January 2014, <http://www.timeslive.co.za/world/2014/01/26/professor-returns-award-over-hungary-holocaust-whitewash>; Israel National Television, “‘Shocked’ Holocaust Scholar Returns Hungary Award,” 26 January 2014, <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/Flash.aspx/285783#.UuWO3P3g75Y>; AP, “Holocaust historian returns award to Hungary,” *Haaretz*, 26 January 2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/jewish-world-news/premium-1.570650>; Dan Bilefsky, “Holocaust Scholar Returns Top Award to Hungary in Protest,” *The New York Times*, 27 January 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/28/world/europe/holocaust-scholar-returns-top-award-to-hungary-in-protest.html?ref=europe>. The letter was also “published and commented upon in a large number of newspapers and periodicals in Hungary,” according to Braham, “The assault on the historical memory of the Holocaust.”

¹¹⁷ “Randolph L. Braham’s open letter,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, 26 January 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/01/26/randolph-l-brahams-open-letter/>

Népszabadság that he fully supported the MAZSIHISZ demand for Szakály to resign and added: “Behind every tyrant with a sword, there is a historian with a sponge.”¹¹⁸

The nonagenarian historian’s gesture was reminiscent of the decision of Transylvania-born Nobel prizewinner Elie Wiesel to similarly return a distinction to the Hungarian authorities in 2012, and much for the same reason.¹¹⁹ During spring 2012, Hungarian parliamentary speaker László Kövér, State Secretary for Culture Géza Szöcs (a dissident poet under Nicolae Ceaușescu in Romania and a former Romanian senator), joined forces with Jobbik founder and leader Gábor Vona to bring back to native Transylvania the ashes of József Nyírő (1889-1953). Nyírő had died in Spanish exile in 1953 and his ashes had been brought to Hungary in 2010, under a decision of the parliament. Nyírő was a member of the Hungarian parliament between 1941 and 1945, being vice-chair of the Education Commission under Szálasi’s Arrow Cross regime. He managed to flee the country together with Szálasi after the siege of Budapest by the Soviets in 1945, but unlike Szálasi (executed in 1946) he was not extradited back to Hungary. A successful author of novels and short stories in the ‘30s and ‘40s, Nyírő is on record for having praised Joseph Goebbels as one who “exudes intellect and genius.” He denounced in parliament the “discredited liberal Jewish heritage” as Hungary’s enemy and called Hungarian marriages to non-ethnics “mutt marriages” and “mule marriages.”¹²⁰

Following protests of the Romanian government, which said it would prohibit plans to bring the ashes by a train wending its way from the border to Odorheiul Secuiesc (*Székelyudvarhely*), where Nyírő had lived since the age of 11, the plans aiming at stirring up national sentiment had to be changed. Szöcs himself apparently smuggled Nyírő’s ashes in. At an “ecumenical ceremony” held instead of the planned reburial, Szöcs reportedly held a large bag, which he placed under Nyírő’s portrait. He refused to either confirm or deny that the urn was inside the bag, but Kövér said Nyírő would be eventually buried at the spot “one way or another.” Soon after, Szöcs told the Hungarian news website index.hu that the urn had been smuggled into Romania. It required a plot, he said, because transporting the urn “was not exactly easy.” For his part, Kövér denounced the Romanian interdiction as “uncivilized,” “paranoid,” “hysterical,” and “barbaric.” After the ceremony, he stayed on in Romania accompanied by Orbán’s friend Zsolt Bayer, but Szöcs resigned from his position, possibly forced to for having revealed the affair.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Braham, “The assault on the historical memory of the Holocaust,” note 82. The interview (“Történész, kezében szivaccsal”) is available online on http://nol.hu/belfold/20140122-tortenesz_kezeben_szivaccsal-1439575

¹¹⁹ James Kirchik, <http://www.nzz.ch/aktuell/feuilleton/uebersicht/horthy-im-hoch-1.17306919>; Elie Wiesel on Hungary’s Nazi ‘Whitewash’,” *World Affairs*, 19 June 2012, <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/blog/james-kirchick/elie-wiesel-hungarys-nazi-whitewash>; Krisztina Tan, “Wiesel raps Hungary Nazi past ‘whitewash’,” *Reuters*, 19 June 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/06/19/us-hungary-wiesel-award-idUSBRE85I0Y320120619>

¹²⁰ “The testimony of Paul A. Shapiro.”

¹²¹ Verseck, “Creeping Cult’.” “The testimony of Paul A. Shapiro;” “Geza Szocs, secretarul de stat ungar implicat in initiativa reinhumarii poetului Jozsef Nyiro, si-a dat demisia,” [Géza Szöcs, Hungarian State Secretary involved in the initiative of poet (sic!) József Nyírő’s re-burial, has resigned], *HotNews*, 13

Kövér, on the other hand, called on his Transylvanian Hungarian brethren to “press the books of Nyirő into the hands of their children” so that “a new generation of Nyirős” would be raised there.¹²² As well as Albert Wass (a Transylvanian count convicted for wartime crimes against Jews and Romanians in 1946, who also managed to escape to the West) and author of children’s tales, Nyirő was introduced in the obligatory school curriculum under the Orbán regime. Another Transylvanian introduced in the curriculum is Dezső Szabó, considered to have been “the first intellectual antisemite among Hungarian writers”.¹²³ The Cluj (*Kolozsvár/Klausenburg*)-born Szabó (1879-1945) wrote in 1921: “In the interest of human progress, the barbarian, murderous memories of dark, primeval centuries [i. e. the Jews, whom he had earlier described as “a life and death question for Hungarians” and Judaism, to which he referred as “a tribal superstition exalted as a religion”] must be *exterminated*”.¹²⁴

3. From the House of Terror to the House of Fates (and back?): Mária Schmidt

The first clear signal of Orbán’s intention to whitewash Hungary’s recent past dates back the year 1998. Not long after becoming the country’s premier, he visited the Hungarian pavilion at Auschwitz and immediately decided to reconstruct the exhibit, originally built by the Communist regime. The plans for redesigning the exhibit were little else than a pro-Horthy apologia designed to sanitize the Nazi era in general and the Hungarian involvement in the Final Solution in particular. They envisaged portraying a “virtual symbiosis of Hungarian and Jewish life since the emancipation of Jews in 1867, downplaying the many anti-Jewish manifestations as mere aberrations in the otherwise enlightened history of Hungary”. Attention was obviously focused on “the positive aspects of Jewish life in the country, emphasizing the flourishing of the Jewish community between 1867 and 1944, the rescue activities of those identified as Righteous Among the Nations, and Horthy’s saving of the Jews of Budapest.”¹²⁵ More importantly, the same plans blamed almost exclusively the Germans for the destruction of the Jews. The redesigned exhibition was canceled after protests from MAZSIHISZ; reacting to the decision, a spokesman of the federation said the country’s Jewish communities did not wish to see the project halted but rather “done right”.¹²⁶ One of Orbán’s chief counselors in the failed enterprise was Dr. Mária Schmidt.

June 2012, <http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-international-12516099-geza-szocs-secretarul-stat-ungar-implicat-initiativa-reinhumarii-poetului-jozsef-nyiro-dat-demisia.htm>

¹²² Cited in “The testimony of Paul A. Shapiro.”

¹²³ John Lukacs, *Budapest 1900. A Historical Portrait of a City and its Culture* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 169.

¹²⁴ All citations from “The testimony of Paul A. Shapiro”.

¹²⁵ Braham, “Assault on Historical Memory,” p.207.

¹²⁶ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, *RFE/RL Newslines*, 8 and 9 September 1999.

There are many speculations around the transformation undergone by Schmidt from a former scholar of the Holocaust into a trivializer displaying antisemitism. These run from personal life (she divorced her Jewish husband) to careerism. They need not preoccupy us beyond establishing that Schmidt's prominence in obfuscating the Holocaust is incontestable and that this role never disturbed the support she enjoyed among the FIDESZ leadership in general and Premier Orbán's trust in her in particular. Indeed, shortly after the Auschwitz exhibition incident and in a manner akin to French radical leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, she said the Holocaust had been but a marginal issue in the history of World War II. "The Holocaust, the extermination or rescue of the Jews represented but a secondary, marginal point of view not among the war aims of either belligerent," was the exact quote in her address at a symposium held under the auspices of the Tibor Eckhardt Political Academia in Budapest in November 1999.¹²⁷ Not by accident, she spoke of "holocausts" (plural) in this context. The word "holocaust," she said, should not be applied only to the extermination of the Jews during World War II, since the Communists had also committed genocide. Yet the West, which was Stalin's ally during the war, refuses to be confronted with its own responsibility, as this would "endanger the legitimacy of the Western democracies." In the face of protests, Orbán issued a statement largely exonerating Schmidt and expressing his "full confidence" in her.¹²⁸

In 2002, Schmidt became director of the House of Terror [*Terror Háza*] museum, located in central Budapest, in the house that served as the headquarters of Szálasi's Arrow Cross in 1944-1945 (when it was called the "House of Loyalty") and later became the headquarters of the Communist-era secret police. Although allegedly dedicated to both Nazi and Communist-era terror, only two of some two-dozen rooms of the museum are dedicated to the former, as this author witnessed during several visits beginning with the fall of 2002. The museum thus appears to be suggesting that, on balance, Communist terror had been by far worse than the Jewish Holocaust and that the Jews (prominently figuring among the perpetrators but never among the victims, though some would fit both categories) were responsible for the country's postwar ordeal.

In more than one way, the House of Terror museum antedated the 2014 controversies of Freedom Square and Veritas. Nowhere can the visitor learn anything about the Hungarian state's own responsibility for the persecution of Jews and for collaboration in their extermination. On the contrary, the first leaflet one picks up as one steps into the museum (there are leaflets in every room) speaks of Horthy's Hungary as having been involved in "desperate attempts" to maintain "its fragile democracy." Until the Nazi occupation of 1944, one is told, Hungary "had a legitimately elected government and parliament, where opposition parties functioned

¹²⁷ Mária Schmidt, "Holokausztok a huszadik században" (Holocausts in the Twentieth Century), *Magyar Hírlap*, 13 November 1999, cited in Braham, "The assault on the historical memory of the Holocaust," *Napi Magyarország*, 13 November 1999 cited in Geró, Varga, Vince, *Antiszemita közbeszéd Magyarországon 2001-ben*, p.153. See also Hanebrink, "The Memory of the Holocaust," p.275.

¹²⁸ *Magyar Hírlap* and Hungarian Radio, in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts-Eastern Europe*, 16 November 1999; *RFE/RL Newslines*, 16 November 1999.

normally.” No word of the anti-Jewish legislation, no word of the 64,000 Jews who perished under Horthy’s rule before the Nazis occupied the country. As a matter of fact, the museum has nothing more suitable to offer for its second room (dedicated to the Szálasi period) than a videotape showing the pro-Nazi dictator delivering a speech in which he calls for the patriotic defense of Budapest against Soviet forces. Why, then, should the Blood and Honor neo-Nazi organization and Jobbik not feel legitimized in organizing a ceremony every year in the memory of those “heroic” fighters (see *supra*)?

As Jakob Mikanovski has recently pointed out, the House of Terror “is a visual blueprint for how FIDESZ... has been busy rewriting the country’s history.” One deals here with an effort aimed at

“equating Fascism with Communism, and dismissing both as foreign intrusions—[that] is typical of Orbán’s rhetoric. It’s also central to the museum’s mission. Its exhibits deliberately avoid making distinctions between perpetrators. They argue that Fascism and Communism both lie outside what FIDESZ calls ‘authentic Hungarian history’, despite the fact that Hungary had its own fascist party and its own Communists. This narrative provides absolution for the worst parts of the twentieth century: since both movements were foreign imports, Hungary bears no responsibility for either the Holocaust or the Gulag. At the same time, it promotes a vision of history in which Hungary is a perennial victim, and FIDESZ its long-awaited savior.”¹²⁹

Holocaust obfuscation in its various aspects transpired more than once in a collection of articles Schmidt published in 1998, titled *In the Devil’s Cauldron of Dictatorships*.¹³⁰ Among other things, the Hungarian historian (in an article titled “The Place of the Holocaust in the Modern History of the Hungarian Jewry (1945-1956)”) fully embraced the “Double Genocide” approach. The Hungarian liberal nobility and the leadership of the Hungarian Jewry, she wrote, had “signed a pact in the middle of the nineteenth century” entailing a separation of functions in the state: the Jews would act only in the economic sphere and the professions, while the nobility would provide political leadership. It was the Jewry that had infringed on the pact by taking over the leadership of the 1919 Hungarian Soviet revolution. Yet, according to Schmidt, not only did not the Hungarian elites of the time retaliate, but between 1928 and 1938 one witnessed “the second flowering of Hungarian Jewry.” The local Jewry supposedly bloomed under anti-Jewish legislation and discrimination, if one were to believe Schmidt. According to her, the regime of Horthy “was not friendly to the Jews but until 1938 its representatives were not antagonistic either.” Fully in line with the official “constitutional” claim, Schmidt then ventures the opinion that “On 19 March 1944 Hungary’s sovereignty ceased to exist” and “the country that was directed by Nazi puppets no longer defended its

¹²⁹ Jacob Mikanowski, “The Frightening Politics of Hungary’s House of Terror,” *The Awl*, 30 March 2012, <http://www.theawl.com/2012/03/the-frightening-politics-of-hungarys-house-of-terror>

¹³⁰ Mária Schmidt, *Diktatúrák ördögszekerén* (Budapest: Magvető, 1998). On this volume see also Braham, “The assault on the historical memory of the Holocaust” and Balogh, “Mária Schmidt’s Revisionist History of World War II and the Holocaust,” Part II, *Hungarian Spectrum*, 10 June 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/06/10/maria-schmidts-revisionist-history-of-world-war-ii-and-the-holocaust-part-ii/>

Jewish citizens.” That the “puppets” were by and large the same with those who had directed the fate of “sovereign Hungary” seems immaterial.

It is when Schmidt addresses the postwar period that her views fully reveal themselves. After the war, she claims, practically all political parties of left or center were in Jewish hands. Depending on how one defines “center,” this is still a gross exaggeration, but the contemporary context of the assertion is clear: liberals and left-wingers are supported by Jews or in their hands. She goes on to cite the Italian political scientist Roberto Michels’ assertion that “in Hungary the parties of the working class were entirely in Jewish hands”, to which she adds: “in Hungary’s case this statement with more or less modifications was true until 1956”.¹³¹ In other words, Stalinist crimes in Hungary were Jewish crimes, just as the fascist crimes had been German crimes.

To “demonstrate” it, Schmidt is not merely emulating other extreme Right wingers from Hungary¹³² (but the same applies to Romania, Poland and other places) by mentioning the names of Communist leaders with Jewish origins, such as Mátyás Rákosi, Mihály Farkas, Ernő Gerő or József Révai while passing over in silence non-Jewish leaders. She also adds that most of the judges who passed sentences on the four hundred or so war criminals in the postwar years had Jewish origins. Schmidt became one of the first post-Communist historians to advocate the rehabilitation of Premier László Bárdossy, executed on 10 January 1946 for war crimes, and thus to identify herself with the demand first raised by the ultranationalist and antisemitic MIÉP.¹³³ In such a situation, according to Schmidt, it was to be expected that antisemitism would arise, since those who were in power came from “the persecuted” – a word put by her in citation marks. The reader is thus led to conclude that in interwar Hungary there had been only marginal antisemitism, but in postwar Hungary there was plenty of it, provoked by the Jews. What is more, in post-1989 Hungary antisemitism has the same cause, for after the change of the regime “the comrades of Jewish origin managed to get themselves into important positions in the new democracy,” in which they “received important, well paid jobs, uniforms, ranks, fabulous careers”. One can only join Eva Balogh in wondering whether Orbán’s staunch supporters such as Schmidt know that the premier’s father used to be party secretary at the company he owns nowadays and that the premier himself was a secretary of the Hungarian Young Communist League (*Magyar Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség, KISZ*).¹³⁴

It is against this background that one must understand why Mária Schmidt raised the suspicion of the MAZSIHISZ leadership once her appointment as curator-director of the planned House of Fates was announced at end 2013. The educational project was intended to perpetuate the memory of Hungarian children in the context of the memorial year relating to the 70th anniversary of the Holocaust. Its name was

¹³¹ As quoted in Balogh, “Mária Schmidt’s Revisionist History.”

¹³² See note 52.

¹³³ Braham, “The assault on the historical memory of the Holocaust”; Shafir, “The Politics of Public Space,” p.25.

¹³⁴ Balogh, “Mária Schmidt’s Revisionist History of World War II and the Holocaust,” Part II.

apparently intended to be a response to Holocaust survivor Nobel Prize winner Imre Kertész's novel *Fatelessness*. In other words, this new museum of the Hungarian Holocaust was to demonstrate that the perished children did have a fate, after all – which Yad Vashem does in its very denomination (Monument and Name). Although MAZSIHISZ had originally welcomed the idea¹³⁵, Schmidt's designation as head of the project raised apprehensions that the hidden intention would repeat the House of Terror's "performance" of cleansing Hungary of guilt, the more so as the project's announced intention was to also emphasize the actions of the rescuers. In other words, fears arose that what Gál had failed to achieve at the HDKE in 2011 (see *supra*) would now be again attempted under the more experienced Schmidt.

As these developments ran parallel to the controversy over the Gabriel monument in Freedom Square, the feeling prevailed in the leadership and among rank and file members of the Jewish community that (at best) the House of Fates was just "the latest in several steps taken by the Orbán government... to counter... an unfair image of Hungary as a racist, antisemitic country".¹³⁶ This sentiment was shared by at least some international Jewish organizations. For example, in a letter addressed to Premier Orbán, the Simon Wiesenthal Centre's Director for International Relations, Shimon Samuels, wrote that the project "would seem to be a fig leaf for international opinion, while the Holocaust itself and contemporary antisemitism are left as a function of domestic politics and political mortgages with the extreme right." "Memory cannot serve as a fig leaf for hate," concluded Samuels.¹³⁷ That Minister of State János Lázár, who heads Orbán's office, was put in charge of both the Gabriel monument and the House of Fates projects did not help assuage such apprehensions either.¹³⁸ Other, perhaps more marginal issues also helped anxieties prevail. For example, the architect of the House of Terror, Attila F. Kovács, was also entrusted with the plans of the *Sorsok Háza*. The location of the museum also came under question. Situated in Budapest's eighth district in the nowadays depleted Jewish quarter, the former Józsefváros train station that was to host the new museum had been never utilized for the deportations to Auschwitz where most Hungarian victims perished, though it later served as departure point to other concentration camps.¹³⁹

Initially, the Hungarian Jewish leaders chose to treat the House of Fates problem separately from those posed by the Freedom Square monument and Veritas.

¹³⁵ Braham, "The assault on the historical memory of the Holocaust."

¹³⁶ Ruth Ellen Gruber, "Plan To Open Another Holocaust Museum in Budapest Faces Criticism—From Local Jews," *Tablet Magazine*, 10 January 2014,

http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/157693/budapest-holocaust-museum?utm_source=tabletmagazine&utm_campaign=9cc9a7e7ba-1_10_2014&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_c308bf8edb-9cc9a7e7ba-207107249

¹³⁷ "Wiesenthal Centre to Hungarian Prime Minister: 'We Endorse MAZSIHISZ Jewish Federation's Decision to Stay Away from Government-Sponsored 2014 Holocaust Commemoration Programme'," <http://www.wiesenthal.com/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=lsKWLbPJLnF&b=4441467&ct=13654019#.VLPdSVqwCfQ>

¹³⁸ Balogh, "The Hungarian Holocaust Year and the Reaction of Jewish Organizations," *Hungarian Spectrum*, 10 January 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/01/10/the-hungarian-holocaust-year-and-the-reaction-of-jewish-organizations/>

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

But very soon it became clear that the three issues belonged to the same “cleansing” package and were addressed in consequence. “We have a problem [with] why Mária Schmidt is leader of this project, and ... a lot of problems with the Terror House, particularly with its ideology,” said Heisler, who had been appointed as one of the members of the House of Fates advisory board. In December 2013, Budapest Jewish Community (*Budapesti Zsidó Hitközség*), led by Péter Tordai, requested that the advisory board be expanded to include its own nominees, a demand that Schmidt refused to heed.¹⁴⁰ Then, Heisler handed Schmidt a list of twenty Jewish historians, archivists, rabbis, and leading intellectuals and asked her to choose five. By late December, Schmidt had simply ignored the suggestion and instead invited a different group of local and international Jewish intellectuals and experts to meet with her and offer their opinion on the planned exhibit. This International Advisory Board held its first meeting on 30 September 2013, though some of the invitees declined to attend.¹⁴¹ Among them, Sara Bloomfield, the Director of the USHMM suggested that instead of building a new museum, the Hungarian authorities should support more generously the existing Holocaust Documentation Center.¹⁴² Holocaust survivor and former dissident writer György Konrád also declined the invitation. “It would be hard to shake the feeling that the hasty organization of this exhibition is not about the hundreds of thousands of children murdered 70 years ago, but rather about the Hungarian government of today”, he wrote in an open letter to Schmidt. “If the government wanted to devote such a large sum to the memory of these children, then in the spirit of the children’s spiritual heritage I would suggest they turn this amount over to feeding the badly nourished, living Hungarian children of today,” he added.

Heisler resigned from the board on 5 March 2014, as the House of Fates as the dispute between MAZSIHISZ and the government intensified. Attempts by Mária Schmidt to conceal her international dubious reputation failed one by one. Randolph L. Braham simply ignored a letter inviting him to become a member of the board and she did not fare any better with Columbia professor István Deák and Central European University professor Mária M. Kovács.¹⁴³ In June 2014, a group of international scholars addressed a letter to the USHMM, the *Mémorial de la Shoah* in Paris, the *Stiftung Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* in Berlin, and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. The letter asked these leading institutions on Holocaust research to “help safeguard the historical memory of the destruction of the Hungarian Jews”. It said the Hungarian government, with deep contempt for historical truth, persists in creating an alternative vision, which denies the responsibility of the Hungarian government and of those Hungarians who had facilitated, or participated in the murders during the Second World War”. It

¹⁴⁰ Braham, “The assault on the historical memory of the Holocaust,” note 80. The request was for the inclusion of Chief Rabbi Alfred Schöner; Imre Lebovits as representative of the survivors; historian Tamás Ungváry; Holocaust expert Zoltán Vági, and Zsuzsanna Toronyi, archivist of the Hungarian Jewish Archives.

¹⁴¹ For a list of those who participated in this gathering and a partial list of those who declined see Braham, “The assault on the historical memory of the Holocaust,” note 72.

¹⁴² Gruber, “Plan To Open Another Holocaust Museum”.

¹⁴³ Braham, “The assault on the historical memory of the Holocaust,” note 81.

mentioned in this context the Veritas institute, whose director “consistently uses terminology once employed by the regime of Regent Miklós Horthy”, emphasizing that one dealt here with “rhetoric, in line with government ideology, [that] exculpates the Hungarian government of the period”; it also called on the four institutes to “oppose the government memorial that is being erected in Budapest to commemorate Hungary’s ‘German occupation’ on 19 March 1944,” stressing that the planned “monument blurs the lines between victims and culprits”; finally, the letter stated: “We are deeply concerned about the falsification of the past, and fear that there will no longer be a public institution in Hungary that will be able to work unhindered on the history of the Holocaust. There are now several operational or planned museums in Budapest that provide a historically inaccurate, distorted version of the past (The House of Terror Museum, the planned House of Fates, and the possible new conception for the Holocaust Memorial Center). The trend is towards minimizing the Holocaust and shifting the blame onto both Nazis and communists who are widely equated with Jews.”¹⁴⁴ Yad Vashem announced in late March 2014 that it will “not be taking part in gatherings or activities organized by the House of Fates Museum project, because the project’s administration has consistently and unilaterally pursued the development of the Museum without any genuine, substantial involvement of the representatives of the Hungarian Jewish community or of relevant international parties, including Yad Vashem”.¹⁴⁵ While the USHMM stopped short of officially cutting ties, it continued to be a harsh critic of all three projects of the 2014 commemorations.¹⁴⁶

As mentioned, in February MAZSIHISZ had decided to stay away from all events commemorating the deportations. The unprecedented decision was taken after the Jewish leadership had written to János Lázár, drawing his attention to the fact that Schmidt practically refused to collaborate with it. Mentioning also the Freedom Square monument and asking that its construction be abandoned and the unacceptable appointment of Szakály as head of Veritas, the resolution (approved by an overwhelming majority of 76-2) also demanded that the House of Fates project, whose “historical approach remains unknown” to the federation’s experts, be similarly sidelined because the project’s head “does not cooperate with MAZSIHISZ”.¹⁴⁷ Yet the same resolution left the door open for change, since the

¹⁴⁴ For the full text see *Hungarian Spectrum*, 11 June 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/06/11/still-about-march-19-1944-a-call-against-the-falsification-of-hungarian-history/>

¹⁴⁵ JTA, “Yad Vashem Won’t Join Hungary Nazi Occupation Museum Project, Accuses Organizers of Ignoring Local Jews,” *Forward*, 24 March 2014, <http://forward.com/articles/195144/yad-vashem-wont-join-hungary-nazi-occupation-museu/>

¹⁴⁶ See “Paul A. Shapiro’s remarks on the Holocaust in Hungary: Evolution of a Genocide,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, 9 March 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/03/09/paul-e-shapiros-remarks-on-the-holocaust-in-hungary-evolution-of-a-genocide/>. As well as Bolloomfield, Paul A. Shapiro also declined the invitation to be a member of the House of Fates’ international advisory board.

¹⁴⁷ “Hungary’s main Jewish umbrella votes to boycott state Holocaust commemorations,” AP, “Hungary Jewish group threatens memorial boycott,” *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, 9 February 2014, http://customwire.ap.org/dynamic/stories/E/EU_HUNGARY_HOLOCAUST?SITE=CACRU&SECTION=INTERNATIONAL&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT&CTIME=2014-02-09-12-28-27; “Hungarian Jews Threaten Boycott of Official Holocaust Events,” *The New York Times* 9 February 2014,

boycott of the commemorations referred only to “the situation existing under the present circumstances”. Furthermore, on the next day three MASZIHISZ leaders (András Heisler, Péter Tordai, and Gusztáv Zoltai) wrote a conciliatory letter to Orbán, suggesting that the House of Fates project be replaced by one devoted to the historic Jewish-Hungarian cultural symbiosis, to be called House of Coexistence.¹⁴⁸

While dignifiedly sticking to its principled opposition to revising history, MAZSIHISZ was thus signaling that readiness to reconsider its position under changing circumstances. The response, however, was abrasive. In an interview on Gyula local television at the end of February, Lázár accused the MAZSIHISZ leadership of issuing an “ultimatum” to the government that was likely to “foment discord between Hungarians and Jews who have lived in unity and symbiosis for centuries”. This was not merely a reiteration of the intention to pass over in silence the years of persecution, discrimination and physical extermination under Horthy. It was also an emblematic admission that Jews were not considered to be real Hungarians. And, at the same time, it was a thinly veiled attempt at accusing the Hungarian Jewish leadership of provoking antisemitism—a pattern closely related to deflecting responsibility for the Holocaust onto Jews. And it was particularly cynical, coming as it did from the man who, only four years earlier, as mayor of the southeastern town of Hódmezővásárhely, had unveiled a statute honoring war criminal Albert Wass (see *supra*), who was hardly a promoter of Jewish-Hungarian “symbiosis”.¹⁴⁹ As Paul A. Shapiro remarked, “[t]o a community commemorating the 70th anniversary of the murder of over three quarters of its members, such language must sound chilling indeed”.¹⁵⁰

In the same interview, Lázár said he nonetheless trusted the “wisdom” of other Jews “to act so as not to fracture that unity and symbiosis in which we have lived together with our Jewish compatriots in Gyula or for that matter in Hódmezővásárhely”. What such “wisdom” meant in Zoltai’s case has been mentioned above. But neither luring nor pressure stopped here.

As local and international criticism of official Hungary mounted, Budapest attempted to turn the tables by using the ace up its sleeve, with Mária Schmidt playing the role of the croupier. On 15 August, the right-wing weekly *Heti Válasz* reported that Nobel Prize winner Imre Kertész was to receive a high state order on 20 August, Hungary’s national day. It soon turned out that the order was Hungary’s highest distinction, the Order of St. Stephen. The report came at the end

<http://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2014/02/09/world/europe/09reuters-hungary-holocaust-jews.html?partner=rss&emc=rss>

¹⁴⁸ Braham, “The assault on the historical memory of the Holocaust;” Balogh, “International pressure but there could be a way out for Viktor Orbán,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, 11 February 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/02/11/international-pressure-but-there-could-be-a-way-out-for-viktor-orban/>

¹⁴⁹ Braham, “The assault on the historical memory of the Holocaust;” Balogh, “The Hungarian Holocaust Memorial Year: One step forward, two steps backward,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, 27 February 2014, <https://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/02/27/the-hungarian-holocaust-memorial-year-one-step-forward-two-steps-backward/> ; JTA, “Hungarian official: Jewish group’s ‘ultimatum’ harms coexistence,” 28 February 2014.

¹⁵⁰ “Paul A. Shapiro’s remarks on the Holocaust in Hungary.”

of a four-page long, appreciative article on Kertész authored by none else than Schmidt.¹⁵¹ Titled “On the nature of dictatorship”, the article¹⁵² insisted on Kertész’s repudiation of both Nazism and Communism, but conveniently left out the writer’s distancing from the current Hungarian government’s association with Far Right ideology.¹⁵³ And, expectedly, it was transformed into yet another opportunity to lash out at the alleged inheritors of the Left with no mention whatever of the progenies of the Right. “[D]ue to his views on the two dictatorships, he had no chance to be admitted to the canon of admired writers and intellectuals, dominated by left-liberals”, Schmidt wrote, stressing that he had “remained an outsider during the entire period of the Communist dictatorship”. According to her, Kertész

“observed the system from the bottom and from the outside, just as he experienced Nazi dictatorship from the bottom and from the outside and as a persecuted person at the same time. This latter dictatorship marked him with the yellow star, out casted him, and deported him first to Auschwitz, then to Buchenwald. He dedicated his oeuvre to understanding and making people understand the lessons to be learned from the experiences of the two inhumane dictatorships. This was in contradiction with the ban imposed by “politically correct” intellectuals on judging the two dictatorships comparable and became rather inconvenient for the neophytes who swiftly discovered their deep commitment to democracy after the collapse of “existing socialism.”

The occasion was thus turned into an opportunity for Schmidt, who might have even initiated it, into one more opportunity to indulge in obfuscation. Observers speculated whether Kertész, aged 85 and apparently suffering from Parkinson’s disease, was at all aware of his manipulation, or of the fact that by accepting the distinction, he would share the honor with figures of the caliber of Hermann Göring, Joachim von Ribbentrop and Benito Mussolini’s son-in law,

¹⁵¹ “Novelist to be honored by state,” *politics.hu*, 15 April 2014, <http://www.politics.hu/20140815/novelist-to-be-honoured-by-state/>; “Kertész, Rubik to be awarded Saint Stephen’s Order,” *Ibid.* 18 August 2015, <http://www.politics.hu/20140818/kertesz-rubik-to-be-awarded-saint-stephens-order/>

¹⁵² Maria Schmidt, “On the nature of dictatorship,” *Mandiner*, 14 August 2014, http://www.schmidtmaria.hu/szakma/cikkek_publicaciok/on_the_nature_of_dictator.html?utm_source=mandiner&utm_medium=link&utm_campaign=mandiner_hungarianglobe_201408

¹⁵³ “The situation in the last ten years has continuously deteriorated. Right-wingers and extremists have the word. The old sins of the Hungarians, their mendaciousness and inclination to extrusion are as thriving as ever. Wartime Hungary, Hungary and Fascism, Hungary and socialism: nothing is worked off, everything is whitewashed.” Tilman Krause, “Ich schreibe keine Holocaust-Literatur, ich schreibe Romane.’ Ein Gespräch mit dem Literaturnobel- und WELT-Preisträger Imre Kertész über seine Wahlheimat Berlin, seine Auffassung von Autorschaft und seine Erfahrungen mit dem Totalitarismus.” *Die Welt*, 7 November 2009: “Auschwitz and the Shoah are pages of history that haven’t been explored in Hungary. There hasn’t been any soul searching. The country never asked itself why it systematically was on the wrong side of history. My writer friend Peter Nádas just published a long analysis in the Hungarian magazine *ÉS* (December 2011). He explains that authoritarianism in Hungary comes from the ‘provincial spirit’, with a basis in tribes and lineage. A republic is of no interest – the country rests on a solid clerical network, which enhances a patriarchal spirit. The hatred towards Jewish people (2% of the population) and Roma people (7%) is necessary to impose a tribal and primitive vision of the nation.” Florence Noiville, “Imre Kertész’s Hungary: a country on the wrong side of history,” *The Guardian*, 12 February 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/global/2012/feb/12/imre-kertesz-hungary-wrong-side-history>

Italian foreign minister Gian Galeazzo Ciano.¹⁵⁴ They probably forgot how powerful an exiled writer's yearning for recognition in his own country can be and how it might smudge the best of minds.

But decorating Kertész was bound to provoke protests on the Far Right. Back in 2002, MIÉP had protested against a Budapest City Council decision to make Kertész an honorary citizen. It was now the turn of Jobbik. In an open letter to President Áder, Jobbik deputy and chairperson of the Parliament's Cultural Commission Dóra Dúró said Kertész had not only failed to use the international attention attracted by his Nobel Prize to promote his country, but had "discredited it and even dissociated himself from it". The award, she claimed, "will cause indignation among a wide spectrum of society".¹⁵⁵ In an all-too-obvious attempt to soothe the anger of its ideological allies, the national day provided for FIDESZ the occasion to award one of its own. Not with the highest state order, but with the more modest Hungarian Order of Knight's Cross (civic class) (*Magyar Érdemrend Lovagkereszt (polgári tagozat)*). The lucky nominee was Mihály Takaró, described as a "poet and literary historian", who is also on record for who considering Kertész to be a mediocre writer and (above all) not a member of the Hungarian nation. One needs no further explanation than mentioning that in an interview on the pro-government commercial channel HírTV granted after the decoration ceremony, Takaró talked about Wass and Nyíró as equals of national poets Sándor Petőfi and Attila József.¹⁵⁶

And yet, the Kertész affair seems to have marked a sort of Pyrrhic victory for Schmidt. Even in governmental circles her act began to be perceived as a liability, rather than an asset. Official Hungary had repeatedly stated that the 2014 commemorations were unconceivable without the participation of the local and international Jewish community. In May 2014, I heard IHRA head of Hungarian delegation Pröhle extend these assurances at the London meeting of the organization and Lázár repeated them in the ears of the MASZIHISZ leadership at a meeting held on 9 September.¹⁵⁷ The media dubbed this meeting as "the second roundtable" between MASZIHISZ and the Hungarian authorities – the first considered to have been the one held in May (see *supra*). It was initiated by Lázár; at the end of the four-hour long encounter, he said the government "will seek support and advice from Hungarian and international Jewish organizations when setting up the House of Fates memorial project", according to an MTI report. In turn, Heisler deemed this

¹⁵⁴ Balogh, "The Orbán government bestows the Order of St. Stephen on Imre Kertész," *Hungarian Spectrum*, 18 August 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/08/18/the-orban-government-bestows-the-order-of-st-stephen-on-imre-kerteszt/>

¹⁵⁵ MSZ, "Hungarian Nobel Prize Winner Criticized by Right Wingers," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, 15 November 2002; "Jobbik protests planned state award to Kertész," *politics.hu*, 15 August 2014, <http://www.politics.hu/20140815/jobik-protests-planned-state-award-to-kerteszt/>; František Kostlán, "Hungary: Jewish Nobel laureate not 'Hungarian enough' for the ultra-right," *romea.cz*, 20 August 2014, <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/hungary-jewish-nobel-laureate-not-hungarian-enough-for-the-ultra-right>

¹⁵⁶ Balogh, "A balancing act: A decoration for Imre Kertész and another for his right-wing foe," *Hungarian Spectrum*, 23 August 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/08/23/a-balancing-act-a-decoration-for-imre-kerteszt-and-another-for-his-right-wing-foe/>

¹⁵⁷ Balogh, "Retreat or Another 'Peacock Dance' by Viktor Orbán"?

promise as “very reassuring,” reiterating that it meant the House of Fates project would go ahead only after a consensus between Hungarian and international Jewish organizations on the content has been reached. And as Balogh observed, the decision was taken in the absence of Schmidt on the governmental side of the table (though it must be added that this was the first forum attended by Zoltai on that side).¹⁵⁸

Those familiar with developments understood that under “international Jewish organizations” both sides meant mainly IHRA, which, in fact, is not a Jewish organization at all. At the May 2014 IHRA meeting in London many experts of the organization’s different working groups had voiced doubt whether it was proper (in view of the ongoing Hungarian government’s attempt to falsify history) to go ahead with the plan to have Hungary chair the organization in 2015 (see *supra*). In diplomatic language aimed at avoiding any mention of Hungary by name, the IHRA plenum (where decisions must be taken by consensus) resolved to instruct British rotating chair Sir Andrew Burns to

“consult with the authorities of countries accepting future IHRA Chairmanships on how to ensure best the full understanding and implementation of the principles, aspirations, and expectations of IHRA, on how Chairs and delegations will best be able to contribute to achieve full compliance with the Plenary’s decisions and guidance, in full cooperation with the experts of all delegations and in the spirit of IHRA, so that IHRA may continue to grow in influence and moral stature on matters of Holocaust education, remembrance and research.”

Sir Andrew and an IHRA delegation traveled to Hungary on several occasions, the first visit taking place in May. According to a report addressed to the national heads of delegations (of which I was one),

“[i]n pre-visit and visit contacts we stressed that there was wide anxiety about the prospective Hungarian chairmanship of IHRA. As instructed we emphasized IHRA concerns and expectations including the role of experts and the need for effective consultation. I am glad to say that I was much reassured to hear the Hungarian delegation’s strong commitment to engage and work closely with IHRA experts.”

¹⁵⁸ “Cabinet chief initiates Jewish Roundtable session,” *politics.hu*, 15 August 2014, <http://www.politics.hu/20140815/cabinet-chief-initiates-jewish-roundtable-session/>; “Gov’t to work with Jewish organizations on House of Fates project, says Lázár,” *Ibid.* 9 September 2014, <http://www.politics.hu/20140909/govt-to-work-with-jewish-organizations-on-house-of-fates-project-says-lazar/>; Balogh, “Retreat or Another ‘Peacock Dance’ by Viktor Orbán?” Other important issues for the Jewish community, such as the socioeconomic situation of Hungarian Holocaust survivors, state support for the restoration of Jewish cemeteries in the country and financial support for the reconstruction of several synagogue buildings were also discussed, but these were rather routine issues by comparison, the more so as before the meeting signals from the governmental side on the House of Fates were rather negative, triggering pessimism on the MASZIHIS side. See JTA, “Jewish leaders, Hungarian government meet for first time in a year,” 12 September 2014, <http://www.jta.org/2014/09/12/news-opinion/world/jewish-leaders-hungarian-government-meet-for-first-time-in-a-year>; “Jewish community disappointed with gov’t policies,” *politics.hu*, 19 August 2014, <http://www.politics.hu/20140819/jewish-community-disappointed-with-govt-policies/>; and “Lázár sets meeting with Jewish community leaders, declines discussion on House of Fates,” *Ibid.*, 2 September 2014, <http://www.politics.hu/20140902/lazar-sets-meeting-with-jewish-community-leaders-declines-discussion-on-house-of-fates/>.

The IHRA delegation also met in May with Mária Schmidt, but apparently came out of that encounter as little illuminated about the concrete plans for the House of Fates as it went in. Sir Andrew Burns diplomatically reported:

“We were given a pre-view of the content of the museum by the Director who had been asked to give us a full presentation and offer further consultation. She told us that the plan is to open the Museum in October. The presentation of content to us was at a rather generalized level and there could be much more to discuss at the level of detailed texts and the material to be made available electronically. We are therefore considering how to take up the Director’s offer of a further high-level discussion at the House of Fates.”

Not only was it thus made clear that further IHRA cooperation with Schmidt was still questionable, but the report also specified: “We expressed regret that the leading Jewish representative group had withdrawn cooperation from the Government’s Year of the Holocaust program,” adding that “[w]e urged the importance for IHRA of seeing good domestic relations with all the Jewish community restored as soon as possible”. According to Sir Andrew “[t]he Hungarian authorities were considering what more might be done. They asked us to give them more time until the end of September. We said that we saw merit in the suggested idea of a temporary deferment. While it was getting too late to expect any other country to assemble the financial and human resources in time for a 2015 chairmanship, informal soundings among a number of delegations suggested that the best solution might be to offer a pared down continuing UK chairmanship funded from IHRA reserves and contributions from some governments. I was able to signal that this would probably be acceptable to London if the membership so wished.” In other words, the Hungarians were (again, diplomatically) told that unless a radical and genuine change were to occur by September, Budapest might lose the 2015 chairmanship, with all what this implied for the country’s reputation that had triggered the offer to chair IHRA in the first place.

But what change could be expected now, after the Freedom Square monument was a *fait accompli*? The Veritas affair and the appointment of Szakály at the head of that institution had been written off by MAZSIHISZ itself, which had stopped mentioning it in its contacts with the government as early as after February.¹⁵⁹ Only the latter was still amendable. But apparently Mária Schmidt had other plans and continued to keep her cards close to her chest about the plans of the House of Fates, while faking international expert blessing for them.

On 28 July, Sir Andrew, now joined by Rabbi Andrew Baker of the American Jewish Committee, MAZSIHISZ Chairman Heisler, HDKE Board of Trustees Chairman György Haraszti and a number of international and Hungarian historians and experts met with Schmidt in Budapest. She outlined before this enlarged forum the project’s purposes, said to be primarily educational. Yet the communiqué issued after this meeting by Schmidt’s office distorted the agreement reached by the sides, giving the impression that the House of Fates project had now

¹⁵⁹ This was probably a combination of realizing that Orbán was unlikely to budge, the lack of instruments to force him do so and the far larger significance of public space cleansing history embodied by the monument and the *Sorsok Háza*.

been endorsed as it stood. As a result, MASZIHISZ issued a protest outlining the agreement reached in fact, while Sir Andrew (throwing out his diplomatic skin) also did so in his report to IHRA heads of delegation: “Contrary to media reports, IHRA will not be in a position to endorse the House of Fates concept until the consultations with the national and international experts as well as with the Hungarian Jewish community have been taken into account.”¹⁶⁰

This is the background against which the 9 September “second roundtable” was held. Schmidt must have realized that her days as House of Fates project director are now numbered. That she would lash out at Sir Andrew, Heisler and MAZSIHISZ was in line with her character. But that she would also indulge into depicting Lázár as a traitor to the cause they both should serve was not. In a long article titled “Love Story” (sic!) published in October in the weekly *Heti Válasz*¹⁶¹, she claimed that in separate meetings in July “US Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues Douglas Davidson and Andrew Burns of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) ascertained, each of his own, that the misgivings concerning and attacks against the project are utterly groundless”; and yet, “Burns told me at the end of the meeting in July – suggesting, again, of course, on a strictly friendly basis—that I should no longer write articles, thereby referring to my text entitled ‘Captive of the Past’ concerning the *Szabadság* Square memorial which had appeared a few weeks earlier in the weekly *Heti Válasz*” (see *supra*). To which she ironically added:

All of these developments only deepened my awe and admiration of the developed western world, on account of its deep and staunch commitment to the freedom of speech and thought, even if I am beginning to vaguely recognize how much there still is for us to learn here, on the outskirts of the

¹⁶⁰ International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, “Chair’s Statement Regarding IHRA Visit to Budapest on the ‘House of Fates’ Project,” <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/media-room/stories/chairs-statement-2>. The agreement reached, according to the same source, stipulated that “The House of Fates will complement, not compete with, the Holocaust Centre at Páva Street, which will mainly, but not exclusively, focus on Holocaust research and documentation; an internationally composed academic working group will be established to review the historical content of the exhibition; a similar academic working group will review the educational content; regular contacts and exchanges of views will be established between the House of Fates project and MAZSIHISZ; and the outlines of the exhibition will be presented to the full membership of the International Advisory Board and subsequently opened up to the public at large in the autumn. See also “International working group to help House of Fates project’s implementation,” *politics.hu*, 30 July 2014, <http://www.politics.hu/20140730/international-working-group-to-help-house-of-fates-projects-implementation/>; “Jewish community sets conditions for cooperation on planned memorial center,” *Ibid.*, 9 August 2014, <http://www.politics.hu/20140809/jewish-community-sets-conditions-for-cooperation-on-planned-memorial-centre/>, which emphasizes that the House of Fates “should represent a ‘generally accepted historic approach’ concerning the Holocaust” and that MAZSIHISZ “should be involved in the preparation of both the center’s exhibition and its educational materials,” and “should be governed by a board which ensures equal representation to the government, MAZSIHIS and ‘consensually selected international experts’”; Balogh, “Federation of Jewish Communities (MAZSIHISZ) versus Mária Schmidt,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, 11 August 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/08/11/federation-of-jewish-communities-mazsihisz-versus-maria-schmidt/>

¹⁶¹ Full translation in Balogh, “Mária Schmidt Latest Opus: The Love Story,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, 18 October 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/10/18/maria-schmidts-latest-opus-the-love-story/>

developed world, before we can also fully enjoy this privilege. Until then, we should best refrain from writing articles or doing things such as thinking about our own history—rather, we should be grateful and accept that all of these missions will be undertaken by them instead of ourselves, for our benefit.

MAZSIHISZ Chairman Heisler, she wrote,

“is not seeking an agreement in relation to the House of Fates but he is trying to improve his position to get re-elected by fully exploiting the media interest concerning the prospective memorial center”. He was “posing in the role of a relentless representative and promoter of the organization’s interests to prove his indispensability towards a handful of voters as well as international Jewish organizations and Israel. This is why he keeps upsetting all agreements and imposing new and then further demands and conditions”.

In actual fact, “the MAZSIHISZ leaders are driven by their own self-interests when they keep provoking fruitless conflicts with the government, whatever action the government happens to take”. This should explain, according to Schmidt, why the agreement reached in July “was broken by MAZSIHISZ within 24 hours, again without any sound reason at all, asserting that the text that was published in the form of a press release was not the same as the one that had been agreed on, despite the fact that the president of MAZSIHISZ had approved this text beforehand in an e-mail message. Within another 24 hours IHRA gave its support to this attitude.” In other words, everyone was a liar, except Mária Schmidt, who was a victim.

But she was not only the victim of her expected foes, but also of Lázár’s betrayal. “In the autumn of 2014, Mr. János Lázár the minister in charge of the Prime Minister’s Office who played a leading role in devising and organizing the memorial year for the 70th anniversary of the Holocaust; in putting in place the *Szabadság* Square memorial and the launching of the creation of the House of Fates, offered an adviser’s contract, much to the consternation of all, to Mr. Gusztáv Zoltai, who had played a leading role in blocking all of the above programs, until his dismissal in early April 2014.” Expectedly, she would not fail to mention that the same Zoltai “used to be a 1956 Communist militiaman, a member of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party, a former member of the Communist workers’ militia.” But that, in Schmidt’s version, was only the beginning of the treason:

Public consternation was only further aggravated by János Lázár’s promise that the House of Fates would be opened “only in the framework of a consensual solution”, i. e. only if the domestic and international Jewish organizations, most recently, Hungarian Holocaust survivors and “those who suffered the tragedy” find it to be acceptable and agree with its “professionalism”. Nothing could be more natural than Mr. Heisler’s interpretation: the minister gave them the right of veto concerning the House of Fates project.

Accordingly, the Faith Community, a religious organization representing about two thousand individuals will exercise censorship over the contents of one of the government’s important large-scale projects, and will determine its view of history and its message. No such thing has happened in Hungary ever since the separation of state and church towards the end of the 19th century.

To let international Jewish organizations have a say without having contributed a single penny to the costs of setting up the institution is contrary to the responsibility of the sovereign Hungarian state for its own past, present and future...

Mr. Lázár apparently fails to understand that this time we are dealing with our very identity. This is not about practices in wielding power or safe bargains concluded in the background, but about principles, belief, all of the things on which our whole life, including our political community rests and is built... When politics appear to be reduced to all-pervasive cynicism and bare immorality, the countdown will immediately start.

And while all these terrible things were happening, poor Mária Schmidt was forced to “have... to sit through countless lectures delivered by western diplomats about Horthy, Hungary’s ‘revisionism’, the collaboration of Hungarians, etc., and all of them represented countries whose history offers at least as many, if not even more, very good opportunities to raise uncomfortable questions.” For example,

I was asked as early as just before Christmas 2013 by US Deputy Chief of Mission Mr. André Goodfriend – of course on a strictly “friendly” basis – for a list of the names of those working on the House of Fates project. Then a fortnight later he told me – again, on a friendly basis – that he did not agree with the participation of some of those included in the list. “I wasn’t aware that you needed to agree” was my response, also on a friendly basis. The Ambassador of the UK to Hungary assured me that Her Majesty’s government was avidly interested in the Hungarian Holocaust. This is very nice of them, particularly in view of the fact that their predecessors weren’t so very deeply concerned while the annihilation of European and particularly of Hungarian Jewry was underway.

If IHRA meets in Budapest in 2015 (as by now seems to be the case, after all), it is unlikely that Schmidt would still be in charge of the *Sorsok Háza* project. And it is certain that Gergely Pröhle will no longer head the Hungarian delegation. Already at the IHRA semi-annual meeting in Manchester, which I did not attend¹⁶², the delegation was headed by diplomat Vince Szalay-Bobrovniczky. I am told by delegation colleagues who did so that both Szalay-Bobrovniczky and senior diplomat Szabolcs Táka (the designated Hungarian chair of IHRA for 2015) were a lot less arrogant than Pröhle used to be and that other Hungarian delegates (many of them also new) hinted that Schmidt is to be replaced soon. A little too late, and a lot too little, I am tempted to comment.

A few concluding lines

In May 2013, addressing members of the World Jewish Congress (WJC) who convened in Budapest, Victor Orbán pledged “zero tolerance” of antisemitism and said it was the “moral duty” of his government to combat it. Since he carefully stopped short of mentioning Jobbik in this context, delegates were hardly

¹⁶² In fact, I resigned as a member of the Romanian IHRA delegation in July 2014, but the Romanian Foreign Ministry never acknowledged the resignation, so nominally I am still a member of that delegation. It is too early to reveal why I did so.

convinced.¹⁶³ In July 2014 and in the context of developments scrutinized in this article, WJC President Ronald Lauder remarked it was "particularly sad and irritating that Hungary, which declared 2014 as Holocaust memorial year, is once again in the news with this sort of thing. How can an antisemite represent a government whose leader pledged a policy of zero tolerance toward antisemitism?"¹⁶⁴ The remark had been provoked by the appointment of notorious antisemite pundit and poet Péter Szentmihályi Szabó as ambassador to Italy. Although (in view of protests) the nominee eventually renounced the appointment, the incident was emblematic. The double-talk policy pursued by the Orbán administration is partly based on intertwining "correct" statements with opposite deeds – past or future, or at least with not following up on them.

A good example in case is the speech delivered by President János Áder at Auschwitz, on 28 April 2014. For the first time ever, a Hungarian president not only acknowledged Hungarian participation in the Holocaust alongside the Nazis, but while emphasizing that "every third victim in Auschwitz was a Hungarian Jew" and that the death camp there was "Hungary's largest cemetery," he added: "Within a few weeks of the German occupation of Hungary" its Jews "were herded into ghettos with systematic cruelty, then deported here, to Auschwitz, with the collaboration of the Hungarian state's administrative bodies." Against the background of the monument about to be erected in Freedom Square, this sounded almost as challenging Orbán's new version of history. Furthermore,

Even if we know that enforcement of the Final Solution was the demonic plan of German occupiers, it is a constant source of pain to realize that the Hungarian State did not oppose this plan, but in fact became an accomplice to it. Hungary, which was occupied on 19th March 1944, failed to protect its own citizens. Its authorities collaborated with those who planned to exterminate our fellow compatriots. It is no excuse or explanation that this also happened in many other countries across Europe... There is no forgiveness for a state turning against its own citizens.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Eldad Benari, "Hungarian PM Promises 'Zero Tolerance' for Anti-Semitism," *Arutz Sheva*, <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/167746#.VLoabFqwCfR>; Pablo Gorondi (AP), "Hungary's prime minister denounces anti-Semitism," *Boston.com*, <http://www.boston.com/news/world/europe/2013/05/05/hungary-prime-minister-denounces-anti-semitism/uJXobN6yWxOem9duqX37GK/story.html>; "Hungarian PM disappoints Jews," *Euronews*, <http://www.euronews.com/2013/05/06/hungarian-pm-disappoints-jews/>, all dated 5 May 2013.

¹⁶⁴ Cited in Balogh, "The Aftershocks of the Szentmihályi Szabó Affair," *Hungarian Spectrum*, 24 July 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/07/24/the-aftershocks-of-the-szentmihalyi-szabo-affair/>. See also her "A Raging Anti-Semite Will Be Hungary's Ambassador in Rome," *Ibid.*, 21 July 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/07/21/a-raging-anti-semite-will-be-hungarys-ambassador-in-rome/>

¹⁶⁵ Office of the President of the Republic, "Speech of President János Áder at the March of the Living memorial event held at the former Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp," 28 April 2014, http://www.keh.hu/speeches/1867-Speech_of_President_Janos_Ader_at_the_March_of_the_Living_memorial_event_held_at_the_former_Auschwitz_Birkenau_concentration_camp. Several other former or current Hungarian officials had expressed compassion, empathy or regrets for what had happened during the Holocaust (for a list see Braham, "The assault on the historical memory of the Holocaust," note 65), but none went as far as Áder. It must, however, be mentioned that soon after coming to power and on several occasions afterward, Socialist Premier Gyula Horn apologized to Jews in general and Hungarian Jews in particular for the

Yet when former Socialist Premier (2009-2010) Gordon Bajnai, now leader of a formation in Hungary's splintered opposition, expressed support for Áder's position and asked him in an open letter to interfere against the construction of the "Eagle-Gabriel" monument¹⁶⁶, there was significant silence from the presidential palace. What is more, soon after Parliamentary Speaker Kövér claimed that apologies and tributes had been paid to the victims of the Holocaust "a thousand times" since the change of regime, "[b]ut we are not going to be party to a game of rewriting history to suit the needs of a political minority, and declare the whole of Hungarian society fascist and anti-Semitic".¹⁶⁷ Obfuscation had been quickly restored.

One last word: on face, the score for 2014 was approximately 2 ½- to ½ for negationism. MAZSIHISZ seems to have scored only in the House of Fates confrontation, and even that is still in doubt. The government has obviously imposed its view on the Freedom Square monument and on Veritas. But the Federation of the Jewish Communities of Hungary had clearly (and perhaps for the first time in its history) successfully withstood the assault (to use Braham's term) on both the memory of the Holocaust and on its dignity. Not many Jewish organizations in post-Communist East Central Europe can match a similar record.

Post-Scriptum

On the eve of International Holocaust Remembrance Day 2015, Orbán told a gathering in Budapest honoring Jewish soldiers who died fighting for Hungary in World War I that during World War II "we were loveless and indifferent when we should have helped, and there were many, very many Hungarians who chose evil over good, who chose shameful acts instead of honest ones." As Reuters reporter Marton Dunai remarked, "[t]hat was the kind of uncompromising language that his critics called for in vain last year, when Orbán's government erected a World War Two monument that Jewish groups said whitewashed Hungary's role in the

Holocaust. See American Jewish Committee, "Central and Eastern Europe (1996)," *AJC Archives*, 314-15, http://www.ajcarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/1996_10_CentralEastEurope.pdf When Horn did the same in the Israeli Knesset, he was sued upon return by Áron Mónus, the local Hungarian publisher of *Mein Kampf*, who claimed that Horn had violated his personal rights by suggesting that he was a member of a guilty nation. See Shafir, "Between Denial and 'Comparative Trivialization'," 36. On Áder's speech in Auschwitz Birkenau see also Balogh, "Dissonant government voices on the Hungarian Holocaust," *Hungarian Spectrum*, 29 April 2014, <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/04/29/dissonant-government-voices-on-the-hungarian-holocaust/>

¹⁶⁶ "Bajnai asks Áder to help prevent Szabadság Square monument," *politics.hu*, 29 April 2014, <http://www.politics.hu/20140429/bajnai-asks-ader-to-help-prevent-szabadsag-square-monument/>

¹⁶⁷ "House speaker says liberal democracy led to 'accumulation of unsolvable problems'," *politics.hu*, 14 August 2014, <http://www.politics.hu/20140814/house-speaker-says-liberal-democracy-led-to-accumulation-of-unsolvable-problems/> Notably, this speech was delivered as part of a campaign launched by Orbán in (of all places!) Tuşnad, Romania, where he spoke of the necessity to replace liberal democracy with an "illiberal" one. Although the implications of this announcement significantly bear on our topic, it must be left out for obvious editorial reasons—the ever-present struggle with allotted space. See website of the Hungarian Government, "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Speech at the 25th Bálványos Summer Free University and Student Camp," 30 July 2014, <http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-25th-balvanyos-summer-free-university-and-student-camp>

Holocaust”.¹⁶⁸ Orbán also said the road that had led from “comradeship with the heroic Jews of the First World War to the concentration camps” was “incomprehensible, incomprehensible.” What forced him into this 180 degree turnaround should nonetheless be comprehensible to readers of this article.

¹⁶⁸ Marton Dunai, “Hungary's Viktor Orban Admits Some Chose ‘Evil’ in Holocaust,” *Forward*, 26 January 2015, <http://forward.com/articles/213499/hungarys-viktor-orban-admits-some-chose-evil-in-ho/>