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**“Free Trade Awry? On the Export of
‘Double Genocide’ Revisionism”**

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Free Trade Awry? On the Export of 'Double Genocide' Revisionism

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PREAMBLE

The fall of the Iron Curtain swiftly enabled free trade in goods and services between the nation states of Eastern Europe freed from Soviet domination with the West and much of the rest of the world. No less important was a new flow of ideas, generally on a west-to-east trajectory, including organizing principles for political processes and governments, education, media, the arts, and more, in short, models for societal structure and governance. Western mores and institutions readily took root in those nations with substantial anti-Soviet and often anti-Russian sentiments, both among the former Warsaw Pact nations, such as Poland and Hungary, and in some former Soviet republics, principally the three Baltic states, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. One common denominator was a legacy, strong by virtue of personal memory and convincingly conveyed immediate family legacy, of the facts of generally successful independent statehood in the interwar period. By contrast, new states such as Belarus and Ukraine had eastern “halves” that had been part of the Soviet Union from around the time of the Russian Revolution. Their western sectors were by contrast “lost parts” of the interbellum Polish Republic, whose official languages bore irksome similarity to Russian, and they were inclined to head, at least initially, in different directions.

The focus of this paper is the “pro-Western” / “anti-Russian” portion of the region, whose states rapidly developed workable democratic institutions including the rarefied pendulum of peaceful transition of power between diverse parties and ideologies following fair elections held at predictable intervals. The West’s governments and NGOs alike have invested heftily both in the modernization of infrastructure and the (re)establishment of Western classic culture, including, for example, rapid translation of extensive lists of Western standard works, and select newer works, into the native languages both as antidote to the Soviet straightjacket on free thought, and as a rapid induction into Western educated discourse.

When it comes, however, to discussing the reverse direction, east to west, common parlance stresses out-of-the-east agricultural goods, raw materials, some regional manufactured goods, and a vast migration of people seeking better lives in the West. The exodus has featured particularly young, ambitious folks seeking a more satisfying future away from the still much lower standard of living and salary scales of their native lands. It has also included many of middling age who would depart to seek higher wages even for physically difficult or menial work as a welcome alternative to poverty.

Less frequently a topic for consideration is the flow of ideas and opinions that emanate from the newly liberated lands outward to the wider West. Surprising to many, it has been in the realm, not of making the wider world aware of unjustly forgotten poets, artists, thinkers and others who have verily contributed to the corpus of international human and societal achievement, but instead, somewhat shockingly, to the export of a revisionist history of World War II and the Holocaust compounded by the idea that the very future unity of Europe depended on the West's succumbing to the newly independent states' proposed history as a matter of principle. Put differently, there is export of the idea that all Europe, and the rest of the free world, must subscribe to the same version of twentieth century history for global unity to take hold.

For many these subjects were sensitive and sore because of a lingering bitterness, especially among the more educated, nationalistic elites in Eastern Europe. These by and large pro-Western and pro-democratic elements, who wish the West to accept that war-weary Churchill and Roosevelt had consciously and flagrantly betrayed them at Yalta, without any lasting remorse in the record from their successors or their nations' history books. There is a feeling that Western friends, associates and sponsors need to understand this, and even more, for governments to start on a path to eventual redress of some sort. This "high end" version, more detailed and more resentful, often gave way, however, to a much more broadly based claim that did not ask for any apologies from the West, but rather for full acknowledgment, in history, public life, and politics, education, and the media, of the many and odious Soviet crimes and misdeeds against nations and peoples in a vast swath of Europe that had, after Stalin's sundry tricks in Poland and elsewhere, fallen on the eastern, or "wrong" side of the Curtain. So much so, that it is sometimes lost in the arguments that the Russian people were by and large the first and greatest victims of Stalinist and Communist abuses.

It is of course true that postwar education in Western countries, above all in the United States, included much anti-Soviet material. I recall myself, as a pupil in New York, being required in the eighth grade to read a booklet called *Life in the Soviet Union*, produced by a U.S. government agency. Someone in our class asked, after a few periods were dedicated to the topic, "But isn't there anything at all decent out there?" In other words, the current problem is not that Westerners baby boomer vintage are in any way in their mainstream "pro-Soviet," or that they were raised on some kind of Communist propaganda, the relatively miniscule number of red-diaper babies notwithstanding. Quite to the contrary.

But this abstract, compartmentalized "bad" verdict-on-the-USSR of the typical Westerner cannot satisfy many an Easterner's understandable insistence that his or her Western friends understand something very simple. To wit, that when the grand party of prosperity, freedom and scarcely imaginable vistas was getting underway after war's end in Western countries, those stuck in the lands abandoned to Stalin and his successors were to

suffer a near half-century of deprivation, repression, and severe limits on both human rights and the possibilities for an economically better life. That in turn, retrospectively, leads to a desire for some kind of justice, not from the West, but from the actual Soviet perpetrators of the wrongs. For all the school-day and media bashing of everything Red, there was little interest in the details of Soviet crimes or Soviet people's lives in faraway lands with which there was scarcely any direct communication. There was, overall, little sincere interest in the fate of many victims whose lives were being at the time ruined by imprisonment, deportation or other cruel punishments including execution, or the understanding that the lack of freedoms of expression, press, religion, emigration, and personal opportunity meant a degree of de facto ruination for many more.

Along with independence of the anti-Soviet, nationalist-oriented states of Eastern Europe came the budgets, howsoever modest at first, which free nations are able to allocate toward ideas and subjects deemed to be national priorities. It must be noted in all fairness that nations invariably hold fast to cherished national narratives, and that myths, interpretations and pride-of-our-nation versions play a prominent role in most countries. It must, equally, be remembered that the successor state of the Soviet perpetrator of the crimes against these states' peoples, was and is Russia, rightly feared as a potential and perpetual bear of a threat in the region, incrementally more so since the turn of the century and the advent of Vladimir Putin's leadership, and exponentially more so in recent years with his regime's turning ever more toward repression domestically and revanchist adventurism abroad.

A logical first step for the newly freed nations entailed the setting up of state-sponsored institutions to study the crimes of the Soviets, new museums to expose them, and special prosecutorial units that could bring to justice those who had collaborated and carried out crimes on behalf of the regime. All these endeavors had ample precedent in Western countries.

A logical second step would be a circumspect pro-active series of efforts to ensure that throughout the West, history education and official memorial occasions not pass over in silence the crimes of the Soviet Union and particularly of Stalinism, against many, not least the nations of Eastern Europe.

But something went wrong. Instead of establishing institutions of research and education dedicated to exposing Soviet crimes and seeking justice for the victims, and exporting knowledge of that history and those efforts, the major east-to-west export of ideas took a dark turn. In most cases, they were increasingly linked with demands for universal agreement about the supposed "equality" of Nazi and Soviet crimes, and the resulting obfuscation of the Holocaust in parts of the world where collaboration with the Nazis was vast. Instead of education about the Western wrongs that handed Stalinism a vast swathe of innocent victims, and of the Soviet crimes themselves, the emphasis was to be on a historical revisionism that would arbitrarily redefine genocide, reclass collaborators and perpetrators as "national heroes," find fault with the victims and obfuscate the Holocaust into one of a chain of similar events in Europe with doors open to a number of antisemitic interpretations and far-right allusions.

AT HOME

Instead of new institutes and museums dedicated to the study and exposure of Soviet Communism, most of the newly free countries opted for what may be referred to generically as the “Nazi and Soviet Crimes Institute” and the “Nazi and Soviet Crimes Museum.”¹ Among the research and education institutions are the Genocide and Resistance Research Center (in Vilnius, Lithuania, established in 1992); the Occupation Museum Foundation, later renamed the Occupation Museum Association (Riga, Latvia, 1993); Institute of the Twentieth Century (Budapest, Hungary, 1999); Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (Prague, Czech Republic, 2007); Estonian Institute of Historical Memory and the Unitas Foundation (both in Tallinn, Estonia, 2008). The major outreach method, to domestic and particularly to international audiences in these growing centers of Western tourism, was the establishment of city-center museums in national capitals. These include the Museum of Genocide Victims (Vilnius, 1992); Museum of the Occupation of Latvia 1940-1991 (Riga, 1993); House of Terror (Budapest, 2002); Museum of the Occupation (Tallinn 2003); Lonsky Street Museum (Lviv, Ukraine, 2009).²

As Aida Hozic has put it, “The thread connecting all these commemorative initiatives and research is the equalization of Communist and Nazi crimes.”³ But why on earth would this “equalization” trump the primary goal of education about Communist crimes? That, in turn, goes to the hub of this paper. An ever-present demon for the history construction projects of these East European nations is the Holocaust.

In a number of countries, there was the embarrassment of collaboration with the Nazis, in some cases by the very persons, groups and institutions that post-Soviet nationalists want to enshrine in the nation’s pantheon of heroes. Then there is the rather more extreme case of some of the nations east of the Molotov-Ribbentrop line, invaded by the Nazis in Operation Barbarossa in June 1941, where local “nationalists” provided thousands of actual enthusiastic volunteer killers to do, depending on location, some, much, most, or all, of the shooting in the “Holocaust by Bullets” in the east. In large parts of the eastern sector there is a pervasive theme of national heroes being those who were anti-Soviet, whether or not they were Holocaust collaborators or even perpetrators. But, come to think of it, virtually all of the killers east of the Molotov-Ribbentrop line were anti-Soviet. The nationalists prayed for a Nazi victory, even though there would have been nothing left of those countries had the Nazis been victorious and established their vast eastern Lebensraum pavilion. In the Baltic states and western Ukraine, in particular, there was, moreover, an additional “detail” to be suppressed as independence thrived and new history establishment rose forth: that the outbreak of murder of defenseless Jewish neighbors by “nationalist rebels against Soviet

1 See KATZ 2016B, pp. 12-24, 27-29.

2 See GENOCIDE MUSEUM (Vilnius), and KATZ 2010B, WIGHT 2016; OCCUPATION MUSEUM (Tallinn), and HIETANEN 2013; HOUSE OF TERROR (Budapest), and MIKANOWSKI 2012; MUSEUM OF THE OCCUPATIONS (Riga), and BINET 2010; LONSKY STREET MUSEUM (Lviv), and HIMKA 2015.

3 HOZIC 2014, p. 256.

rule” broke out *before* the arrival of the first German forces, a phenomenon documented most thoroughly for Lithuania and western Ukraine.⁴

Beyond the first complex of motives designed to minimize Holocaust complicity, by recasting the Holocaust as one of two presumptively “equal genocides,” alongside Soviet crimes, there is the question of antisemitism. Scholars who believe in the “equivalence” of Nazi and Soviet crimes are not ipso facto antisemitic. Nevertheless, there is a cumulative body of evidence that the Holocaust revisionism, and indeed reductionism, underway in the east of the pro-Western parts of Eastern Europe is related to the little understood phenomenon of selective antisemitism that is rooted precisely in Holocaust issues, and particularly the eerie phenomenon of Holocaust Envy.⁵ While visitors from the West or Israel can be afforded great honors, the remnant local Jewish communities can be disdained precisely because they have a historic narrative that is congruent with the West’s, in which Hitler’s genocidal war against the Jewish people is of unique empirical status, and that the Soviet Union, for all its many crimes, did not commit genocide in Eastern Europe, and moreover, that it was the primary agent of Hitler’s downfall throughout Eastern Europe. An array of scholars from notably diverse traditions of research have documented the special kind of East European antisemitism and its various manifestations, all related specifically to the Holocaust, and to the wave of historic revisionism underway.⁶ A certain potent strain of specifically East European antisemitism, which was blaming the Holocaust’s victims in the spirit of “They are/were all Communists and getting what they deserve” meandered its way from popular parlance to cunning incorporation in sophisticated theoretical models that could gain acceptance in the West.

PRELUDE TO EXPORT

One major point of contact with the West regarding this set of issues came to the fore in the 1990s. East European states, particularly the Baltics, eager for rapid accession to NATO and the European Union found themselves under pressure, directly from Holocaust survivor- and related groups, and indirectly from the US, Israel and other countries where such groups still wielded political clout during that decade. The pressure was to “come clean” about the Holocaust. This was, with hindsight, a grave error. Courageous individuals and NGOs in these nations had been standing up to tell the truth, and it is they who should have been supported.⁷ It was, again with hindsight, somewhat naive to pressure governments

4 See e.g. GILBERT 1987, pp. 155-179; KWIET 1996; SUTTON 2008, pp. 97-156; KAUFMANN 2010, pp. 36-45; BANKIER 2011; ARAD 2014, pp. 88-95; ROSSOLIŃSKI-LIEBE 2014, pp. 167-240;

5 See KATZ 2015.

6 See e.g. BRAHAM 1994; ZUROFF 2005; DONSKIS 2006; KATZ 2016A.

to make statements on history that they did not believe in. The result entailed a kind of intellectual sleight of hand, one that contributed noticeably to the rise of the more formal paradigm of Double Genocide by linking the introduction of Holocaust Studies with “new research” into *both* Nazi and Soviet crimes that amounted to simple conceptual revisionism designed to downgrade the Holocaust and inflate local Soviet crimes to genocide, both in the service of what has been called Holocaust Obfuscation.⁸

In the face of what was informally called “the Jews’ demands,” though they were directly pressed largely by some American diplomats and international Jewish organization, the Baltic states’ officials responsible for these matters naturally kept in touch with each other. The result was the establishment of three state commissions, all in 1998, to deal with Nazi *and* Soviet crimes. They came to be known informally as “the red-brown commission” though each has a formal and sophisticated name. They all sought to involve Western scholars and Jewish leaders who would add legitimacy. All had access to plentiful state funding for staging well-organized events.

In the case of Latvia and Estonia, the commissions in point of fact had limited life spans devoted to producing a series of books on the crimes of both totalitarian regimes. The Latvian Commission of Historians (known also by variants of the name) was formally established on the initiative of the president, Guntis Ulmanis in November 1998. Listed under the government’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it was divided into four sub-commissions and produced a number of volumes.⁹ Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, famously resigned in 1999. In a letter to then Latvian president Vaira Vike-Freiberga, Foxman explained that his decision was due to the “intermingling and confusion of the Holocaust and the Soviet occupation of Latvia.”

While I acknowledge the suffering of many Latvians at the hands of the Soviets and Latvia’s desire to investigate this history, as a Jew and a Holocaust survivor, I am deeply offended by the intermingling and confusion of these two very different experiences. [...] ‘Therefore, I am resigning from the Latvian Commission of Historians. I am deeply concerned that Latvia is not yet ready to truly examine and confront the experience of Latvian Jews during the Holocaust.’¹⁰

The “Estonian International Commission for Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity” was founded in October 1998, and announced by the president. In the spirit of many ‘tasked commissions’, it published a number of reports and books before putting itself

7 For Lithuania see the representative list of local citizens who spoke out courageously over the years, BOLD CITIZENS (2016). See also KATZ 2009C.

8 On the term Holocaust Obfuscation” see DONSKIS 2008; KATZ 2009C, KATZ 2010.

9 See PRESIDENT OF LATVIA 1998; LATVIAN COMMISSION 2002.

10 See ADL 1999.

to bed in December 2008.¹¹ Anton Weiss-Wendt's critique of the Estonian Commission's record is telling for the Baltics in general.

The main goal has definitely been attained – to show the Western European and American political establishment that the Baltic governments are ready to submit even the most complex aspects of recent history to critical examination. Ironically, the Reports were published after Estonia officially joined the NATO and the EU. After all, setting the historical record straight was not the most important criterion for admission. [...] The way the Commission treated the Holocaust does not open new vistas but rather reinforces old misconceptions. Estonian scholars compartmentalized the history of the Holocaust by dealing separately with the Estonian, Czech/German, Polish/Lithuanian and French Jews. As we know all too well, the Nazis were exterminating the Jewish people not as Estonian, Lithuanian, French, etc. nationals but as Jews. Finally there is a question of accessibility: how many Estonian readers would be willing to spend 750 Estonian crowns (around one-fifth of the [monthly] minimum wage) for an encyclopaedic volume in English that contains information on both Soviet and Nazi occupations?¹²

Lithuania, however, has invested more resources into the “red equals brown project” than any other country in Europe. Research into the reasons for that disparity is a desideratum for the future, but it is fair to air a number of speculations. With a Holocaust murder rate of around 96%, the country may have the highest rate of murder of its Jewish population of any in Europe.¹³ This is something that does not sit well with nationalists. At the same time, the grand heritage of Litvak (“Lithuanian”) Jewry, covering the territory of current Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania and swaths of eastern Ukraine and northeastern Poland, continues to be known by its Lithuanian moniker, and to regard Vilna (Yiddish *Vilne*, Ashkenazic Hebrew and Aramaic *Vilno*, Israeli Hebrew *Vilna*) as its historical capital, congruent with Lithuanian views on the present-day capital of the nation, Vilnius.¹⁴ The upshot is that the marketing of the onetime “Jerusalem of Lithuania” as a center of Jewish culture is regarded as valuable for countering the Holocaust reputation, for increasing international goodwill and for productive tourism.¹⁵ These two factors have combined with the phenomenon of a major Jewish parliamentarian who is a champion of both Litvak (and Yiddish) culture and the government's history policies (more on this below).

Incidentally, when the Lithuanian commission, formally known as The International Commission on the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes, was announced in 1998, it drew protests from the association of Lithuanian Holocaust

11 ESTONIAN INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION for Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity. [Undated statement at conclusion of commission's work] (<http://historycommission.ee/>).

12 WEISS-WENDT 2008, p. 481.

13 See PORAT 1994, p. 160.

14 See KATZ 2010C.

15 See e.g. VENCLOVA 2015.

survivors in Israel and the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, precisely because of its equal — and mixed — dedication to Nazi and Soviet crimes.¹⁶ The survivors' letter, signed by Holocaust survivor Joseph Melamed, then chairman of the Association of Lithuanian Jews in Israel, included the text:

The linking of the histories of the Nazi and Soviet occupations is the heart of the problem. More than any other factor, this false symmetry has been a major obstacle to any serious soul-searching by Lithuanian society in regard to the extensive collaboration of Lithuanians with the Nazis in the murder of Lithuanian Jewry. Even worse, false accusations and patent exaggerations regarding Jewish participation in Communist crimes against Lithuanians have been adduced time and again to explain, and in some cases even justify, the participation of Lithuanians in the murder of Jews during the Holocaust.¹⁷

Melamed's words would prove to be darkly prophetic. Years later, in 2006, the one Israeli scholar the Commission had at its inception attracted, Dr. Yitzhak Arad, a former director of Yad Vashem, was himself accused of "war crimes" by Lithuanian prosecutors. In the decade from 2006 five Holocaust survivors, including Melamed himself, would be accused by Lithuanian prosecutors or other government agencies either of "war crimes" or of "libelling" Lithuanian "national heroes" or otherwise "lying."¹⁸

Indeed, the elevation to national hero status of Nazi collaborators has been a strident corollary of Double Genocide throughout the region. The "logic" has usually run along the lines of claiming that if indeed the Communists were ipso facto equal in evil to the Nazis, then all who fought the Communists must be heroes (even if they are also Holocaust perpetrators). At the next level of reductionism, victims are also villains, villains are heroes.¹⁹ While the arguments take many different forms, the common denominator consists of state-sponsored memorials, plaques, statues, street names and memorial events for local Nazi collaborators in Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Ukraine, among others.²⁰ Country-specific scandals have included a statue for Hungary's fascist leader who helped deport his nation's Jews, reburial with full honors of Lithuania's 1941 Nazi-puppet prime minister who signed papers consigning the Jews of his city to a death camp (and the rest to a ghetto), and the renaming in the summer of 2016 of a street in Kiev for Holocaust collaborator Stepan Bandera.²¹ For geostrategic reasons, both American and Israeli

16 See MELAMED 1998, ZUROFF 1998.

17 MELAMED, *ibid.*

18 For details see BLAMING THE VICTIMS 2016.

19 One infamous formulation was captured by the executive director of the Lithuanian state "red-brown commission" in the German documentary film *Liza ruft*. Video clip available at RAČINSKAS 2015.

20 For multiple examples in recent years, see COLLABORATORS GLORIFIED (to 2016).

21 See as (one each of many available) examples individual cases in Croatia, ZUROFF 2012; in Estonia, HIETANEN AND KROHN 2014; in Hungary, BILEFSKY 2014; in Lithuania, KATZ 2012; in Romania, SHAFIR 2014; in Ukraine, GOLINKIN 2014. More examples available by country on the page BY COUNTRY (2016).

diplomacy have helped cover for such outrages as well as related outbursts of antisemitism in Eastern Europe. In the case of America, the New Cold War and the neoconservative-led search for “truly reliable allies against Russia” has often been the justification for efforts to stymie even mild criticism of US allies in the region.²² In the case of Israel, the search for new allies who would cast pro-Israel votes in the United Nations, the European Union and other multinational bodies has been the motivating factor.²³

The best way, perhaps, or an outsider to fathom the degree of seriousness with which Double Genocide is taken in these countries is to take note of the harsh, anti-democratic laws, passed in societies the history of World War II, with Double Genocide revisionism lurking just beneath the surface. The most frequent formulation is to accept “equality” of Nazi and Soviet crimes as a given and to criminalize any who would deny or demean “either” instance of “genocide.” The threatened prison terms include maximums of two years in Lithuania, three in Hungary, five in Latvia and ten in Ukraine.²⁴ Indeed, a number of East European parliaments have passed laws legislating modified definitions of genocide that inflate the term to cover deportation, dismantling of certain social or cultural classes by various means and other violations of human rights.²⁵

EXPORT AND OPPOSITION

The wholly legitimate and necessary historical reckoning with the evils of Communism and the Soviet Union’s many crimes, and the demand for knowledge in the West, and for historic justice, has led to numerous East European successes in European institutions. Two resolutions in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, a decade apart, can serve to symbolize that success, even if portions of the first, Resolution 1096, in 1996, paved the way for some partisan and selective witch hunts against former Communist operatives who had not necessarily been guilty of any crime. That resolution, “Measures to Dismantle the Heritage of Former Communist Totalitarian Systems” represented a milestone in cementing the transition away from Communist societal structures, and included such practically important demands as the demilitarization of civilian institutions in former Communist states.²⁶

22 See KATZ 2014; US STATE DEPT. MANIPULATED? 2016.

23 See ISRAEL CHRONICLE 2016. It is worth noting that valiant individual Israeli diplomats have on occasion gone against the grain and stood up to the history revisionism, most famously the late Israeli ambassador to Latvia and Lithuania Chen Ivri Apter. See APTER 2009.

24 For Lithuania see: LITHUANIAN PARLIAMENT 2010, DEFENDING HISTORY 2010; on Hungary: POLITICS.HU 2010; on Latvia: BALTIC COURSE 2014; on Ukraine: OSCE 2015.

25 See discussion and sources in the section “Redefinition of Genocide” in KATZ IN PRESS.

A decade later, Resolution 1481, in 2006, entitled, “Need for International Condemnation of Crimes of Totalitarian Communist Regimes,” made the clear the need for historic justice and knowledge and for recognition of the suffering of many victims.²⁷ The resolution does indeed mention Nazism too, in making the logical point that “the authors of these [i.e. Communist] crimes have not been brought to trial by the international community, as was the case with the horrible crimes committed by National Socialism.”²⁸ There are numerous other examples, not only of declarations, but of educational materials, and the opening of previously sealed Soviet-era archives to the free inspection by scholars internationally. There was much progress on the road to documentation, recognition, and justice by independent judiciaries in various newly democratic states.

But something went awry with the advent of fait-accomplis European Union and NATO membership. A monograph is needed to document it. The shorthand goal in the present essay is to provide some of the key events as a point of departure for future researchers.

On 22 January 2008, a group of five right-wing parliamentarians from Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland set up the “Common Europe — Common History” group. At the founding conference, the Latvian co-founder declared: “What is needed above all is an equal evaluation of the two large criminal regimes of the twentieth century — Nazism and Communism.”²⁹ It is noteworthy that the equals sign the revisionists were placing did not invoke Stalinism specifically, but all of Communism. That meant that in the Baltics per se, where anyone of middle age or above well remembered the Brezhnev or Gorbachov periods, their own lives from the 1970s and 1980s were being placed on a level of equality with Hitlerism.

A single Western elected official provided a rapid and potent response. UK Labor MP John Mann, a founding figure in the cross-party parliamentary group dedicated to combating antisemitism and racism, rose in the House of Commons on 31 January 2008:

On 22 January, in Tallinn, Estonia, five MEPs from five different countries met to launch a group called Common Europe — Common History. It has the same theme — the need for an equal evaluation of history. It is just a traditional form of prejudice, rewritten in a modern context. In essence, it is trying to equate communism and Judaism as one conspiracy and rewrite history from a nationalist point of view. Those are elected MEPs.³⁰

26 PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY 1096 (1996).

27 PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY 1481 (2006).

28 *Ibid*, point 5.

29 BNS 2008; ESTONIAN WORLD REVIEW 2008.

30 MANN 2008.

After some intensive months of preparation, the movement organized a conference in Prague that would sign off, in the established spirit of Europarliamentary nomenclature, on The Prague Declaration (of 3 June 2008).³¹ The declaration's preamble contains various Double Genocide formulations, including quotations that have since become standard signals of the movement:

Whereas Europe will not be united unless it is able to reunite its history, recognize Communism and Nazism as a common legacy

Whereas consciousness of the crimes against humanity committed by the Communist regimes throughout the continent must inform all European minds to the same extent as the Nazi regime's crimes did

Whereas there are substantial similarities between Nazism and Communism in terms of their horrific and appalling character and their crimes against humanity

Believing that millions of victims of Communism and their families are entitled to enjoy justice, sympathy, understanding and recognition for their sufferings in the same way as the victims of Nazism have been morally and politically recognized.³²

The last-cited point, on which the preamble ends, while seemingly innocuous, is in a sense the most counter-empirical in that 'in real life' it came to proclaim by fiat the wholly non-empirical equivalence between genocide of virtually all of a population (the Holocaust) with the deportation to Siberia of a minority for perceived anti-government, nationalist, religious or capitalist proclivities; most certainly a horrendous crime, but of a completely different nature and order than genocide. Still, this principle is so cherished by the Double Genocide movement that it actually appears again within the Prague Declaration, in the call for "ensuring the principle of equal treatment and non-discrimination of victims of all the totalitarian regimes." From the legal standpoint, it is tantamount to asking that the crime of murdering nearly all the members of a national minority be legally equal to the crime of deporting perceived state enemies, or in even more general terms, that all that is bad is somehow also equal.

The Prague Declaration contains five occurrences of the word *same*. In addition to the three in the citations above (paragraphs 2 and 4) of the preamble, there are two further "sames" in the demands for

recognition that many crimes committed in the name of Communism should be assessed as crimes against humanity serving as a warning for future generations, in the same way Nazi crimes were assessed by the Nuremberg Tribunal

establishment of 23rd August, the day of signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, as a day of remembrance of the victims of both Nazi and Communist totalitarian regimes, in the same way Europe remembers the victims of the Holocaust on January 27th.³³

31 PRAGUE DECLARATION 2008.

32 Ibid, preamble.

Had it been a day proposed for victims of Communism alone, explicitly respecting the international status of Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27 January, it would, paradoxically, have successfully advanced the genuinely noble cause and moral imperative of remembering the horrors of Stalinism. On the ground in Eastern Europe, there is an obvious tendency to ignore 27 January, not only because it is in remembrance of Holocaust victims alone, but it marks, of course, the liberation of Auschwitz by the Soviet army. One of the various absurdities of the Double Genocide movement, beyond glorifying perpetrators and demeaning victims in a fast-lane drive to mental mush, is the equating of those who committed the genocide at Auschwitz with those who liberated the camp, and its remaining survivors, in January of 1945.

Further steps mentioned in the Prague Declaration include the establishment of an “Institute of European Memory and Conscience” and the fifth and final use of the word *same* in the declaration:

Adjustment and overhaul of European history textbooks so that children could learn and be warned about Communism and its crimes in the same way as they have been taught to assess the Nazi crimes³⁴

Most of the signatories were from the (ultra)nationalist East European (far) right, but the Declaration had a heftily legitimizing signatory, the late Czech author and former president Václav Havel, whose signature has been variously explained.³⁵ Some explanations informally advanced focus on its one openly Jewish signatory, the Lithuanian right-wing politician Emanuelis Zingeris, a philological scholar, champion of Yiddish culture, and cherished figure in the eastern NATO alliance. A member of parliament in the Conservative – Homeland Union in all but one of the nation’s post-independence parliaments, he has frequently been required, perhaps somewhat cruelly, to “prove his loyalty” to the Double Genocide cause by using his Jewish credentials with foreigners. When, for example, the Lithuanian Parliament announced its support for the Prague Declaration, the announcement was headed:

On the initiative of Mr. Emanuelis Zingeris the position of [the] Lithuanian Parliament on [the] Prague Declaration become[s] clear.³⁶

Several months before the Prague Declaration, during an intensive lobbying period, Mr. Zingeris was sent to Brussels to deliver a package of proposals including the demand for the lofty-sounding “principle of non-discrimination and equal treatment of all victims of the

33 Ibid. These points appear in the Declaration’s points numbered 2 and 9.

34 Ibid, Point 17.

35 See the section “The Prague Declaration of June 2008” in ARAD 2012.

36 See BALTIC TIMES 2008; INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION 2009.

totalitarian crimes.”³⁷ On the ground in Eastern Europe, this principle is widely understood as the proclamation of moral and legal equivalence between the Nazi massacre of a population (the Holocaust) and the deportation and other maltreatment of dissidents and others by the USSR.

In the years since 2008, the Double Genocide movement has made considerable advances. There is a web of Double Genocide advocacy institutions, all financed directly or indirectly by public funds of the European Union and the European Commission. In most cases, valuable work, particularly in the field of exposing Communist crimes, can be disentangled from Double Genocide public relations efforts. The central body, known for short as the Prague Platform, is the Platform of European Memory and Conscience, linked to the Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism.³⁸ It boasts important international members, including a number of nationalist state-sponsored Holocaust-relativizing agencies in Eastern Europe and further afield.³⁹ Among Holocaust scholars, Yitzhak Arad has been the most direct in positing Lithuania as the prime mover of the revisionists and the setting up of a European center for the movement in Prague as a choice undertaken “in order to make Lithuania’s major role less conspicuous.”⁴⁰

Although there has been disproportionately little organized (let alone financed) opposition to the Double Genocide juggernaut, which has enjoyed to a great extent a “free ride” because of current geopolitics, there has been some critical attention. Early Jewish challenge came in a Yiddish newspaper in New York in 2008 and in a handful of English publications in 2009.⁴¹ The first academic challenges came in papers by Austrian historian Heidemarie Uhl and German political scientist Clemens Heni, both in 2009.⁴² Heni expanded his 2009 critique in his 2013 book on contemporary antisemitism in which the Prague Declaration and its associated revisionism, spearheaded by the far right in Eastern Europe, is accorded extensive and profound scrutiny.⁴³ The Declaration has been decried by the last

37 INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION 2008. Nevertheless, the author has heard Mr. Zingeris, an esteemed colleague, expressing very different sentiments at Holocaust memorials and talks to international groups in Vilnius and beyond. This may be a case of East European political manipulation of a Jewish official to help effect aspects of a proposed Holocaust revisionism. Within Lithuania, the symbolic “Jewish answer to Zingeris” has been the luminous Lithuanian philosopher of part Jewish heritage, Leonidas Donskis (1962 – 2016). For a partial listing of his writings on these subjects, see DONSKIS 2016. With respect to Mr. Zingeris, himself son of a Holocaust-survivor mother and Red Army hero father (in the war against the Nazis), scholars of the Holocaust will be looking forward to his frank memoirs in the fullness of time. His many achievements include the founding of the state-sponsored Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum and the active promotion in the European Union of the endangered secular and literary legacy of pre-Holocaust modern Yiddish culture.

38 See PRAGUE PLATFORM 2016.

39 See PRAGUE PLATFORM 2011. A useful list of state institutions is also provided by RECONCILIATION OF HISTORIES 2014.

40 See the section “The Prague Declaration of June 2008” in ARAD 2012.

41 See KATZ 2008; 2009A; 2009B; ZUROFF 2009.

42 UHL 2009; HENI 2009. The same year, the present author founded the website *Holocaust in the Baltics* which was renamed *Defending History* a year later. From early on, the web journal included the page CRITIQUES OF THE 2008 PRAGUE DECLARATION.

active group of Lithuanian Holocaust survivors.⁴⁴ It has been referred to by British MP John Mann as a “sinister document.”⁴⁵

It would seem that mounting opposition served to contain the Prague Declaration movement in the European Parliament after 2009. That year it had its one major Euro-parliament success in the passing of a (nonbinding) resolution in April 2009 on ‘European Conscience and Totalitarianism,’ which included the recommendation “for the proclamation of 23 August as a Europe-wide Day of Remembrance for the victims of all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, to be commemorated with dignity and impartiality.”⁴⁶ But then opponents of the effort to insert Double Genocide language into the European Union’s “Stockholm Programme” won the day in late 2010.⁴⁷ An extensive report commissioned by the European Commission ultimately found that there is no one-size-fits-all (as such things are called in Euro-speak) for a unitary and enforced singular history policy for the European Union.⁴⁸ Yehuda Bauer wrote an op-ed countering the April 2009 European Parliament resolution for a joint day of commemoration.⁴⁹ A number of the primary academic contributions in opposition to Double Genocide, duly exposing its (mis)application in Holocaust studies, have come from the pen of Bucharest-based Professor Michael Shafir.⁵⁰

While the effort to enshrine the Prague’s Declaration’s historical, moral, legal and practical demands has been successfully stalled in the European Parliament — perhaps temporarily — the Double Genocide juggernaut has had ongoing success in many Western academic, intellectual and political circles. The academic campaign, lavishly financed by state-sponsored conferences, has produced numerous international concaves, seminars, lectures and other events at which Double Genocide thought and Holocaust revisionist academic effort is intermingled with non-controversial study and commemoration of Jewish heritage as well as the Holocaust. One of the best documented was a series of events in London financed by the Lithuanian Ministry of foreign Affairs, which included an academic conference on the Holocaust in February 2011. Centered at University College London (a part of London University), the conference’s announced purposes included an attack on the “simplistic” approaches of both Soviet historiography (a readily justifiable claim) and of the Western survivors’ narrative.” This latter term is a known code-phrase for introducing at least Double Genocide corollaries, such as efforts to “reduce” the degree of local participation in the genocide by implicitly claiming that the Western narrative has been

43 HENI 2013, esp. pp 313-383.

44 ASSOCIATION OF LITHUANIAN JEWS IN ISRAEL 2013.

45 MANN 2009.

46 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT 2009.

47 See PHILLIPS 2010; ZELDIN 2010; DEFENDING HISTORY 2011A.

48 MONTERO 2010.

49 BAUER 2010.

50 See e.g. SHAFIR 2013; 2014A; 2014B; 2014C.

imposed by hapless Holocaust survivors.⁵¹ Western Jewish leaders and others have been awarded various honors for going along with aspects of the revised historical narrative.⁵²

One of the most difficult strategies to counteract has been the effective embedding of straightforward Holocaust Studies by East European countries within revisionist Double Genocide historiography and campaigns, the more so when much of the actual teaching is perfectly competent but serves a dual purpose: carrying out Holocaust education in addition to satisfying the nationalist base calling for the teaching of Prague Declaration historiography as established fact.⁵³ Bizarrely and painfully, Baltic-inspired Holocaust revisionism has taken hold with various institutions in Israel, which needs friendly East European votes in such international forums as the United Nations and the European Union.⁵⁴

In late 2011, Professor Danny Ben-Moshe and the author of the present paper embarked on the drafting of a formal response to the Prague Declaration.⁵⁵ The result was the Seventy Years Declaration, published on 20 January 2012, the seventieth anniversary of the Wannsee Conference.⁵⁶ Its text includes some direct responses both to the Prague Declaration and to the various associated theorems and corollaries:

[In the section “Recognize”:]

The nobility of Jewish partisans who survived ghettos or camps and went on to fight the Nazis and their allies.

[In the section “Reject”:]

Attempts to obfuscate the Holocaust by diminishing its uniqueness and deeming it to be equal, similar or equivalent to Communism as suggested by the 2008 Prague Declaration.

51 See HENI 2011; ZUROFF 2011; DEFENDING HISTORY 2011B. The London conference, sponsored by the Lithuanian government to promote its Holocaust policies in the end elicited a public letter of protest signed by twenty-one scholars, political leaders, and scions of Lithuanian Jewry. See PROTEST LETTER 2011.

52 See WHEN GOVERNMENT HONORS.

53 See e.g. CROUCHER 2011.

On dilemmas faced by Western and Israeli institutions seeking to cooperate on local Baltic Holocaust education, see Danny Ben-Moshe, ‘Yad Vashem and the “Two Genocides”’ in *Jerusalem Report*, 12 August 2013 (<http://www.jpost.com/Jerusalem-Report/Jewish-World/Yad-Vashem-and-the-two-genocides-322817>; <http://defendinghistory.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Danny-Ben-Moshe-in-Jerusalem-Report-26-August-2013.pdf>).

54 See the page ISRAEL CHRONICLE for links to most of the major debates in recent years. Among the most notable debates, concerning Yad Vashem’s policies, transpired between BEN-MOSHE (2013) and PORAT (2013). See also the materials in YAD VASHEM MANIPULATED? and KATZ 2016B.

55 See BEN-MOSHE 2012 and KATZ 2012A. Ben-Moshe produced the documentary film REWRITING HISTORY (2012).

56 SEVENTY YEARS DECLARATION 2012.

Equating Nazi and Soviet crimes as this blurs the uniqueness of each and threatens to undermine the important historical lessons drawn from each of these distinct experiences.

Attempts to have European history school books rewritten to reflect the notion of ‘Double Genocide’ (‘equality’ or ‘sameness’ of Nazi and Soviet crimes).

As unacceptable the glorification of Nazi Allies, and of Holocaust perpetrators and collaborators, including the Waffen SS in Estonia and Latvia, and the Lithuanian Activist Front in Lithuania.

Attempts to legalize or sanitize the public display of the swastika by racist and fascist groups.

Efforts to have the Holocaust remembered on one common day with the victims of Communism.

The Seventy Years Declaration rapidly led to heated debate, particularly in Lithuania. Eight Lithuanian parliamentarians (six MPs and two MEPs) were among the document’s seventy-one signatories. The eight, all Social Democrats, were rapidly berated by the foreign minister who referred to their signatures as “rhetoric by the Social Democrats that repeats the Kremlin’s ideological positions.” He went on to produce the now iconic statement: “It isn’t possible to find differences between Hitler and Stalin except in their moustaches. Hitler’s was shorter.”⁵⁷ Then UK MP Denis MacShane wrote letters of support to all eight.⁵⁸ The (Conservative Homeland Union) foreign minister, Audronius Ažubalis went on to pen an article attacking the signatories of the new declaration.⁵⁹ One of the most remarkable documents to emerge from the dispute is the dauntless response of one of the signatories, Vytenis Povilas Andriukaitis, in an article of his own, which sets out the case against Double Genocide politics from a Lithuanian patriotic standpoint.⁶⁰

UK Professor Dan Stone commented on the “battle of the declaration” as follows.

Some, however, regard the Prague Declaration as a sinister attempt to minimize the Holocaust. As a result, in 2012, the Seventy Years Declaration, signed by 71 MEPs and national politicians, was announced, denouncing the equating of Nazi and Soviet crimes, “as this blurs the uniqueness of each and threatens to undermine the important historical lessons drawn from each of these distinct experiences.” It also rejected the “glorification” of war criminals and collaborators, such as the Waffen-SS in Latvia and Estonia or the Lithuanian Activist Front, and condemned the increasing acceptance of the swastika being displayed at public events. Indeed, whilst war criminals and former fascists are still being reburied and otherwise commemorated

57 See BNS 2012.

58 See MACSHANE 2012.

59 See AŽUBALIS 2012.

60 See ANDRIUKAITIS 2012.

and musealized in the name of anti-communism, one can see why suspicions of the “double genocide” rhetoric coming from Eastern Europe arise — the claim that communism and Nazism are equivalent is undermined by the lion’s share of the attention being paid to the former, and by the negative sentiments directed towards those who fought against the latter.⁶¹

What is, however, sometimes lost in the debate is that Double Genocide is nowadays exported to an ever greater extent by reference to the current geopolitical east-west situation, as if rewriting the Holocaust and World War II is a valid tool in the West’s resistance to Putin’s autocratic and revanchist regime.⁶² Indeed, some very fine Western scholars have been effectively recruited to tilt toward Double Genocide and to make resistance to it less acceptable.⁶³ It is disconcerting to note how quickly a new political correctness can take hold of segments of Western academia.

It is also, finally, important to note that the ostensible source of much of the revisionism currently being exported is not the Baltics or Eastern Europe but the European Union per se. That is because of the revisionists’ success in persuading the European Union to actually fund institutions and exhibitions can be made to appear as if they are expressing European consensus. The undemocratic and unacademic notion that to be “united” all of Europe must hold identical opinions about Nazi and Soviet crimes frequently goes unchallenged in the mainstream. In recent years, the Prague Platform’s international traveling exhibition “Totalitarianism in Europe” has appeared with virtually no comment, inter alia, in Dublin, New York, Strasbourg, Toronto, and Washington.⁶⁴

While it may be quite expected for some nationalist governments in Eastern Europe to invest in exporting revisionist history of the Holocaust, it is equally natural to ask that people in these countries, and in the West, be perfectly free to disagree and defend the known history. Free trade in ideas can go awry when only one side of an argument is state-financed, and when export is facilitated by current geopolitical concerns that stigmatize the other side. Defending the eastern flank of NATO does not necessitate capitulation to nationalist rewriting of history to deny not the facts but the essence of the history of the Holocaust. The elevation of Nazi collaborators to the status of heroes is an affront to all that Western democracy stands for and serves to legitimize current racist tendencies. The confounding of perpetrators and victims is an affront to intellectual honesty. The export of Double Genocide revisionism merits a robust response in academia, media, education, and the arts.⁶⁵

61 STONE 2014, p. 281.

62 See the debate referenced above in notes 57-60.

63 The most celebrated case is that of the eminent historian, Yale professor Timothy Snyder. On some of the controversies concerning his alleged tilt toward the right-wing history rewriting of Eastern Europe, see the page RESPECTFULLY DISAGREEING WITH PROFESSOR TIMOTHY SNYDER (2016).

64 See “PRESENTATIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL TRAVELING EXHIBITION ‘TOTALITARIANISM IN EUROPE’” 2016. The European Union is also funding the accompanying booklet that is distributed free of charge and contains gross historical inaccuracies; some examples are cited in KATZ 2016B.

65 On the spread of Double Genocide in film, fiction and other arts, see Defending History’s section, THE ARTS.

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