

**Country Visit: Hungary**  
**Report of the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chair-in-Office on**  
**Combating Anti-Semitism, Rabbi Andrew Baker, November 2-3, 2009**

*Background:*

The Jewish community of Hungary is the largest in Central and Eastern Europe, with an estimated population of between 80,000 and 120,000 mostly residing in Budapest. During the Holocaust Jews from outlying areas in Hungary were deported to Nazi death camps, but those in Budapest, although forced into ghetto encampments, were largely spared annihilation by the war's end.

As in other Eastern European countries, Jewish communal activity was closely monitored and controlled during the Communist period, and prior to 1989 many Hungarian Jews avoided any open display of Jewish identity or involvement. However, during these last two decades there has been a renaissance of Jewish life in Budapest. It is symbolized by the restoration of the Dohaney Street Synagogue, the largest synagogue in Europe, and evidenced in the growth of religious, cultural, educational and social activities.

At the same time, in an otherwise largely homogenous society, Jews stand out as an identifiable minority, second only to the much larger Roma community. Among populists and xenophobes in Hungary they have been a frequent target in the political arena and the media and occasionally the victims of violent attacks.

*Atmosphere:*

Although Parliamentary elections will not take place until spring of 2010, they overshadowed nearly all of our discussions. According to opinion surveys, support for the present government is quite low and the opposition FIDESZ party is expected to win a substantial majority. Leaders of the Liberal (SZDSZ) party, which has been in every Parliament since democracy was reestablished, readily concede their own disappearance. The surprising success of the extreme right-wing Jobbik party (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom - Movement for a Better Hungary) in the European elections all but guarantees its presence in a new Parliament; the only question is with what percentage. Analysts point out that a low voter turnout—not uncommon with a disillusioned electorate—will work to Jobbik's advantage. Perhaps due to this politically charged atmosphere conversations frequently turned to posturing and finger pointing rather than addressing practical steps.

*Holocaust Education and Commemoration:*

Since 2001 the country has observed April 16 as the official day of commemoration. (The date marks the anniversary of the establishment of the first ghetto on Hungarian territory in 1944.) Actual educational programs vary across the country, but all schools are expected at least to observe this date with special programs. In 2002 the Holocaust Memorial Center was established with government support in Budapest. The Center, which incorporates a restored synagogue building in one of the city's former Jewish neighborhoods, includes a permanent exhibit describing the history of the Holocaust in Hungary and a memorial to the country's Holocaust victims. There are cooperative arrangements and the sharing of archival materials with the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington and teacher training conducted by Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. But the focus on Holocaust education itself produces some backlash from extremist elements in society, according to government officials.

Government officials and MPs emphasized the need for legislation that would criminalize Holocaust denial in Hungary as is the practice in other countries such as Germany and Austria. Previously proposed legislation which was more expansive in nature was deemed by the President to be in conflict with constitutionally protected freedom of speech and not enacted.

Earlier in the fall the Holocaust Memorial Center commissioned a survey to gauge the level of Holocaust denial among the Hungarian public. Professor **András Kovacs**, the sociologist who conducted the survey, reported that such views are held by between 6-11 percent of the population. The smaller number reflects those who firmly dispute that the Holocaust took place, while the larger number also includes those who may have doubts or who believe the accounts of the Holocaust are exaggerated. While these findings are disturbing in their own right, they do not reflect any significant change from when the last survey was conducted three years ago.

During the course of the visit, Norbert Hinterleitner, ODIHR's Advisor on Anti-Semitism Issues, met with representatives of the Ministry of Education and potential NGO partners to discuss the development of a Hungarian version of ODIHR's teaching tools to combat anti-Semitism. At the present time the Ministry of Education is prepared to work with ODIHR on this, but funding is a problem. However, if outside funding could be secured, the Ministry would be open to the development and use of such materials.

*Reflections on Anti-Semitism, Xenophobia and Intolerance:*

The success of Jobbik generated some analysis and "soul searching" on the part of political leaders. Education Minister **Istvan Hiller** said it would not have been expected a decade ago, but the current economic crisis combined with a widespread disillusionment regarding the expected changes after the fall of communism and general anti-Roma sentiments have fueled this extremist

movement. While in Western Europe xenophobic attitudes are directed toward immigrants and other foreigners, in Hungary—with relatively few foreign residents—they focus on the country’s “national” minorities, namely Roma and Jews.

MP **Zsolt Nemeth**, Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and a leader of FIDESZ, also viewed Jobbik’s success with concern. At the present time, he pointed out, Hungary has no extremist party in its Parliament, but that will change with the next election. He shared his belief that anti-Semitism in Hungarian society has increased in recent years. This is evidenced by the fact that more people feel free to give public voice to such views and also in explicitly anti-Semitic websites. Jobbik has succeeded in playing on the declining popularity of the political left and public animosity toward Roma by loudly declaiming against “Roma crime.” Anti-Semitism is not openly voiced, he said, but a coded version is discernable. According to FIDESZ MP **Zoltan Balog**, Chairman of the Committee on Human Rights, Jobbik’s leaders realized that its anti-Roma campaign “could bring them 20 percent of the vote,” while an anti-Semitic one would only draw a much smaller fraction.

*Hungarian Guard:*

The Jobbik Party itself is an outgrowth of the anti-Roma Hungarian Guard, which has the appearance of a paramilitary organization, dressed in uniforms copied from the World War II-era fascist Arrow Cross, parading in towns and villages and in the center of Budapest as well. Since the Arrow Cross was responsible for many of the atrocities committed against Jews during the Holocaust, the use of its uniforms, flags and other symbols today is particularly upsetting to the Jewish community. Until recently police and political leaders seemed unable to prevent the Hungarian Guard from organizing its own provocative public demonstrations. Legislation has been adopted with the intention of shutting it down by prohibiting the wearing of certain clothing, carrying certain signs or behaving in certain military-like fashion, such as marching. Government officials such as Justice Ministry State Secretary **Andras Turi** insist that this legislation now provides the police with all the tools they need to take action against the Guard. However, **Jozsef Bencze**, High Commissioner of the National Police, maintains that a certain clarity is still lacking, which hampers police efforts to intervene. By way of example, he explains that slight changes in the uniform would appear to circumvent the ban.

*View from Civil Society:*

Leaders of the Jewish community believe there has been a threefold increase in the number of Hungarians who harbor anti-Semitic sentiments over the past two decades, rising from ten to 30 per cent. This is the result, they maintain, of people being “educated” to become intolerant through newspapers and other media and through the speeches and actions of politicians. The Federation of

Jewish Communities collects information on anti-Semitic incidents but lacks the money and resources to do so in a systematic way. Physical attacks had been a rarity, but three separate incidents of violent beatings of individual Jews in Budapest were reported within the last five months.

Some may debate the significance of hate speech laws, which are lacking in Hungary, but civic leaders express the view that politicians do not speak out against hate crimes and do not lead society toward tolerance and mutual understanding. Of particular concern is the lack of reaction to attacks on and hate speech directed toward Roma, in some cases even emanating from public officials.

Prior to our visit the anti-Semitic remarks of a regional mayor and FIDESZ MP Oskar Molnar had already been reported internationally. Troubling to many had been the initial response of party leaders which fell far short of condemning the anti-Semitic comments which were voiced by the mayor during a television interview and rebroadcast on the Internet. This subject arose in our meetings with FIDESZ representatives, who assured us that there would be consequences for such hate speech and one leader said he would not be included in the 2010 Parliamentary list. Although such reactions are appreciated, it is important that the Hungarian public (and not only foreign visitors) receive a similarly clear message.

#### *Policing Efforts:*

**Jozsef Bencze**, High Commissioner of the National Police, explained that Hungarian legislation included hate crime laws which also cover manifestations in the context of sporting events and radio and television. While the term anti-Semitism is not defined, it is referenced in the penal code (Article 174/B) via the description, "violence against a member of a national, ethnic, racial or religious minority." In 2008 only one case was registered while as of November 2009 there were five registered cases. There were 64 cases of displaying banned symbols in 2007, while 204 cases were recorded in 2008.

Regulations prevent the collection of information on victims' ethnicity, even those of hate crimes. However, victims of violent attacks are routinely asked if they believe the motivation for the attack was racist in nature. Enhanced police investigation efforts (including the use of secret service methods) are only permitted in serious cases, which would mandate a maximum punishment of at least five years.

As in other countries, hate speech frequently is found on the Internet. Several officials cited one website (kuruc.info) as being a particular problem. It is hosted by an American server and even when pressure is successful in getting it removed, it quickly finds a new host and resumes operation.

The political divisions in Hungary have so far prevented the adoption of any hate speech legislation. However, speaking from the perspective of policing, Commissioner Bencze indicated that such legislation—especially if it would clearly define where such speech becomes incitement—would be a welcome and useful step.

The police do have a limited program of training its officers in the area of hate crimes, which is conducted by the Hungarian Helsinki Committee. It has an agreement with the national football league to cooperate on controlling outbursts at sports matches. It has established agreements with more than 200 local Roma communities, which identify a police contact point.

The Commissioner expressed his interest in renewing and continuing the police training program (LEOP) offered by ODIHR.

*Recommendations:*

The problem of anti-Semitism and certainly anti-Roma and other ultranationalist expressions in public discourse is likely to increase as the 2010 election approaches. Mainstream political leaders need to be mindful that racially-charged rhetoric can have serious consequences and also lead to physical violence. Religious and civic leaders should step forward to insist on maintaining appropriate boundaries for political debate.

The necessary resources should be found and training (by ODIHR or others) provided to enable the Federation of Jewish Communities and/or other appropriate civil society organizations should develop and implement a comprehensive monitoring procedure to record anti-Semitic incidents in Hungary.

The Hungarian National Police and ODIHR should formally renew and reinvigorate the Law Enforcement Officers Program to provide training in dealing with hate crimes.

Police should be empowered to collect comprehensive data on hate crimes, which includes information about the motivation as perceived by the victims. This data should be reported to ODIHR via Hungary's National Point of Contact.

Efforts should be made to find the necessary funding that will enable ODIHR, the Ministry of Education, and key NGO partners to develop a Hungarian version of the educational training materials designed to combat anti-Semitism.

***Program:***

*Accompanied by Ms. Floriane Hohenberg, Director of ODIHR's Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department and Mr. Norbert Hinterleitner, Advisor on Anti-Semitism Issues*

## **November 2**

István Hiller, Minister of Education and Culture

Zsolt Németh MP, Chairperson of the Committee on Foreign Affairs

Vilmos Szabó, Senior State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Gábor Iklódy, State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Zoltán Balog MP, Chairperson of the Committee on Human Rights, Minorities, Civil and Religious Affairs

Mátyás Eörsi MP, Alliance of Free Democrats

Péter Feldmayer, President, and Gustav Zoltai, General Secretary, Federation of the Jewish Communities in Hungary

## **November 3**

József Bencze, High Commissioner of the National Police

Balázs Dénes, Executive Director, Hungarian Civil Liberties Union

Andras Turi, State Secretary for Law Enforcement, Ministry of Justice

Janos Marotnyi

András Kovács, Professor and Chair of the Jewish Studies Department, Central European University  
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András Simonyi, former Ambassador of Hungary to the United States