

**Country Visit: Hungary**

**Report of the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chair-in-Office on**

**Combating Anti-Semitism**

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The FIDESZ led government of Hungary has been criticized by the Venice Commission and others for imposing new laws and constitutional changes that will have a significant impact on social and political life—among them a media law, changes in the appointment of judges and a religion law that sharply reduces the number of officially sanctioned churches. Inside the country government officials speak of these steps as a necessary “consolidation” of laws and regulations while opposition voices decry what they believe is a “democracy deficit” in the country. My visit to Budapest came shortly after National Day events which included a fiery speech by Prime Minister Viktor Orban widely understood as an attack on Brussels and the EU establishment.

The state of the Jewish community in Hungary and questions about anti-Semitism in society should be examined separately from this broader discussion, but of course they cannot be entirely divided. Hungarian Jewry, numbering 80,000-100,000, represents the largest Jewish community in Central Europe. They are deeply-rooted, largely assimilated and well-integrated into Hungarian social life. They have naturally gravitated to politically left-leaning parties and are understandably troubled by appeals to Hungarian nationalism even when voiced by center-right politicians. Six hundred thousand Hungarian Jews were murdered in the Holocaust, and that trauma still hovers over the present-day community which is virtually entirely a community of survivors and their offspring. Like other former Communist states, Hungary has only recently confronted its own Holocaust-era past, and this process of self-examination remains incomplete.

The emergence of the Jobbik Party—an unabashed, right wing force that espouses a strong anti-Roma and anti-Semitic agenda—has unnerved many people in Hungary and abroad. The periodic gatherings of its affiliated, militia-like Hungarian Guard dressed in uniforms modeled after the wartime, fascist Arrow Cross, are at the very least a provocative symbol especially to those Jews who lived through the Holocaust in Hungary. When the Hungarian Guard masses in towns and villages with significant Roma populations they pose a threat to physical security and safety. Few people in Hungary believe that the party will be able to increase its level of support much beyond its current level of 20 percent, and they note that a considerable number of Jobbik voters are only looking for a way to express their dissatisfaction with the political establishment and a deteriorating economic situation. Nevertheless, Jobbik’s presence means

extremist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic rhetoric is now a regular feature of Parliamentary debate.

Hungarian Jews largely agree that FIDESZ leaders are very careful in their own public remarks and do not accuse them of espousing anti-Semitism. There are some who see in the general attacks on certain European and economic interests coded references to attacks on Jews, although this is surely open to debate. However, there is general agreement that in the outer circles of the party or among traditional party supporters in the media more explicit anti-Semitic appeals are present, and they believe that the FIDESZ leadership turns a blind eye to this. With a worsening economic climate and the prospect that FIDESZ will need to ratchet up its populist appeals in the next election, Hungarian Jews—not a terribly optimistic people in the best of times—are quite understandably on edge.

### **Assessing the Climate of Anti-Semitism:**

By coincidence the Anti-Defamation League released a survey on attitudes toward Jews in ten European countries at the same time as my visit to Budapest. Based on telephone interviews conducted in each country, ADL determined that the level of anti-Semitism was highest in Hungary. Although a prominent Jewish researcher in Hungary criticized the survey's methodology and questioned its findings, his own research work shows the problem increasing in recent years. No doubt the presence of the Jobbik Party in the Parliament is a contributing factor; for the first time in post-Communist Hungary one can hear overt anti-Semitic language from the mouths of MPs. While the worst of this rhetoric has been condemned by MPs from other parties, they have yet to figure out how to prevent its continuation. Also during my brief stay in Budapest anti-Semitic posters appeared on some city kiosks. Professionally produced, they depicted a paramilitary man in an Arrow Cross-like uniform dangling a crude caricature of a Jew from his fingers with words below reading, "Join the Fight." (A photo of this poster appears at the end of this report.)

Such unvarnished anti-Semitic manifestations may be largely relegated to the extreme—but not insignificant—right. However, there are those who see in the populist and frequently anti-European and anti-business rhetoric of mainstream politicians veiled references to Jews. As one moves outward from this core of national, political leaders to columnists and writers associated with them or to regional and local politicians, the anti-Semitic references are more evident. Internet web sites frequently host anti-Semitic postings, and Jewish leaders point out that even major newspapers are lax in removing such writings from their own on-line publications. When they protested to the Mayor of Budapest on the appointment as director of the city-sponsored theater of the late István Csurka—more noted in recent years for his anti-Semitic political agenda than as a dramatist—they were told that the city deserved at least one "Hungarian"

theater. At the same time, physical attacks are rare, and security precautions taken at Jewish institutions in Budapest are less stringent than those in most Western European capitals.

### **Development of a National Curriculum:**

At the present time the Ministry of National Resources is developing a national curriculum for use in all Hungarian schools. It provides an important opportunity to address the general lack of information on Jews and Jewish life in the country and its history. According to those familiar with the current teaching materials, Jews “appear” on three occasions—in the time of Jesus to account for the birth of Christianity, in the Nazi era as victims of the Holocaust, and in modern times as part of the Israeli-Arab conflict. Nothing is presented of the long history of the Jewish presence in Hungary and its contribution to Hungarian culture. This limited, two dimensional picture of Jews is likely to perpetuate old stereotypes and prejudices, especially in regions where few if any Jews live today. This serious omission should be corrected. A consortium of Hungarian Jewish organizations has prepared a detail analysis of the national curriculum and offered its recommendations; they should be given serious consideration. Minister Réthelyi cited the educational programs of Centropa which offer a more detailed picture of Jewish life in Hungary before and after the Holocaust, and more support should be given to this effort. ODIHR has developed secondary school teaching materials in cooperation with the Hungarian Holocaust Memorial Center and the NGO *Zachor* Foundation designed to combat anti-Semitism through education, and the Ministry is encouraged to facilitate their dissemination and use in Hungarian schools.

### **The Hungarian Jewish Community:**

As noted above, the Jewish population in Hungary is the largest in Central Europe. While the adoption of a new religion law severely reduced the number of officially recognized and supported church groups—and as a result engendered considerable criticism abroad—it actually extended designation to two new Jewish congregations. (Until now the government had accorded recognition only to the Jewish Federation of Hungary.) However, many were surprised that the Reform synagogue movement was not included in the legislation. Foreign Minister János Martonyi conceded that this was a mistake which should be corrected when the law is next amended.

A larger but related question—and not necessarily the full responsibility of government—is predicated on the fact that Hungarian Jews are a largely assimilated community with relatively few identifying through synagogue affiliation. Many more are likely to express their Jewishness through social, cultural and educational activities, but these institutions receive only limited if any financial support.

### **Holocaust Remembrance and Education:**

The Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest contains a permanent exhibit detailing the story of the Holocaust in Hungary, research facilities and a moving memorial to the 600,000 Hungarian victims. In principle, it is an invaluable resource for training teachers and instructing students. However, some critics say its remote location and the lack of any mandated Holocaust education in the schools leave it underutilized. With the change in government in 2010, there were charges that the new authorities sought to change the content of the permanent exhibition so as to downplay Hungarian culpability in the Holocaust. In fact the subject was raised in my meeting with Andras Levente Gal, Commissioner for Good Governance in the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice and the official primarily responsible for dealing with Holocaust-related issues. Mr. Gal defended his criticism of the exhibition saying it was time, “to go beyond well-established Communist history.” In the meantime the controversy has partially abated and for the time being the exhibition remains unchanged.

The Museum was officially opened during the previous term of Prime Minister Orban, whose government also established an official Holocaust commemoration day. Despite the singular presence of this center in Southeastern Europe there are also critics who contrast it unfavorably to the larger, more centrally located and more frequently visited House of Terror Museum which focuses primarily on the crimes of Communism.

The Hungarian government has created a special commemorative committee to mark 2012 as the centennial anniversary of Raoul Wallenberg. The committee has organized events inside Hungary and abroad to highlight the Swedish diplomat’s rescue of Jews in Hungary during the war. Certainly Raoul Wallenberg is a rare example of what a committed individual could do even in those darkest days, and Hungary should be commended for raising awareness of his efforts.

Professor Szabolcs Szita, Director of the Holocaust Memorial Center, also indicated that they intend to focus more on the prewar experience of Jews and Hungarians living together. By way of example, he cited an exhibit which just opened that described day-to-day Jewish life in those times prepared by *Centropa*.

Hungary’s new constitution declares that the country lost its self-determination with the Nazi occupation in March 1944 and only regained it in 1989. There are some who see in this language—especially when taken together with calls for changing the narrative of the museum exhibition—an effort to distance Hungary from taking responsibility for the worst crimes of the Holocaust. Although the mass deportations were ordered by the Nazi occupiers they were largely implemented and carried out by Hungarian civil and police authorities. It would be unfortunate while other European countries such as France and Austria have belatedly

confronted their own complicity in Holocaust-era crimes if Hungary would march in the opposite direction. In this regard it is worth making special note of Foreign Minister Martonyi's words in his January 2012 speech marking the opening of the Wallenberg Centennial Commemoration: "It is especially painful for me as minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary to say this: during the Holocaust the Hungarian State was weighed on the scales and found wanting. It could not protect its citizens, what's more—even if under foreign occupation—it assisted in their extermination."

### **Combating Hate Crimes:**

Peter Polt, the Prosecutor General, explained that the concept of a hate crime is not defined under Hungarian law. In cases of violence directed at specific ethnic communities authorities have no difficulty in categorizing them as hate crimes. But it is far more difficult when examining hate speech, especially as the constitution offers a wide protection of freedom of opinion and speech, and the line is not clearly defined. As a result there have been very few cases of prosecuting hate speech—24 in 2009, 16 in 2010 and 16 in 2011.

Data collection is also a problem. Not only is it not the practice of police to note the ethnic or religious identity of a victim, but according to the prosecutor data protection laws forbid it. The only exception is where the victims themselves ask that it be noted.

In my 2009 visit the Hungarian Guard was a new and disturbing presence and drew considerable attention. This paramilitary organization with connections to the Jobbik Party continue to parade in central Budapest and in other towns and cities in uniforms modeled on those of the wartime, fascist Arrow Cross. In an effort to prevent their activities laws were passed that banned the display of certain symbols, the wearing of certain uniforms and even marching in formation. And yet, despite this legislation, they continue virtually unabated. By their own admission, officials in the Ministry of Interior said the laws simply do not work. By making small changes to their uniforms or to the way they assemble or to the symbols they display, they manage to avoid prosecution. In fact, Deputy State Secretary Dr. Krisztina Berta explained that they frequently come to their demonstrations with legal counsel. These attorneys will explain to the police who are present why these guardsmen are not in violation of the law, and are thus left unhindered. Police and authorities are equally frustrated by this.

### **Addressing Concerns of the Roma Minority:**

By all accounts anti-Roma attitudes in Hungary are dramatically high. They play a significant role in fueling support for the right wing Jobbik Party and surely are a contributing factor in the physical attacks that have occurred on Roma villages and encampments. Although the Roma in Hungary are quite different from Hungarian Jews, the two groups are often dual targets by xenophobic extremists in what is a largely homogenous society. A national social inclusion

strategy has been drafted by the government which includes job training, economic development and the training of local community leaders.

**Recommendations:**

1. The Ministry of National Resources should accept the recommendations offered by Hungarian Jewish organizations in the development of the national curriculum. (See appendix.) Education officials should support and facilitate the use of materials prepared by ODIHR and the *Zachor* Foundation and by Centropa in Hungarian schools. Greater use should be made of the Holocaust Memorial Center as an educational tool by encouraging more comprehensive visits by student groups and teachers.
2. The presence of the Jobbik Party in the national Parliament and in local and regional councils has brought overt anti-Semitic (and racist and xenophobic) rhetoric to a new level in Hungarian society. It is thus incumbent on all mainstream political leadership and especially those of the ruling FIDESZ Party to counter this. Wherever possible and permitted under the law this hate speech should be prosecuted. Senior government leaders should swiftly and loudly condemn such anti-Semitic outbursts. They should avoid any unnecessary contact or seemingly friendly relations with Jobbik members which might thereby accord the party de facto respectability.
3. The OSCE Prague Conference on Anti-Semitism in Public Discourse (March 2011) warned of the dangers of anti-Semitic rhetoric and note the corrosive effect they posed to the security of Jewish communities. Hungarian political leaders should continue to be careful in their own speech and to admonish their allies and supporters when such language presents itself.
4. Despite sincere interest on the part of Hungarian authorities, efforts to curtail the presence of the (newly renamed) Hungarian Guard have not succeeded. New methods should be explored and undertaken. Perhaps with the assistance of ODIHR or other governments new legislative language could be found and adopted that would prove more effective in day-to-day use. Police should be encouraged to act more aggressively (albeit within the law) and in greater numbers so as to minimize the impact of the group's gatherings.
5. It is well-established that comprehensive methods of the monitoring and data collection of hate crimes serve multiple, positive purposes. By identifying victims and perpetrators and the locations of these crimes, police, prosecutors and public officials are better able to deal with them at all stages of the justice process and to take effective counter-

measures going forward. Other countries with strong data protection laws have nevertheless been able to carry out this work, and guidance should be sought from ODIHR and/or other governments.

6. Hate crime data collection starts with proper reporting by the police. As reported to ODIHR, no hate crimes were recorded by the police in 2010 whereas 15 were recorded in 2009. The Hungarian authorities should accept ODIHR's offer to deliver training for law enforcement in the framework of its TAHCLE program.

### Appendices:

Poster appearing on Budapest kiosks (as reported in *Nepszava*, March 23 2012):



A report and recommendation on the proposed national curriculum was prepared by a consortium of 14 Jewish congregations and NGOs (identified below) and shared with the Ministry of National Resources. (The full report can be accessed here: <http://www.jmpoint.hu/nat> .)

Az előterjesztő szervezetek:

Magyarországi Autonóm Ortodox Hitközség, Balázs Gábor Előljáró

Egységes Magyarországi Izraelita Hitközség, Köves Slómó vezető rabbi

Budapesti Zsidó Hitközség Frankel Leó utcai Zsinagógai Körzet, Verő Tamás főrabbi

BZSH Bét Salom zsinagóga Radnóti Zoltán rabbi és Heisler András a MAZSIHISZ korábbi elnöke

Szim Salom Progresszív Zsidó Hitközség

Magyarországi Cionista Szövetség, Dr Kardi Judit elnök

Magyar Zsidó Kulturális Egyesület, Kirschner Péter elnök

B'nai B'rith Budapesti Szervezete, Vadász Magda elnök

Magyar Zsidó Örökség Közalapítvány, Szabó György mb. elnök

Lauder Javne Zsidó Közösségi Iskola

Bét Menachem Oktatási Központ, Betseva Oberlander igazgató

HAYER Alapítvány, Kuratórium

JMPoint a Zsidó Közösségért Közhasznú Alapítvány, Kürti Csaba igazgató

Bálint Ház, Fritz Zsuzsa Igazgató

(csatlakozási sorrend)

## **Meetings:**

### **Representatives of civil society**

- Ms Andrea Szőnyi, Regional Consultant in Hungary of the USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Chairperson of the Board of Trustees - Zachor Foundation for Social Remembrance
- Ms Mónika Kovács, Vice-Dean for International and Scientific Affairs of the Faculty of Education and Psychology - Eötvös Loránd University
- Mr László Csósz, Historian - Holocaust Memorial Center
- Mr András Kovács, Sociologist, Professor at the Nationalism Studies and Jewish Studies Program at the Central European University
- Mr László Várkonyi, President and CEO of the International Centre for Democratic Transition
- Mr Máté Fischer, Operations Officer of the Tom Lantos Institute
- Ms Nora Kuntz, Programme Director of the Tom Lantos Institute
- Mr Imre Szebik, M.D. Master of Bioethics, Institute of Behavioral Sciences
- Rabbi Slomó Köves, Chief Rabbi of the Unified Hungarian Jewish Congregation (EMIH)
- Mr Andras Megyeri, Unified Hungarian Jewish Congregation (EMIH)



- Mr Gábor Szántó, Chief Editor of “Szombat” The Hungarian Jewish monthly
- Mr Janos Gado, Editor “Szombat” The Hungarian Jewish monthly
- Prof. Szabolcs Szita, Executive Director of Holocaust Memorial Centre
- Dr. Janos Botos, Deputy Director of Holocaust Memorial Centre
- Mr Péter Feldmájer, President of the Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities (MAZSIHISZ)

### **Ministry of National Resources**

- Mr Miklós Réthelyi, Minister for National Resources
- Ms Ágota Schmidt, Chief of Cabinet of the Minister
- Ms Mária Ladó, Head of International Department
- Ms Bettina Török

### **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

- Mr János Martonyi, Minister for Foreign Affairs
- Mr Gergely Pröhle, Deputy State Secretary for EU Bilateral Relations
- Mr Zsolt Németh, Deputy Minister for State for Foreign Affairs
- Ms Andrea Komáromy, Deputy Head of Delegation, Head of Department for Cultural Diplomacy
- Mr Mihaly Dudas, OSCE Desk Officer
- Ms Anna Miklos, Third Secretary, Cabinet of the Minister

### **Parliament**

- Mr János Fónagy, MP (KDNP), member of the Economic and Information Technology Parliamentary Committee

- Mr László Kovács, MP (MSZP), member of the Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs (former Minister for Foreign Affairs)
- Mr András Schiffer, MP (LMP), member of the Constitutional, Judicial and Standing Orders Parliamentary Committee
- Mr Károly Tüzes, Head of Secretariat for Security and Defense Policy of the Foreign Affairs Office of the Parliament

#### **Office of Prosecutor General**

- Mr Péter Polt, Prosecutor General
- Ms Eszter Mária Köpf, Head of Department of International and European Affairs
- Ms Katalin Gáspár, Adviser of the Department of Supervision of Investigations and Preparing of Charges
- Mr Krisztian Eperjes

#### **Ministry of Interior**

- Dr Krisztina Berta, Deputy State Secretary
- Mr István Erdős, Head of International Department

#### **Ministry of Public Administration and Justice**

- Mr Béla Locsmáncsi, Deputy State Secretary for Social Inclusion
- Mr András Levente Gál, Government Commissioner for Good Governance
- Mr Márton Lacsni, Senior Advisor, Cabinet of Mr Gál
- Ms Eszter Andits, Advisor in international affairs of the State Secretary for Social Inclusion

#### **US Embassy**

- Ambassador Eleni Tsakopoulos Kounalakis

**Hungarian News Agency**

- Ms Alexandra Nádori (Hungarian News Agency)

**Accompanied by (OSCE/ODIHR)**

- Ms Floriane Hohenberg, Head of the Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department
- Mr Timur Sultangozhin, Associate Programme Officer