

Hungary

The most complex and contradictory developments in Europe during 2013 took place in Hungary, which by the beginning of 2014 seemed as a prologue to the intensification of debates and differences of opinion with the events commemorating the 70th anniversary of the Holocaust in Hungary. The year 2014 was also designated by the Hungarian government for a series of events and activities, which became the focal point of strong differences of opinion not only concerning the politics of memory in today's Hungary but also focusing on the rise of anti-Semitism.

In the words of Rabbi Schlomo Koves, Jews can now feel anti-Semitism in the street, although physical attacks on Jews are rare. (see CBN News, March 19,2014) Among the more significant events, the nailing of bars of soap to the fence of the Szeged synagogue (see, Reuters October 1, 2013)

While the number of incidents is not on the rise, the main danger in Hungary is the attempt to "whitewash " the anti-Semitic past, rehabilitate aspects of the Horthy era, emphasize Hungary's alleged loss of sovereignty in March 1944, with the German occupation, thus as attempt to relativize Hungary's role in the destruction of its Jewry.

The anti-Semitic, anti-Roma outbursts of the right-wing extremist party, Jobbik, the continuing flourishing of anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial in extremist web sites, have become a standard feature of present day Hungary. The major questions that are being asked in the context of anti-Semitism in Hungary is how much the ruling Fidesz party, facing national elections in April 2014 is doing in order to combat such phenomena.

Jobbik does not try to hide its true face. During an anti-Israeli demonstration in front of the Israeli Embassy in November 2012, the party leader, Gabor Vona said that "Israel operates the world's largest concentration camp", (Jobbik.com, November 22, 2012) Does it should not serve as a surprise that Jobbik is expanding its ties with Iran, and an Iranian delegation was hosted by Jobbik, clearly an alliance between anti-Semites from Hungary and Iran.(Times of Israel, March 11, 2013)

Extremist sites, such as Kuruc.info (complicated legal moves to ban it have failed as it uses US servers) , openly uses Holocaust denial material,

such as a cynical item that a list of children found alive with the liberation of Auschwitz by the Red Army in January 1945, shows that strangely the Nazis "have forgotten to gas them" . (Kuruc.info, December 14,2013

The government has faced increased criticism from local and foreign factors for its policies. The President of the European Jewish Congress, Dr. Moshe Kantor "has identified Hungary as experiencing the most worrying racist and anti-Semitic trends in Europe".(see www.europjewcong.org., April 8,2013) Likewise at the plenary assembly of the World Jewish Congress in Budapest, while Prime Minister Orbán strongly condemned all manifestations of anti-Semitism, WJC President Ron Lauder criticized the government for ignoring the ultra-nationalist Jobbik. (se for example, JTA, May 6, 2013)

At a major conference on "Jewish Life and Anti-Semitism in Contemporary Europe" organized by the Tom Lantos Institute in 1-2 October 2013 in the Hungarian Parliament, with the participation of Israel's Minister of Finance, Yair Lapid, leading Hungarian politicians, as Deputy Prime Minister , Tibor Navracsics and Foreign Minister, Janos Martonyi reiterated Hungary's responsibility for the Holocaust of Hungary 's Jewry, and the determination of the government to combat anti-Semitism. (for the major speeches see, the Tom Lantos Institute's site, "Hungary Pledges to crack down on anti-Semitism, Reuters, October 1, 2013)

Yet, the disturbing signs in 2013 were very evident. The continuing rehabilitation and events concerning anti-Semitic writers, intellectuals – as Cecile Tormay, Jozsef Nyiro, Albert Wass – have caused public outrage and reaction, by the attempts to include such "iconic" figures in the school curriculums, naming of streets on their name by local authorities, and erecting busts and memorial sites. (for an extensive English language coverage see, The Hungarian Spectrum) . In the case of naming a street in Budapest after Cecile Tormay, a Mussolini fan, who passed away in 1937, the plan was cancelled after public outrage. (see, Hungary drops plan to name street after anti-Semitic author Cecile Tormay, The Guardian, October 7,2013) Jozsef Nyiro, writer, who adored Hitler's regime, and was member of the Arrow Cross parliament to the end of its activities in late 1944. These attempts to the rehabilitation and growing cult of anti-Semitic persons and ideas for the dark past, should be seen on the background of the growing Horthy era cult. While, one may classify such trends as being an important part of debates on the interpretation or re-interpretation of the past, they have to be seen in the

light of the crisis that Hungary is undergoing both internally and in its international position. (see also, Israel Hayom, November 29,2013)

The nationalist wave riding high on the effects of the economic crisis, criticism leveled by factors in the US, EU against the Fidesz government, and at the same time a feeling by the Hungarian government that Hungary is unjustly being criticized, has also affected and strained relations between the Hungarian government and the major Jewish organization in Hungary, MAZSIHISZ, and between world Jewish organizations abroad.

The tensions reached a new high with the decision of MAZSIHISZ to boycott the government organized and supported Holocaust commemoration events and activities, a step supported also by Jewish organizations abroad, and as Rabbi Andrew Baker, the American Jewish Committee's Director of International Affairs said in a statement " the efforts of the Hungarian government to rewrite history are absolutely traumatic". (JTA, February 11. 2014, Haaretz, February 2014) Likewise, the leading historian of the Holocaust in Hungary, and Holocaust survivor, Randolph L. Braham, returned a high state award to Hungary in protest to the rewriting of history in Hungary. (see AP, January 26, 2014)

The political polarization in Hungary is being reflected in the major issues related to the past and present of Hungarian anti-Semitism and Hungary's role in the destruction of its Jewry. There is no doubt that the Hungarian government is and should be sensitive to the rise of anti-Semitism, noted by factors inside and outside Hungary. Headlines, such as "Hungary Sliding Back to Nazi-Era Anti-Semitism?" (cbnnews, March 19,2014) , must worry both the government, the opposition and civil society.