

# **HUNGARY: THE ASSAULT ON THE HISTORICAL MEMORY OF THE HOLOCAUST**

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*Memoria est thesaurus omnium rerum et custos*  
(Memory is the treasury and guardian of all things) Cicero

## **THE LAUNCHING OF THE CAMPAIGN**

### *The Communist Era*

As in many other countries in Nazi-dominated Europe, in Hungary, the assault on the historical integrity of the Holocaust began before the war had come to an end. While many thousands of Hungarian Jews still were lingering in concentration camps, those Jews liberated by the Red Army, including those of Budapest, soon were warned not to seek any advantages as a consequence of their suffering. This time the campaign was launched from the left. The Communists and their allies, who also had been persecuted by the Nazis, were engaged in a political struggle for the acquisition of state power. To acquire the support of those Christian masses who remained intoxicated with anti-Semitism, and with many of those in possession of stolen and/or “legally” allocated Jewish-owned property, leftist leaders were among the first to

use the method of “generalization” in their attack on the facticity and specificity of the Holocaust. Claiming that the events that had befallen the Jews were part and parcel of the catastrophe that had engulfed most Europeans during the Second World War, they called upon the survivors to give up any particularist claims and participate instead in the building of a new “egalitarian” society. As early as late March 1945, József Darvas, the noted populist writer and leader of the National Peasant Party, asserted that “no one may claim any privileges on the basis of former suffering.” On August 26, 1945, he reiterated this anti-Jewish position by stating that “a certain group should not demand preferential treatment on the ground of racial prerogatives.” The incitements by the Communists soon led to the spread of blood-libel rumors and to pogroms in several cities, including Kunmadaras and Miskolc.<sup>1</sup>

Following their acquisition of power in 1949, the Communist-dominated government of Hungary largely put an end to physical attacks on Jews, but soon began an assault on the memory of the Holocaust. That regime pursued this goal concurrent with the Soviet-led anti-Semitic campaign against “cosmopolitanism” and Zionism, and soon began attempts that sought the de-legitimization of the State of Israel. As a consequence, the Holocaust, like the “the Jewish question” in general, were for many decades sunk in an Orwellian black hole of history.

Unlike in the West, however, where the campaign to distort, denigrate, and actually deny the Holocaust has been waged freely by so-called “historical revisionists,” the campaign in the Soviet bloc had been pursued under strict state control with its intensity varying in accordance with the changing political interests of the Kremlin.<sup>2</sup>

### ***The Post-Communist Era***

Following the dissolution of the Communist regimes and the disintegration of the Soviet bloc in the late 1980s, “historical revisionism” also infected the xenophobic nationalist stratum of

Hungarian society. Ironically, this new strain came to the fore following the liberalization measures that the first democratically elected government adopted after the systemic change of 1989. The political stresses and socioeconomic dislocations engendered by the new administration's privatization and marketization measures enabled the xenophobic nationalist-populist elements to revive both "the Jewish question" and anti-Semitism as convenient instruments of domestic politics. The number of Hungarian xenophobic champions of anti-Semitism has grown since the systemic change, constituting an increasing danger not only to the integrity of the historical record of the Holocaust but also to the newly established democratic system. The current danger is represented not so much by the "historical revisionists" who vocally deny the Holocaust – they will most probably end up in the dung-heap of history – but by "respectable public figures" – members and heads of government, parliamentarians, and high-ranking officers. The rhetoric and tactics of these respectable individuals vary in terms of their particular political-ideological group interests and personal ambitions. The leaders of the successive democratically elected Hungarian governments have, with a few exceptions, consistently pursued policies that aimed to:

1. Bring about the rehabilitation of the Horthy era and the revitalization of the national-Christian principles that had guided it;
2. Absolve Hungary of any guilt for the Holocaust by placing ultimate responsibility on the Germans;
3. Deflect attention from the Holocaust by focusing on the "positive" experiences of the Jews since their emancipation in 1867 and on the rescue activities of Christian Hungarians during the German occupation, including Horthy's halting of the deportations in early July 1944.

To achieve these objectives the successive governments have supported with various degrees of enthusiasm the efforts of “patriotic-nationalist” groups and individuals who have dedicated themselves to cleansing the historical record of Hungary, that is, in effect, to falsifying the historical record of the Nazi era in general and of the Holocaust in particular. Like their counterparts elsewhere in the former Nazi-dominated world, the Hungarian history-cleansers have, among other things, adopted the historical technique of “denationalization,” to prove Hungary’s “innocence” during the Holocaust, and that of “relativization” and “trivialization,” to demonstrate that the number of the Nazi victims was dwarfed by that caused by Communism, and that the Holocaust was but a relatively minor factor during the Second World War.

This study documents the policies of the successive Hungarian governments since 1989, critically evaluating the various approaches they have used to reach their national self-exculpatory objectives. It also aims to identify the historical context in which these policies were formulated, focusing on the radical “constitutional” and other “legal” and politically oriented Holocaust-related measures that were introduced following the inauguration of the Viktor Orbán-led government in 2010.

## **THE FACTS UNDER SIEGE**

In March 1944, Hungary had a Jewish population of more than 800,000 (including the approximately 100,000 Christians and converts who were identified as Jews under the racial laws then in effect). They constituted the last relatively intact Jewish community in Nazi-dominated Europe. Having survived throughout most of the war, they were destroyed on the eve of Allied victory with the connivance of their own government. An ally of Nazi Germany, Hungary,

beginning in early 1938, instituted a series of increasingly severe anti-Jewish measures that not only curtailed the basic civil and socioeconomic rights of the Jews<sup>3</sup> but also claimed approximately 60,000 Jewish lives by early 1944.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the bulk of Hungarian Jewry survived the first four and a half years of the war “thanks” to their physical protection by the conservative-aristocratic government of Miklós Kállay. After the German occupation of March 19, 1944, however, it was this relatively intact Jewish community that was subjected to the most concentrated and brutal ghettoization and deportation process of the Nazis’ Final Solution program.<sup>5</sup> The murderous drive against the Hungarian Jews was launched almost immediately after the beginning of the occupation that was welcomed not only by the military but also by a large stratum of the population.<sup>6</sup> By that time the leaders of the world, including those of Hungary, already were familiar with the realities of Auschwitz. By that time even many among the Nazis realized that the Axis would lose the war. It was precisely because of this prospect that the Germans and their Hungarian accomplices decided to win at least the campaign against the Jews. Time was clearly of the essence. The Red Army was fast approaching Romania, and the Western Allies were expected to launch their invasion of Europe soon.

The Nazis’ machinery of destruction was already well oiled by 1944. With experience gained through the mass murder of Jews from almost all over German-dominated Europe, the Nazis were ready and well prepared for a lightning operation in Hungary. Their initial fear at that juncture of the losing war was that Miklós Horthy, the Hungarian head of state, might emulate the latter-day position of Marshal Ion Antonescu of Romania, and prevent the full implementation of the Final Solution by identifying the Jewish question as a domestic issue. The German’s concern was dissipated soon after the occupation began. Adolf Eichmann, the experienced head of a small but efficient SS unit, was amazed at the enthusiasm with which

members of the new Döme Sztójay government – all constitutionally appointed by Horthy – proved ready to “solve” the Jewish question.<sup>7</sup> This new government placed the instruments of state power – the gendarmerie, police, and civil service – at the disposal of the Hungarian and German Nazis bent on the swiftest possible implementation of the Final Solution. With Horthy still at the helm and providing the symbol of national sovereignty, the approximately 200,000 Hungarian policemen, gendarmes, civil servants, and “patriotic” volunteers had collaborated in the anti-Jewish drive with a routine and efficiency that impressed even the relatively few SS who had served as “advisors.” Within less than two months – that is from late March to mid-May, 1944 – those in charge of the Final Solution completed the first phase of the anti-Jewish drive. Acting in accordance with the provisions of the many “laws, decrees, and orders,” issued by the central and the regional governmental organs, the Jews were isolated, marked, robbed of their possessions, and placed into ghettos. During the next two months – from May 15 through July 9 – they were subjected to the most barbaric and speedy deportation and extermination program of the war. It was so massive and so swift that the crematoria in Auschwitz-Birkenau, updated as they were, could not cope. Special ditches had to be dug to burn the thousands of victims the crematoria could not handle. When Winston Churchill was informed about this catastrophe, he referred to it as “probably the greatest and most horrible crime ever committed in the history of the world.”<sup>8</sup> In sheer numbers the mass murder of the Hungarian Jews overshadowed the losses of many major combatants of the Second World War!<sup>9</sup>

## **STAGES OF THE ASSAULT**

The Hungarian chapter of the Holocaust of European Jewry constitutes not only the greatest tragedy in the history of Hungarian Jewry but also the darkest chapter in the history of Hungary. Never before in the history of the Hungarian nation were so many people expropriated and

murdered in so short a time as in 1944. Most of the hundreds of thousands of victims were Hungarian citizens who had proudly considered themselves “Magyars of the Jewish faith.” To the chagrin of the other ethnic-national minorities of Hungary, most Jews were patriotic and had been firmly committed to the Magyar cause since 1848. They were the forerunners of Hungary’s modernization and champions of the Hungarian language and culture even in the territories Hungary lost in 1918. At the end, however, they fared less well than the other ethnic and national groups. They were destroyed with the connivance of the Magyars they had so eagerly supported and implicitly trusted.

The details of this apocalyptic chapter in the history of Hungary have not yet sunk into the national consciousness of the Hungarian people. The reasons are many and complex. The wartime history of Hungary, including the Holocaust, has been manipulated by the successive postwar regimes to serve their particular political interests.

### ***The Immediate Postwar Era***

During the immediate postwar period, the needs and interests of the survivors came into conflict with the political aspirations of the various parties. It is one of the ironies of history that, at the end, the surviving remnant of Hungarian Jewry suffered most at the hands of the very political party that many of them had trusted as their genuine supporter and whose members, like the Jews, had been a main target of the Nazis and of the Horthy regime: the Communist Party. During the immediate postwar era, many of the victimized Jews placed their faith in the Party, believing that it was the only one that was genuinely free of any stain of Fascism. They also considered it reliable for the advancement of their legitimate interests, including the roundup and prosecution of war criminals, the effectuation of an equitable restitution and reparation program, and the building of a just and egalitarian society. The Jewish survivors were soon awakened to

the political realities of the postwar power struggle. Small and generally mistrusted by the ethnic majority, the Communist Party had no scruples about sacrificing the interests of the Jews in order to build a popular base for the acquisition of state power. Driven by political expediency, the party leadership, which included a proportionately large number of Communists of Jewish origin, urged the survivors to forget about their past suffering, abandon their demands for restitution, and subordinate their special needs to the building of the new socialist society. With the exception of the relatively few diehards who remained loyal to their ideology and newly acquired power, the survivors soon discovered that it was the Communist Party's search for mass support that was in fact largely behind the anti-Semitic agitation and the many "spontaneous" anti-Jewish outbursts and pogroms that occurred during the immediate postwar period.<sup>10</sup>

During the Stalinist era, the Holocaust was virtually sunk into the Orwellian black hole of history. The Jewish martyrs were subsumed as part of the losses incurred by the population at large. The survivors themselves were subjected to many inequities. Many of them found themselves persecuted on both social and religious-political grounds. They were either identified as members of "the exploiting bourgeoisie" or accused of the sins of Zionism and cosmopolitanism. Many among these Jews were once again deported to concentration camps for "re-education," often in the company of their former tormentors. Others were either jailed or deprived of a livelihood. In the course of time even the Communist Party itself was purged of its Jewish component to make it more attractive to the ethnic majority.<sup>11</sup>

During the National Communist era that followed the Uprising of 1956, the Jewish question and the issue of anti-Semitism, while persistent at the popular level, were kept under control by the government. Consistent with the policies of the previous governments, public awareness of the Holocaust continued to remain low even though Hungary – unlike the other



Soviet bloc countries – witnessed the appearance of several important documentary and historical publications on the tragedy of Hungarian Jewry.<sup>12</sup>

### ***The Post-Communist Era***

The systemic change in the Soviet bloc nations began in Hungary as early as 1987. It was spearheaded by the reformist group within the ruling Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (*Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt*). Defying the Kremlin, Imre Pozsgay, one of the leaders of this group, identified the Hungarian revolution of 1956 as a popular uprising rather than a counterrevolution, leading thereby to a public discussion of other hitherto prohibited topics such as Trianon and gradually even the Holocaust. Since the triumph of democracy in 1989, the Holocaust has emerged as an “embarrassing” topic for the various governments that succeeded the Communist regime. Driven largely by domestic and international political considerations, the elected national leaders of the new democratic society have reacted to the Holocaust in a different manner, which, in turn, determined the level and intensity of the assault on historical memory during their administration. They all publicly acknowledged the wartime tragedy of the Jews and have consistently committed themselves, especially during Holocaust remembrance occasions, to combatting the scourge of anti-Semitism.

In the absence of unambiguous and unequivocal moral guidance on the Holocaust, the history-cleansers appear to have been given a green light to “safeguard the national honor of Hungary” by absolving that nation of any responsibility. The offensive against the historical memory of the Holocaust was spearheaded not only by the “historical revisionists,” but also – and more important – by an ever-larger group of sophisticated degree-holding history-cleansers.

These “patriotic” professionals have dedicated themselves to rewriting the Horthy era, ostensibly "to enable conservative Hungarians to become once again proud of their history."

The initial steps in this direction were taken during the tenure of József Antall, Jr., the first democratically elected prime minister of post-Communist Hungary (May 23, 1990 – December 12, 1993).<sup>13</sup> A leader of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (*Magyar Demokrata Fórum* – MDF), a political party he co-founded with notorious anti-Semitic figures such as István Csurka<sup>14</sup> and Sándor Csoóri, Antall had dedicated himself to rebuilding Hungary along national-Christian lines reminiscent of the Horthy era. He spearheaded the rehabilitation of former prime minister Pál Teleki, the author of several major anti-Jewish laws, and launched the campaign to bring about the rehabilitation of the former Regent as well. It was he in fact who first aimed to unburden the national conscience over the Holocaust by consistently repudiating the idea of any official apology. It was also Antall who first suggested that in any discussion of the Holocaust, if it must be discussed at all, emphasis should be placed on the rescue activities of the Righteous rather than the on perpetrators.<sup>15</sup>

It was during Antall’s administration that the drive to bring about the rehabilitation of Miklós Horthy gained momentum. A major step in this direction was the political resurrection of the former Regent by returning his and his family’s remains from Portugal and reburying them with the pomp and circumstance befitting a former head of state.<sup>16</sup> Antall’s informal guidelines relating to the treatment of the Holocaust were soon abused by neo-anti-Semitic nationalists. Taking advantage of the new democratic freedoms, some of them openly resorted to anti-Jewish diatribes. Sándor Csoóri, one of Hungary’s most celebrated writers of the period, for example, aimed to demonstrate that “liberal Hungarian Jewry wanted to ‘assimilate’ the Magyars in style

and thought.” Reminiscent of the anti-Jewish campaign of the Horthy era, he clearly implied that the surviving remnant of Hungarian Jewry had become a threat to the Christian Magyars.<sup>17</sup>

Antall’s successor, Prime Minister Péter Boross (December 12, 1993 – July 15, 1994) was considerably more active in encouraging and supporting the history-cleansers. As the spiritus rector of the neo-Fascist drive to rehabilitate the Horthy regime, Boross has become a leading champion for the restoration of the national-Christian tradition in Hungary. He also 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.<sup>18</sup>

The historical memory of the survivors was jolted early in 1994, when the Constitutional Court (*Alkotmánybíróság*) that was established in late 1989 nullified many provisions of the People’s Tribunals Act (Law No. VII of 1945). It soon led to the reversal in the conviction of many individuals who had been involved in various degrees in the implementation of the Final Solution program.<sup>19</sup> Concluding that the wartime activities of the convicted individuals were not deemed criminally punishable at the time of their commission, the Court enabled the rehabilitation of many of those who had been involved in the roundup, expropriation, ghettoization, and deportation of the Jews.

The policies deemed detrimental to the survivors of the Holocaust continued even during the administration of Gyula Horn, a leading figure of the Hungarian Socialist Party.<sup>20</sup> It was during his tenure (July 15, 1994 – July 8, 1998) that the issue of restitution and reparation, virtually overlooked since 1945, finally came to the fore. The Communists when in power, had ignored the issue almost altogether, citing the requirements of socialist construction. The post-Communist regimes, for their part, became more concerned with the compensation for the victims of Communism than for those of Nazism. To add insult to injury, an indeterminate

number of the Christian victims who were compensated for properties nationalized by the Communist regime had, in fact, “legally” or fraudulently acquired them from Jews during the Nazi era.<sup>21</sup>

It was also during the Horn administration that the historical memory of the Holocaust was subjected to another challenge. A ruling by the Constitutional Court and the many governmental rules and regulations issued during his tenure virtually prohibited many scholars from pursuing their work on the preservation and/or acquisition of archival materials relating to the Holocaust. The “personal data protection” provisions of various legislative acts and judicial decisions, plausibly designed to protect public officials who had formerly been associated with either the Nazi-collaborationist or the Communist regime, not surprisingly had the ancillary effect of restricting the Holocaust-related research activities of scholars in general and of foreign nationals in particular.<sup>22</sup> The issue continued to remain unsolved.<sup>23</sup>

### ***The Intensification of the Assault***

The assault on historical memory gradually exacerbated during the first administration of Viktor Orbán (July 8, 1998 – May 27, 2002) and took an ominous turn during his second term (May 29, 2010 – ).

Even though Orbán’s party, the League of Young Democrats (*Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége* – FIDESZ), had only won a narrow parliamentary majority following the elections of May 1998,<sup>24</sup> he and his right-of-center coalition government had given a free hand to the history-cleansers dedicated to the rehabilitation of the Horthy era. While reportedly not an anti-Semite himself, it appears that political expediency has compelled Orbán to condone the activities of the ultra-right and to encourage, if not actually support, those dedicated to cleansing Hungary’s wartime history. It was during his tenure that the history falsifying technique of

“denationalization” gained general acceptance. Using this technique, history-cleansers have dedicated themselves to absolving Hungary of all guilt by transferring exclusive responsibility for the Holocaust onto the Germans. To assure a guilt-free national continuity in Hungary’s history, the Orbán administration decided to revitalize the national-Christian values of the Horthy era by re-introducing its national symbols.<sup>25</sup> One of the most forceful spokesmen for the need to return to these values was Ibolya Dávid, Orbán’s minister of justice.<sup>26</sup>

It was also around this time that the history-cleansers were indirectly encouraged to “re-evaluate” the Hungarian state security agencies that had been involved in the Final Solution and to focus on the “positive” contribution of Hungarians to the rescuing of Jews.

As part of their re-evaluation drive, history-cleansers expended considerable effort to bring about the absolution of the gendarmerie, which had played a crucial role in the roundup, ghettoization, and deportation of the Jews.<sup>27</sup> Toward this end, they produced a documentary that was first shown on Hungarian television in early December 1998.<sup>28</sup> The “historians” featured in the documentary were seen in effect to exonerate the gendarmerie not only by placing ultimate responsibility on the Germans but also by focusing on the law-abiding attitude of the Jews. Sándor Szakály, one of the “experts” associated with the documentary, advanced the obscene argument that there was no need for the gendarmerie to use force because the Jews – law-abiding citizens that they were – carried out the anti-Jewish measures of their own volition. Another “expert” advanced the thesis that the gendarmes were, in fact, engaged in a form of resistance by carrying out the anti-Jewish measures “humanely.” All of the participants in the documentary appeared to conclude that the gendarmes were guided by the Christian spirit and were highly appreciated by the people they had served for the preservation of law and order. The gendarmes who were interviewed for the documentary – all of whom were veterans of the anti-Jewish drive

– offered a variety of extenuating “explanations” for their own involvement.<sup>29</sup> Less than a year later, a plaque honoring the gendarmes who died during the war was unveiled by Zsolt Lányi, head of the armed services committee of the Hungarian Parliament, in the courtyard of the Institute of War History and Museum (*Hadtörténelmi Intézet és Múzeum*), headed by Szakály.

The escalation in the activities of history-cleansers appears to have been indirectly encouraged by governmental policies that increasingly reflect the “national-Christian” course of the interwar period. Despite its very brief tradition of civil liberties, Hungary has permitted the dissemination of hate literature<sup>30</sup> and, until recently, the denial of the Holocaust – acts that are deemed illegal and severely punished in France and many other countries with a much longer record of liberal democracy.<sup>31</sup>

Ultra-nationalists seem to have been encouraged in history-cleansing activities by the attitude of some of the highest-ranking officials. A few among these have not only expressed sympathy for the objective pursued by many of the cleansers but have also occasionally engaged in such practices themselves.<sup>32</sup>

One of the most brazen attempts to falsify the history of Hungarian Jewry in general and the Holocaust record in particular was a plan that was initiated by the Hungarian Ministry of Culture for a new exhibition in Auschwitz. The idea originated in the fall of 1998, when during a trip to Poland, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán visited the death camp and found the current exhibit in the Hungarian pavilion – established by the Communist regime in 1979-80 – both “inappropriate and neglected.”

The original plan called merely for the reconstruction of the exhibit, but the experts in the Ministry of Culture subsequently decided to shelve it altogether and create a new one to be opened, with appropriate pomp and circumstance, by the prime minister on May 9, 2000. The

Ministry entrusted the planning and creation of the new exhibit to the Hungarian National Museum. The head of that museum, Dr. Tibor Kovács, had no problem in finding the "right person" for the job: István Ihász, the chief of the museum's Contemporary History Division. An unabashed rightist, Ihász had already established his nationalist credentials as the creator of that museum's highly controversial "Twentieth Century Hungary" exhibit. Still one of the museum's most popular exhibits, it virtually glorifies the Horthy era and denigrates the tragedy of Hungarian Jewry.

Ihász began working on the new assignment in December 1998, preparing a script and collecting the visual and archival materials he wanted to use in the new pavilion. He pursued his task with the assistance of a committee of three experts: Mária Schmidt, then a counselor to the prime minister; Tamás Stark, an associate of the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences; and József Schweitzer, then the chief rabbi of Hungary. The first draft of the script was finished early in the spring of 1998. Following the experts' input during several consultations, a second draft – dated April 9, 1999, and bearing the names of the three experts – was forwarded to the Ministry of Culture early in June. Convinced that the main purpose of the script was informational rather than educational, Ihász reportedly recommended that no further experts be consulted. The Ministry, however, followed a more cautious approach and forwarded the script for evaluation to three well-known historians and museology experts: Szabolcs Szita, the chief historian of the Hungarian Auschwitz Foundation of Budapest; Ilona Radnóti, the historian associated with the Janus Pannonius Museum of Pécs; and Róbert Turán, the head of the Jewish Museum of Budapest. Shocked after its first reading, Turán decided to forward copies of the draft to László Karsai, a leading expert on the Holocaust, and Emil Horn, an expert in museology with many museum exhibits to his credit.

The reaction of all five experts was prompt and virtually unanimous. They individually concluded that the script basically falsified the history of the Jews in Hungary in general and of the Holocaust era in particular, and that it appeared to have a political objective: the rehabilitation of the Horthy era by transferring virtually all responsibility for whatever crimes were committed in Hungary almost exclusively to the Germans. Collectively, the evaluations of Ihász's script exposed not only his shortcomings as a historian but also his apparent political agenda as a museologist. His deficiencies as a historian were revealed by Karsai and four fellow historians in a lengthy collective report dated August 4, 1999; his perceived political objectives and museological shortcomings were demonstrated by Horn, in a lengthy and cogently argued report dated August 6.<sup>33</sup>

Almost three weeks after these reports were forwarded to the leadership of the Jewish community, the chief rabbi decided to resign from Ihász's committee. Stark, reportedly upset that his name appeared on the second draft of the script without his authorization, informed Mária Schmidt about his displeasure. Only Schmidt, a historian who formerly specialized in Holocaust studies, continued to express her basic satisfaction with the unfortunate script. Ihász, on his part, must have felt vindicated: on August 20, a national holiday, he received a prestigious state award on the recommendation of the prime minister's office.

The reaction of the official leadership of the Jewish community was prompt and forthright. In a letter dated August 25, 1999, Péter Tordai, the president of the Association of the Jewish Communities of Hungary (a *Magyarországi Zsidó Hitközségek Szövetsége* – Mazsihisz), informed the Ministry of Culture that in the view of the community the script was unacceptable. He expressed his doubts about whether it was the intention of the Hungarian government to establish a pro-Horthy, Holocaust denigrating, and covertly anti-Semitic exhibit in Auschwitz –



"the emblematic scene of Nazi genocide and the largest mass grave of Hungarian Jewry." Tordai coupled his bewilderment with a warning: Should Ihász's script, nevertheless, become the basis of the planned exhibit, "it will elicit an international scandal that would extend from Jerusalem to Washington and from Budapest to Berlin."<sup>34</sup>

In addition to the technique of "denationalization" by which exclusive responsibility for the Holocaust is transferred onto the Germans, the Orbán-supported experts on the national-Christian traditions of Hungary have also employed the method of "generalization." This approach is used by those claiming that the tragedy of the Jews was part and parcel of the general catastrophic consequences of a war in which many others suffered as well. Some among the history-cleansers go so far as to identify the Jews themselves as primarily responsible for their own tragic fate. Others claim that the Holocaust was in fact intentionally brought about by rich Jews who had supported Hitler.<sup>35</sup> Still others in this group attempt to absolve the Christian Hungarians from any guilt by blaming the Jewish Councils for the suffering the Jews.<sup>36</sup>

Another favorite history-cleansing technique is that of "generalization." Some of the "patriotic" individuals in this category try to mitigate the magnitude of the Holocaust by linking the tragedy of the Jews and the trauma endured by Hungary at Trianon.<sup>37</sup> Others in this category have dedicated themselves to the whitewashing of Hungary's close alliance with Nazi Germany, including the fact that it was the last satellite to fight along its side until the end of the Second World War, by arguing that the Hungarians had in fact been the Third Reich's *last victims* and as such had suffered as much as the Jews, if not more.<sup>38</sup>

Insisting on the commonality of suffering, many history-cleansers have dedicated themselves to the preservation of "collective" historical memory. They generalize the Holocaust by homogenizing the losses of Jewry with those incurred by the military forces and the civilian

population during the war. Toward this end they erected a large number of monuments, unveiled many plaques, and published many monographs in memory of communal casualties, transmogrifying the Holocaust victims into war casualties. The equation of the martyrdom of armed soldiers, who died as heroes in the service of their country, and of Christian civilians, who were killed in the wake of the hostilities, with that of the Jews, who were murdered irrespective of their age or sex, is clearly politically motivated. This approach enables history-cleansers to demonstrate that the combined military-civilian casualties incurred by the Christian population during the Second World War far exceeded those suffered by the Jews.<sup>39</sup>

Still another technique frequently employed by history-cleansers is that of “trivialization and relativization.” Denying the uniqueness of the Holocaust, the destruction of the Jews is viewed as just another chapter in the long history of man’s inhumanity to man. The apparent main objective of this group of cleansers is to safeguard Hungary’s honor by demonstrating not only that the Holocaust, to the extent that it took place, was in fact preceded by other examples of mass murder (e.g., the massacre of Indians in the Americas and the genocide of the Armenians by the Turks), but also and above all that the destruction of the Jews was dwarfed in scope and magnitude by the atrocities committed by Communist regimes the world over. In this context, many in this group also argue that the Jewish suffering, like that of many other ethnic-national groups, was war-related.<sup>40</sup>

During the first Orbán administration, the nationalists dedicated to the cleansing of the Horthy era have found, in addition to Szakály, a new ally – Dr. Mária Schmidt. A rising young scholar in Holocaust studies during the Communist era, Dr. Schmidt changed her original academic ambitions soon after the systemic change of 1989. She appears to have dedicated herself to the “nationalist” reinterpretation of Hungary’s history after World War I, shifting her

interest to the unmasking of the crimes of the Communist era. This soon proved to be a somewhat politically risky undertaking in a country in which Communism has been claimed by sundry anti-Semites since 1919 to be Jewish in origin and character. One may wonder, like many other nationalists, Dr. Schmidt may have concluded that by unmasking the crimes of the Soviet-dominated Communist regimes in general and those perpetrated by the Hungarian Communists in particular, she might not only help mitigate the impact of the Holocaust but also contribute to the defense of the domestic and foreign policies of Horthy's Hungary. Whatever her motivations, she emerged as a vociferous advocate of the idea that the same yardsticks must be used in the assessment of the Nazi and Communist-type totalitarian regimes and of the crimes perpetrated by them.<sup>41</sup> By mechanically applying this methodology, Schmidt, like many among some ideologically-oriented colleagues, seems to overlook the many historical, socioeconomic, and moral factors that differentiate these totalitarian regimes, correctly concluding that in terms of numbers the crimes committed by the Communists the world over far exceeded those perpetrated by the Nazis.<sup>42</sup> Among the crimes and injustices committed by the Communists, she also includes many of the verdicts of the People's Courts of the immediate postwar period.<sup>43</sup>

Ms. Schmidt caused a considerable political uproar in early November 1999 when she spoke extensively before a largely rightist group on an accustomed theme: the supposed use of two yardsticks in the evaluation of Nazi and Communist crimes. She expressed profound disappointment that only the Holocaust of the Jews was being recalled in connection with World War II. In her view, the idea that the Holocaust was unique and indisputable was being advanced and propagated by a segment of the intelligentsia who dominated the mass media, whereas, in fact, "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."<sup>44</sup> The reaction of the

Jewish community leaders and many intellectuals was immediate and caustic. In a press release, the Jewish leaders characterized Ms. Schmidt as “the best Hungarian student of Jean-Marie Le Pen,” the French far-right leader who referred to the Holocaust as a “detail” of history.<sup>45</sup> Others questioned her historical analysis and intellectual integrity.<sup>46</sup> Still others expressed disapproval of her activities as head of the newly established and financially well-endowed Twentieth Century Institute.<sup>47</sup> The numerous protests and criticisms notwithstanding, she has continued to play an influential role because of the support she receives from various nationalists and, above all, because she continued to enjoy the confidence and support of the prime minister.<sup>48</sup>

Many Hungarian history-cleansers have taken Schmidt’s anti-Communist crusade a step further. Counterbalancing the accounts of the Holocaust, they concentrate and emphasize almost exclusively the crimes perpetrated by the Communists. Identifying Communism and Bolshevism as Jewish in origin and character, these historical revisionists insist that the wartime suffering of the Jews was matched, if not actually exceeded, by the pain the Jews supposedly inflicted upon the Christian world during the Communist era.<sup>49</sup> This was particularly the case during the Stalinist period when, in their view, “the Jews” exploited their power to avenge the suffering they had endured during the Holocaust. In parliamentary debates and other public forums, even “moderate” politicians occasionally feel compelled to remind their compatriots of the Jewish factor during the Soviet era by selectively identifying former Communist leaders by their original Jewish names.<sup>50</sup>

Another ploy in this context is the tendency to equate Auschwitz with the Gulag, “balancing” the suffering of the Jews with that endured by Hungarian POWs and other political prisoners in Soviet camps. Borrowing a page from their counterparts elsewhere, some Hungarian revisionists claim that Auschwitz was modeled on the Gulag, revealing their ignorance or

intentional misrepresentation of the fundamental differences in the operation and objectives of the Nazi death camps and the Soviet penal establishments.<sup>51</sup>

The campaign for the rehabilitation of the Horthy era coupled with the drive to falsify the history of the Holocaust gained momentum during Prime Minister Orbán's second administration. Emboldened by the landslide victory of his party in the elections of April 2010,<sup>52</sup> Orbán provided both the legal framework and the political directives for the successful pursuit of this campaign. The legal façade for his grand design was provided by the following provision of the preamble to the new constitution that was adopted on April 25, 2011:

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 organ of popular representation was formed. We shall consider this date to be the beginning of our country's new democracy and constitutional order.

By this constitutional provision, the Orbán government appears to pursue two major objectives: to establish a historical continuity between the Hungarian state of the Horthy era and the Hungarian state of the post-communist period and to convince the world that Hungary had lost its sovereignty in the wake of the beginning of the German occupation and, as a victim itself, not responsible for the subsequent destruction of the Jews. By using this big lie technique, he and the history-cleansers he supports have proceeded to erase the historical fact that the German occupiers were well-received by most Hungarians, civilians and the military alike. They seem to be particularly dedicated to falsify the fact that the occupation took place without any resistance in the wake of a Horthy-Hitler agreement at Schloss Klessheim (March 18–19, 1944), that the Hungarian army and the law enforcement agencies continued to serve the Axis war effort, and that the Horthy-appointed government placed the instruments of state power – the gendarmerie,

police, and civil service – at the disposal of those in charge of the Final Solution – while he, the Regent, continued to represent the sovereignty of the nation as head of state.

The Hungarian history-cleansers could not, in the age of the Internet while Hungary is a member of NATO and the European Union, deny the realities of the catastrophe that befell the Hungarian Jews. As a result, concurrent with blaming exclusively the Germans for the Holocaust, they are engaged in covering up Hungary's involvement by focusing on the "positive" aspects of its history – the help Hungarians had provided for the Jews since 1867 in general and during the Second World War in particular. In connection with the latter, the history-cleansers usually have focused on the protection of labor servicemen following the beginning of the German occupation, the rescue activities of the Righteous, and the saving of the Jews of Budapest.

It is true that the Jewish labor servicemen were, with a few exceptions, exempted from the ghettoization and deportation measures and had the "protection" of the armed forces, which continued to exercise exclusive jurisdiction over the labor service system even after the beginning of the German occupation. It is also true that quite a number of military commanders recruited "strong-looking" Jewish men from within the ghettos in order to save them from deportation and almost certain death – still another indication of their awareness of the realities of the anti-Jewish drive. The history-cleansers fail to deal with the basically discriminatory nature of the system and the horrors to which many of the labor servicemen were subjected along the Soviet front lines, in the copper mines of Serbia, and during the *Nyilas* era. A few well-known "patriotic" historians, including Sándor Szakály, went so far as to describe the labor service system as quite equitable, emphasizing that the treatment of the Jewish labor servicemen was tolerable, and that their losses were far fewer than generally claimed.<sup>53</sup>

In accordance with the guidelines originally formulated by former prime minister József Antall, Jr., the history-cleansers, like many among the “respectable” governmental and political leaders of contemporary Hungary, have tried to deflect attention from the Hungarians’ involvement in the Holocaust by focusing attention on the rescue activities of the relatively few Christians who had been identified by Yad Vashem as Righteous among the Nations. This politically directed overemphasis on the Righteous, in the absence of the historical context of the Final Solution, is presumably designed to inculcate in the postwar generations the belief that the practitioners of righteous conduct, rather than the perpetrators, were the dominant elements of the Holocaust era.<sup>54</sup>

One of the major arguments used by the history-cleansers in their drive to rehabilitate the Horthy era has been the Regent’s decision of July 6-7, 1944 to halt the deportations and thereby save the Jews of Budapest.<sup>55</sup> While this is basically true, history-cleansers fail to identify the political and military factors that induced the Regent to act at a time when all of Hungary, with the notable exception of the capital, already had been made *judenrein*. They also fail to acknowledge Horthy’s own responsibility for the liquidation of the provincial Jewish communities. He did so by consenting, during his March 18, 1944 meeting with Hitler at Schloss Klessheim, to the delivery of hundreds of thousands of Jews “for labor in Germany.”<sup>56</sup> After constitutionally appointing his new pro-German government, he decided not to be involved in Jewish matters thereby giving a free hand to those involved in the Final Solution program.<sup>57</sup> The argument advanced by Edmund Veessenmayer, the Führer’s former plenipotentiary in Hungary, is quite persuasive. In his testimony at the 1946 war crimes trial of the so-called “deportation trio” – Andor Jaross, László Endre, and László Baky – Veessenmayer declared that Horthy, who as head of state, had demonstrated his ability to halt the deportations at a particular time could

have prevented their initiation in the first place – had he really wanted to do so.<sup>58</sup> Horthy's champions also overlook the fact that credit for the rescuing of the Jews of Budapest has also been claimed by or attributed to many others, including the commander of the troops that foiled an anti-Horthy coup early in July 1944.<sup>59</sup>

As part of the drive to focus attention on the Righteous, the Orbán government decided to celebrate Raoul Wallenberg's centenary in 2012 by organizing a series of commemorative events both at home and abroad. One of these events was planned for New York.<sup>60</sup> Among the many events organized in Budapest, one featured Kati Marton, the well-known Hungarian-born author of a book on Wallenberg, focusing on his disappearance in the Soviet Union. In an interview following her lecture, she claimed that Wallenberg "was in fact a *Hungarian* hero... who was honored because he had in fact saved *Hungarians* in Budapest" (emphasis added).<sup>61</sup> Presumably designed to please her official hosts, these claims were properly rebuffed by those interested in protecting the historical integrity of the Holocaust era.<sup>62</sup> The commemoration of the centenary of Raoul Wallenberg, one of the first rescuers to be identified by Yad Vashem as a Righteous among the Nations, provided an opportunity to highlight the rescue activities of the Hungarian righteous – all diverting attention from Hungary's involvement in the Holocaust.

The drive to bring about the rehabilitation of the Horthy era continued to be pursued along seemingly two conflicting paths: the encouragement of activities relating to the revitalization of the national-Christian spirit of the interwar period and the commemoration of its national heroes concurrent with the adoption of some policies relating to the Holocaust. Along the former path, the Orbán government consented to, if



not actually encouraged, the renaming of streets and the erection of statues for Horthy in many parts of the country and condoned the “positive” reevaluation of notorious anti-Semites such as the writers Albert Wass and József Nyirő, and Bishop Ottokár Prohászka.

Along the second path, the Orbán government adopted a number of positive measures relating to the commemoration of the Holocaust. It was during his administration that April 16 was designated as the day of remembrance of the Hungarian chapter of the Holocaust.<sup>63</sup> It also supports the Holocaust Memorial Center (*Holokauszt Emlékközpont*), which was established on July 1, 2002 and inaugurated on April 16, 2004 under the auspices of Prime Minister Péter Medgyessy (May 27, 2002 – September 29, 2004).<sup>64</sup> As a state agency, the Center depends almost exclusively on the financial support by the government. As a result, its leaders, like the members of the Board of Directors (*Kurátorium*), appear not to be totally free and independent in determining the agenda of their research and other activities. They had managed, so far at least, to retain relatively intact the permanent exhibition that was organized during the Medgyessy era, and this in spite of occasional public criticism by high officials of the Orbán government. In 2011, for example, they were subjected to an attack by András Levente Gál, then state secretary in the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice (*a Küzigazgatási és Igazságügyi Minisztérium*) – an official with jurisdiction over the Center. Gál, a non-historian and a well-known nationalist politician, had publicly objected to some aspects of the Center’s permanent exhibition. He was particularly angered by the correlation he had found between Hungary’s territorial acquisitions between 1938 and 1941 and the Holocaust, he reportedly suggested that appropriate changes be effectuated in the exhibition. The suggestion aroused vocal protests in Hungary and elsewhere, forcing Gál to retreat. In addition to Gál, Cardinal Péter

Erdő, the Archbishop of Esztergom, objected to the placement of a portrait of the anti-Semitic Ottokár Prohászka, the bishop of Székesfehérvár, next to that of Hitler.

One of the major conflicts between the remnant Jewish community and the successive Hungarian governments during the 70 years following the Holocaust has revolved around the issue of responsibility. In contrast to the leaders of many states in former Nazi-dominated Europe, those of Hungary so far have lacked the courage to confront the Holocaust openly and honestly. In the course of the past few decades, quite a number of officials, including members of the various successive governments, have expressed sorrow and even apologized for the tragedy that befell Hungarian Jewry.<sup>65</sup> These expressions of contrition usually have been made during official national or international commemorative events, especially those organized by Jewish or democratically-oriented civic organizations. The hopes of the surviving remnant of Hungarian Jewry that one day the leaders of the government and state will – in an official address to the nation – admit responsibility and perhaps even apologize, however belatedly, for the Hungarians' involvement in the destruction of their fellow citizens of the Jewish faith have virtually faded. Ironically, they were shattered by the very measures the Orbán government had initiated for the remembrance of that tragedy.

Early in 2013, the Orbán government decided to make 2014 the year for the commemoration of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Holocaust in Hungary. Toward this end, it brought about the establishment of a “2014 Memorial Committee on the Holocaust in Hungary” (*a Magyar Holokauszt – 2014 Emlékbizottság*).<sup>66</sup> It was placed under the leadership of János Lázár, a state secretary in charge of the prime minister's office – a controversial political figure whose previous activities raised a number of agonizing questions about his suitability for the job. In June 2010, for example, Lázár, then mayor of Hódmezővásárhely, unveiled a statue honoring

Albert Wass, a Hungarian writer who, in 1946, a people's court in Romania convicted for war crimes.

Following the first organizational meeting of the Committee, which came into existence on January 1, 2013, Lázár attempted to disarm his critics by publicly stating, among other things:

2014 must be the year for facing up to the fact and for apologizing... . Facing up to the fact denotes a command for remembrance and under law, a prohibition of forgetting; we must make the apology a part of our national identity... . The remembrance year must be the time for the national facing up to the Holocaust and for apologizing rather than the time for individual or intellectual confrontations and apologies... . We owe an apology to the victims; the Hungarian state was guilty during the Holocaust. Doubly guilty: first because it failed to save its own citizens from destruction and, second, because it assisted and provided instruments of power for the genocide.<sup>67</sup>

Lázár's statement was welcomed by those who were interested in setting the Holocaust-related historical record straight; others were more skeptical not only because of the anti-democratic policies of the Orbán-led government, but also and primarily because it has condoned the glaringly anti-Semitic and racist policies and activities of several extremist political parties and movements.

To assist the work of the 2014 Memorial Committee, the government created a Civil Fund of 1.5 billion forints (approximately 6.8 million US dollars) for the support of civil and municipal initiatives and commemorative program proposals. Shortly after the deadline of November 15, 2013, the hundreds of proposals submitted by Jewish community organizations, branches of the Christian churches, cultural institutions, and individuals were reviewed and ranked by the Commission for Culture and Media of the Hungarian Parliament.<sup>68</sup>

The government's Holocaust commemoration plans were not universally applauded. Some argued that, given the political climate in the country and the dire economic conditions with high levels of unemployment, the allocation of such funds for the remembrance of the Holocaust might only stoke the fire of anti-Semitism and could be better used for helping the needy. Many others expressed their suspicion that the grandiose remembrance program had been designed to detract attention from the government's intentions to "denationalize" the Holocaust by transferring exclusive responsibility onto the Germans and concurrently to rehabilitate the Horthy era.

One of the most controversial projects in the government's commemoration plans was a decision to transform the former Józsefvárosi Railway Station into a museum honoring the children who were murdered during the Holocaust.<sup>69</sup> Early in July 2013, the Orbán government authorized the building of such a museum to be named "House of Fates - European Education Center" (*Sorsok Háza – Európai Oktatási Központ*).<sup>70</sup> To the dismay of many, the government entrusted Mária Schmidt, the controversial founder and director of the House of Terror (*Terror Háza*), with the realization of the new museum plans. As a visionary and director of the House of Terror, Schmidt has, in the view of many historians, used this richly funded institution to denigrate and minimize the Holocaust and emphasize the crimes that had been committed during the communist era.<sup>71</sup> Following her new assignment, Schmidt, assured of a large budgetary allocation, soon established an International Advisory Body (*Nemzetközi Tanácsadó Testület – NTT*) that included a number of reputable individuals, including a few scholars and several top Jewish community leaders.<sup>72</sup>

The appointment of Schmidt to build and lead a Holocaust-related museum aroused the ire not only of the official leaders of Hungarian Jewry but also of many individuals familiar with her professional background.<sup>73</sup>

Another development that cast a foreboding shadow on the Orbán government's history-cleansing plans was the inauguration of a new institute on January 2, 2014 – at the very start of the highly publicized Holocaust remembrance year. Named *VERITAS Történetkutató Intézet* (VERITAS Historical Research Institute), the new institute is envisioned “to strengthen national awareness” by re-studying and presumably re-writing Hungary's history of the past 150 years in a “genuinely multidisciplinary” fashion.<sup>74</sup> To carry out this “historically important patriotic task,” the institute was placed under the leadership of Dr. Sándor Szakály, a historian who had already distinguished himself as a defender of the wartime activities of the Hungarian gendarmerie and as a minimizer of the plight of the Jewish labor servicemen. Shortly after his appointment, Szakály demonstrated his history-cleansing qualifications for his appointment by reinterpreting two horrific events of the Nazi era. He first tried to “prove” that the fire that killed hundreds of labor servicemen at Doroshich in late April 1943 was caused by the Jews themselves.<sup>75</sup> On another occasion his portrayal minimized the roundup and deportation of approximately 18,000 “alien” Jews, most of whom were subsequently murdered near Kamenets-Podolsk in the summer of 1941, as merely a police raid against those who were illegally in the country.<sup>76</sup> What many assess as the falsification drive of the past few years was directed not only against the historical reality of the Holocaust era but also toward the distortion of the anti-Semitic record of the Horthy regime prior to the German occupation.<sup>77</sup>

What many cannot help but see as the Orbán government's *real* objectives in connection with the commemorative year were revealed within less than three weeks into 2014. On January

17, it announced its decision to erect a monument in commemoration of the German occupation of Hungary on March 19, 1944. The statue, depicting the crushing of Archangel Gabriel, symbolizing Hungary, by Germany's imperial eagle, was planned to be erected on Szabadság (Heroes') Square and unveiled on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the occupation.<sup>78</sup> The decision on the statue was a logical sequence to the deceitful preamble to the new constitution. Both of these measures by the Orbán government clearly aim to absolve Hungary of any responsibility for the Holocaust by denying its close and fruitful alliance with Nazi Germany, by identifying all casualties of the Second World War – the Jews who were destroyed with the involvement of Horthy's regime, the soldiers who died on the battlefields, and the civilians who were killed by enemy fire – as victims of the Germans.

Originally applauding the government's Holocaust remembrance plans, the leaders of the Jewish community became apprehensive by late 2013. Aware of Mária Schmidt's record, they first expressed their concerns over her suitability in building the Józsefvárosi Holocaust Museum. András Heisler, the president of Mazsihisz, expressed his apprehensions over her record of relativizing the Holocaust vis-à-vis the horrors of Communism; he emphasized the uniqueness of the tragedy of the Jews during the Holocaust.<sup>79</sup> Specific demands relating to the planned Museum were made during the December 2013 assembly of the Jewish Community of Budapest (*Budapesti Zsidó Hitközség* – BZSH), led by Péter Tordai. Distrustful of Schmidt's suitability, the leaders of the community requested that her advisory committee be expanded through the inclusion of their own nominees<sup>80</sup> – a request, reportedly, that she refused to honor.<sup>81</sup>

The Jewish community leaders' concerns over Schmidt's plans for the new Holocaust museum – plans scheduled to be realized by April 2014 – were compounded by their shock over Szakály's falsifications of history, and by their distress over the government's decision to build a

statue designed to falsify Hungary's active involvement in the Holocaust. In a public statement distributed by MTI (*Magyar Távirati Iroda*; Hungarian News Service) on January 19, they demanded not only the resignation of Szakály, but also issued a veiled warning:

The leaders of Mazsihisz request the representatives of political public life to prevent the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hungarian Holocaust from becoming part of the electoral campaign and to stop all attempts at the rewriting of our past history. If Hungary's government is serious about historically facing up to the Holocaust, it must immediately stop the ruinous and offensive processes that question the legitimacy of the series of events relating to the 2014 remembrance. ... Mazsihisz will use the funds awarded it from Civil Fund only if the series of remembrance events are returned to the path acceptable by our community.<sup>82</sup>

The following day Heisler addressed a formal letter to Prime Minister Orbán regarding the Jewish community's concerns. In his response of January 22, the prime minister assured Mr. Heisler of his government's determination to defend the interests of the Jewish community while restating his resolve to build the statue, insisting that one could not overlook the fate of those (i.e., the Christian Magyars) "who were imprisoned, dragged away, or murdered." Citing the new Hungarian Constitution, he implied that these victims were to be honored and remembered just like "your community's losses."

The uproar over the statue and the Holocaust-denigrating activities of the state-supported history-cleansers became considerably louder following the publication of an open letter that I addressed to the leaders of the Holocaust Memorial Center on January 26, 2014.<sup>83</sup> Picked up by several news services, the letter was published and commented upon in a large number of newspapers and periodicals in Hungary and many other parts of the world, galvanizing those dedicated to the preservation of the historical truth.<sup>84</sup>

Disturbed over the government-condoned drive to falsify the history of the Holocaust, the leaders of some of the local Jewish congregations and communal organizations decided not to

avail themselves of the grants that were allocated to them from the Civic Fund.<sup>85</sup> The same decision was taken by a number of individual grant awardees.<sup>86</sup> The ire over Orbán's unyielding position on the statue was also shared by many Christians.<sup>87</sup>

In an attempt to restore calm, János Lázár decided to convene a "Jewish Communal Roundtable" (*Zsidó Közösségi Kerekasztal*) on February 6.<sup>88</sup> Apparently, the Jewish representatives had been left unconvinced by Lázár, who claimed that "it was important to identify the facts that might lead closer to the question of responsibility." Ignoring that the facts of the Holocaust already had been verified in countless studies and through innumerable archival sources, the state secretary, defending the planned erection of the statue, declared that "it would be a falsification of history to claim that Hungary did not lose its sovereignty following the occupation of March 19, 1944."

The leaders of *Mazsihisz* found themselves in a bind. Clearly committed to the preservation of the historical record of the Holocaust, they also were mindful of their responsibility to the central and local Jewish communities for maintaining the various religious, cultural, and charity organizations and institutions – a responsibility they could fulfill only with the financial support of the government.<sup>89</sup> The government's adamant position on their demands induced these leaders to consider the possibility of boycotting the commemorative events. Under pressure from representatives of communal, social, religious, and cultural organizations, the leaders decided to convene an extraordinary general assembly – an unprecedented event in the 150-year history of Hungarian Jewry.<sup>90</sup>

In an unusual display of unity, at the meeting held on February 9, the delegates voted 72 to 2 with three abstentions in passing a resolution (No. 1/2014.02.09) that authorized *Mazsihisz*



to abstain from participating in the state-sponsored 2014 Holocaust Remembrance events unless the government agreed to:

1. Stop the erection of a statue relating to the German occupation because its symbol would contribute to the deflection of national responsibility for the Holocaust;
2. Stop work on the Józsefvárosi Museum because the community's experts were still left in the dark about its historical conceptions and the project leader [Mária Schmidt] has in effect failed to cooperate; and
3. Remove Sándor Szakály as head of Veritas because his public and professional declarations made him unsuitable for that position.<sup>91</sup>

The position of Mazsihisz was publicly supported not only by a group of Hungarian Christians, but also by the leaders of several international Jewish organizations.<sup>92</sup> Its wisdom was questioned primarily by the enthusiasts of Orbán's national-Christian policies.<sup>93</sup>

A day after the general assembly's historic decision, the Mazsihisz leaders forwarded a conciliatory letter to Prime Minister Orbán. Signed by András Heisler, Péter Tordai, and Gusztáv Zoltai, the leaders suggested, among other things, that instead of the controversial Schmidt-led Józsefvárosi Museum another institution – a House of Coexistence devoted to the symbiosis of Jewish and non-Jewish culture – should be built. While ignoring their earlier concerns over Szakály's activities, they also suggested that a dialogue be held over the planned statue commemorating the German occupation, arguing that the conflicts surrounding it “harm our homeland, Hungary.” Presumably designed not to further exacerbate the conflict, the letter was considered “wise” by some and as sycophantic and treacherous by others.<sup>94</sup>

Orbán's long-awaited response came on February 19. While acknowledging the “constructive” tone of their letter, he reminded the Jewish leaders about the initiatives he had

taken in support of Holocaust remembrance, including the establishment of the Holocaust Memorial Center and the designation of April 16 as the day of Holocaust remembrance. However, he failed to refer to any of the specific suggestions by the Jewish leaders and instead suggested that in light of the electoral campaign that officially began on February 15, the proposed dialogue be postponed until after the Easter holidays.

Lázár's reaction to Mazsihisz's stand was more bellicose. He lashed out at the Jewish leaders, identifying their "ultimatum" – something these leaders never gave – as a potential danger wrecking the government's plans for the commemoration of the Holocaust. He also charged them with "fomenting discord between Hungarians and Jews who have lived in unity and symbiosis for centuries," cynically "overlooking" the horrors of the Horthy era that culminated in the Holocaust.<sup>95</sup>

The chances for resolving the fundamental issues dividing the Jewish community and the Orbán government are slim. The assumption of responsibility for the Holocaust is currently "forbidden" under the new constitution. The resolution of the great divide will to a large extent depend on the outcome of the May 2014 elections, which most pundits believe will result in another Fidesz victory. In the meantime, the government will undoubtedly proceed with its grand design for the rehabilitation of the Horthy era, continue to transfer ultimate responsibility for the Holocaust onto the Germans, and go on condoning the anti-Semitic agitations of the neo-Fascist Jobbik party and its allies.<sup>96</sup> During the same time, more and more Jewish congregations and organizations probably will decide against participating in the government-sponsored memorial events and return the grants they had received from the Civic Fund.

The anti-Semitic and Holocaust-denigrating developments in Hungary since the systemic change in 1989 have shocked many people of good will – Jews and Christians alike. For a short

while immediately after the end of the Second World War it was generally believed that the Holocaust would put an end to the age-old scourge of anti-Semitism. Elie Wiesel, the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, once believed that the memory of the Holocaust would put to shame all those who were proud of their anti-Semitism. He recently admitted that he was wrong, asserting that people no longer are ashamed about being anti-Semitic. In Hungary this is largely due to the history-cleansing policies that the state and government leaders have pursued since the systemic change in 1989. The declarations of the government officials about their commitment to the proper commemoration the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Holocaust sound hollow in light of the constitutional provision they had adopted to exculpate Hungary from any responsibility.

The distortion, denigration, and actual denial of the Holocaust represent a new danger to the Jewish people. The survivors of the Holocaust have a special obligation to confront this danger. In the words of Elie Wiesel:

[A survivor's] duty is to bear witness for the dead and for the living. He has no right to deprive future generations of a past that belongs to our collective memory. To forget would be not only dangerous but offensive; to forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time.<sup>97</sup>

The anti-Semitic assault on memory is wrought with danger: without memory there is no history and without history there is no national-ethnic continuity. One is reminded of the party slogan in George Orwell's *1984*: "Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past." History is a formidable weapon. It is particularly corruptive and dangerous in the hands of chauvinistic nationalists bent on shaping history. Unless the historical revisionists and the history-cleansers are unmasked and counteracted, the record of the Holocaust inevitably will be tarnished, if not obliterated. One must protect the integrity of this record in order that the

world –the current and future generations – may learn its lessons and thereby avoid another cataclysm.

## Notes

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\*Some parts of this study were reproduced from an article published in *East European Quarterly*, Boulder, 33(January 2000)4: 411-425, and in *Hungary and the Holocaust: Confrontation with the Past. Symposium Proceedings*. Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2001, pp. 45–75.

<sup>1</sup> Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp.1312–1313. (Cited hereafter as Braham, *Politics*).

<sup>2</sup> For some details, see Randolph L. Braham, “Revisionism: Historical, Political, and Legal Implications.” In: *Comprehending the Holocaust – Historical and Literary Research*. Asher Cohen, et al., eds. (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1988), pp. 61–96.

<sup>3</sup> Between May 14, 1938 and March 27, 1945, the Hungarian authorities issued many hundreds of anti-Jewish “legal” measures. For details, see László Karsai, “Anti-Jewish Laws and Decrees in Hungary, 1920–1944.” In: *The Holocaust in Hungary: A European Perspective*. (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2005), pp. 143–179.

<sup>4</sup> Approximately 40,000 of these were labor servicemen; 18,000 to 20,000 were the so-called “alien” Jews who were deported in the summer of 1941 and murdered near Kamenets-Podolsk; and the remainder of the victims of the massacred in and around Újvidék early in 1942. See Braham, *Politics*, pp. 205–218. 1296. See also Krisztián Ungváry, *A Horthy rendszer mérlege: Diszkrimináció, szociálpolitika és antiszemitizmus* (The Balance of the Horthy Regime: Discrimination, Social Politics and Anti-Semitism). (Budapest: Jelenkor Kiadó, 2013), 607 p.

<sup>5</sup> For details on Hitler’s decision to occupy Hungary, see *ibid.*, pp. 381–405.

<sup>6</sup> When Maximilian von Weichs, the general in command of the invading forces was asked about the time he would need to accomplish his mission, he said 24 hours. “And in case of resistance?” he was asked. He responded 12 hours, because in that case there would be no welcoming speeches to attend. Krisztián Ungváry, “Kinek az emlékműve?” (Whose Monument?), *Népszava/Szabadság*, New York, January 31, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Seeing the enthusiasm with which his Hungarian accomplices carried out the Final Solution program, Eichmann commented that the Hungarians must surely be descended from the Huns since nowhere else had he seen so much brutality. The newly-appointed government of Sztójay included nine members of the deposed Kállay government. Krisztián Ungváry, “Az eleven borzalom” (The Living Horror). *HVG.hu*, January 21, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> For details, consult Braham, *Politics*. For additional scholarly accounts and personal narratives, consult the *Bibliography of the Holocaust in Hungary*. Randolph L. Braham, ed. (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs, 2011), 934 p.

<sup>9</sup> 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

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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.

<sup>10</sup> For details see Róbert Szabó Györi, *A kommunista párt és a zsidóság* (The Communist Party and Jewry) (Budapest: Windsor Kiadó, 1997), 350 pp.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. See especially, pp. 179-283.

<sup>12</sup> Among the most important of these publications are the three-volume *Vádirat a náciizmus ellen* (Indictment of Nazism) by Elek Karsai and Ilona Benoschofsky, (1960-1967); Karsai's two-volume "*Fegyvertelen álltak az aknamezőkön...*" (They Stood Unarmed in the Mine Fields . . . ; 1962); Mária Ember's *Hajtűkanyar* (Hairpin Bend; 1974); György Száraz's *Egy előítélet nyomában* (In the Footsteps of a Prejudice; 1976); and István Nemeskürty's *Requiem egy hadseregért* (Requiem for an Army; 1972).

<sup>13</sup> While in Budapest for the inauguration of *A magyar holocaust*, the Hungarian translation of my *The Politics of Genocide* in late January 1989, József Antall, Jr., then Executive Director of the Semmelweis Museum of Medical History, Library and Archives (*Semmelweis Orvostörténeti Múzeum, Könyvtár és Levéltár*), gently reproached me for not having written anything about his father József Antall, Sr., who as head of a section in the Ministry of the Interior in charge of refugees had saved a large number of Polish Jewish and non-Jewish refugees during the war. He sent me a number of archival documents relating to his father's activities, which I later used in the second editions of both the English and Hungarian versions of my two-volume work. On August 28, 2011, Reverend Tamás Majsai, a highly respected student of the Holocaust, sent me a copy of a forthcoming study which included several disturbing documents about Antall's wartime activities. According to Majsai's documentation, Antall, Sr. had in fact agitated against the Jewish refugees who sought or actually found refuge in Hungary.

<sup>14</sup> Sometime in 1990, Csurka, ousted from the party by Antall, formed his own the neo-Fascist Hungarian Justice and Life Party (*Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja*—MIÉP). He continued to be one of Hungary's leading anti-Semitic figures until his death on February 4, 2012.

<sup>15</sup> See László Karsai, "The Radical Right in Hungary." In: *The Radical Right in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989*. Sabrina P. Ramet, ed. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), pp. 133-146. See also his "Mitoszok, rágalmak és pártpropaganda" (Myths, Slanders, and Party Propaganda). *Kritika*, Budapest, December 1990, pp. 22-26, and January 1991, pp. 27-30.

<sup>16</sup> The remains of the Regent were brought back from Portugal, together with those of his wife and youngest son, and re-interred in their home town of Kenderes on September 4, 1993. Among the tens of thousands of Hungarians attending the reburial were a few leading members of the Antall government, including Péter Boross, Lajos Für, László Surján, István Balsai, and Béla Kádár. Randolph L. Braham, "The Reinterment and Political Rehabilitation of Miklós Horthy," in *Slavic Almanach* Vol. II. Henrietta Mondry and Paul Schweiger, eds. (Johannesburg: University of the Witwaterstand, 1993), pp. 137-40. See also my "Horthy Miklós újratemetése és politikai feltámadása" (The Reburial and Political Resurrection of Miklós Horthy), Menóra, Toronto, August 27, 1993, and reproduced in *Népszava/Szabadság*, New York, September 27, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Csoóri's diatribe was part of his autobiographical series *Nappali Hold* (Daytime Moon), published in *Hitel* (Credit), Budapest, September 5, 1990, p. 6. Like others, Csoóri singles out a few noted writers and poets, including Antal Szerb, Miklós Radnóti, and György Konrád, as "good Hungarians." The contrasting of a few "prominent" Jews with the rest of Jewry was also the technique used by Bishop Ottokár Prohászka, the notorious Catholic Jew-baiter, and Miklós Horthy himself.

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<sup>18</sup> For an overview of Péter Boross's political background and Holocaust-related views, see László Bartus, "Boross." *Népszava/Szabadság*, New York, February 14, 2014, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> See Decision No. 2/1994.(I.14) AB, which was adopted on January 11, 1994, in *Az Alkotmánybíróság határozatai* (Decisions of the Constitutional Court), Budapest, No.1, 1994, pp. 9-20.

<sup>20</sup> Horn was one of the leaders of the radical reformers who changed the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party into the Hungarian Socialist Party in 1989. He played a major role in Hungary's transition to democracy.

<sup>21</sup> In late 1998, the Orbán government sought to ease the collective conscience of the nation by offering to compensate survivors by paying approximately \$150 for each member of their particular immediate families, assuming that they can prove that their loved ones were in fact victims of the Holocaust. The reparation offer was based on Law XXIX of 1997. The survivors who availed themselves of this offer discovered, after considerable time-consuming paper work, that even this amount was to be obtained in forints and spent in Hungary. The issue of the heirless and unclaimed property has still not been resolved. As a result of negotiations with the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO), represented by a delegation headed by Moshe Sanbar, and the Hungarian government, represented by István Hiller, then Minister of Education and Culture, the Hungarians transferred \$21 million to the Jewish Heritage of Public Endowment of Hungary (*Magyarországi Zsidó Örökség Közalapítvány – MAZSÖK*), as a down payment on the value of all heirless and unclaimed, formerly Jewish-owned private property in the country. MAZSÖK, created in 1997, distributed one-third of the amount for the benefit of Holocaust survivors residing in Hungary, while two-thirds of the fund is being distributed and administered by the Claims Conference to assist survivors of Hungarian origin in need residing outside of Hungary. The WJRO is currently in discussions with government officials, primarily János Lázár, regarding the resumption of negotiations relating to remaining open restitution issues. As part of these discussions, in November 2013, WJRO submitted a paper to Hungary reviewing approaches taken by other European countries regarding the restitution of heirless and other unclaimed property. Lázár's predecessors on these negotiations were István Hiller and András Levente Gál.

<sup>22</sup> For example, see the ruling by the Hungarian Constitutional Court of June 30, 1995, and Decree No. 118/1998 of the Council of Ministers. To cite just one example of the difficulties, access to the archives of the National Central Alien Control Office (KEOKH), which was the agency that was responsible for the roundup and deportation of nearly 18,000 "alien" Jews in the summer of 1941, most of whom were slaughtered near Kamenets-Podolsk, was reportedly blocked for ninety years.

<sup>23</sup> The restrictions continued to be strictly enforced. The frustration over these restrictions was felt not only by individual scholars but also by such world-renowned Holocaust-related archival and research centers as Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. Miles Lerman, then chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, expressed this frustration in a letter addressed to Prime Minister Orbán on June 17, 1999. Among other things, he stated: "After several rounds of discussions with Hungarian officials and archivists and a series of unfortunate experiences, we have reached the regrettable conclusion that Hungary has failed to cooperate with the Museum in its efforts and stands nearly alone among countries in Europe in its failing to make available its records on the Holocaust."

<sup>24</sup> Orbán's FIDESZ Hungarian Civic Party and his coalition partners (i.e., the right-wing rural-based Smallholders' Party led by József Torgyán and the Hungarian Democratic Forum led by Ibolya Dávid) controlled only 213 seats (55 percent) of the total 386 seats in Parliament. For some details on anti-Semitic incidents since the inauguration of the Orbán government, see Marta S. Halpert, "Hungary: A Growing Tolerance for Anti-Semitism," *ADL International Notes*, New York, December 1999.

<sup>25</sup> Early in 2000, the Orbán government restored the Royal Crown of St. Stephen as the symbol of the Hungarian state. Overlooking the inherent contradiction between the symbol of a royal crown and Hungary's current democratic, republican form of government, Zsolt Lányi, vice president of the Independent Smallholders' Party and chairman of Parliament's armed services committee, for example, declared that the Crown represented "the embodiment of Christian Hungary." The Orbán government also revived the Corvin Prize, the state award

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introduced by Horthy in 1930. Some nationalists have also called for the restoration of noble titles and knighthood rituals, the honoring of those who fought for the Fascist cause as “heroes,” and the renaming of a street in Budapest for Horthy. Alex Bandy, “Hungary Revives Nationalist Symbols,” *The Associated Press*, December 14, 1999, and Zoltán Vajda, “Horthyról mégsem neveznek el utat” (There Will Be No Road Named for Horthy), *Magyar Hírlap*, March 17, 2000.

<sup>26</sup> Early in November 1999, she declared, among other things, that the “experience of the post-Communist era revealed a great societal need for the representation of Christian-conservative values based on national traditions.” For some details on Dávid’s activities, see “Antallra emlékezett az MDF: Dávid Ibolya pártelnök a demokrata fórum integráló szerepéről” (The MDF Memorialized Antall: Ibolya Dávid, the Party President, on the Integrating Role of the Democratic Forum). *Népszabadság*, November 1, 1999. During her tenure, Dávid consistently rejected the Jewish leaders’ plea for her to initiate legislation making Holocaust-denial punishable.

<sup>27</sup> The many personal narratives by Holocaust survivors are virtually unanimous in their recollection of the barbaric behavior of the gendarmes during the roundup, expropriation, ghettoization, and deportation of the Jews. For references to these narratives, consult the bibliography listed in note 7.

<sup>28</sup> Titled *Hiven, becsülettel, vitézül* (Faithfully, With Honor, Bravely), the logo of the gendarmerie, the documentary featured a few experts on national security, including Sándor Szakály and József Parádi, who were also involved in its production.

<sup>29</sup> Among those featured in the film were Captain István Jáni, the former commander of the gendarmes in the ghetto of Szombathely; First Lieutenant László Radnay and First Lieutenant Mihály Gerencséry, who were convicted for their involvement in the Újvidék massacres in early 1942; First Lieutenant Pál Bugarin-Horváth, who was involved in the ghettoization of Jews in Matészalka; and Sergeant József Szendi, who was deported from the United States for hiding his background and involvement in the anti-Jewish drive.

<sup>30</sup> In addition to permitting the publication of venomously anti-Semitic, Holocaust-denying periodicals such as *Hunnia* and *Szent Korona*, the Hungarian authorities also consented to the reissuing of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* (see note 34) and the notorious forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, works that were effectively exploited by the Nazis and their Hungarian hirelings in the drive against the Jews.

<sup>31</sup> During the administration of Gordon Bajnai (April 14, 2009 – May 29, 2010), the Criminal Code (*Büntető Törvénykönyv*) was amended by Parliament on February 22, 2010. In January 2013 a Holocaust-denier was convicted and sentenced to visit the Holocaust Documentation Center in Budapest at least three times. For some details on the legal issues surrounding Holocaust denial in Hungary, see <http://www.jogiforum.hu/hirek/22695>.

<sup>32</sup> For example, István Stumpf, a top-ranking minister in the Orbán government, misled his Stockholm audience at the January 2000 summit conference on the Holocaust. He did so by failing to address Hungary’s anti-Jewish historical record of the 1938-1945 period. For the text of his talk, see *Új Kelet* (New East), Tel Aviv, February 4, 2000.

<sup>33</sup> The planned exhibit attempted to portray a virtual symbiosis of Hungarian-Jewish life since the emancipation of the Jews in 1867, downplaying the many anti-Jewish manifestations as mere aberrations in an otherwise chivalrous history of Hungary. While focusing attention 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, and Horthy’s “saving” of the Jews of Budapest, it blamed almost exclusively the Germans for the destruction of the Jews. In connection with the pre-Holocaust era, the planned exhibit failed to deal with various aspects of the anti-Jewish drive, including the anti-Semitic manifestations of the pre-World War I era; the agitation of the so-called Patriotic Associations; the pogroms by the counterrevolutionary forces during the White Terror; the enactment of ever harsher anti-Jewish laws; the shared responsibility of the Christian churches for reinforcing the



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climate of anti-Semitism by approving the adoption of virtually all anti-Jewish measures; the inequities of the forced labor service system; the deportation and subsequent murder of nearly 18,000 "alien" Jews in the summer of 1941; and the mass murder of Jews during the so-called Délvidék raids early in 1942. In connection with the Holocaust, the planned exhibit falsified the historical record by placing exclusive blame on the Germans. The Jewish leaders, as did many others interested in a cooperative resolution of the issue of the new exhibit in Auschwitz, were in favor of authorizing another "team of experts" to prepare a historically accurate and a politically neutral exhibit. Toward this end they hoped to keep the whole affair under cover. But it exploded into the open on September 8, 1999, when the *Népszabadság*, Hungary's most popular daily, revealed the Jewish community's negative reaction to the planned exhibit. Taken aback by the avalanche of critical reviews, officials of the Ministry of Culture recommended that the project be shelved, saving the nation from an international scandal.

<sup>34</sup> The Jewish community leaders forwarded a copy of the script for my own evaluation and input. I read it with great personal and professional interest. As a survivor of the Holocaust in Hungary, I was shocked by its tone and content; as a historian, I was disturbed by its clearly political-propagandistic objective. I found it a clearly pro-Horthy apologia designed to sanitize the Nazi era in general and the Hungarians' involvement in the Final Solution in particular. I thought it was especially obscene that the author and his supporters aimed to achieve these objectives through an exhibit in Auschwitz!

<sup>35</sup> This view is espoused by, among others, Aron Mónus. See his epilogue to the 1996 Hungarian edition of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (Harcot. Hódmezővásárhely: Interseas Editions, p. 366). He reiterated the same views in *Új Magyarország* (New Hungary), Budapest, August 13, 1994, p. 5. See László Karsai, "The Radical Right in Hungary," op. cit.

<sup>36</sup> This view has been expressed by, among others, István Jáni, who is the former gendarmerie captain in charge of a unit guarding the ghetto of Szombathely. See note 28.

<sup>37</sup> This view was aired by then Foreign Minister Géza Jeszenszky on April 5, 1994, during the opening session of the International Scholars' Conference in Budapest, "The Holocaust in Hungary: Fifty Years Later." His comments caused a scandal in the hall as well as in the press. For example, see "Holocaust-konferencia: kitapsolták a külügyminisztert" (Holocaust Conference: Foreign Minister Shouted Down) in *Népszabadság* (People's Freedom), Budapest, April 6, 1994; "Az igazság megismeréséért, a lelkek megbékéléséért" (To Know the Truth and Give Peace to the Spirit) in *Esti Hírlap*, Budapest, April 6, 1994, p. 3; "Holocaust-tanácskozás Budapesten, Jeszenszky—kitapsolt párhuzam" (Holocaust Discussion in Budapest, Jeszenszky—Parallelism Shouted Down), by Éva V. Bálint and Éva Cseh in *Magyar Hírlap*, Budapest, April 6, 1994; "Holocaust-konferencia Budapesten, Jeszenszky Géza beszédét félbeszakították" (Holocaust Conference Budapest, Géza Jeszenszky's Speech Interrupted), by Sára Szeli in *Pesti Hírlap*, Budapest, April 6, 1994.

<sup>38</sup> One of the most vocal representative of this position has been János Horváth, a rightist member of the Hungarian Parliament. He tried to lecture me on the veracity of his position at a meeting with various Hungarian officials, including Zsolt Németh, State Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at the Hungarian Consulate General in New York on November 30, 1998.

<sup>39</sup> Many communities in Hungary have erected plaques and monuments honoring the local martyrs of the war, listing them alphabetically irrespective of the circumstances of their death. The same approach is followed in many memorial books. For example, see *Somogy megye a II. világháborúban* (Somogy County in the Second World War), Péter Szabó and Ferenc Szily, eds. (Kaposvár: A Somogy Megye Levéltár kiadása, 1993), 539 pp. Pages 179-536 of the book, for which Sándor Szakály wrote the introduction and served as editorial consultant, contain the listing of the wartime casualties by communities. With this approach, which amalgamates Jewish and non-Jewish casualties into a single category, the number of Christian victims is almost three times as high as that of the Jews killed during the Holocaust: Soldiers, 5,916; civilians, 4,498; Jews, 3,539.

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<sup>40</sup> Champions of this group argue, among other things, that the suffering of the Jews was due to the fact that they had sided with the Allies and actually participated in revolts in many ghettos and concentration camps. For example, see “Összehasonlító véralgebra és a holocaust” (Comparative Blood Algebra and the Holocaust) by István Lovas in *Népszabadság* (People’s Freedom), Budapest, March 5, 1999, p. 10.

<sup>41</sup> At the London conference on the Holocaust on April 17-18, 1994, for example, Mária Schmidt was virtually shouted down by members of the audience when it appeared to many that she was trying to “prove” that the postwar Communist regime in Hungary was more oppressive than the pro-Nazi Sztójay government. Her paper was excluded from the volume dealing with the conference (*Genocide and Rescue: The Holocaust in Hungary, 1944*, David Cesarani, ed. (Oxford: Berg, 1997).

<sup>42</sup> Supporters of this argument rely for documentation on *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* by Stéphane Courteois, et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 858 pp. In a controversial speech (see note 43), Ms. Schmidt emphasized that while the Communist regimes were responsible for nearly 100 million victims, the Nazis killed only about 25 million. In this context, see also some of her essays in her *Diktatúrák ördögsekerén* (In the Devil’s Cauldron of Dictatorships ) (Budapest: Magvető, 1998), 289 pp.

<sup>43</sup> Within a few years after the systemic change of 1989, she emerged as a crusader for the rehabilitation of former Prime Minister László Bárdossy, who was executed for war crimes in 1946. For example, see her “Az első kirakatper” (The First Show Trial), *Ibid.*, pp. 217-30. The article was first read as a paper at the Vienna Conference of November 2-5, 1995, held under the sponsorship of the *Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen*. This writer took pains to remind her and the audience that the former prime minister was not only the “statesman” she basically portrayed him to be but also the man during whose relatively brief tenure as head of government (April 4, 1941–March 7, 1942), Hungary among other things declared war first on the Soviet Union and then the Western Allies; adopted the Nuremberg-type Third anti-Jewish Law; aggravated the status of the Jewish labor servicemen; rounded up nearly 18,000 so-called “alien” Jews, who were deported and subsequently murdered near Kamenets-Podolsk; and massacred more than 3,300 men, women, and children in and around Újvidék. György Dancsecs, a top-ranking leader of István Csurka’s neo-Fascist Hungarian Justice and Life Party in Budapest, launched an initiative in late October 1999, for the re-trial and possible rehabilitation of the former prime minister. *Népszabadság*, October 22, 1999. A month later, the initiative for the judicial rehabilitation of Bárdossy was publicly endorsed by Csurka himself. Michael Shafir, “Radical Politics in East-Central Europe.” *RFE/RL East European Perspectives* 2:2 (January 26, 2000), p. 6.

<sup>44</sup> Ms. Schmidt’s talk was given under the auspices of the Eckhardt Tibor Political Academy (*Eckhardt Tibor Politikai Akadémia* ) at the headquarters of the Independent Smallholders’ Party (*Független Kisgazdapárt*). For text, see Mária Schmidt, “Holokausztok a huszadik században” (Holocausts in the Twentieth Century), *Magyar Hírlap* (Hungarian Journal), Budapest, November 13, 1999.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> For example, see Tamás Gáspár Miklós, “Sírablok és halottgyalázók” (Grave Robbers and Vilifiers of the Dead), *Ibid.*, November 16, 1999, and Sándor Kopátsy. “Holocaust csak egy volt” (There Was Only One Holocaust), *Ibid.*, November 23, 1999.

<sup>47</sup> In this capacity and with a huge budget at her disposal, some people believe that Ms. Schmidt reportedly has the power to determine which historians and projects will receive state funding. According to a published report, “she also backs the unrestricted publication and distribution of *Mein Kampf*, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and other anti-Semitic tracts, which are selling well in many Budapest bookstores in new Hungarian editions.” Michael J. Jordan, “Hungary Whitewashes Its Murky Past,” *Jerusalem Report* 10:23 (March 13, 2000), pp. 30-31.

According to many reports, Schmidt has also been exerting considerable influence on shaping media policy. Some details about her role in this area were revealed in the March 2, 2000 judgment of the *Pesti Központi Kerületi*

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*Bíróság* (Central Regional Court of Pest) in a libel case she initiated – and lost – against the *Magyar Hirlap*. For the text of the judgment, see *Magyar Hirlap*, April 6, 2000.

<sup>48</sup> See “Orbán bizik Schmidt Máriában” (Orbán Has Confidence in Mária Schmidt), *Népszabadság*, November 17, 1999. Among the nationalist-rightist organizations that expressed support of Schmidt’s activities is the *Történelmi Igazságtétel Bizottság* (Committee for Historical Justice). See *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Anti-Semites and ultra-nationalists continuously emphasize that most of the leaders of the short-lived proletarian dictatorship of 1919 were “Jews,” overlooking the fact that these Communists of Jewish origin were in reality “magyarized internationalists” whose class-oriented social and economic policies hurt the Jewish community even more than they did the Christian society. Of course, these anti-Semites also predictably fail to note that the counterrevolutionary forces that succeeded the proletarian dictatorship killed many more human beings – Jews and non-Jews alike – than the Communists.

As to the postwar Communist era, they also fail to note that the Communist Party of Hungary had more than 800,000 members in the late 1980s, among whom the percentage of Jews was relatively small (the total Hungarian Jewish population was only around 80,000). Moreover, the top leadership of the Party, like its membership in general, consisted overwhelmingly of ethnic Hungarians, the Jews having been largely purged in the wake of the anti-Zionist and anti-cosmopolitan campaign that began during the Stalinist era

<sup>50</sup> A notorious example of this was the comment by G. Nagyné Maczó Ágnes, a representative of the Smallholder’s Party and one of the vice presidents of the Hungarian Parliament. During a speech on March 17, 1997, the former member of the right-of-center Hungarian Democratic Forum reminded Imre Szekeres, the leader of the Hungarian Socialist Party faction, that his predecessor was “the Hungarian-hating Manó Roth,” which was a clear reference to Mátyás Rákosi, the Stalinist leader of Jewish origin. Ignoring the fact that Rákosi was perhaps an even greater Jew-hater, the parliamentary vice president clearly did not even know that Rákosi’s original name was Rosenfeld. For some details on this incident, see Péter Regős, “Zsidózó ‘56-os vendég” (An Anti-Semitic Guest of the ‘56 [Generation]), *Menóra*, Toronto, October 3-10, 1997.

<sup>51</sup> Horrible and murderous as the Gulags were, the inmates were overwhelmingly political and performed tasks deemed useful by the Soviet state. These history cleansers ignore the fact that, unlike the Jews deported to Auschwitz, the Gulag inmates, identified as “enemies of the people,” were allowed to receive mail, food packages, medical care, and occasionally visits during the period of their incarceration. While millions of Gulag inmates died or were killed during the seventy-year history of the Soviet Union, their entire families were not automatically subjected to genocidal treatment as the Jews were during the Holocaust.

For a balanced overview of the basic differences between Auschwitz and the Gulag, see Steven T. Katz, *The Holocaust and Comparative History* (New York: Leo Baeck Institute, 1993), pp. 18-25.

<sup>52</sup> In the elections of April 11 and April 25, 2010, his FIDESZ–Hungarian Civic Union and its coalition partner, the Christian Democratic People’s Union (KDNP), won 261 seats, constituting a supermajority of 67.88 percent. The extremist neo-Nazi party, the Jobbik (*Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom*; Movement for a Better Hungary), gained 47 seats (12.18 percent), emerging as the third-largest party represented in the Hungarian Parliament.

<sup>53</sup> Tamás Stark, Péter Szabó, and Sándor Szakály, “Második világháború: A magyar munkaszolgálat” (The Second World War: The Hungarian Labor Service), *Magyar Nemzet* (Hungarian Nation), Budapest, February 20, 1992 and February 28, 1992. In rebuttal, see Randolph L. Braham, “Nyugtalanító gyakorlatok Magyarországon a Holocausttal kapcsolatban” (Disturbing Research Practices on the Holocaust in Hungary), *Menóra*, Toronto, May 29, 1992, pp. 3-4.

<sup>54</sup> See also Rabbi Marvin Hier, “Remembrance Needs to Emphasize Villains, Not Heroes,” *Martyrdom and Resistance*, New York, March-April 1995, p. 12.

A relevant example of this possible conclusion is based on a personal experience I had in Budapest in September 1997. I found that all of the graduating students of the Jewish High School were acquainted with the wartime

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activities of Raoul Wallenberg, but none of them had any recollection of ever having heard or read anything about László Endre or László Baký. Since these students were completely unaware of the key role that these high-ranking Hungarian officials had played in the destruction of the Jews, one can assume that the same students were basically ignorant of the Holocaust in general. If this is the case with students graduating from the *Jewish High School* in Budapest, one can surmise the level of Holocaust awareness on the part of Christian students in the capital, let alone in the countryside.

<sup>55</sup> Sándor Püski, a publisher and book-dealer went even further, claiming that the Horthy regime entered World War II to save the Hungarian Jews and could not end the alliance with Hitler for the same reason. For some details on this outlandish position, see Ivan Berend, “‘Jobbra át [Right Face]’: Right-Wing Trends in Post-Communist Hungary.” In: *Democracy and Right-Wing Politics in Eastern Europe in the 1990s*, Joseph Held, ed. (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1993), pp. 127–128.

<sup>56</sup> It was partially this agreement that the perpetrators exploited as the “legal” basis for their drive against the Jews. Cynically arguing that the Jewish workers would be happier with their loved ones with them, the Hungarian law enforcement officials proceeded, in accordance with directives received from the Ministry of the Interior, to round up all Jews in the countryside irrespective of their age, sex, or medical status.

<sup>57</sup> Braham, *Politics*, pp. 393, 397–401.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1063–1064.

<sup>59</sup> While mythmakers operating at opposite ends of the political spectrum also claim credit for Heinrich Himmler and Raoul Wallenberg, very few find it politically fashionable to acknowledge the decisive role that the Red Army had played in the liberation of the Jews. The chief spokesman for Himmler’s alleged role in rescuing the Jews of Budapest is SS-Sturmbannführer Wilhelm Höttl (Walter Hagen), former head of the Intelligence Service of the Security Service in Vienna (which covered Hungary). See his interview in Péter Bokor’s *Végjáték a Duna mentén* (Endgame Along the Danube) (Budapest: RTV-Minerva-Kossuth, 1982) p. 192. See also Braham, *Politics*, p. 939, note 152.

<sup>60</sup> At a lunch at the Hungarian Consulate in New York on November 28, 2011, Ambassador Károly Dán revealed his plans for such a commemoration, inviting me to get involved. While aware of the government’s intentions, I submitted some ideas, which were considered with reservation. I suggested, among other things, to synchronize the event in conjunction with an address on Wallenberg that I already had prepared as part of the Fall 2012 lecture series of the Institute for Holocaust Studies at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. The ambassador apparently informed the Hungarian Foreign Ministry because the May 15, 2012 issue of *Új Élet*, the official organ of the Jewish community of Hungary, reported that a Wallenberg symposium would take place on October 10, 2012 “under the patronage of Professor Randolph Braham.” It did not take place because I did not want to cooperate with the ambassador’s expectations. He managed to persuade the head of the Museum of Jewish Heritage to co-operate in the sponsorship of a lecture on Wallenberg by Kati Marton sometime in November 2012.

<sup>61</sup> *Új Élet*, Budapest, May 15, 2012.

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, László Bartus, “Tollhegy,” *Amerikai Magyar Népszava/Szabadság*, New York, June 1, 2012.

<sup>63</sup> It was on April 16, 1944, the last day of Passover, that the roundup and ghettoization of the Jews of Carpatho-Ruthenia and northeastern Hungary began. The date establishing the Memorial Day for the Victims of the Holocaust in Hungary (*a Holokauszt Magyarországi Áldozatainak Emléknapja*) was set by the National Assembly (*Országgyűlés*) on January 18, 2000, and was first observed by high school students on April 16, 2001.

<sup>64</sup> The Holocaust Memorial Center, officially known as the Holocaust Documentation Center and Public Foundation for Memorial Collection (*Holocaust Dokumentációs Központ és Emlékgyűjtemény Közalapítvány*), is the successor organization of the Hungarian Auschwitz Foundation (*a Magyar Auschwitz Alapítvány*), a private organization that

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was established in 1990 by a historian (Szabolcs Szita) and two survivors of the Holocaust (László November and Gábor Verő).

<sup>65</sup> Among the most persuasive expressions of sorrow over the Holocaust during the past few years were those by Deputy Prime Minister Tibor Navracsics and Foreign Minister János Martonyi during the October 1–2, 2013 conference on Jewish life and anti-Semitism organized by the Tom Lantos Institute. For text, see *Múlt és Jövő*, Budapest, 2013/3, pp. 6–10. Similar sentiments were expressed by Csaba Kőrösi, Hungary’s ambassador to the United Nations, and by President János Áder on the occasion of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day (January 27). It was in the same vein that János Lázár, the secretary of state in charge of the Prime Minister’s Office, spoke on the same occasion at the UNESCO in Paris on January 28, 2014.

<sup>66</sup> Among those who were invited to participate were representatives of the various Jewish organizations, of the Christian Churches, various ministers, the president of the Hungarian Academy of Science, and the ambassadors of Austria, Germany, Israel, and the United States.

<sup>67</sup> *Új Élet*, Budapest, February 1, 2013.

<sup>68</sup> The Civil Fund was created under the provisions of Decision No. 1688/2013 of September 30, 2013, and implemented under the provisions of Paragraph 68 of Decree 368/2011.(XII.31.)Korm. Applications were invited not only from organizations and individuals in Hungary but also from those in the Successor States (Croatia, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia), parts of whose territories were part of Hungary during the Holocaust. The list of the award recipients was published in the middle of December 2013. By early 2014, the government had added an additional 300 million forints to the Civic Fund.

<sup>69</sup> The idea of transforming the defunct station into a Holocaust-related museum originated with Szabolcs Szita, the director of the HDKE. His idea was to use the museum as an education center in honor of Raoul Wallenberg (*Raoul Wallenberg Európai Emlékhely és Oktatási Központ*; The Raoul Wallenberg European Memorial and Education Center).

<sup>70</sup> The name reportedly was selected to counteract the impact the Nobel-laureate Imre Kertész had had with his autobiographical novel *Sorstalanság* (Fatelessness).

<sup>71</sup> One can only speculate whether the intention of Schmidt and of her history-cleansing nationalist supporters was to induce the visitors to conclude that the crimes committed by the communists (often a codename for Jews) were equal, if not more horrendous, than the ones the Nazis and their few “misguided Hungarian *Nyilas*” had committed against the Jews during the war.

<sup>72</sup> The first organizational meeting of the NTT was held on September 30, 2013, with the participation of György Haraszti; Professor Gabriel Gorodetsky, an Oxford University historian; Professor Muravchik of Johns Hopkins University; Professor Michael Wolffsohn of Munich; Anne Applebaum, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist; János Szász, a film producer-director; Annette Lantos, the late Congressman Tom Lantos’s widow; Yehudit Shendar and Chava Baruch, as representatives of Yad Vashem; András Heisler, the president of MAZSIHISZ; and Rabbi Andrew Baker, Director of International Jewish Affairs of the American Jewish Committee. Sara Bloomfield, the Director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, diplomatically rejected Mária Schmidt’s personal invitation to participate in the NTT. Paul Shapiro, the Director of the Museum’s Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies also refused an invitation proffered by Hungary’s Deputy Foreign Minister Zsolt Németh during a visit to Washington. Ms. Bloomfield reportedly suggested that instead of building a new Józsefvárosi museum, the authorities should support more generously the Holocaust Documentation Center already in existence in Budapest. Heisler resigned from the International Advisory Committee on March 5, 2014.

<sup>73</sup> See her characterization above. See also László Karsai’s “Schmidt Mária és a holokausz” (Mária Schmidt and the Holocaust), *Népszabadság*, Budapest, February 19, 2014.

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<sup>74</sup> According to many sources, one of Orbán's chief advisers on Veritas and the entire history-cleansing campaign is Péter Boross, a former prime minister. By authorizing and financing Veritas, one is led to conclude that the Orbán government had lost confidence in the competence and scholarly activities of the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

<sup>75</sup> Szakály made this outrageous claim during a radio roundtable discussion, "The Royal Hungarian Army, Gendarmerie, and the Holocaust" on October 8, 2013. An abbreviated transcript of the discussion was published in the online October 23, 2013 issue of *Népszava*, Budapest, and in the November 8, 2013 edition of the New York-based *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*. For some details on the Hungarian soldiers' involvement in the mass murder of the Jewish labor servicemen in Doroshich, in rebuttal to Szakály's distortions, see Daniel Löwy, "Valójában mi is történt Dorosicsban?" (What Did in Reality Happen in Doroshich?), *Kritika*, Budapest, 43(January–February 2014)1–2: 2–6. See also Braham, *Politics*, pp. 333–334.

<sup>76</sup> For details on the tragedy of the "alien" Jews, see *ibid.*, pp. 207–214.

<sup>77</sup> As part of the commemoration year, the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration (*Közigazgatási és Igazságügyi Minisztérium*-- KIM) announced plans for the organization of a mobile exhibition titled Famous Hungarians in the Great World (*Híres magyarok a nagyvilágban*) that would focus attention on 21 Jews who had become famous after leaving Hungary. The announcement emphasized that these Jews had left the country "in order to advance their knowledge and talent abroad, raising thereby the Hungarians' reputation in the world." This announcement falsifies the history of the Horthy era not only by limiting the number of the Jewish scholars and scientists who were compelled by the anti-Jewish laws to study abroad, but also by ignoring the large number of Hungarian-Jewish scholars and artists who were murdered during the Holocaust. Miklós Hernádi, "Emlékezik a KIM" (The KIM Remembers). *Élet és Irodalom*, Budapest, February 7, 2014.

<sup>78</sup> The decision on the plans for the statue was reached without the involvement of any historians. See the letter, dated January 21, 2014, addressed to János Lázár by Professor Attila Pók, secretary of the *Magyar Történelmi Társulat* (Hungarian Historical Association), in *Múlt és Jövő*, Budapest, 2013/4, p. 20. To substantiate his complaint, Pók attached a listing of the six historical realities relating to the consequences of the German occupation noted by Dr. Krisztián Ungváry in his "Az eleven borzalom" (The Living Horror). *HVG.Hu*, January 21, 2014.

<sup>79</sup> *Új Élet*, January 15, 2014.

<sup>80</sup> The Jewish leaders requested the inclusion of Chief Rabbi Alfred Schöner; Imre Lebovits as representative of the survivors; Tamás Ungváry, the literary historian; Zoltán Vági, the Holocaust specialist; and Zsuzsanna Toronyi, the archivist of the Hungarian Jewish Archives (*a Magyar Zsidó Levéltár*). *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Perhaps in light of the criticism surrounding her activities, in early February 2014, Mária Schmidt contacted me and several other well-known scholars, including Professors István Deák and Mária M. Kovács, requesting that we – as experts in the field – assist her work on the construction of the Józsefvárosi Museum by offering constructive suggestions. I decided not to respond.

<sup>82</sup> "Szakály Sándor lemondását követeli a Mazsihisz" (Mazsihisz Demands the Resignation of Sándor Szakály). *Népszabadság*, Budapest, January 19, 2014. In an interview published in the January 22 issue of the daily ("Történész, kezében szivaccsal"; Historian with a Sponge in His Hand), I expressed my support for Mazsihisz's position, identifying Szakály's distortions of the Holocaust era by referring to the saying: "Behind every tyrant with a sword there's a historian with a sponge."

<sup>83</sup> I addressed my open letter to György Haraszi and Szabolcs Szita, the top leaders of the Holocaust Memorial Center, requesting that my name be removed from the HMC's Library and Information Center (*Téka és Információs Központ*). I also announced my decision to return the Medium Cross of the Order of the Republic of Hungary, together with the scroll signed by President Pál Schmitt, which I received in October 2011. I resolved to act not only in protest against the shocking Holocaust-denigrating activities at the very start of the Holocaust remembrance year,

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but also in reaction to the questionable activities of the HMC, including the active involvement of its leaders in the Mária Schmidt-led planning of the *Sorsok Háza* and in the organization of a conference on January 27, 2014, to which they also invited Sándor Szakály. For details on the conference, see “Katolikusok voltak a holokauszt áldozatai?” (Were the Victims of the Holocaust Catholic?). *Amerikai Magyar Népszava Online*, January 23, 2014.

<sup>84</sup> A declaration of support for my stand was published in the January 31, 2014, issue of *Népszava*. It was signed by well-known writers, professionals, and theologians, including István Deák, Ágnes Heller, Gábor Iványi, László Karsai, György Konrád, Judit Molnár, József Schweitzer, Krisztián Ungváry, and Mária Vásárhelyi. A declaration in support of the protest by the Hungarians was published by a number of foreign scholars specializing in various aspects of Hungarian history on February 2. Among the signers were Eva S. Balogh, Yehuda Bauer, Holly Case, Tim Cole, Christian Gerlach, Eleonore Lappin-Eppel, Julia Richers, and Georg Sessler.

<sup>85</sup> The first to act in this respect, on January 28, 2014, was the Jewish Congregation of Érsekújvár (Nové Zámky). It was followed by that of Nyíregyháza, and a number of foundations. See *Új Élet*, Budapest, February 15, 2014.

<sup>86</sup> One of the most notable among these was Róber Garai, the actor-playwright, who decided not to avail himself of the 2.5 million forints awarded him by the Civic Fund. *Szombat Online*, February 11, 2014.

<sup>87</sup> Rudolf Ungváry, the noted Hungarian writer, for example, asserted that if “Mazsihisz and the other Jewish and non-Jewish organizations continued, in light of the issue of the statue, to cooperate to any degree in the state-organized Holocaust-year then this could not be compared to the cowardice of the wartime Jewish Council because then its members were fearful for their lives.” *Magyar Narancs Online*, January 25, 2014.

<sup>88</sup> Among those who decided not to attend was Rabbi Slomó Köves, head of the United Jewish Congregation of Hungary (*Egységes Magyarországi Izraelita Hítközség*).

<sup>89</sup> For a perceptive analysis of the Jewish leaders’ predicament, see Mátyás, Eörsi, “Keretek és korlátok. A Mazsihisz külső és belső harcáról” (Framework and Limits. On Mazsihisz’s Outer and Inner Battles). *Magyar Narancs*, Budapest, February 20, 2014.

<sup>90</sup> Personal communication by Dr. János Kőbányai, the editor and publisher of *Múlt és Jövő*, dated January 31, 2014.

<sup>91</sup> “Mazsihisz: példa nélküli egység!” (Mazsihisz: Unprecedented Unity). *Új Élet*, Budapest, February 15, 2014. Mazsihisz’s stand was also supported by a group of Christians. “Magyar keresztényként felemeljük hangunkat a múlt meghamisítása ellen” (We Raise Our Voice as Christian Hungarians Against the Falsification of the Past). <http://www.mazsihisz.hu/2014/02/24>.

<sup>92</sup> In his March 19, 2013 testimony before the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (“The Trajectory of Democracy: Why Hungary Matters”), Dr. Paul A. Shapiro, Director of the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, provided a fully documented overview of the changing political climate in Hungary, emphasizing the drive to bring about the rehabilitation of the Horthy era and the concurrent attacks on the memory of the Holocaust. See also “Magyar keresztényként felemeljük hangunkat a múlt meghamisítása ellen” (We Raise Our Voice as Christian Hungarians Against the Falsification of the Past). <http://www.mazsihisz.hu/2014/02/24>. On February 10, Rabbi Andrew Baker, a top official of the American Jewish Committee, urged the Orbán administration to respond to the Jewish community’s concerns without delay, emphasizing that it now has “an opportunity to openly confront Hungary’s past and responsibility.”

In an op-ed published in *Népszabadság* on February 15, Ronald Lauder, the president of the World Jewish Congress, expressed his support for the stand taken by Mazsihisz, emphasizing that the Hungarian government must do more in acknowledging the role the wartime regime of Horthy had played, in collaboration with the Nazis, in the destruction of the Jews. On February 13, the Foreign Ministry of Israel summoned Andor Nagy, Hungary’s Ambassador, to express its concerns over Hungary’s failure to deal truthfully with the past. Rafi Schutz, the Ministry’s deputy director general for Europe, expressed his anxiety over the trends within Hungary to re-write the

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history of the Holocaust and of the role Horthy had played in it. Schutz referred specifically to the conference that was held at the House of Terror on December 6, 2013, during which the two Horthy-apologists, Mária Schmidt and László Tőkéczy, tried to re-write history by defending the Regent and his policies.

<sup>93</sup> Minister of Human Resources Zoltán Balog expressed his disappointment over Mazsihisz' decision, citing it as shortsighted, emphasizing that the dispute is not only between the Jewish leadership and the government, but that it also involves the 10 million Hungarians. He also cited the "positive" actions taken by the Orbán administration. *Szombat Online*, February 10, 2014.

<sup>94</sup> Among the leaders' severest critics was Tamás Suchman, a former Mazsihisz vice president. In an electronic letter to the delegates, he identified the leaders as liars and traitors, who went counter to the decision taken by the general assembly. "Suchman szerint a Mazsihisz vezetői hazudnak" (According to Suchman the Mazsihisz Leaders Are Lying). *Amerikai Népszava Online*, February 13, 2014. For a very critical overview, see "A Mazsihisz vezetősége elárulta közgyűlése határozatát" (Mazsihisz's Leadership Betrayed the Decision of Its Assembly). *Népszava/Szabadság*, New York, February 21, 2014.

<sup>95</sup> "The Hungarian Holocaust Memorial Year: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back." <http://Hungarianspectrumwordpress.com>, February 28, 2014. See also Mária M. Kovács, "Kettős beszéd: holokauszt- emlékévk és Horthy-rehabilitáció." <http://www.galamuscsoport.hu>, March 8, 2014, and István Sebestyén and Marie-Rose Makki, "Érik a botrány" (The Scandal Is Growing). *Hetek*, Budapest, 18(February 28, 2014)9: 14–15.

<sup>96</sup> While formally decrying some of the activities of this neo-Fascist party, the Orbán government failed to take any meaningful action against the anti-Semitic agitations by representatives of this party. On November 26, 2012, for example, Márton Gyöngyösi called on the government to draw up lists of Jews who "pose a national security risk" and on November 3, 2013, he, Reverend Loránt Hegedűs, and other top leaders of the party participated in the unveiling of a bronze bust of Miklós Horthy. For a thoroughly documented overview of Viktor Orbán's policies in general and of his condoning of the activities of the anti-Semitic extremist *Jobbik* party in particular, see Zoltán Tibori Szabó, *Hungary under the Orbán Regime*, Cluj-Napoca, August 2013. A copy of the manuscript is in possession of this author.

<sup>97</sup> Elie Wiesel, *Night*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), p. xv.