

# HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE PROJECT

This first-ever report rating individual European Union countries on how they face up their Holocaust pasts was published on January 25, 2019 to coincide with UN Holocaust Remembrance Day. Researchers from Yale and Grinnell Colleges travelled throughout Europe to conduct the research. Representatives from the European Union of Progressive Judaism (EUPJ) have endorsed their work.

## Key Findings

- Many European Union governments are rehabilitating World War II collaborators and war criminals while minimising their own guilt in the attempted extermination of Jews.
- Revisionism is worst in new Central European members - Poland, Hungary, Croatia and Lithuania.
- But not all Central Europeans are moving in the wrong direction: two exemplary countries living up to their tragic histories are the Czech Republic and Romania. The Romanian model of appointing an independent commission to study the Holocaust should be duplicated.
- West European countries are not free from infection - Italy, in particular, needs to improve.
- In the west, Austria has made a remarkable turn-around while France stands out for its progress in accepting responsibility for the Vichy collaborationist government.
- Instead of protesting revisionist excesses, Israel supports many of the nationalist and revisionist governments.

**By William Echikson**

As the world marks the United Nations Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27, European governments are rehabilitating World War II collaborators and war criminals while minimising their own guilt in the attempted extermination of Jews.

This Holocaust Remembrance Project finds that Hungary, Poland, Croatia, and the Baltics are the worst offenders. Driven by feelings of victimhood and fears of accepting refugees, and often run by nationalist autocratic governments, these countries have received red cards for revisionism.

Not all our findings are negative. Some European countries – led by Austria, France and Romania – have made important progress in confronting their dark pasts. They have accepted that their police or army, not the Nazis, played an important role in deporting Jews and Roma to their deaths. They are returning art to their former Jewish heirs. And, in an attempt to prevent a repetition of the Holocaust, they are working hard to educate their citizens and officials about their personal and official responsibilities to disobey illegal orders and confront evil.

For decades, many French have held onto the idea that their ancestors had been either victims or resisters of Nazis, or of the collaborationist regime that was set up in Vichy. This past July, standing at a site from which thousands of French Jews were sent to their deaths during the Holocaust, President Emmanuel Macron of France deplored his nation's wartime role in abetting murder and pledged to fight a renewed tide of anti-Semitism.

Romania represents another exemplary country. During the war, its army organised the deportation of Jews. In response, President Klaus Iohannis has made Holocaust training mandatory for the country's military's general staff. Until March 2017, Romania held the chairmanship of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, comprising 31 nations.

Unfortunately, though, history is often being forgotten or rewritten. The Hungarian government is minimising its country's participation in the genocide, rehabilitating war criminals, and introducing anti-Semitic writers into the national curriculum. According to Paul Shapiro of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the truth is that Miklos Horthy's Hungary was the first European country after World War 1 to put in place *numerus clausus* legislation, which restricted Jewish participation in higher education. Hungary passed racial laws similar to Nazi Germany in 1938 and 1939. With war came the systematic theft of Jewish property and mass murder. In 1944, Hungarian police identified and concentrated the Jews, loaded them onto trains, and delivered them into the hands of German SS units for execution at Auschwitz.

Revisionism is often accompanied by a revival of Nazi-inspired hate speech. Hungary's right-wing Prime Minister Viktor Orban has described the arrival of asylum seekers in Europe as "a poison", saying his country did not want or need "a single migrant". Jaroslaw Kaczyński, head of Poland's governing Law and Justice Party, has warned that migrants are "parasites" that carry "very dangerous diseases long absent from Europe". In the same vein, French right-wing extremist Marine Le Pen called for the

“eradication of bacterial immigration”, proclaiming that immigration was causing an “alarming presence of contagious diseases” in France. In his *Mein Kampf*, Hitler repeatedly refers to Jews as parasites.

In 2018, the nationalist Polish government criminalised the term “Polish death camps”. The same government is waging an offensive on the rule of law and freedom of expression, imposing new repressive bills to control the media and attacking the independence of the country’s courts. Anger is understandable when foreigners refer to Auschwitz and other extermination centres the Nazis set up in Poland as “Polish death camps”. They were Nazi death camps. Along with three million Polish Jews, at least 1.9 million Polish gentiles were killed.

Yet many Poles were complicit in the crimes committed on their land. When a Polish minister questions Polish participation in the murder of hundreds of their Jewish neighbours during a Holocaust-era programme, he is wrong. Like other countries conquered by Germany, Poland too must face up to all aspects of its World War II history – without the threat of sending historians to prison. It is no surprise that a Polish nationalist government is behind the new revisionist bill. And it is notable that international and domestic criticism forced the government to dilute its original Holocaust law.

### **The Importance of History**

This battle over history extends beyond the questions of mere historical accuracy. It carries important implications for Europe’s present. Today’s revisionism coincides with a rise of extreme nationalist and far-right political movements dedicated to rolling back democracy, the rule of law, and its modern-day beacon, the multi-ethnic, tolerant European Union. Around Europe, the generation of Holocaust persecutors and survivors is dying out. Post-war anti-Semitic taboos are fading. Migration is bringing large numbers of Arabs harbouring anti-Semitic sentiments.

Amid this heated atmosphere, memories of the Holocaust are fading. According to a CNN/ComRes survey taken in September 2018, 34 percent of Europeans surveyed said they know just a little or have never heard of the Holocaust. A third of Europeans said Jewish people use the Holocaust to advance their own positions or goals, according to the poll, for which 7,000 people across Europe were surveyed.

Before joining the European Union, countries had to show that they accepted responsibility for what happened there during the wars. All recorded significant progress. These advances now are being rolled back as illiberal, nationalist governments take power. The new nationalists often believe that their

ethnic group suffered as much as or more than Jews. Others cannot accept that their nationalist leaders often collaborated with the Nazis and killed their Jewish neighbours.

The Romanian example is particularly telling. After years of neglect or outright rejection of any guilt for the death of the country's Jews, the country pressed to join the European Union and NATO. Under the leadership of Romanian-born Holocaust survivor and Nobel Prize winner Elie Wiesel, the government commissioned an independent committee. It discovered and publicised the fact that at least 280,000 Romanian Jews along with other groups, were massacred in Romanian-run death camps.

Unfortunately, countries with troubled pasts such as Croatia, Bulgaria, Poland and others have not followed this model. They should also appoint independent commissions to study their Holocaust history.

European Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans has made Holocaust revisionism a test of member governments' commitment to the rule of law. "With Holocaust survivors dying out, and at a time when anti-Semitism is on the rise, we need to foster the memory of the darkest chapter in our history," Timmermans says.

The present European Commission has done more to protect Jews and promote Judaism than any of its predecessors. In speech after speech, Timmermans has underlined how only a Europe with Jews can fulfil the goal of a liberal, tolerant, multi-ethnic and multi-national Europe. "There is no Europe without the Jewish community," Timmermans continuously repeats.

The Commission has also taken a series of important concrete actions to support these words. Timmermans has named the first-ever European co-ordinator against anti-Semitism. He has pressed internet companies to combat online anti-Semitism. He calls out countries for trying to rehabilitate Holocaust war criminals and minimise their own guilt. And he has unlocked millions of euros in grants to fight anti-Semitism and finance interfaith initiatives. Our study identifies new challenges. Germany has a growing Muslim population, with one million new migrants from Middle Eastern countries. They account for the largest group responsible for anti-Semitic incidents, according to Jewish participants in the Fundamental Rights Agency's report. Will migrants adopt Germany's values of tolerance and responsibility for its past? Our research questions whether these new arrivals are receiving sufficient education about the Holocaust.

## **The Report**

These dangerous tendencies prompted us to undertake this Holocaust Remembrance Project.

European authorities have expressed a need for an independent report to press their rule-of-law campaign. I believed, too, that there needs to be a naming and shaming of poor performers - and encouragement for good performers. This report is limited to European Union countries because it is meant to spur change within the Union. I would have liked to have included non-EU countries such as Macedonia and Ukraine, but lacked resources to report on them. Perhaps the next version will be able to include them and others.

The report does not cover all of the EU either. Sweden, Portugal and Spain, all “neutral” during the war, are absent, even though their relations with Berlin and their treatment of fleeing Jews deserve study. Unfortunately, here, too, resources did not allow these neutral countries to be studied.

The model for this report is the Freedom House report on the State of Democracy, which judges countries’ adherence to basic democratic principles. Freedom House grades countries on their faithfulness to a list of yardsticks ranging from freedom of the press to independence of the judiciary. We consulted with Freedom House researchers.

Unlike Freedom House, this report does not benefit from a single universal definition of democracy. Holocaust Revisionism varies from country to country because their situation during the war varies. In some, such as Poland, the Nazis occupied and ran the country by themselves. In others, such as France, Croatia and Slovakia, a collaborationist government took charge and played its own role in exterminating Jews. Finland was never occupied and remained independent. Romania and Bulgarian leaders sympathised, to an extent, with Berlin and attempted to navigate between them.

In general, the Holocaust hit the east of the continent harder than the west. In the west, Jews were deported to their deaths. In contrast, the Baltics and Poland were situated in what historian Timothy Snyder has called “Bloodlands”, sites of mass extermination. They also lived, alternatingly, under Soviet and German tyranny, and often, the comparison between the two clouds their vision of the Holocaust.

These different histories are reflected in the various country reports. Denmark is proud of saving its small Jewish community, but today finds it difficult to accept any failure of its action and is making it difficult for Jews to live in its country. Italy, led by a Fascist government that refused to deport most of its Jews, is failing to accept responsibility and return Jewish property. Lithuania and the rest of the Baltics, home to large Jewish communities, tackle with the difficulty of comparative victimisation - their Nazis brutalised many of their non-Jewish citizens and many of their revered anti-communist resistance fighters.

These varied histories make it difficult to grade performance on Holocaust Revisionism. Instead of a detailed methodology, the report adopts a simple green, yellow and red coding. The grades do not compare like by like. They just acknowledge progress, caution, or problems. Green demonstrates on the right path, go ahead. Yellow says caution, watch out. And red means tough work lies ahead.

Hopefully, the report will support those countries taking strong action to combat Holocaust revisionism - while pointing the finger at countries which need to do much more to come to terms with their pasts.

### **Acknowledgements**

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At Grinnell, thanks to Daniel Reynolds, the Seth Richards Professor of Modern Languages in the German Department. His books look at the ways museums and memorials to the Shoah have evolved over the past 75 years in Poland, Germany, Israel, and the United States, and how modern tourism brings its own challenges, but also opportunities, to Holocaust remembrance. His most recent book is *Postcards from Auschwitz* (NYU Press, 2018).

At Yale, thanks to Maurice Samuels. He specialises in the literature and culture of 19<sup>th</sup> century France and in Jewish Studies. Since 2011, he has directed the Yale *Program for the Study of Antisemitism*. Thanks also to Ivo Banac, Bradford Durfee Professor Emeritus. He reviewed the Croatia chapter and offered invaluable suggestions. And my fellow Yale *Daily News* editor Eric Rubin, now the US Ambassador to Bulgaria, offered invaluable advice on the situation in the Balkans.

Local representatives from the European Union of Progressive Judaism (EUPJ) have checked the various contributions. In advance of the United Nations Holocaust Remembrance Day, the EUPJ represents the Progressive branch of Judaism; around the world this branch counts 1.8 million Jews across six continents in 1200 communities. Thanks to EUPJ leaders Leslie Bergman and Sonja Guentner for bringing this vast network to support this project.

Thanks, above all, to the seven researchers who undertook a summer of travel in order to conduct interviews and visit Holocaust sites. They include Lindsay Dougherty, Caderan Owen-Jones, and Justin Jin from Yale; Ilana Luther, Jeremy Epstein and Nicholas Haeg from Grinnell. All were exceptional.

Thanks to American University for allowing Lauren Watrobsky to intern in Brussels during the autumn of 2018. She researched the Luxembourg report and organised many of the contributions for additional editing.

Finally, thanks to my own family. My oldest son Samuel designed the logo and built the framework of the website. My youngest son Benjamin did much of the website's heavy lifting. And my wife Anu designed the country reports. Without their assistance, this report would never would have been published.





# AUSTRIA

**After decades of denying complicity, Austria has become a star performer in living up to its responsibility. In art restitutions, it is the clear leader.**

## *Overview*

Even though Austria's government now includes a far-right Freedom Party founded in 1956 by former Nazis, the country is making vast, if belated progress, in Holocaust remembrance.

Austria was a central perpetrator of the Holocaust and was late to admit its guilt. Until the late 1990s, long after West Germany had accepted responsibility, Austria portrayed itself as "first victims" of the Nazis.

A new generation has corrected this misguided perspective. Current chancellor, Sebastian Kurz, travelled in the spring of 2018 to Israel and stated that Austria has "historic responsibility" in the Holocaust. The chancellor's strong rhetoric is tempered by his party's coalition with the far-right Freedom Party, (FPO), which touts strict anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim policies. Though the Freedom Party has attempted to rebrand itself, clear ties to Nazism remain, including connections to far-right fraternities. Many in the Jewish community remain wary of the FPO, and the Israelitische Kulturgemeinde Wien (Israeli Cultural Community of Vienna) has boycotted a state sponsored Holocaust commemoration due to the FPO's presence.

Perhaps because of this background, the present Austrian government has gone out of its way to promote good practice regarding Holocaust remembrance. From school curricula, to memorials, to active support of survivors and the Jewish community, Austria expends significant effort to ensure that the memory of the Holocaust stays alive and is handled properly, including work to ensure that the next generation of Austrians keeps the Holocaust in their thoughts and hearts.

This commitment extends to civil society, where Austrian organisations foster strong ties to survivors, commemorate victims, and educate the general population. Austria, like many European countries, struggles to provide the financial resources to fund the new or expanding remembrance projects, such as those in Mauthausen or the Gedenkdienst (commemoration service) organisation.

Additional work needs to be done. Despite this considerable resume of Holocaust remembrance, Austria remains one of the more anti-Semitic countries in Western Europe. A 2015 Pew Research poll found that 21 percent of Austrians would be unwilling to accept a Jewish person as a member of their family, as compared with just six percent of Danes and 19 percent of Germans. Though the public has come a long way since the days of Waldheim and total denial of Austrian involvement, Holocaust remembrance in Austria is still vital.

### ***The Holocaust in Austria***

Prior to World War II, Austria counted 192,000 Jewish residents, the majority living in Vienna. It was one of the largest centres of Jewish cultural life in Europe. With the rise of discriminatory laws after the German annexation of Austria in 1938, Jewish life became impossible. In November of 1938, synagogues and Jewish communities were attacked during Kristallnacht, the night of the broken glass. Due to this discrimination, only 57,000 Jews remained in Austria by the start of the war, the majority having emigrated.

The remaining Jews faced annihilation. Some 30,000 were dispatched to the eastern front and killed by Einsatzgruppen divisions. Some 15,000 more went to the Theresienstadt concentration camp. Others went to camps in Germany. By the end of the war only 7,000 Jews remained in Austria.

Austria faces responsibility for this tragedy. Not only was Austria the birthplace of Hitler as well as Eichmann and other top Nazi orchestrators of the Holocaust, the Nazis received overwhelming popular support there and a larger percentage of Austrians served in the SS than even the Germans.

Despite this guilt, the Austrians were able to take advantage of their non-German national identity to construe themselves as victims of the Nazis after the war. This disingenuous and damaging myth enabled Austrians to ignore their guilt for almost a half century, and in the process elect a former Nazi to the presidency, Kurt Waldheim.

### ***Timeline***

- 1947: Even though the Verbotsgesetz statute bans the Nazi Party in Austria, rhetoric around the creation of the Second Republic demonstrates the pervasive acceptance of the “victim myth” that Austria was the first victim of Hitler and the Third Reich.
- 1949: The Mauthausen concentration camp is made an official memorial, the first in Austria.
- 1975: Mauthausen Museum is officially opened.

- 1986: Former U.N. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim runs for President, only to be uncovered as a former SS Cavalry corps member who was involved in the deportation of Greek Jews. The victim myth begins to be questioned in public dialogue. Despite this, Waldheim wins the election and remains president until 1992.
- 1988: A “Year of Remembrance” is announced as a response to the Waldheim Affair, sparking further public debate on Austria’s role in the Holocaust and the Third Reich.
- 1991: Chancellor Franz Vranitzky officially confesses Austria’s crimes as a perpetrator of the Holocaust and asks for forgiveness.
- 1995: Nationalfonds, an organisation founded to recognise the victims of National socialism, is founded.
- 1998: Commission is created for restitution of wealth to those who were robbed during wartime.
- 2000: Errinern.at is founded to help improve Holocaust education in Austria
- 2000: Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial in Vienna is inaugurated.
- 2001: Austria joins the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.
- 2018: Chancellor Sebastian Kurz speaks of “historic responsibility” of Austria with respect to Holocaust.

### **Government**

Austria’s current government is a coalition between the center right party, the OVP Austrian People’s Party and the anti-immigrant far right Austrian Freedom Part), which has historically been linked to the Nazis. While this coalition forms a government that seems unlikely to support Holocaust remembrance, the chancellor, Sebastian Kurz, has made open remarks about Austria’s “historic responsibility” towards the Holocaust, and his rhetoric has staunchly supported the importance of the Holocaust remembrance in Austria.

Some remain unconvinced that this coalition is a friend of Holocaust remembrance. The IKG (Israelitische Kulturgemeinde Wien) boycotted a government sponsored ceremony commemorating the Holocaust due to the presence of the Freedom Party. The Mauthausen committee refused to invite the Freedom to attend a similar commemorative ceremony. The Freedom Party responded to this rebuke by calling for a “culture of awareness and remembrance.” Overall, Freedom Party rhetoric on Holocaust issues remains softer and more progressive than that of the comparable Alternative for Germany party in Germany.

Yet the Freedom Party’s past continues to haunt this debate. The party’s hateful rhetoric on immigration leads many to draw comparisons with the Nazi ideology of racial purity. Until the Freedom Party can

show remorse and that they can be active leaders on the issue, and their policies demonstrate they have learned lessons from Austria's mistakes in the Holocaust, scepticism will remain and the government's nominal support of Holocaust remembrance will be tainted.

In addition, Kurz's coalition has supported one of Europe's harshest crackdowns on migration. Since taking office in December 2017, it has tightened borders and cut benefits for new immigrants. In June 2018, the government closed seven mosques and sought to expel dozens of Turkish imams, citing suspected violations of an Austrian law that bans "political Islam" or foreign financing of Muslim institutions. In October 2018, Austria joined the United States and Hungary by announcing that it will not sign the United Nations agreement on migration.

At the same time, the Austrian government stepped up support for Holocaust remembrance. The government funds education, memorials, museums, and research institutions dedicated directly to the Holocaust. These factors have created strong ties between the country's past and its present and foster a consciousness of Austria's role in and responsibility for National Socialism and the Holocaust.

### ***Restitution***

The Nationalfonds has been key in passing restitution laws, including the initial laws in 1998 concerning the restoration of art and cultural works to their rightful owners. Austria is the leader in this field of legal restitution of artifacts. Though there are certainly failings, as in the 2015 case of Klimt's Beethoven Frieze, the Austrian commitment since the late 1990s to restitution is among the strongest in Europe, with over 50,000 major artifacts stolen by the National Socialist regime returned to their rightful heirs.

### ***Education***

Austria has mandatory Holocaust education and the topic is commonly taught in both elementary and high school. The curriculum is curated to be age appropriate, accurate, and demonstrate Austrian guilt. Though class time is at a premium, considerable work is taking place to ensure that the time available to teachers to address the topic is used most effectively.

Errinern (German for "remember") is a branch of the Ministry of Education dedicated to Holocaust education, and their work is key to understanding the strengths and weaknesses of Holocaust education in Austria. Moritz Wein, a coordinator for Errinern, related how the organisation is renovating teaching materials to meet the needs of a modern classroom. Errinern has updated textbooks and has developed an interactive educational app that can be used on school sponsored devices. The app relates the stories of Holocaust victims, allowing students to engage personally with the Holocaust in relatively short time

and in an accessible way. These aids have been developed to adapt Holocaust education to a modern era where students have fewer personal links to the Holocaust itself.

Even so, the organisation faces challenges. Errinern can only reach and help teachers who are interested in improving Holocaust education. They have no mandate, but rather are only able to give materials to those who ask for them. While all history teachers in Austria undergo training that involves Holocaust education, it is by no means the case that all history teachers are interested in devoting all their energy to the subject. As is frequently the case in Holocaust remembrance, those already interested in the Holocaust have a plethora of options available, but it is easy for those who do not care to ignore the subject altogether.

In prior generations, many teachers found it difficult to teach on the Holocaust due to the prevalence of the victim myth and the closeted guilt of student's grandparents and parents. However, this problem becomes less prevalent as time passes. Today, many students engage in genealogy projects where they discuss their family's role during the war with their parents and reflect.

While the issue of teaching guilt has eased with time, teachers in Austria still face many challenges when educating about the Holocaust. Teachers often do not know how to approach the topic with ideologically right-wing students who they know will not be reached by standard textbooks and lessons. These issues are reported to Errinern by teachers with increasing frequency. Often social media is cited as the root of the problem, as anonymous posting of racist and anti-Semitic material, or even outright Holocaust denial, is becoming more and more common. Addressing this problem is not an easy task. Errinern and other organisations, such as Nationalfonds Austria, are doing research about how to reach this demographic, which is normally closed off to being lectured on this topic.

Traditionally, Errinern brought Holocaust survivors into schools as witnesses to tell their story through the Zeitsorger programme (Time Caretakers). This immersive experience is a powerful means of bridging the cognitive dissonance between history and the student's own lives and their current belief systems and can be an effective tool to reach demographics normally uninterested in the Holocaust. Sadly, Austria now only has 12 remaining survivors of the Holocaust participating in the Zeitsorger programme. This makes innovative teaching materials, such as interactive apps, accessible textbooks, and in person visits of sites even more important.

Another common problem within Holocaust education is the emotional and psychological difficulty of teaching the material to students. According to Hannah Landsmann, a curator and educational director at the Vienna Jewish Museum, teachers sometimes use trips to museums or visits by Holocaust survivors as a replacement for having to lecture on the subject.

These activities should not be treated as replacements for classroom Holocaust education, but rather as supplements. Indeed, Moritz Wein contends that visits from survivors or visiting concentration camps increases the burden on the teacher in the classroom, as the activities raise so many questions for students. This is a deficit that is difficult for the government to correct, but it is nonetheless an area of concern that requires an innovative solution.

Holocaust education is difficult in any country, and Austria's unique situation makes it even more complicated. Government institutions such as Errinern attempt to alleviate this difficult task by providing educational materials and trying to diagnose problems within the current system. In doing so, they have provided Austrian teachers with an outline and resources for improving Holocaust education. While they may not reach everyone, since they have no legislative mandate, it is clear Austrian Holocaust education is improving through this work.

### ***Commemoration***

Dr. Werner Dreier's favourite Holocaust memorial is in the south Austrian town of Villach. The memorial is made of glass and has been vandalised multiple times and damaged due to its fragility. Each time it has had to be restored, and it serves as a reminder of how Holocaust commemoration is not a one-time commitment but is something that needs attention over time to remain strong and meaningful.

According to Dreier, a history professor at the University of Salzburg, the vandalism serves as a good metaphor for the situation of commemoration in Austria in general. Memorials and commemorative sites in Austria are numerous but are not always treated respectfully.

Memorials in Austria have changed significantly in the past few decades. According to Wolfgang Gedeon, a historian and researcher of National Socialist Austria, prior to the 1990s it was still common to find memorials to Nazis in Austria. These memorials have begun to be removed, although some still remain. Debate around the historical importance of the memorials stall efforts to see them removed. While these memorials are historically interesting, they should at the very least be contextualised with educational materials, such as boards relating the context of the genocide that the commemorated Austrians perpetrated. In this way, these memorials can serve as historical reminders of the National Socialist period rather than as a means of honouring the perpetrators of a genocide.

Another significant change in recent years is the increase in the number of memorial sites dedicated to the Holocaust. In Melk, a small town between Salzburg and Vienna, a monument to a satellite camp has

appeared in the past five years. The small monument is inconspicuous, but stands next to a high traffic area, serving as a reminder that the beautiful provincial town along the Danube was once the site of a genocide. This is significant development in commemoration culture in Austria, and it is vital to the continuation of Holocaust remembrance in rural areas where big museums and Jewish communities are less accessible.

The most important commemorative site in Austria is the Mauthausen memorial. The former concentration camp serves as a museum and commemorative site and is funded by the ministry of the Interior. The site functions as an important educational facility. Schools throughout Austria are encouraged to make a trip to Mauthausen as part of their curriculum, and right-wing extremists are rehabilitated through programmes at the site. Mauthausen thus serves Austrian remembrance as an active commemorative site, not just as a static monument. Through the dynamic involvement with commemoration of this sort, Austrian remembrance continues to be strengthened.

An important government organisation in the field of commemoration is the Nationalfonds. The Nationalfonds was founded in 1995 to serve the “special responsibility” that Austria has with regard to its historical involvement with the Holocaust. The Nationalfonds is currently led by Hannah Lessing, the daughter of a Jewish Holocaust survivor. Hannah Lessing now does “memory work” to try to stem the tide of hate and anti-Semitism that she sees growing in Austria with the rise of right-wing populism. While the Nationalfonds helps in the promotion of large-scale sweeping legislation, it also partakes in smaller scale commemorative work. In June 2018, the members of Nationalfonds wrote all the names of the Austrian Jewish victims of the Holocaust on the Prater Hauptallee in Vienna.

This seems minor in comparison to restoring artwork, but is an innovative way of reaching new people and remembering the Holocaust in a more active and participatory way. Hannah Lessing recalled that there were bikers passing by who would stop and ask to write a name, and that this felt very meaningful to them, even if it was just a few minutes of memorialising that person. It is this kind of powerful memory work that will continue in Austria thanks to the establishment of this commemorative organisation.

### ***Archives***

Mauthausen is a memorial and a museum, but it is also home to Austria’s Holocaust archives. The director of the Mauthausen archives, Christian Duerr, emphasised how important the archives’ role in remembrance as they help in establishing the reestablishment of rightful ownership of property stolen during the Holocaust, as well as serving as an important research tool. As such, the Mauthausen archives are digitised and open to the public.

Another important archive is held at [Documentation Centre](#) of Austrian Resistance (DÖW). It commemorates the victims of the Holocaust.

### ***Victimisation***

In the post-war years, the Austrian “victim myth” was pervasive in the public consciousness and is one of the best-known examples of post-war revisionist history. Austrian governments portrayed themselves as the “first victim” of Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany, and this idea was widely accepted throughout the mid twentieth century.

This was an attempt not only to be assimilated into the international community and regain sovereignty, but also to avoid having to pay reparations. The year 1986 is widely considered a turning point in Austrian victimisation history. Kurt Waldheim, a former SS cavalry corps member, was running for president and in doing so brought attention to the active Austrian role in executing the Holocaust.

While this was by no means the end of the Austrian victim myth, it began the public dialogue. The Waldheim Affair brought Austrian victimhood into question. Though Waldheim became president, which was an international scandal, it brought Austria to its modern state of Holocaust remembrance by sparking a dialogue. Most chancellors since that time have been vocal proponents of Holocaust remembrance and most have recognised Austria’s guilt. According to Moritz Wein, the victim myth is thoroughly debunked, and is now only at the fringes of Austrian social consciousness.

### ***Opposition Parties***

The primary minority party in Austria is the Social Democratic Party. The party has been staunchly against the Freedom Party. Prior to the election in 2017 they signed a 30-year ban on forming a coalition with the far-right party. While this ban has little policy effect, it is a demonstration of how reprehensible the left wing views the Freedom Party as being.

### ***Civil Society***

While the government seems to lead the charge in Holocaust remembrance by funding memorials, education, and institutions, pressure from the ground up by members of civil society generated the political will to force these policies through.



Perhaps the most critical of these civil institutions is the Gedenkdienst (Commemoration Service). Although partially funded by the government, the Gedenkdienst operates independently from any government branch. It takes volunteers and sends them abroad to learn about the Holocaust through service as workers at Auschwitz, or by serving as aids to Holocaust survivors. According to Hannah Lessing, President of the Nationalfonds, the Gedenkdienst produces “the best ambassadors for Austrian remembrance”.

The Gedenkdienst faces financial challenges. Volunteers are given a stipend to live abroad, but those who are sent to more expensive countries often struggle to make ends meet. Without increased funding, the Gedenkdienst has warned that it may be forced to shut down. While the Gedenkdienst has only a limited number of volunteers, they are excellent candidates to be leaders at the forefront of future Holocaust remembrance.

Holocaust remembrance events are proliferating. In Vienna, for example, John Clarke of the Progressive Jewish Community says that members of a nearby Catholic church hold a candlelight vigil at the site of a former synagogue. A memorial was erected and [new street lamps](#) have been installed in the shape of a star of David.

### ***Media***

The Austrian media has a strong influence in Holocaust remembrance. Social media has enabled a rise of anti-Semitic comments. This hateful rhetoric is typically anonymous, and no anti-Semitic movement has a significant public figurehead. The mainstream media is primarily left-leaning and has called attention to this fringe revisionism and rising anti-Semitism in Austria.

Media coverage of Holocaust topics generally promotes Holocaust remembrance. The year 2018 marked the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Anschluss, Austria’s assimilation into the Third Reich, and as such it has been dubbed the “Year of Remembrance”, accompanied by radio and TV documentaries about the Holocaust. As the Holocaust period becomes a part of the more distant past, it is key that the media remains actively involved in spreading accurate information about the Holocaust and its local history.

### ***Jewish Community***

Ms. Julia Weduwen, educational director at the Jewish museum of Vienna emphasises that the Jewish museum is not a Holocaust museum. Jewish life in Austria did not start in 1933, nor did it end in 1945.

The Jews have always been, and continue to be, influential and important to the cultural life of Vienna and all of Austria. The primary Jewish organisation in Austria is the IKG, the Israelistische Kulturgemeinde Wien. This organisation supports Jewish communities, Jewish schools, and Holocaust education in Austria, as well as serving as an important political watchdog. Its boycott of the Holocaust Remembrance Day service in January 2018 attracted the attention of the media and brought the Freedom Party's ties to their Nazi past under further scrutiny.

Jews play other important roles in Holocaust remembrance in Austria. Many descendants of survivors serve on the Mauthausen Committee, a board of survivors and associated people who help to determine how to best keep the memory of the concentration camp alive in future generations.

Author: Nicholas Haeg

## BELGIUM



**Belgium scores well in almost all categories. Even Flemish nationalists, long sensitive about the subject of collaboration, have opened a museum which points out their responsibility in deportations.**

### *Overview*

The Belgian government today accepts its role in the Holocaust.

After claiming for decades that Belgium played no significant role in the Holocaust and that country was only a victim of the Nazi occupation, the government commissioned a report on its role in the genocide from the Centre for Historical Research and Documentation. The resulting report published in 2007 under the title “Docile Belgium, a more than 1000 page study detailing how the Belgian state collaborated with the Nazi occupation in hunting down its Jews and Roma, or gypsies.

That same year, Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt apologized for Belgium’s complicity in deporting Jews at the site of the Dossin Barracks, a transport camp in Mechelen. Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo issued a similar apology in 2012. Last year, the federal government instituted an annual special session at the Senate and Chamber of Representatives to memorialize the Holocaust.

Holocaust denial is illegal in Belgium. Holocaust education is mandated in the French-speaking Wallonian region. In Flanders, Holocaust education is widespread, though not explicitly required in the curriculum. Although some Flemish politicians have claimed that Flemish cooperation with the Nazis was not driven by racism or anti-Semitism, but rather by a fight for equal economic and social status with French-speaking Belgians, none have denied the Holocaust.

### *The Holocaust in Belgium*

Germany invaded and conquered Belgium in 1940. A government fled to London in exile. A collaborationist Belgian civilian government remained behind and coexisted with the German military government.

German occupiers began to identify and regulate Jewish life. An estimated 70,000 Jews lived in Belgium before the war. Belgian authorities followed German orders to register the Jews, but only 42,000 Jews were eventually registered. Many Belgian Jews fled to France and other European countries. German Military Governor General von Falkenhausen hesitated to carry out Nazi orders. The Belgian civilian government also made significant efforts to protect Belgian-born Jews, though no attempts were made to save non-Belgian or immigrant Jews.

Beginning in July of 1942, the German occupiers began deporting Jews and Roma from Mechelen Transit Camp, today known as the Dossin Barracks. The camp is located midway between Brussels and Antwerp and served as the main transport base in Belgium. More than 25,000 Jews were deported from Mechelen. The majority were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Two-thirds of those deported were immediately sent to gas chambers. At least 90% of those deported were not Belgian citizens. They were immigrants or refugees who had arrived in Belgium after fleeing persecution in Germany, Austria, or Poland.

While the Belgian nation was complicit in the crimes of the Holocaust, Belgium can claim the fifth largest number of "Righteous Among Nations." Belgium is especially known for its network of "hidden children," Jewish children taken in and protected by non-Jewish Belgians during the war.

There was only one incident of clearly anti-Semitic violence in Belgium during the war, which occurred on Easter, April 14, 1941. A mob of Belgian citizens vandalized and destroyed much of the Jewish Quarter of Antwerp. The group set fire to two synagogues and the house of a Belgian rabbi.

### ***Timeline***

- 1969: Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society (CEGES) is founded, originally as Centre for Research and Studies on the History of the Second World War.
- 1995: Act of 23 March 1995 prohibits Holocaust denial. The law penalizes any minimization, approving, or justifying of the genocide.
- July 1997: The Study Commission is founded to research the assets of the Belgian Jewish community lost during WWII.

- 2000: A PhD thesis outlines the collaboration and contributions of Antwerp authorities in deporting Jews.
- 2001: The report by the Study Commission (founded in 1997) is published.
- December 2001: Act of 20 December 2001 establishes the Indemnification Commission for the assets of Belgian Jews.
- 2004: The Belgian government designates January 27th as “Remembrance Day of the Genocide committed by Nazi Germany”.
- 2004: The Belgian government commissions CEGES to research the role of Belgian authorities in WWII and the Holocaust.
- 2007: “La Belgique Docile” published.
- 2007: Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt publicly apologizes for Belgium’s complicity at the site of the Dossin Barracks.
- December 2007: Research closes on the assets and individual claims of Belgian Jews. The Belgian Judaism Foundation is established, and remaining reparations are donated to the Foundation for the support of the Jewish community.
- May 2007: Belgian Prime Minister and Minister of Defense honor the Righteous Among Nations of Belgium with a plaque.
- March 2009: Decree of 13 March 2009 by the French Community supports Holocaust research.
- 2012: Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo publicly apologizes for role of Belgian authorities in the Holocaust.
- 2017: Federal government institutes an annual special session at the Senate and Chamber of Representatives to memorialize the Holocaust

### ***Government***

The current Belgian government condemns the atrocities of the Holocaust and apologizes for the role that Belgium played in the persecution of the Jews.

The most recent case of Holocaust revisionism dates back to 2015 when politician Laurent Louis made a public speech claiming Zionism to be worse than Nazism. The Brussels Court of Appeals initially fined Louis EUR20,000 and gave him a six-month suspended jail sentence, but later changed his punishment to visiting and writing about one Nazi concentration camp each year for five years. This change caused significant controversy.

Current controversy focuses on the immigration aspect of Belgium’s Holocaust history. During the war, the Belgian government took strong action to protect Belgian Jews but willingly provided the information of non-Belgian Jewish refugees and immigrants to German authorities.

This memory is often politicized to support various immigration policies. Conservative parties reference the Holocaust as a warning sign against anti-Semitism, which they claim is common among Muslim immigrants. Conservative leaders invoke Belgium's past to justify stricter immigration laws. Left-wing parties use Holocaust remembrance to argue for more open borders for immigrants and refugees.

In December 2018, Prime Minister Charles Michel's government lost its majority in Parliament after its most significant coalition partner – the right-wing N-VA Flemish party – left in opposition to the planned signing of the United Nations international agreement on migration. Michel said he would lead the remaining minority government to “ensure stability.”

On New Year's Day 2019, the Flemish regional government banned on the Muslim and Jewish ritual slaughter of animals. Both animal rights advocates and right-wing nationalists pushed for the ban ritual slaughter, igniting fears from the Jewish anti-Semitism hiding under the guise of animal protection.

### ***Education***

Education in Belgium is a local concern, so Holocaust education must be evaluated in each of its two main regions: French-speaking Wallonia and Dutch-speaking Flanders.

In Flanders, Holocaust education is not mandatory. The Flemish constitution allows pedagogical liberty for teachers, which bans specific curriculum requirements. The Ministry of Education instead focuses on the development of the skills and strategies necessary to better analyze history. Yet, Flemish schools have signed a “Declaration of Commitment” to teach about “genocides and crimes against humanity in the second world war.” The Flemish Ministry of Education believes that most teachers teach the Holocaust because of the declaration.

Researchers at the Free University of Brussels are investigating the effectiveness of these policies. The results of this study are expected to be published at the end of 2018. Holocaust education will also be included in 2018 as a “curriculum goal,” which will require teachers to prove their students have learned about the Holocaust. Efforts of Holocaust Revisionism are managed by the “Special Committee for Remembrance Education,” which is based out of the Kazerne Dossin.

In contrast, Wallonia and Brussels, the French-speaking communities of Belgium, explicitly require Holocaust education. The subject is listed in the curriculum as “the universe of concentration camps and genocide.” Démocratie ou Barbarie, an organization founded in 1994 to coordinate and encourage citizenship education in French-speaking Belgium, plays an important role in the advancement of

Holocaust education. It organizes school visits to museums and memorials such as the Kazerne Dossin and even Auschwitz. Such visits are not required, but they are common.

### ***Commemoration***

The federal government owns and operates a Holocaust museum on the site of the Breendonk concentration camp, which held mostly political prisoners during the war. The Flemish government owns the Dossin Barracks deportation camp.

The fate of the Dossin Barracks is instructive. After the war, the federal government used the site as a military base. It sold the land to a private real estate developer in the early 1990s. After protests by the Jewish community, the Flemish government bought two of the flats in the complex and constructed a small museum.

In 2001, Flemish Prime Minister Patrick Dewael announced a plan to build a large museum on the site and appointed a committee of well-renowned historians to put together a proposal. It focused on the local Belgian Holocaust story. Although the new Flemish Prime Minister Yves Leterme initially rejected the project, he changed his mind after a visit to Auschwitz in 2006.

The museum today confronts the dark past in an unflinching, passionate fashion. Photos of all 25,846 Holocaust victims deported from Mechelen are posted on a three-story high wall. Each year, photos are added. When pictures remain unavailable, a graphic representation is shown.

The museum's permanent exhibit presents an unsparing look at Belgian collaboration, emphasizing how Flanders was the most compliant to Nazi orders. According to Dr. Eric Picard, founder of the Brussels-based Association for the Memory of the Shoah, about 25 percent of the Jewish population in French-speaking Belgium was murdered, compared to 75 percent of Flanders' similarly sized Jewish community. Hundreds of Belgians — many of them police officers — were involved in identifying and rounding up Jews. Not a single Belgian municipality refused the Nazi occupiers' orders to register the Jews in their jurisdictions. Only one, in the Brussels region, refused to hand out yellow stars.

Holocaust commemoration is widespread in Belgium. January 27 is nationally recognized as the Holocaust Remembrance Day. Last year, the government instituted an annual special session at the Senate and Chamber of Representatives to memorialize the Holocaust.

### ***Archives***

Belgium has three main wartime archives, the Centre Communautaire Laïc Juif, The Auschwitz Foundation, and The National Memorial Fort Breendonk.

Archives are accessible to researchers, but the process of obtaining information is more complicated for non-academics. All archives will be accessible by 2020, which will mark the 70-year anniversary of the end of the war. Certain archives have also been digitized in a process led by Yad Vashem.

### ***Restitution***

A Study Commission was founded in July 1997 to research assets of the Belgian Jewish community lost during WW II. It published its findings in 2001. Financial reparations were first allotted to survivors and the families of survivors. The remaining money was used to create The Belgian Judaism Foundation, which supports Jewish communities in Belgium.

### ***Civil Society***

Religious leaders are not active in Holocaust remembrance in Belgium. While the country's majority Roman Church, in general, condemns the Holocaust, it has made no official apology.

Holocaust remembrance is occasionally a contentious topic within Islamic communities because Judaism is often associated with Israel state action. Certain Belgian citizens have expressed concern that teachers are reluctant to teach the Holocaust in schools with large Muslim populations.

### ***Media***

Belgian news sources are sensitive to the memory of the Holocaust, and they often cover events of commemoration. Some Belgians are frustrated that the media focuses so much on the Holocaust and neglects other parts of history, such as Belgium's brutal colonization of the Congo.

### ***Jewish Community***

Approximately 30,000 Jews live in Belgium today, according to the World Jewish Congress. This means that Jews make up only about 0.2% of the total population of 11 million.

The overwhelming majority of Belgian Jews live in either Antwerp or Brussels. The Jewish community in Brussels is largely Ashkenazi and secular, while the community in Antwerp is mostly Orthodox. Jews are



well integrated into Belgian society. The process of distributing reparations to Jews after the war has been completed.

Authors: Ilana Luther and Lindsay Daugherty

# Bulgaria

**Bulgaria continues to believe it saved its Jews. While it does have much to be proud about, it fails to take responsibility for deporting Jews in Macedonia and Thracia.**

## *Overview*

Bulgaria faces a major challenge with its Holocaust memory. It celebrates itself as saviours of their country's Jewish population. Yet it remains reluctant to acknowledge any fault in the deportation of the Jews from occupied territories.

One important piece of history was the democratic election of Simeon, the son of King Boris III, in 2001. Simeon brought with him an agenda to rehabilitate his father, and has contributed to the climate of glorifying to the former King for his role in the Holocaust.

Far-right parties in the government also pose a problem. They prevent governmental recognition of fault. As the Bulgarian Holocaust's truth is obfuscated, room for revisionism rises. Although officially banned, far-right supporters rally every year in Sofia to pay tribute to a fascist general Hristo Lukov with close ties to Nazi Germany. In 2018, more than 1000 marchers took part.

## *The Holocaust in Bulgaria*

Bulgaria was stripped of most of its territory after the First World War, and grew closer to Germany. When war began, Bulgaria declared neutrality, while profiting from agreements with Nazis. German diplomacy forced the return of Romanian territories and Bulgaria-German relations tightened. In 1940 Bulgaria instituted the first of many laws aimed at the Jewish population. In 1941 Bulgaria joined the Tripartite Pact, and seized the opportunity to occupy territories in Macedonia, Pirot and Thrace. Bulgaria administered the territories and granted citizenship but deported Jews to death in March 1943.

The Nazis then demanded Bulgaria send away its own Jewish population - only to ignite an outcry from religious leaders, and politicians. The Tsar halted the deportation, instead

interning the Jewish population in the countryside of Bulgaria. Men were dispatched to labour camps, and Jewish women and children stayed in countryside homes. In May 1944 the government began to dissolve the anti-Jewish laws. The Soviet Army forced Bulgaria to declare neutrality and declare war on Germany.

Bulgaria engaged in its only military campaign of the entire war against Germany. The price for joining the war was the complete withdrawal from the occupied territories, and Bulgaria remained within the Soviet sphere until 1990.

Bulgaria deported 11,343 Jews from the occupied territories during the war, but allowed for the survival of almost all of the Jews in its pre-war territory. Between 1948 and 1951, almost 90% of Bulgarian Jews emigrated to Israel, and the country now has between 3000 and 6000 Jews.

### ***Timeline***

- 15 November 1990: People's Republic of Bulgaria renamed to Republic of Bulgaria, fall of Communism
- 1992: Decree restoring ownership rights in Jewish communal property to the country's chief Jewish organization, Shalom
- 2001 – 2005: Former King Simeon elected Prime Minister
- February 2003: First Lukov March in Sofia
- December 2012: Bulgaria admitted as Observer Country into IHRA
- 7 July 2016: Inauguration of monument commemorating Bulgaria's bravery in saving its 48,000 Jews
- 18 October 2017: Government adopted IHRA's working definition of antisemitism and appointed Georg Georgiev as national coordinator on combating antisemitism
- January – June 2018: Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union
- 12 March 2018: Prime Minister Boyko Borisov attends Holocaust Commemoration in Macedonia
- April 2018: Commemorative plaque unveiled in Dupnitsa Railway Station to pay tribute to
- 8 May 2018: The Country of the Rescued Jews Exhibition Opening in Sofia
- December 2018, Bulgaria gains full status within IHRA

### ***Government***

In June, 2017, Bulgaria adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism and appointed Deputy Foreign Minister Georg Georgiev as national coordinator for the

fight against antisemitism. Unlike certain other countries in Europe, it has not witnessed a significant rise of anti-Semitism.

Its record on the Holocaust is not as exemplary. The government continues to skirt around the issue of the deportation of Jews from the occupied territories. While quick to discuss the country's past saving Jews, Bulgarian presidents neglect to mention the deported Jews from occupied territories.

In a 2016 speech, former President Rosen Plevneliev spoke with pride how, "in the dark years of World War II, Bulgaria... set an extraordinary precedent and saved the lives of all its citizens of Jewish origin. Unfortunately, our country was not in a situation to do the same for the Jews from Northern Greece and parts of Yugoslavia, as they weren't Bulgarian citizens."

Two years later, in March, 2018, Prime Minister Boyko Borisov attended the 75th anniversary of the deportation of the Jews in Skopje. But he never mentioned any Bulgarian involvement.

Borisov's coalition depends on support from a right-leaning group called the United Patriots and is composed of several parties: VMRO, National Front, and Attack (Metodieva). Members, and even leading figures of these parties, are known for anti-Semitic remarks and Holocaust obfuscation.

Despite its membership in the European Union, Bulgaria has no explicit law against Holocaust denial, though it does criminalize the display of fascist and totalitarian symbols. Bulgaria has also joined the IHRA with Israel as its mentor, and currently has liaison status.

Bulgaria has no proper law on hate speech. Bulgarian law bans "incitement to racial hatred," but is questionably enforced. Although no Polish-style law regulating historical discussion exists, but the lack of Holocaust negation laws allows revisionist negation.

### ***Education***

Bulgaria fails to teach about the deportation of the Jews from the occupied territories. The curriculum of schools managed by the Ministry of Education was amended, in March 2018, to include "the act of the rescue of the Bulgarian Jews during World War II." Former editions contained little to no information on the Holocaust in Bulgaria.

The government has launched several programs to combat the lack of information on the Holocaust in schools, including web resources and open lessons in seven cities, as well as the work of extra-governmental organisations like Alef. Teacher training in conjunction with

Yad Vashem takes place annually and joint seminars for history teachers from Bulgaria and Macedonia are held in Sofia. Although few university options exist to study the Holocaust, Sofia University has been running the Hebraistika (Jewish Studies) program for the past three years, the first of its kind.

The country has no Holocaust Museum. Occasional exhibits take place at the Sofia Synagogue.

### ***Commemoration***

Bulgaria has created several monuments commemorating the Holocaust, often celebrating the rescue of its Jews. Many of these commemorative monuments have been erected under the encouragement of Shalom, the umbrella organisation for Bulgarian Jews.

On May 11 2018, a plaque went up in Breznik to honour the Jews who worked in camps in the area. Another plaque at Dupnitsa, unveiled in April 2018, pays tribute to locals who saved their Jewish fellow citizens from deportation and “eased the sufferings of 4,000 Jews... who passed through in transit to the Nazi death camps.” Further monuments, such as the one near the National Assembly in Sofia, were recently changed to include mention of the deportation of Jews.

The capital Sofia has facsimiles of monuments from “Bulgaria Forest” of Yad Vashem. The original monuments honoured King Boris III. Shalom criticizes monuments which do not acknowledge Bulgaria’s role in the Holocaust.

March 10 is designated as the “Day of the Rescue of the Bulgarian Jews and of the Victims of the Holocaust and of the Crimes against Humanity”, with commemorations taking place in the capital.

### ***Civil Society***

In May 2018 an exhibition travelled around Bulgaria, created by a Bulgarian Jew, Iakov Djerassi, and funded by the Ministry of Culture. This exhibition, called “The Country of the Rescued Jews” appeared in Sofia and Plovdiv, and purported to shine a new light on Bulgaria’s Holocaust history, commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the rescue of the country’s Jews. The exhibit glorified the role of the King in saving the Jews, ignoring the problematic parts of his reign. Most Jewish figures skipped the exhibition opening.

At the exhibition opening, Deputy Prime Minister Valeri Simeonov criticized Jews for their role in Bulgaria's communist governments. In response, the American Defamation League President Jonathan Greenblatt called "this remark anti-Semitic for singling out Jews, as Jews, for the harms caused by the Communist regime. Also known as the 'Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy theory,' this idea that Jews are responsible for Communism or the evils of Communist regimes is widely held to be anti-Semitic."

Bulgaria is the unwilling host of an annual Lukov March in February. Hristo Lukov, the namesake is touted as an anti-communist hero, conveniently killed by, among others, a Jewish partisan. His march involves torches and a uniform eerily similar to that of the Wehrmacht. The march is organised by Bulgarian National Union, a small far-right party who have named themselves after variant of Lukov's own party, The Union of Bulgarian National Legions. Beginning with small numbers in the early 2000s, the march grew and is now a staple on the European neo-Nazi circuit. The government has banned the march, but it goes away anyhow, with the government preferring to avoid violent clashes with the demonstrators. In 2018, Shalom created a 180,000-strong petition to stop the Lukov March. The march went ahead anyway.

### ***Archives***

There are several archives in Bulgaria, ranging from the records of State Security, to Jewish Archives and military archives. All grant full access to researchers and are free to use.

### ***Financial Settlements***

Although Holocaust reparations began right after the war, the Communist government nationalized much property. Most surviving Bulgarian Jews made Aliyah to Israel, relinquishing their property to the state.

In 1990, democratic Bulgaria began restitution, and was successful in its restoration of communal Jewish property, or fair compensation. Nearly all confiscated communal property that was Jewish-owned has been returned, although one property in Varna remains in dispute. Shalom has been assigned control of this property.

Confiscated heirless property is not covered in Bulgarian restitution legislation. Many synagogues were neglected under communism to the extent that they had to be demolished or restored to be used for other cultural activities. There have also been disputes resulting from additional construction on buildings and to whom ownership belonged. In 2003, the government returned all of a

building to Shalom but the top two floors, which had been built after the building's confiscation. Only in 2007 did the government gift the floors to Shalom. Cases such as confiscated empty land upon which factories had been later built suffer from similar hang-ups.

### ***Victimization***

In Bulgaria, Jews are associated with communism since the Jews who remained after the war and did not make Aliyah tended to support the new Communist authorities and the Soviet occupation.

Since many Bulgarian people see themselves as victims of communism, the next step is to see themselves as victims of the Jews – insulted further by the prevalent notion in the country that the Bulgarian people “saved” the Jews.

In recent years, particularly since joining IHRA and approaching the 75 Anniversary of the Rescue of the Jews on 10 March 2018, the government has been more active in matters combating anti-Semitism and raising awareness on matters of the Holocaust. Borissov's attendance of the Skopje commemoration was perhaps the largest step taken, but the lack of a full acknowledgement or apology for Bulgaria's involvement in the deportation of Macedonian Jews qualified his presence.

### ***Opposition Parties***

Bulgaria has a host of far-right parties VMRO, Attack, and National Front. All flirt with anti-Semitism.

Attack has consistently been the fourth-strongest party in the Bulgarian parliamentary elections, while the other two have had wavering support, including an unsuccessful 2014 coalition. . The three parties are now in a coalition with the government as a minority party (United Patriots), and two of the three party leaders are deputy prime ministers, Krasimir Karakachanov (VMRO) and Valeri Simeonov (National Front).

Karakachanov is a quieter leader with fewer scandals. Simeonov has a long track record of spewing hatred: he was convicted of hate speech against the Roma minority and admitted to taking spoof pictures in the concentration camp of Buchenwald. The leader of Attack has also published several anti-Semitic books, feeding into the myth of a Jewish cabal.

## ***Civil Society***

In 2014, the Anti-Defamation league conducted research on anti-Semitism in Bulgaria, and rated it among the highest countries in Europe, lower only than Poland, Greece, and Turkey. According to the survey, 59% of the interviewees responded, “probably true” to the statement that “Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust.”

Iuliana Metodieva, in conjunction with Shalom, has conducted research on internet forums and found a high level of racism present. Other interviewed figures were quick to mention the anti-Semitism found online.

Football represents another venue for anti-Semitism. In 2018, two young fans painted swastikas on their chests. In 2013 the Levski Club was fined after supporters displayed a banner celebrating Adolf Hitler’s birthday. Many interviewed expressed the sentiment that swastikas were commonplace at football matches, as well as anti-Semitic chants (Metodieva). Mein Kampf and other anti-Semitic books are often sold in bookstores (Sawyer).

Much of the intolerance in Bulgaria is directed at the Roma minority. Jews in Bulgaria are less visible than other minorities, particularly because the Jewish population has historically been well-integrated and because the names of children are derived from their father’s name, often obscuring Jewish heritage.

## ***Media***

The Bulgarian media reflects the national consensus. For the most part, it does not cover the deportation of Jews and speaks only about the rescue. There is free speech in Bulgaria, but it is checked by libel law and law against hate speech and incitement to racial hatred.

Abuses continue nonetheless. In 2015, four youths were acquitted after urinating on synagogue wall and spray-painting “Death, Jews” on it. When interviewees make racist statements, journalists often do not challenge them. On online forums, comments against Jews and Roma tend to be left in place).

## ***Jewish Community***

The Jewish community had to be rebuilt almost from scratch after the communist period.



Only two synagogues remain functioning, with former synagogues converted into cultural centres to storage depots.”

The vast majority of Bulgarian Jews are a part of Shalom. Established in 1990, Shalom is involved politically, fighting against the Lukov March and pushing for the appointment of a national coordinator on combating anti-Semitism in 2017. It organized an exhibition “Bulgarian Jews: Living History” in March 2018.

Shalom also publishes the newspaper “Evreiski vesti” and “La Estreya” magazine 30. Although Bulgaria lacks a full-fledged Jewish History Museum, the community has created one inside the synagogue in Sofia.

The Jewish population of Bulgaria is somewhere from 3000 to 6000, constituting less 1% of the country’s population.

Author: Caderyn Owen-Jones

## CROATIA

**Croats continues to have difficulty coming to terms with its wartime past under a Nazi collaborationist government. Although new historical research shows**

**that most Croats opposed the fascist puppet regime and many saved Jews the country's troubled past, including five decades of post-war communist rule, continues to cast a heavy cloud.**

### ***Overview***

“Here there is no culture of remembrance, just one of commemoration” – Aneta Lalić, sociologist.

Holocaust memory in Croatia is troubled. Croatian fascists allied themselves with Hitler during the war and sent most of the country's Jews – and many Serbs - to their death. During the 1990s Serbo-Croat war, the Croatian Defence Forces adopted the salute of the wartime fascist Ustaša. At football games, rallies, protests and commemorations alike, many Croats continue flash this infamous salute.

Little restitution has been made to the Jewish community. No Holocaust museums exist. Croatia suffers from a lack of consensus about the country's main wartime concentration camp at Jasenovac. For the past three years, Jewish, Serbian and Roma communities have boycotted the official Jasenovac commemoration.

Despite honest efforts to get at the bottom of the nature and number of victims of this and several other Ustaša-era concentration camps, the government has failed to organize an international commission on the Holocaust in Croatia, on the model of the Eli Wiesel Commission in Romania. Although Prime Minister Zoran Milanović in 2012 and President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović in 2018 both proposed establishing such a commission, they backed down when faced with right-wing criticism against allowing foreigners to write Croatian history and by leftists who said the government should just recognize the country's complicity. At the least, Croatia should appoint an independent commission to come up with an honest reckoning.

### ***The Holocaust in Croatia***

When the Austro-Hungarian empire collapsed after World War I, Croatia became part of Yugoslavia. It was an uncomfortable marriage. A far-right terror group, the Ustaša, emerged in 1930, dedicating itself to Croatian independence. The Ustaša leader was Ante Pavelić. In 1934, an Ustaša – inspired and supported assassin killed King Alexander I of Yugoslavia.

During the first few years of World War II, Yugoslavia remained neutral. When the government allied with Germany and Italy in 1941, a coup d'état put new pro-British leaders in charge. The Axis invaded Yugoslavia, and on April 10, 1941, the Ustaša proclaimed an Independent State of Croatia. The Ustaša slogan was “Za dom spremni” (For the Homeland, Ready).

The Ustaša opened the Jadovno concentration camp in April 1941. Soon after Jadovno, they established the Jasenovac concentration camp. The Ustaša ran these camps by themselves, without any Nazi assistance and remained loyal to fascism until the end of the war, and much of its leadership fled to the West to escape Tito's partisan forces and the Soviet Red Army.

More than 300,000 Serbs, 30,000 Jews and a similar number of Roma perished. Around 9,000 Jews survived, and many made aliyah to Israel afterward. Today it is estimated that between 500 and 1,500 Jews remain in Croatia, a large majority of them secular.

### ***Timeline***

- May 1945: British forces in Bleiburg, Austria refuse to give asylum to Yugoslav collaborators including Ustaša and return them to Yugoslavia, where the communists kill many of them.
- 29 November 1945: Yugoslavia's Constituent National Assembly proclaimed the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia
- 1948-1952: After the Communists institute anti-Jewish measures and confiscate Jewish property, more than half of Croatia's Jews leave for Israel.
- 1952: Monument is constructed to the Jewish Victims of the Holocaust in Mirogoj Cemetery
- 1961: Croat communists remove 1000 Jewish graves from Mirogoj Cemetery, making space for the communist elite to be buried.
- 1966: During a reform period, a stone flower is unveiled at Jasenovac
- 1968: Opening of Jasenovac Memorial Camp
- 4 May 1980: Death of Tito
- 1989: Publication of Franjo Tuđman's 'Horrors of War: Historical Reality and Philosophy' in Croatia; the English version is published in 1996.
- April – May 1990: First democratic elections in Croatia
- 1990-1991: Dissolution of the Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia
- 1991-1995: After Croatia declares independence, the Yugoslav People's Army and Serbian and Montenegrin auxiliaries attacked Croatia, using the local Serbs to foment insurgency and occupy a third of Croatia's territory. The occupied territory was restored in 1995. Serbia always denied involvement in these developments, though obviously it gave military and intelligence support to the insurgents.
- 30 May 1994: Introduction of Croatian Kuna
- 1 January 1997: The Law on Compensation comes into effect
- 21 August 1997: Croatia apologizes for Ustaša crimes against Jews
- October 1998: Dinko Šakić found guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity
- 1998: State Administration Ministry registered The Association of HOS Volunteers in the City of Zagreb
- 2002: Amendment on the Law of Compensation
- 2004: Removal of a memorial plaque dedicated to Ustaša Commander Jure Francetić
- 2006: Founding of Bet Israel Community

- 27 April 2015: Appeal of Triple Camp Jasenovac Society and subsequent registration by the City of Zagreb
- 4 April 2016: Jakov Sedlar's Jasenovac film opening night
- 5 November 2016: Installation of plaque in Jasenovac municipality with HOS (and Ustaša) Slogan
- 1 March 2017: Establishment of Council for Dealing with Consequences of the Rule of Non-Democratic Regimes
- September 2017: Moving of memorial plaque to nearby town of Novska

### **Government**

*"My position on the "Za dom spremni" salute is clear. It is the old Croatian salute, but unfortunately it was compromised during the Ustaša days." - President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, 4 September 2017*

Facist leader Pavelic initiated the "Za dom spremni" slogan in the 1930 and it was used exclusively by his movement until 1990.

After independence in 1991, the ruling HDZ party relativized the Ustaša. Its ally, the HSP (Croatian Party of Rights) openly deployed Ustaša iconography. While the HDZ never went that far, it reintroduced the Ustaša-era kuna as the currency and renamed the Square of the Victims of Fascism to the Croatian Nobles Square in 2000.

Some monuments honouring the Partisans were destroyed. In Istria, the Croatian littoral, and some other areas of strong partisan tradition partisan monuments not only were not touched, but new ones were introduced. In other areas, the partisan monuments, many of them actually Communist Party monuments, were seen as signs of the communist dictatorship.

Croatia's first President, Franjo Tuđman, inflamed the subject. In a 1989 book called "Wasteland of History," later published as "Horrors of War" in English. Tuđman minimized the Ustaša crimes. In a translation of his book provided by the American Jewish Congress, he alleged that the estimate "of six million dead is based to the greatest extent on emotionally biased testimonies as well as on one-sided and exaggerated data on post war calculations of war crimes and on the settling of accounts with the defeated perpetrators of war crimes."

Tuđman and Croatia only apologised for Ustaša crimes in 1997, as part of an arrangement establishing the ties with Israel. "New, free and democratic Croatia completely condemns Nazi crimes of the Holocaust and genocide over Jewish people in many European states, including Croatia," said a statement.

Extreme sensitivity continues around the numbers of those murdered at the Jasenovac Concentration Camp. Serbs estimate 700,000 victims. More recent and objective findings, however, such as those of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, puts the number between 77,000 and 100,000. The

numbers remain unclear and the subject of a genuine detective story. An independent commission, similar to Romania's Weisel Commission, would help clarify.

The issue remains unresolved. In 2017, Croatia's coalition government, led by the Croatian Democratic Union, almost broke up over the installation of a plaque at Jasenovac with the Ustaša slogan 'Za dom spremni' ('Ready for the Home(land)').

Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic seems schizophrenic on the issue. While she [condemned the Ustasha's role](#) during the Holocaust during a 2015 visit to Israel, she posed with a group of Croatian émigrés [holding a flag bearing the Ustasha symbol](#). The Ustasha initiated the brutality and mass killing of Serbs, Jews and Roma on their own initiative, for their own ideological reasons. The flag in question bore no Ustaša symbol but a variant of Croatia's coat-of-arms that was used during the Habsburg period. This is a good example, however, of how historical details can be used to fuel political propaganda. Serbian media and several Croatian leftist groups knowingly spread the story about the "Ustaša flag."

### ***Education***

In Croatian high schools, the Holocaust is taught as part of the mandatory curriculum, as centralised by the Ministry of Education. Croatia hosts a seminar for teachers on teaching the Holocaust, which around 20 teachers, not just historians, attend annually.

At college level, Zagreb University has a Judaic Studies department and classes are available in the history department. A special online program on Holocaust memory is offered in conjunction with Yad Vashem. The Holocaust is dealt with in other lectures, such as Croatian History in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Croatian textbooks condemn the Ustaša as fascists. No attempts are made at rehabilitation.

As part of Yugoslavia before the 1990s, Zagreb hosted the Museum of Revolution of the Peoples of Croatia and as a Communist Party institution, closed in 1991. Its Holocaust component is minimal. The Croatian History Museum in Zagreb recently featured a show on 1945 and has plans for a permanent Holocaust section if the government approves a plan for a new building. The Jasenovac Memorial Museum is both public and free, offering programs for schools. Only about ten schools visited, last year, according to numerous interviewees.

### ***Commemoration***

Holocaust Memorial Day has proved a point of contention. The Zagreb Jewish community organizes the 27 January International Holocaust Remembrance Day. It has boycotted, since 2015, the 22 April official Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Jasenovac, holding alternative commemoration a day earlier.

Few commemoration sites exist. A small synagogue-cum-museum in Dubrovnik is dedicated to the Jewish community, with a single room on the Holocaust. Jasenovac and Jadovno remain open to the

public, and Mirogoj cemetery has a monument dedicated to the Jews who lost their lives in the Holocaust, the placement of which holds a certain unfortunate irony.

A soon-to-be-unveiled museum, the Museum of Tolerance, is scheduled to open in Zagreb. It will be located in the centre of Zagreb, in a former oil factory. Before World War II, the building was owned by a Jewish family. Little is known yet about the museum's content.

Croatia's treatment of the main Jasenovac camp remains controversial. The camp's museum reopened in November 2006 with an exhibition designed by Croatian architect Helena Paver Njirić. It features a field of glass panels inscribed with the names of the victims. Critics point to the removal of all Ustaše killing instruments from the display and a lack of explanation of the ideology that led to the crimes committed there in the name of the Croatian people.

In 2016, Croatian filmmaker Jakov Sedlar released a documentary titled "Jasenovac—The Truth." This film contended that Jasenovac had not been a concentration camp where the Ustasha had committed genocide, but rather a benign labor camp and that the number of victims is exaggerated. [Jewish](#), Serbian, left-wing and anti-Nazi groups, as well as [Israeli diplomats](#), reacted with dismay.

### ***Legal Environment***

Although Croatia has a law banning fascist symbols, the question remains on what constitutes a fascist symbol, and it seems in the hands of the courts and various commissions to interpret.

### ***Archives***

Many archival collections pertaining to the Ustaša state were hauled to Belgrade immediately after the war. Most are within the depositories of the Serbian Ministry of Defence and inaccessible under the excuse that they had to be stored outside Belgrade during the "NATO intervention" of 1999. This issue is part of the succession negotiations among the successor states of Yugoslavia. Some academics interviewed complain that many of the archives useful in understanding the Holocaust are in Serbia and difficult or impossible to access.

What wartime archives remain in Croatia are open, and the procedure to access the archives is straightforward. A book lists archival collections in Croatia, and a website equivalent and then there is a small yearly fee of 100 kuna, or a smaller fee for a shorter access window. The provincial archives are less streamlined, but equally open.

Post-war communist secret police archives are under special regulation, and permission is required before using them. The archives are state organised, their director appointed by parliament, and every archivist is paid by the state as public servants with a responsibility towards the public to grant access.

## ***Restitution***

“In Croatian law, there is an invisible clause which says ‘try not to retribute as much as possible’” – Zlatko Hasanbegović, historian and politician

This is the essence of the Holocaust restitution issue. Whereas in Poland and many other East European countries, the Jewish property was restituted, this is not the case in Croatia, Srrbia, and many other ex-Yugoslav states.

Croatia resists restitution, not only for Jewish property, but other private property confiscated in the fascist and communist eras.

On January 1 1997, Croatia issued the Law on Restitution/Compensation of Property Appropriated During Yugoslav Communist Rule: It fails to cover property prior to May 15 1945. Members of the Ustaša can claim full restitution of their property, but members of the Jewish community, most of whose property had been seized before the end of World War II, enjoy no similar claim. No payment is provided for demolished buildings, and so Jewish property destroyed by the Ustaša received no compensation.

The government has offered to donate the former Ministry of Justice building in Zagreb to the Jewish community. In return, it demanded relinquishing claims on other property across Croatia. The Jewish community refused.

Many restitution procedures extending decades, during which time many claimants had passed away. Many stolen works of art have not been returned, despite the Ministry of Culture possessing an archive with lists of works of art plundered by the Ustaša and Socialist regimes.

In April 2016, the US Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, Nicholas Dean, came to Croatia for the explicit purpose of discussing restitution, while in March 2018 the World Jewish Restitution Organisation visited Zagreb to discuss the same matter.

## ***Civil Society***

Controversy swirls over the wartime role of the Roman Catholic Church. The Archbishop of Zagreb Aloysius Stepinac has been accused of failing to condemn the Ustaša, yet at the same time credited with thousands of Serbs and Jews. The Church beatified him in 1998. Recent research by historians Robin Harris and Esther Gitman Stepinac show Stepinac as anti-Ustaša, a vocal critic of Ustaša racial theories, and a thorn at Pavelić’s side.

The current Croatian Church has “asked for forgiveness” for the victims of the Holocaust. At the same time, individual priests, such as Stjepan Razum, have been known for revisionist peddling. The Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Zagreb is the site of memorial services on the day of Pavelić’s death.

Other elements of Croatian civil society continue to support the Ustaša. The Communists used Jasenovac after the war, including in 1948 for the so-called Cominformists, the pro-Soviet opponents of the Tito regime. Today, an NGO called Triple Camp Jasenovac Society claims that communist camps after the war were worse than this Ustaša facility. In 2016, members of this Triple Camp Jasenovac Society laid a wreath with the inscription “for those who perished in Jasenovac camp in 1941–1951.”

### ***Media***

Much of the issues in the media revolve around Jasenovac and often reflect problematic revisionist thinking. After film director Jakov Sedlar created a revisionist documentary on Jasenovac in April 4, 2016, Croatian state television HRT hosted Sedlar and did not challenge his claims.

### ***Jewish Community***

“No other minority has this existential problem to cope with.” – Aleksander Srećković, Croatian Jewish community leader

Between 500 and 1500 Jews continue to live in Croatia. Although technically recognised as a national minority and aware given a seat in the Sabor, the seat. Their seat is shared with 11 other minority groups.

Author: Caderyn Owen-Jones



## THE CZECH REPUBLIC



**The Czech Republic has become a star student in Holocaust remembrance, even though its government is tinged by anti-immigrant, nationalist sentiments.**

### **Overview**

Throughout its history, Czechia welcomed and integrated Jews, creating a contemporary climate in which the Holocaust is accorded solemn respect. Even among the ascendant far-right Freedom and Direct Democracy party, hatred and systematic scepticism is reserved mostly for Roma and Muslims, rather than Jews.

In interviews, Czechs were adamant that the political climate for Jews was positive. Many brought up in conversation the threats faced by the Roma population without prompting, often to criticise their own country and compare their dire situation with the relative peace enjoyed by Jews. While the Czech Republic has succeeded in creating a positive remembrance culture around the history of the Jewish Holocaust, it clearly has a long way to go in its recognition of the persecution, both historical and contemporary, of its other ethnic minorities, especially the Roma.

The Czech Republic has also made strides in education, property restitutions, and official commemoration, as detailed in the following sections. While not exempt from the larger trend of populist ethno-nationalism sweeping across Europe, Czech right-wingers generally keep quiet about the Jewish Holocaust.

### ***The Holocaust in the Czech Republic***

The Czech lands were pulled into the war following the 1938 Munich Pact, the agreement made between the allies and Hitler permitting the Nazi leader to annex the German-speaking region of Czechoslovakia, the Sudetenland. Hitler broke his promises and engineered a pro-Nazi secession movement in Slovakia and sent German troops into Prague in March, 1939. The Nazis established the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, maintaining military occupation until the end of the war.

The nearly 120,000 Jews who resided in the new protectorate became subject to an increasingly anti-Semitic culture, both socially and legally. The spring and summer of 1939 saw a sharp rise in anti-Semitic violence, with a synagogue in Jihlava burned and pogroms occurring in Brno. Jewish doctors and attorneys were prohibited from practicing at public institutions and Jews in all sectors lost leadership roles. The *Reichsprotektor*, the Nazis' representative and the true governing authority (ethnic Czechs continued to serve in the offices of president and prime minister but without any real power) officially applied the criteria of the Nuremberg laws to Bohemia and Moravia.

The government supported Jewish emigration, although it was expensive and increasingly difficult as the number of countries willing to accept Jews was tiny. A curfew was instituted in 1939 – Jews were not to leave home after 8 pm – and from November 1940 Jews were no longer permitted free movement without special permission. From 1941, Jews were required to wear yellow stars in public, one of the last measures taken before transports to camps began en masse.

In November 1941, the Nazis began using the walled city of Terezín as a ghetto. The settlement's 18<sup>th</sup> century origins as a fortress for the Holy Roman empire and convenient location between Prague and Germany made it a natural choice. Theresienstadt, as the camp was known in German, was a transit camp, serving as a temporary base for Jews before they were sent to death camps further east like Auschwitz-Birkenau. The Nazis deported more than 70,000 Jews from the Protectorate with the help of the local Czech gendarmerie.

Theresienstadt wasn't as abject as the death camps further east. The camp was used as propaganda to suggest to the international community that the 'settlements' where Nazis were moving Jews were humane. Not that prisoners there were spared – on the contrary, infamous Nazi practices such as requiring prisoners to stand outside for many hours in the cold were common – but the camp could be made to appear more liveable than it was, as when the Red Cross visited in 1944. The Red Cross later took over administration of the camp in the spring of 1945, just days before the Soviet army arrived.

Today the Czech Republic is home to approximately 3,900 Jews, most of whom live peacefully in Prague.

## **Timeline**

- June 1945: Czechoslovakia re-established.
- 1948: Czechoslovakia incorporated as a Soviet Socialist Republic.
- 1952: Communists hold Slánský trials against 'bourgeois nationalists.' 11 Jews (out of 14 total defendants) convicted of conspiracy and mostly executed.
- 1968: Following the Prague Spring, the country is under military occupation until 1989.
- 1989: Czechoslovakia secedes from the Soviet Union.
- 1993: Czechoslovakia dissolves in the 'Velvet Divorce' and Czechia gains independence.
- 1991: A law allowing for the restitution of property confiscated by the communists between the years of 1948-1989 is passed.
- 1994: The 1991 law is amended to include claims made on property confiscated by the Nazis during the war.
- 2000: Another law is passed to help Shoah victims reclaim lost farmland and art from state museums.
- 2001: An endowment fund for Holocaust Victims is established with 300 million Czech Koruna (about US \$7 million at the time) to be distributed over the next four years as lump sum payments for education, social service, and for survivors who could not or did not reclaim property.
- 2002: The Czech Republic joins the International Holocaust Remembrance Association (IHRA).
- 2004: The government officially adopts the international Holocaust remembrance day of 27 January.

## **Government**

As in other Communist countries, little public discussion of the Holocaust took place during the Cold War. According to Jan Roubínek, director of the Terezín Memorial, 'The topic of the Shoah was intentionally silenced by order from the highest ranks of the Czechoslovak communist party and decision makers in the Soviet Union.'

During the communist regime (albeit with a short exception in the sixties when there was briefly a period of liberalisation before the Soviet invaded in 1968), the government dictated the ways Czech history could be presented, including and especially with regards to World War II. This historical narrative celebrated the communist resistance movement against the Nazis, overstating its historical significance. The communists highlighted the small fortress at Terezín where political prisoners and communists were held, neglecting the larger ghetto complex where the Jews were confined.

After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, historical research at Terezín and elsewhere became possible, and the true stories of the ghetto, as well as those from the rest of Czech lands, began to emerge. Roubínek mused, 'We didn't miss the train that much, as it was only around this time that the commemoration of the Holocaust started really reaching the national historical narratives of many countries.'

The current governing coalition has a solid record regarding Holocaust remembrance. Prime Minister Andrej Babis refuses to engage with the far-right Freedom and Direct Democracy party which became

infamous for its hostility to Roma, Muslims, and immigrants during the 2017 parliamentary elections. However, in 2018 he also stated that Tomio Okamura, the party's leader, should not have to resign his position after apologising for inflammatory remarks about the Romani Holocaust.

President Miloš Zeman, whom *Politico* has deemed 'the European Trump', is a vocal supporter of Israel, including the United States' move to relocate its embassy to Jerusalem. He is outspoken about anti-Semitism, but his concern for Jews is couched in an extreme Islamophobia. He has said that Islam is a movement calling for the mass murder of Jews and has warned that accepting any refugees could lead to a 'super-Holocaust' of Jewish and Christian Europeans alike.

In late 2016, Zeman caught backlash for withdrawing a state honour that was to be given to Holocaust survivor George Brady. Brady's nephew and Minister of Culture, Daniel Herman, had met with the Dalai Lama at a moment when Zeman wanted to avoid antagonising China.

### **Education**

Czech educational curricula include teaching the Holocaust as a part of World War II history. Twice a year there are also training programmes to help teachers better facilitate this difficult topic. School districts are willing to pay for their teachers to attend because they are accredited by the Ministry of Education and thus considered professional development. Teachers who complete all the courses gain over a week of training on teaching the Shoah and antisemitism, as well as Jewish history and culture.

Teachers can also attend training at Terezín as part of a programme in which they begin by training at Czech sites before traveling abroad to sites in Germany and Poland (including Auschwitz) and finally, Yad Vashem in Israel. Apparently, there is more demand than can be accommodated.

### **Commemoration**

The Czech government officially recognises both 8 March and 27 January as Holocaust remembrance days. The March date marks the anniversary of the liquidation of the Theresienstadt family camp in 1944. The Czech Republic became a member country of the International Holocaust Remembrance Association (IHRA) in 2002 and adopted the international date of 27 January as well, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

On Yom Hashoah in May, Czech towns and cities all over the country participate in a ceremony in which all the names of the Jews from each municipality who were deported to Terezín are read aloud in the town centre. There is also a successful programme to fund the installation of *Stolpersteine* (stumbling stones) to mark the former homes of Jews all over the country.

In Prague, the Pinkas synagogue, part of the Jewish Museum and the second oldest synagogue left in the city, hosts a striking memorial to the Jewish victims of the war. The names of approximately 78,000 Czech Jews who died in the war are written in tightly wound rows encircling the walls. The names were originally

painted on to the walls in the 1950s and have been restored multiple times since.

### ***Legal Environment***

Holocaust denial has been illegal in the Czech Republic since 2001, when the 'Law Against Support and Dissemination of Movements Oppressing Human Rights and Freedoms' was passed. It criminalises the denial, justification, or doubt of both Nazi and communist crimes.

Convicted perpetrators face prison sentences of six months to three years. The fact that both Nazi and communist crimes are addressed in the same law does not necessarily reflect any effort to equivocate the magnitude or moral weight of the respective crimes, but rather the historical circumstance that those living in Czech lands suffered under both regimes in the course of the twentieth century.

Attempts were made to ban the use of Nazi and communist symbols and propaganda in 2005, but the motions failed. The efforts were aimed primarily at forcing the contemporary communist party to distance itself from its past. The Nazi salute, however, is illegal.

### ***Victimization***

Czechs don't harbour resentment toward the Holocaust's prominence in political culture as some in other post-Communist countries do. Locals do not feel that their own historical suffering is reduced or neglected by discussion of the Holocaust.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Jews of Bohemia became highly integrated into Czech society, serving in all sorts of professions and speaking Czech. Many interviewees cited the legacy of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the first president of Czechoslovakia (1918-1935) who was renowned for his humanism. He took his wife's family name into his own (Garrigue) and fought against the Jewish Blood Libel long before even taking office.

Bohemia became exceptionally tolerant of Jews for its time and Jews played a positive role in Masaryk's newly created Czechoslovak state, acting as loyal citizens and finding success in most professions. The loss of Jews during the war is understood by Czechs as not only as a catastrophe for the Jewish community, but as a national tragedy as well.

### ***Archives***

According to Tomas Jelinek, former chairman of the Jewish Community of Prague, what archives remain are fully open to the public, but much was destroyed either during or after the war.

### ***Restitution***

More communal property has been restored than private property. The restoration of communal property such as synagogues and cemeteries is straightforward compared to the process for individuals' property. While such communal property is incontrovertibly Jewish, it is often difficult to prove the provenance of farmland, artworks, or even whole companies which were stolen from their Jewish owners.

The post-communist government passed legislation ensuring property restoration in 1991. It applied only to property taken between 1948 and 1989, by the communists. It didn't apply to property seized by the Nazis. A 1994 amendment widened the scope to include Nazi seizures, but survivors had a limited window in which to make their applications.

Later, in 2000, a fund to provide for the victims of the Shoah was established to give lump sum payments for education and social care to survivors. Another law passed in 2000 provided for the restoration of confiscated farmlands and artworks residing in state museums. The Jewish Museum of Prague, with its multitude of monuments and Jewish valuables, was restored to the Jewish community.

There was also the issue of how to resolve the sizeable deposit of gold and other precious metals taken from Czechoslovak Jews. After the war, the communists confiscated the valuable metal and transferred it to Prague. During the Velvet Divorce, the Czech government worried about the safety of transferring the valuable metals to the new Slovak government. Instead, it donated them to the Federated Jewish Communities, with two thirds going to the Czech Jewish community and another third going to Slovak Jews.

The government has appointed a Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues who is responsible for resolving remaining disputes. Full restitution remains a practical impossibility, says the president of the Federated Jewish Communities, Petr Papousek. Before the war, Czech Jews owned vast amounts of property; only a small portion of what the community once held will ever be returned.

### **Opposition**

The main far-right party in the Czech Republic is the Freedom and Direct Democracy party. In 2015 it gained representation in parliament, winning eight seats. In 2017 it took fourth place in the elections with 10.6% of the vote and now holds 22 seats. Like its counterparts in Slovakia, Poland, Germany, and elsewhere, the party and its supporters are hostile to immigrants and ethnic minorities and feel that the Czech Republic must assert its identity as a Christian nation. There have been some instances of anti-Semitism from this camp. Just last year, according to multiple witnesses, the party's secretary Jaroslav Staník said in a restaurant that 'Jews, gays and Roma should be gassed'. He reportedly also said that homosexuals, Roma, and Jews should be shot at birth.

While these comments target Jews, Roma, and homosexuals together, it is important to note that the larger party's policies and statements are far more dangerous to the latter two groups than to Jews. Tomio Okamura, the leader of the Freedom and Direct Democracy party, has repeatedly questioned and denied the history of the Nazi campaign against the Roma people. He has stated, against the facts, that the Roma concentration camp at Lety was unguarded and that inmates were free to leave. While he partially

rescinded some of his more egregious claims after widespread outrage, he has continued to stand by many of them.

Serious anti-Semitism is relegated to the extreme fringes of Czech politics, such as in the 'No to Brussels - National Democracy' party, which has little popular support (its candidate for president received fewer than 30,000 votes in the most recent election). A court convicted two of the party's leaders, Adam Bartos and Ladislav Zemanek, of illegal hate speech after they wrote a note supporting the blood libel, an ancient anti-Semitic myth.

### ***Civil Society***

Czech civil society considers Czech Jews welcome full citizens, and this is reflected in the history of Holocaust commemoration. Whereas in Poland, most of the restoration efforts to save old synagogues after the war were funded by Americans and Israelis, local Czechs here have made significant contributions.

In Prague, the Jewish Museum, which was the first of its kind in Europe, was founded in 1906. Today, the museum is a leader in Holocaust remembrance, running education programmes for students as well as teacher training seminars to better equip educators to handle this difficult topic. Additionally, the museum maintains a traveling exhibition which is so popular it is on the road nearly all the time.

Unlike in Slovakia, where a priest led the wartime state and where the Catholic church continues to have a strong presence, the Czech Republic is by many measures one of the most secular, even atheist, states in the world. Correspondingly, the influence of the church is weak in comparison to neighbouring countries and does not extend in any significant way to Holocaust remembrance.

### ***Media***

The Czech media is proactive about covering issues related to the Holocaust. According to Jelinek, the media does a good job of paying attention to history, telling the stories of survivors, and keeping up to date with commemoration events. None of the major publications in the country are known to publish pieces which advance a revisionist agenda.

According to staff at the Terezín Memorial, the media sometimes makes innocent mistakes in their coverage of events at the former camp. For instance, images of the small fortress are often featured in stories about the Jewish ghetto, despite the fact that the fortress element of the camp was a Gestapo prison largely inhabited by political dissidents, whereas the Jews were interned elsewhere. Many have come to associate Terezín exclusively with the Holocaust rather than as a site which served multiple purposes and housed multiple populations.

### ***Jewish Community***

Owing to the long history of assimilated Czech Jews making significant cultural contributions and a political culture which embraced them, the Jewish community has remained in good standing in Czech society, despite years of Nazi propaganda and generations of communist anti-Semitism. Not one anti-Semitic pogrom occurred after the war ended, a rarity for central European countries. According to Papousek, anti-Semitism has remained low.

The Federated Jewish Communities of the Czech Republic monitors anti-Semitic incidents online and publishes an annual report. Papousek says the greatest concern for many in the community is not violence but intermarriage. Because Czech Jews are so assimilated, it is perhaps an even greater concern than in other countries.

Czech culture is not merely not anti-Semitic, though; it is welcoming to Jews. Leo Pavlat, the president of the Prague Jewish Museum, said he has been pleasantly surprised at how proud Czech gentiles are of their Jewish history, and that many of them truly mourn the loss of Czech Jews as an injury against their larger Czech culture.

Author: Jeremy Epstein



## DENMARK



**Denmark, which saved its Jews during World War II seems to have forgotten the real lesson of this success. It is becoming increasingly intolerant to refugees and Jewish religious practices.**

### *Overview*

Since 99% of Danish Jews survived the Holocaust, Denmark faces the challenge of celebrating its country's success while simultaneously commemorating the Holocaust tragedy. This is a tough balancing act, which the country has not always gotten right.

The Danish celebrate their role in the rescue of Danish Jews. Overall, too, the government is a staunch supporter of Holocaust remembrance, despite criticism that Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen failed to attend the 2017 Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony. As 2018 marked the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Jews escaping to Sweden, the prime minister did attend a commemorative ceremony.

What remains problematic is both present-day attitudes towards Jews and immigrants. In 2018, more than 50,000 Danes signed a petition to ban circumcision for anyone under 18 to protect "children's fundamental rights." Parliament was forced to debate the proposal but rejected it.

Despite its reputation for tolerance, Denmark is cracking down on immigration. It introduced a new plan to force some migrants to live on an isolated island that is currently home to a facility for researching infectious animal diseases. It is also introducing a new set of laws to regulate life in 25 low-income and heavily Muslim enclaves, saying that if families there do not willingly merge into the country's mainstream, they should be compelled.

### *The Holocaust in Denmark*

Germany occupied Denmark in April of 1940. The Danes offered little resistance to this occupation, and as a result, were given some leeway by the German occupiers. The 7,500 Danish Jews remained unmolested by the Nazi regime until October 1943.

The Danish police largely refused to follow Nazi orders to round up the Jews. More than 7,000 Jews fled to Sweden in the following months, avoiding deportation to concentration camps. Approximately 500 Danish Jews remained and were sent to Theresienstadt. Many of these survived the war as well. At the end of the war, Jews returned to Denmark, and the initial lack of police cooperation is largely considered one of the most successful countermeasures against the Holocaust.

### ***Timeline***

- June 2004: Danish Jewish Museum opens
- December 2005: Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen apologises for Danish collaboration with Nazis during the Second World War

### ***Government***

While Denmark collaborated in part with Nazis during the Second World War, the country has much more to be proud of regarding its Holocaust history. The Danish government considers the Holocaust as a point of national pride rather than national shame.

Some Danish actions are more myth than fact. During the war and in its immediate aftermath, the Danish government propagated a myth that the King wore the yellow star of David in solidarity with the Jews. This was untrue. The myth persists, though the government no longer spreads it. In addition, the Danish government has apologised for all collaboration with the Nazis.

### ***Education***

Holocaust education is standard in schools, though no longer mandatory. Denmark's Holocaust education covers both the international events, as well as focusing on the Danish role. Holocaust literature is also common in schools, including the popular book *Number the Stars*, which is partially set in Denmark.

The Jewish Museum in Copenhagen plays a significant role in education. The museum is responsible for programming for school students that leads them to relate the Holocaust to modern issues, such as immigration and human trafficking.

### ***Commemoration***

Denmark commemorates what they view as a patriotic act of defiance against the Nazis. Sometimes, this commemoration sometimes ventures too far from reality. Sara Feldt, the curator at the Jewish Museum in Copenhagen, laments that the commemoration at the harbour often lauds the boat captains too much, and neglects to mention Jewish refugee victims. In addition, Danes often neglect to mention that Jews were frequently required to pay for their fare to Sweden.

### ***Archives***

The Danish government has a 75-year moratorium on 'security' related documents in archives, and thus the archives will be fully opened this year, though documents with names of living people will be anonymised.

### ***Jewish Community***

The Jewish community is small, with only about 7,000 members. Denmark was a refuge for Jewish peoples fleeing the USSR in the 1960s, and indeed has one of the lowest rates of anti-Semitism in the world according to the Pew Research Center.

Still, recent trends in Danish society have been less friendly towards Jews. The 2018 circumcision debate angered many community leaders. "This spring has been nightmarish for the Jewish community," Dan Rosenberg Asmussen, chairman of The Jewish Community in Denmark, told the New York Times. "The proposal takes as a starting point that Jews are child molesters." A ban would "make it difficult for the next generation of Jews to maintain a religious life in Denmark," he added.

Author Nicholas Haeg

## ESTONIA



**Estonia has made the most strides among the Baltics in coming to terms with its tragic collaborationist history; then again, compared to its Baltic brethren, it was home to few Jews.**

### *Overview*

Compared to its Baltic relatives, which were true bloodlands during the war, the Holocaust had a small impact on Estonia. Only about 963 Jews were killed, compared to hundreds of thousands in its neighbours.

Estonians tend to see themselves as innocent victims of fascism and communism and have failed to prosecute any accused Nazi collaborators. Neo-Nazi ultra-right marches continue to take place.

Holocaust remembrance exists in Estonia developed in the late 1990s as a response to international pressure, the need to spruce up applications to join Western institutions such as NATO and the European Union. Those initial efforts appear to have taken root.

Estonia now leads the Balts in both its efforts to acknowledge and pay compensation for the Holocaust. Expropriated property has been returned to either its original owner or their descendants, reparations have been settled, and the government acknowledged and apologised for the responsibility of Estonian collaborators. In 2007-08, the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against Humanity published a comprehensive report on the Holocaust in Estonia, and the Ministry of Education and Research has produced a handbook for teaching the Holocaust.

Over the past decade, the government has pushed forward with important initiatives in Holocaust remembrance. Leading politicians attend Holocaust commemorations. Museums work with the Ministry of Education and Research to hold events and seminars. Nearly a dozen monuments are displayed on the sites of former concentration camps and killing fields.

### ***The Holocaust in Estonia***

Estonia counted only about 4,000 Jews when the Germans invaded the Soviet Union. Three quarters, given time by the near-suicidal resistance of Soviet army units and Estonia's relative distance from the German border, fled deep into the Soviet Union. The remaining population of less than 1,000 Jews, compared with the 200,000 in Lithuania, 100,000 in Latvia, or the nearly 2.8 million in Ukraine, was by and large elderly, sick, or otherwise unable or unwilling to move. Such a small and vulnerable population was wiped out, earning Estonia the dubious distinction of being the only country east of Germany to be declared *judenfrei*, or free of Jews. Only 12 Jews who stayed behind survived.

The story does not end with the death of Estonia's Jews. The Nazis established a network of work and concentration camps in Estonia and shipped tens of thousands of Jews from conquered territories to either work or die on Estonia soil. Jews deported from Central Europe and other Baltic countries worked in the oil shale mines in northern Estonia, as well as countless other forestry and fieldwork sites. Jews were beaten, starved, and marched under horrible conditions from subcamp to subcamp, and those deemed unfit to work were separated out and sent off to assorted killing sites to be shot.

As the Red Army approached, the Nazi's priorities quickly shifted away from developing infrastructure in Estonia to sustaining their war effort. Jews themselves were shipped back to camps closer to or within Germany to serve as slave labour and three years worth of murders were dug up and burned or otherwise concealed. In some places, the Nazis, or rather the Jews who they forced to do the dirty work, did a good job at hiding the evidence. At Kalevi-Liiva, one of the main killing grounds in Estonia, bodies were not found until 1961.

### ***Timeline***

- 1944: Soviet forces stumble upon the Klooga camp, and later bring war crimes investigators to examine the site.
- 1944-1994: Soviet forces occupy Estonia; Soviet government operates from 1944-1991 and imposes its historical narrative of the "Great Patriotic War," which denies the particular suffering of Jews under Nazi occupation.
- 1961: Local Soviet authorities bring charges against four Estonian collaborators accused of participating in the mass murder of Jews in Estonia. These included one Ain-Ervin Mere, a former NKVD informer and active member of the Estonia expatriate community. All were convicted.
- 1962: Local Soviet authorities bring charges against another three killers. Embarrassingly, the verdict is published before the trial even begins. One of the accused, Karl Linnas, is later handed over to the Soviet government by the United States, the evidence against him declared "overwhelming and largely uncontroverted" by a federal appeals court.
- 1991: Estonia regains its independence. Holocaust education added to national school curriculum shortly afterwards.
- 1998: The Baltic states establish international commissions to investigate crimes committed during the occupations of 1940-1956.
- 1998: Estonia begins sending teachers to seminars hosted by Yad Vashem every other year.
- 2002: Estonia declares 27 January, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, Holocaust Remembrance Day.
- 2003: Museum of Occupations opened, covering both the Nazi and Soviet occupations.
- 8 May 2005: Prime Minister Andrus Ansip issues two apologies on behalf of the Republic of Estonia, as well as an official statement acknowledging the collaboration of Estonian citizens in Nazi and Soviet crimes.
- 24 July 2005: President Arnold Rüütel acknowledges and apologises for the participation of Estonian citizens in running the Klooga concentration camp at the opening of a memorial at the site.

- 2005: The Estonian Ministry of Education and Research begins supporting study visits for Holocaust education to the United States.
- 2007: Estonia joins the International Holocaust Remembrance Association (IHRA).
- 2007: Teacher's Handbook, with "guidelines on how to teach about the Holocaust, explanations of terminology, a chronology, background and topical information on anti-Semitism, crimes against humanity, Jewish life and culture in Europe, memories about Jewish life in Estonia and concentration camps during WWII in Europe and Estonia, tasks for students (the book); PowerPoint presentations, maps, pictures and films (on DVD) with subtitles in Estonian and Russian" is published.
- 2008: Estonia's International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against Humanity (EICICH) completes its mission, publishes its final reports, and is dissolved by order of the President.
- 2008: Part of the EICICH is revived in spirit as the Estonian Institute for Historical Memory, tasked to "give Estonian citizens a thorough and objective overview of the human rights situation in Estonia during the Soviet occupation".
- 2011: Estonia adopts a new curriculum that changes how the Holocaust is taught.
- 2012: Holocaust day celebrations institutionalised under the aegis of the Ministry of Education and Research; commemorations become regularly covered and discussed on state television.
- 27 January 2012: The Gallery of Memory opens, a memorial to Estonian Jews killed during the Holocaust located in the Jewish Community.
- 2013: Klooga open-air exhibition inaugurated.

### **Government**

Official Estonian engagement with the memory of the Holocaust begins in 1991, when the country regained its independence. Relative to its fellow Baltic states, Estonia was late to acknowledge and engage with its role in the Holocaust and was just as sensitive about past collaboration with the Nazis as Lithuania and Latvia. When the Estonian government established a Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2002 at the urging of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, many Estonians expressed their opposition. No official apology was issued until 2005, ten years after the Lithuanian president apologised before the Knesset.

Since then, Estonian leaders have made up for lost time. Estonia's drive to rejoin the West included recognising its role in the Holocaust. Malle Talvet-Mustonen, the head of the Estonian IHRA delegation, notes that the EU has done a lot to help Estonian memory along. Milestones came as Estonia was petitioning for membership. The "concrete action" requested by members of NATO as preconditions for

admission, led to the establishment of research bodies or to a greater emphasis on governmental acknowledgement of the Holocaust.

Outside pressure collided with internal resistance around 2002-03, as the Simon Wiesenthal Center pushed to identify and bring to trial Estonian collaborators. The government has acknowledged the participation of Estonia citizens in the mass murder of Jews and apologised for Estonian actions during the Holocaust. The government today organises an annual Holocaust Remembrance Day commemoration and has scaled it up. Even as the government expands its involvement with Holocaust memory, and works to further bring it into line, it always finds a way to bring up the memory of Soviet occupation.

Despite these material efforts to promote awareness, Holocaust denial remains legal in Estonia, under the aegis of free speech. While there is a law criminalising and penalising “incitement to hatred,” historian Anton Weiss-Wendt says that it is limited in scope and difficult to enforce because of the anonymity provided internet comment boards and chat rooms.

Traces of victimization remain. Gennady Gramberg, a former member of the Estonian IHRA delegation, notes the lingering conception of Estonia as the “double victim” of World War II. As time passes by, though, the narrative is shifting to acknowledge Estonian collaboration. “The more we integrate into European and Western ways of thinking,” Mrs. Talvet-Mustonen notes, “the more our students are confronted with this knowledge.”

### ***Education***

The history of the Holocaust was not taught during the Soviet time. It became part of the national curriculum shortly after Estonia regained independence in 1991.

Beginning in 1998, Estonia has sent a team of teachers to Yad Vashem seminars. In the current national curriculum adopted in 2011, the Holocaust is part of the topics of World War II and totalitarian regimes. The Holocaust is explicitly addressed in the ninth-grade history syllabus. New and revised relevant textbooks including the topic of the Holocaust are published regularly.

Teachers can choose the format and environment to address topics; in the case of the Holocaust, they often choose to visit museums, invite guests, organise study trips etc. This is mostly done in January around the international Holocaust Memorial Day.



A teacher handbook includes guidelines on how to teach about the Holocaust, explanations of terminology, a chronology, background and topical information on anti-Semitism and crimes against humanity. In the classroom, memories of survivors (from books available at school libraries), are added. There are lessons guiding students to reflect on human values and on moral dilemmas, thus developing empathy.

The country also hosts seminars of its own, organised primarily through the Ministry of Education and Research. Both the Estonian government and the American Embassy spent part of their budgets funding a series of projects covering the Holocaust, including the creation of history textbooks for high school students entitled *Tell Ye Your Children*, and another edition entitled *What are Jews and What is the Holocaust?* In 2004, an Estonian translation was published of Benjamin Anolik, a Holocaust survivor from an Estonian camp.

### **Commemoration**

The government cooperates with both the international institutions, the Jewish community and with the various museums in commemorating and educating about the Holocaust. It has financed the creation of many, many monuments at concentration camps and killing sites, and has four official commemorations for victims of the Holocaust.

The first is 27 January, International Holocaust Remembrance Day. The second is 23 August, the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Totalitarian Regimes. The third is 5 September, the commemoration of the victims killed at the Kalevi-Liiva site. The fourth 19 September, the anniversary of the liquidation of the Klooga camp.

The January 27 commemoration takes place either at the synagogue, the Jewish cemetery, or at the Klooga memorial. Since 2012, the Ministry of Education and Research has taken over responsibility. National media, radio and television cover the event, often accompanied by interviews with assorted opinion leaders and researchers. The Ministry of Education and Research also organises seminars and conferences for educators around this date.

Four sites related to the Holocaust are protected as national monuments in Estonia, these are: an execution place and mass grave in Kalevi-Liiva, a mass grave in Klooga, a mass grave in Reiu and a burial ground at Metsakalmistu Cemetery in Tallinn. The Klooga open-air exhibition, established according to the Government's action programme, now organically connecting all monuments erected on this site in earlier times, has attracted most of the interest and visitors since its inauguration in 2013. The Klooga

site, where mass killings took place in 1944, became a place of Holocaust commemoration after Estonia regained independence in 1991, and can now be considered the central Holocaust memorial in Estonia.

### ***Civil Society***

Few non-governmental organisations are dedicated to Holocaust remembrance. The three museums that mention it are generally focused more on other topics, from the Soviet occupation, as in the case of the Museum of Occupations, to general Estonian History, as in the case of the National History museum, to Jewish history, as in the case of the Jewish museum.

Some religious leaders are active in memory in Estonia. Christian groups cooperated with the Jewish community in setting up and running Holocaust Remembrance Day. The majority Lutheran Church condemns the Holocaust, though it has not commented on the presence of Lutheran chaplains in killing squads.

### ***Archives***

Records pertaining to the Holocaust are mostly found in the National Archives and the department of the latter, the Film Archives, both in Tallinn. To a lesser extent, records of relevance can be found in the Tallinn City Archives, the Estonian History Museum, and others. Researchers have free access to all archives.

### ***Restitution***

Parliament passed principles of restitution in 1991, allowing both Jewish survivors of the Holocaust and Estonian survivors of the Soviet era to reclaim their lost property. By now, the restitution process is completed. The expropriated property was returned with no distinction being made according to the nationality of the owners.

### ***Opposition Parties***

Even though Estonia is home nationalist and far-right parties, few focus their ire on Jews or the Holocaust. The Estonian Independence Party is dedicated to achieving independence from the European and the Conservative People's Party is aims "to protect Estonian national values and interests" According to Mrs. Talvet-Mustonen, the far right "is not picking enemies from history. Instead, it is focused on refugees."

When in 2017, one far right politician Georg Krisberg suggested decriminalising Holocaust denial and enter a correct teaching of the history of the Third Reich,” his party disavowed him.

### ***Media***

No significant issues of Holocaust revisionism appear in the media. Estonian news sources are sensitive to the memory of the Holocaust, especially the state networks, and they often cover events of commemoration. Some Estonians are frustrated that the media focuses so much on the Holocaust, seeing it as unfair given the suffering of Estonians and other national groups during and after Nazi occupation.

### ***Jewish Community***

About 2,500 Jews live in Estonia today, most in Tallinn. The government often collaborates with the Jewish community on commemorative events, and the community feels it has begun taking more of the initiative.

Estonian Jews are pleased with the government’s initiative in remembrance, as they feel that commemoration cannot be only a Jewish issue. They believe that, though it may take a while, it is critical that non-Jewish Estonians understand and are invested in the memory of the Holocaust. The government also provides support for the Jewish museum, located within the synagogue grounds.

Author: Justin Jin

## FINLAND



**Finland, though allied with Germany during the war, never handed over its Jews. The government has been commendable in its reaction to reports that Finnish SS volunteers took part in Holocaust killings.**

### *Overview*

No Finnish Jews died in the Holocaust, though 61 did die in combat fighting in the Finnish Army, often alongside German soldiers. Finnish authorities handed another 12 Central European refugees to the Gestapo in Estonia and 49 Jewish Soviet Prisoners of War over to the Nazis. The questions in Finnish memory of the Holocaust are not about the fate of Finnish Jews, but rather about Finland's treatment of refugees and prisoners of war and the actions of Finnish Nazi sympathisers during the war.

Finland has been strong in recent years about confronting its marginal role in the Holocaust. Before, the national narrative centred on Finland's defiance of the Soviet Union in the Winter and Continuation Wars (1939-1944), with its treatment of Jews mentioned only to emphasise the exceptional irony of some Finnish Jewish soldiers receiving Nazi war crosses.

Confronted with evidence of Finnish complicity in Nazi crimes, such as mistreatment of POWs, the transfer of Soviet Jews to German security forces, and the potential war crimes of Finnish members of the SS Viking division in the Ukraine, the Finnish government convened a commission of respected scholars to study the topic and produce a comprehensive report, which was then shared with the public.

### ***The Holocaust in Finland***

Jews first came to Finland as soldiers in the Russian empire. After a 25-year term of service, the Czar allowed them to settle anywhere in the Russian empire without restriction. These soldiers generally settled down in trades such as selling second-hand clothes, achieving a certain level of prosperity. They never reached the levels of prominence and prosperity that Jews did elsewhere in Europe. Anti-Semitism was relegated to the fringes.

World War II in Finland took place in three stages, each considered a war of its own. First, there was the Winter War (1939-40), where the Finns fought off a Soviet invasion. During the Continuation War (1941-44), Finland allied with Nazi Germany to fight the Soviets. In the Lapland War (1944-45), Finns fought the Germans.

The alliance with the Germans, combined with the fact that no Finnish Jews died during the Holocaust, has become another symbol of the resilience of the nation in the national myth, showcasing the willingness of Finland to defy a great power to protect its own people. In a famous, and oft-repeated, moment, a Jewish synagogue tent operated in close proximity to Nazi lines.

But even as Finland fought the Soviets, it wrestled with the problems presented by Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi conquest. Jewish refugees in Finland faced either emigration to Sweden or an unregistered, unemployed existence in Finland. Close collaboration between the Finnish Security Police and the Gestapo, as well as the presence of German forces added to the tension.

Another chapter in Finland's Holocaust involvement played out far away from home, in Belarus and Ukraine. Finnish SS volunteers in the SS Viking division fought alongside known war criminals and may have committed war crimes themselves. This chapter is contentious and is being studied by an independent commission.

### ***Timeline***

- 1945-46: War Responsibility Trials. These trials, mirroring the Nuremberg trials and the many other trials which took place across Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War, were

slightly different in Finland, as they operated under Finnish law and were widely seen as a travesty.

- 1968: Finnish historian Mauno Jokipii publishes his work on Finnish soldiers in the SS. This work, 900 pages long, establishes the Wiking division as a 'better' SS unit, one that contained war criminals but did not commit war crimes.
- 2002: Jan 27 becomes the official day of Holocaust Remembrance, or "Memorial Day for Victims of Persecution".
- 2003: Elina Sana publishes *Luovutetut*. This book, about the foreign Jews extradited by Finland, immediately set off a storm of interest in Finland's role in the Holocaust, as well as a furore within political and academic circles.
- 2004: Research for "Finland, Prisoners of War and Extraditions in 1939-55" report begins.
- 2008: "Finland, Prisoners of War and Extraditions in 1939-55" report released.
- 2010: Teaching the Holocaust in classrooms becomes mandatory.
- 2015: Work begins on "Cultures of Silence" report on the legacy of the SS Wiking division, and especially on the question of whether or not they committed war crimes.

### **Government**

The Finnish government promotes reasoned engagement with all elements of Finland's past. It has sponsored two commissions researching various aspects of Finland's involvement in World War II, as well as fulfilling all the requirements for continued IHRA membership.

The government has slowly but substantially changed its stance on Holocaust remembrance over the years. In the immediate aftermath of the war, and indeed through most of the Cold War, the national narrative of Finnish exceptionalism persisted. The embrace of this narrative, and the consequent minimisation of Finland's role in the Holocaust was shaped by the immediate political necessities of the post-war era, namely a desire to avoid giving the USSR any reason to intervene in Finnish affairs and promoting national pride in the face of the Soviet threat.

The two reports the government commissioned, the first on the Finnish treatment of prisoners of war and the second, still ongoing, on the Finnish "cultures of silence", are moving the development of Finnish Holocaust remembrance forward. Though they have received the government's unequivocal support, there have been a few missteps surrounding their implementation.

Most notably, the historical working group tasked with studying the behaviour of the SS Viking division originally included one Olli Wikberg, an amateur historian and enthusiast who had previously published a photo history of the SS Viking division. While he is certainly an expert in the insignia and uniforms of

that division, his closeness with many Viking division veterans raised questions. He was eventually dropped from the group after Dr. Andre Svanstrom and Professor Oula Silvennoinen threatened to resign in protest.

By and large, Finnish civil society is not particularly interested in the Holocaust. As mentioned above, organisations do exist, but the small presence of the Jewish community and the small scale of the Holocaust in Finland, as well as the highly academic nature of most inquiries into the established narrative, all combine to keep public interest rather low.

### ***Education***

Holocaust education became compulsory in 2010. The public school history curriculum is split approximately half and half between general history, covering topics from Greco-Roman history to Vietnam, and Finnish history.

Jewish history is not prominently taught, and discussion of the WWII era tends to focus on the general outlines of the war.

Students also take part in assorted commemorations on UN Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January, which vary based on their municipality and teacher. Suggestions, provided by the Finnish national board of education, include “drawing, writing poems and observing a moment of silence at school”.

The Finnish Peace Education Institute research project (University of Helsinki) recently published new teaching material against antisemitism and racism, which are similar to materials that have been published in 15 European countries. This project is part of an international project led by Anne Frank House and Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (the ODIHR of the OSCE).

These materials target secondary and upper secondary schools, as well as vocational institutions. They are designed to be usable in a variety of different academic contexts, such as history and psychology, among others. The first booklet, "Persecution of Centuries", discusses anti-Semitism both in the past and today. The second booklet, "Prejudiced - me?" focuses on prejudices, stereotypes, and discrimination as phenomena, and especially on identifying them in daily life. Both of the booklets are designed to equip their readers to think critically about stereotypes and act against them.

The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture finances their publication. Additional funding is presently being applied for by the Peace Education Institute to be used for the distribution of these materials and educational seminars.

### ***Commemoration***

The prime minister and president often participate in the annual official commemoration on 27 January, which is organised by the Finnish Society for Yad Vashem, with the financial support of the Ministry of Education. Since 2009, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has promoted the ceremony in coordination with Yad Vashem.

A monument commemorating the Finnish decision to hand over eight Jewish refugees to the Nazis was unveiled in 2000 in Helsinki. At the inauguration event, then Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen apologised for that action to the Jewish community.

The Helsinki Jewish Community arranges an annual commemoration ceremony at the monument of the deported. On the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2013, the University of Helsinki and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs organised a seminar at the Finnish National Museum.

### ***Archives***

The Finnish National Archives are open to all, though non-residents have to fill out a questionnaire with personal data and their subject of study. Some documents are restricted due to rules contained within the Personal Data Act or within the Public Information Act. These reasons range from protecting state secrets (unreleased foreign ministry communications) to preventing financial market manipulation (discussions of regulations that are not public information). Closed documents remain closed for 25 years, or 50 if they are closed for privacy reasons. Online access and document requests are allowed.

### ***Restitution***

Finland does not appear to have any restitution programs, appearing in neither the Jewish Virtual Library Archive nor the World Jewish Restitution Organization index.

Author: Justin Jin



## FRANCE



**Over the past decades, France has made a remarkable turnaround away from its founding postwar myth of resistance to the Nazis to accept the truth that the French collaborationist government was responsible**

### *Overview*

On the facade of the nursery school at 5 Rue de Poissy in the centre of Paris hangs a black marble plaque. Written in golden letters, it contains a stark message: “To the memory of the children — students of this school deported from 1942-1944 because they were born Jewish. They were victims of Nazi barbarity with the active complicity of the Vichy Government. They were exterminated in the death camps. Let us never forget them.”

The plaque underlines a dramatic transformation in France’s memory of the Holocaust. Gone is the Gaullist postwar myth of France united in resistance against occupying Nazis and their Vichy collaborators.

Gone is the falsehood that those who helped Germans soldiers deport Jews were not French. French police, not German soldiers, arrested the Jewish schoolchildren and put them on the trains to Auschwitz. Says Gabrielle Rochmann, the director of the Fondation pour la Memoire de la Shoah, "There are so many projects on the Shoah now; there's even programs about it on TV every week."

This wave of commemoration comes at a delicate moment, in a country struggling to cope with migration, the role of Islam and recent anti-Semitic attacks. In 2018, young French Arabs stabbed to death Mireille Knoll, the 85-year-old Holocaust survivor in her Paris apartment. Fearful French Jews are moving out of Arab neighbourhoods in the Paris suburbs.

Unlike in the 1940s, however, the French government is doing much to protect its Jewish population, the largest in Europe. Mass demonstrations for tolerance followed Knoll's murder. According to the Pew Research Center, [85 percent of the French](#) hold a favourable view of Jews.

An accurate view of France's wartime history began to take shape in the 1980s. Activists Serge and Beate Klarsfeld hunted down those involved in the Holocaust in France, including Vichy officials who had been rehabilitated and were making their way back into government were brought to trial one by one. One by one, they showed how Vichy Police Chief [René Bousquet](#) and fellow collaborators, [Jean Leguay](#), [Maurice Papon](#) and [Paul Touvier](#) were involved in Holocaust. The Klarsfelds detailed, name by name, the children deported by Vichy to Auschwitz. Despite sensational trials and increasing public pressure, the government stuck by the Gaullist myth that the Fifth Republic was distinct from Vichy. Francois Mitterrand, president from 1981 to 1995, had served Vichy. While president, he continued to meet with Bousquet in the Elysee Palace.

Official change first came in 1995 when President Jacques Chirac, the first postwar French president without any involvement in the war, acknowledged that it was French police, not German soldiers, who raided schools and sent the children on their way to death. Two months after taking office, Chirac acknowledged: "Yes, the criminal folly of the occupiers was seconded by the French, by the French state."

Successive governments have gone further. President Francois Hollande in 2012 [said](#) the roundups were a "crime committed in France, by France."

In July, 2017, Emmanuel Macron spoke at a ceremony at the Vel d'Hiv Holocaust memorial monument exactly 75 years after French police officers rounded up 13,152 Jews there for deportation. He named individual collaborators who helped the Nazis kill Jews, including Bousquet, the police chief who was indicted for planning the Vel d'Hiv roundups.

For the first time, Macron detailed the post war cover-up, explaining how “ministers, civil servants, police officers, economy officials, unions, teachers” from the Vichy government were incorporated into the post-World War II government that replaced it. “It is very convenient to view Vichy as a monstrosity, born of nothing and returned to nothing,” Macron said, emphasizing the continuity between governments. “But it is false. We cannot base any pride on a lie.”

Over the past few decades, France has made remarkable progress, both in bringing Holocaust memory into the national consciousness and in facing the rising challenges to the newfound acceptance of French guilt. Almost every schoolchild in France knows the events of the Holocaust, and the vast majority of the population have at least some understanding of the tragedy. Unlike many other countries in the world, France seems to recognize the need for continued vigilance to make sure that convenient narratives don’t displace true ones.

### ***The Holocaust in France***

In the years before the Nazi invasion of France, hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees poured into the country, attracted by French liberalism. The interwar population of 150,000 Jews in Metropolitan France swelled to about 340,000 by 1940, as other countries, especially the United States and United Kingdom, refused to take in refugees.

The German army conquered France in June 1940, bringing down the democratic Third Republic and dividing France into occupied and non-occupied zones. Eighty-four-year-old Maréchal Philippe Pétain set up his capital at Vichy to rule the non-occupied zone.

On his own, Pétain imposed anti-Semitic legislation, banning Jews from the professions, show business, teaching, the civil service and journalism. It confiscated Jewish property. More than 40,000 refugee Jews were held in concentration camps under French control. Beginning in the winter 1940-1941 French Jews were imprisoned in concentration camps.

During 1941 and 1942, French police carried out mass arrests in Paris. Under the direction of Rene Bousquet, Secretary General of the Vichy police, French police arrested 13,000 Jews in Paris on July 16 and 17, 1942, interning them in the [Vélodrome d'Hiver](#) sports arena. The French Railways then took them to death camps in the East.

A significant percentage of these victims were foreign or stateless Jews, sacrificed by the Vichy government in a vain attempt to spare France's indigenous Jewish. According to the United States

Holocaust Memorial Museum, “the calculated strategy of the Vichy administration to collaborate with German deportation efforts in order to gain more independence for unoccupied France had failed.”

Deportations of Jews from France in the summer and fall of 1942 spurred significant protest within the Catholic Church and from the public. Escape lines to Switzerland and Spain had been set up, and thousands of families risked death to shelter Jews. Since the war, Israel has given medals to 2,000 French people, including several priests, in recognition of this, and of the fact that about 250,000 Jews survived in France.

In November 1942, German troops occupied Vichy's formerly “free zone.” Italian forces had occupied the southeastern corner of France in 1940. Thousands of Jews sought and received protection in the Italian zone until its occupation by German forces with Italy's surrender in September 1943.

German authorities reinstated transports of Jews from France in January 1943 and continued the deportations until August 1944. In all, some 77,000 Jews living on French territory perished in concentration camps and killing centres—the overwhelming majority of them at Auschwitz—or died in detention on French soil. Thanks to the obstruction of French officials, the vast majority of Jews with French citizenship survived the Holocaust.

Where around 90% of Jewish populations in Eastern Europe died, and indeed were mostly wiped out by 1942, about three quarters of French Jews who were French citizens survived. French Jews in Algeria, some 400,000 strong, were spared many of the worst ravages of the Holocaust first by their place in the unoccupied zone and then by the arrival of the Allies in 1942-43.

### ***Timeline***

- 1945-1951: French citizens took the opportunity to settle scores from the occupation, often once the provisional government asserts its control over the countryside, it puts prominent collaborators on trial.
- 1945: Property restitution begins.
- 1948: Restitution payments begin. In this first wave of reparations, which was primarily consisted of monetary payments for stolen property, as well as the creation of the deportee pension system.
- 1953: Pardons issued for vast majority of convicted collaborators.
- 1956: The Memorial to the Unknown Jewish Martyr is unveiled.

- 1987: Klaus Barbie convicted of crimes against humanity. This was the beginning of the second wave of French war crimes trials, driven by Nazi hunters such as Serge and Beate Klarsfeld, as well as by increased popular opposition to the gaullist narrative.
- 1991: Rene Bousquet indicted for crimes against humanity
- 1995: Jacques Chirac acknowledges French participation in Nazi roundups
- 1998: Maurice Papon convicted of crimes against humanity
- 1999: France joins the IHRA
- 2005: France opens the Memorial de la Shoah, building around the original memorial to the unknown Jewish Martyr
- 2012: François Hollande recognizes the collaboration of the French state, and opens an expansion of the Mémorial de la Shoah in Drancy
- 2017: Emmanuel Macron notes the continuity between Vichy and Free French administrations

### **Government**

Since 2014-5, and the dramatic attacks against Jewish communities, the government has intensified efforts to counter anti-Semitic rhetoric, improve and ensure the relevance of Holocaust memory. President Macron has also gone above and beyond past presidents with his rhetoric and aggressive deconstruction of the Gaullist myth. Not only did he name collaborators who had overseen the roundup of Jews, but he also highlighted the officials who served under Vichy and continued to serve under the Free French government. The France which collaborated with the Nazis, he implied, was one and the same with the France which followed it, and any attempts to differentiate between the two is...[an attempt] to absolve one's conscience."

The government has made wide-ranging efforts to counteract the rising levels of Holocaust fatigue in schools and online hate speech. In schools, teachers have begun implementing a variety of programs which help increase interest in the Holocaust. These include more school trips to concentration camp sites, retailoring curricula and programs at memorials to increase their relevance to students, and increased emphasis on tolerance.

The government has pursued hate speech and Holocaust denial cases with a furious passion, prosecuting cases wherever and whenever they appear and has made as extensive efforts as possible to shut down Holocaust revisionists. A Paris court fined far-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen EUR30,000 for his comments about the Holocaust being "a detail" of history. The Ministry of Culture banned Dieudonné's shows and a French court convicted him of hate speech, advocating terrorism, and slander. "The trials have been kind of a pedagogical process for French society" says Rochman of the Fondation pour la Memoire de la Shoah.

Far from declaring victory, the government is redoubling its efforts. In the recent months, it has given new powers to [DILCRAH](#), an organization run by Prime Minister Édouard Philippe that coordinates efforts to combat racism, anti-Semitism and homophobia. The Mémorial de la Shoah has signed an agreement with DILCRAH to provide punishment alternatives to those convicted of Holocaust denial or anti-Semitism. It will run seminars consisting of workshops “about the construction and historical consequences of racism, anti-Semitism and genocide” and designed to raise awareness of the harms of even revisionist and anti-Semitic language.

Judges can send people convicted of hate crimes to a two-day “citizenship course” at the national Holocaust memorial. Police are being training to respond better to victims.

### ***Education***

French Holocaust education is extensive. It is one the dozen or so countries to mandate education about the Holocaust. The Holocaust is first taught as part of a history class in the first year of middle school, then again in the first year of secondary schooling, and once more in the last year of high school. Other classes, including German and philosophy classes, touch on the Holocaust from less direct perspectives, such as by discussing human rights. Schools aim to provide students with in-depth knowledge of the origins of the Holocaust, the social and political conditions and particular sparks that caused it, and the methods used.

French public schools work closely with the Mémorial de la Shoah and other organisations such as the Camp des Milles, to tailor curriculum and develop new programming. Such programming includes visits to local memorials or even Auschwitz, documentaries and conversations with survivors. Not only do teachers have resources readily available to draw from, they can also tap into an extensive network of training materials, specialists, and experts. The Mémorial de la Shoah, as well as other memorials, also conduct training workshops.

Although there are reports of teachers having trouble teaching about the Holocaust, particularly when their students are of immigrant or Muslim background, a 2014 [analysis](#) supported by the UNESCO noted that such cases are likely to be overreported. Teachers are also adapting their teaching practices to prevent feelings of boredom and informational saturation, also known as Holocaust fatigue. These new practices include bringing parents along to visit concentration camps, and in some cases even organizing trips just for parents, to tasking students with collecting and recording the testimonies of survivors. Such programs often receive the support of the Fondation pour la mémoire de la Shoah, Dilcrah, or both.

## ***Commemoration***

France is home to an extensive number of monuments and memorials dedicated to Holocaust victims thanks to its emphasis on preservation of and provision of access to sites. Many of the transit and concentration camps on French soil, such as Natzweiler-Struthof, Gurs, Les Milles, and Drancy, have memorial museums which not only preserve the original site of the camp, but also house artifacts and exhibitions. Local museums such as the Place of Memory in Chambon-sur-Lignon commemorate local efforts to save Jews or remember the Jews who were killed.

In 2012, the French government created a [website](#) to assist with finding memorials. Run by the Directorate of Memory, Heritage and Archives, it not only provides a tool to search for museums, memorials, and other places of memory (Holocaust related and otherwise), it also compiles images and summaries of seminars, special commemorations, and exhibitions. The Directorate's position as a part of the Ministry of Defence, and the official authority the Ministry exercised over memorial sites such as Drancy and Natzweiler-Struthof is a residual legacy of the Gaullist myth. Other national memorials include a plaque in the Pantheon honouring those who saved Jews, and a memorial wall at the Mémorial de la Shoah in Paris listing the names of those who were killed.

Extensive commemorations of Holocaust memory take place at various points throughout the year. Towns, local Jewish communities, and regional memorials, as well as national groups such as CRIF and the Memorial de la Shoah hold commemorations on relevant dates, such as April 29 in Marseille. The anniversary of the Vel d'Hiv roundup in Paris on July 17 receives particular attention, as the President makes an annual speech. Most organizations and towns also hold commemoration ceremonies on Holocaust Remembrance Day, January 27th.

## ***Legal Environment***

France has strict laws against denying crimes against humanity and inciting racial animosity. The Gayssot Act, passed in 1990, makes it a crime to question either the existence or size of crimes against humanity. This legislation has been used to repeatedly prosecute and fine high-profile Holocaust deniers such as Robert Faurisson and Jean Marie Le Pen. "The trials have been kind of a pedagogical process for French society," says Gabrielle Rochman, noting that the attention that these trials drew provided a jumping off point for the Memorial de la Shoah's teaching efforts.

France has pursued other options for preventing the spread of anti-Semitic and Holocaust revisionist narratives. When Dieudonné, a comedian who's been prosecuted nine times for hate speech and

Holocaust denial, attempted to start a comedy tour, cities banned him from performing, a ban which has stood up to challenge in court. Ministers in the government have described these bans as battles for the Republic.

### ***Archives***

Before Jacques Chirac admitted French collaboration with Nazi efforts to round up French Jews, access was limited to archived information about Vichy, the operations of Vichy police, and other difficult parts of French history. Sona Combes wrote *Archives Interdite* ("Closed Archives") in 1994, which essentially accused the French government of both underfunding its archival services and restricting access to any documents which could cause a scandal.

Since then, the French government has improved access, publishing a circular in 1997 affirming the duty of the government to maintain Holocaust memory. Most archives relating to the Holocaust and Vichy have either been digitized or are in the process of digitization. Many archives are either held or digitized by the Mémorial de la Shoah, often in collaboration with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Yad Vashem.

### ***Restitution***

Significant efforts are being made by the French government and by other institutions involved in the deportation of Jews to provide compensation. There is a compensation program for children of deported parents, compensation and restitution for looted property, and general pensions for those who were deported. SNCF, the national French railway operator, has also partnered with the United States in paying out nearly 60 million dollars to survivors and descendants of 76,000 Jews transported to concentration camps by SNCF.

Restitution of buildings, land and Jewish properties is ongoing. Approximately EUR351 million worth of heirless property has not been returned. It is compensated for by the EUR394 million endowment of the Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah.

The process of returning art and other valuables is complex. Large quantities of art have been returned, but legal battles continue to be fought between those who purchased the art without knowledge of its origin) and the descendants of their original owners. The CIVS, or Commission for the Compensation of Victims of Spoliation Resulting from the Anti-Semitic Legislation in Force during the Occupation, has conducted extensive research as it attempts to restore stolen property to its proper heirs.



## ***Civil Society***

The main concerns affecting French Holocaust memory are in civil society.

On the one hand is the resurgence of the far-right and the emergence of the alt-right, with a deep history of Holocaust revisionism. On the other is the wave of anti-Semitic sentiment, primarily among France's Muslim communities. And finally, there are students, generally leftist, who don't fit into either category. For them, the Israel-Palestine conflict and opposition to Israel/Zionism are catalysts for anti-Semitism and later Holocaust revisionism

Holocaust memory is fading. Some 10 percent of 18 to 34 year olds and 20 percent of non-Christian (effectively meaning Muslim) respondents of the same age. report never having heard about the Holocaust. A similar percentage of the population believe that Jews use the Holocaust as a tool to extract unfair advantages. Some believe that increased attention to the story of Jewish suffering crowds out the memory of the suffering of other groups.

The rise in Holocaust revisionism itself breaks down largely along lines of class and race. It tends to be popular among the demographic who feel discriminated against and among immigrant communities, who object to the apparent preferential treatment of Jews. Among minority communities, Holocaust revisionism is a "way of opposing white, Western domination," and of taking aim at the sacred cows of French society. These sentiments help explain the continued popularity of the comedian Dieudonné, whose opposition of Holocaust memory led to an effort to ban his performances across France.

French organizations have begun working with DILCRAH to combat racism, anti-Semitism, and Holocaust revisionism under DILCRAH's 2015-2017 [action plan](#). Many of these groups promote Holocaust memory not just at home, but in Eastern Europe. The Mémorial de la Shoah also provides training services to teachers throughout at least the Baltics, sometimes in partnership with Yad Vashem. Other organizations, such as Yahad-In Unum, focus on studying and collecting testimony about the "Holocaust by bullets," or the killings which took place in East Europe prior to the Wannsee Conference in 1942.

## ***Opposition Parties***

The far-right National Front is most associated with pushing revisionist narratives of the Holocaust. Its former leader, Jean Marie Le Pen, is a convicted Holocaust denier. Despite his daughter Marine Le Pen taking over the party and disavowing her father's comments, she too has minimized the role of the France in the roundup and deportation of French Jews.

Rumblings of anti-Semitism and Holocaust revisionism are not limited to the National Front. During the 2017 presidential election, the traditional right-wing Republicans tweeted a anti-Semitic [caricature](#) of Emmanuel Macron, claiming a connection between Communism and Jews.

The left is not immune either. Strong anti-Zionist sentiment, common in particular among the far-left, often devolves into anti-Semitic and Holocaust revisionist ideas. A notable example of this progression is Dieudonné, a formerly anti-racist comedian and current anti-Zionist Holocaust revisionist.

### **Media**

French mainstream media treats the Holocaust with respect and sensitivity, be it the news, art, or entertainment. Just as there are hundreds, if not thousands, of books on the Holocaust, there are a myriad of movies and other programs. “There are so many projects on the Shoah now; there’s even programs about it on TV every week.” Each of these stories approaches the Holocaust from a slightly different perspective, from the romantic and artistic perspective of movies like *Transit* to the made-for-children perspective of *Otto: The Autobiography of a Teddy Bear*. The Internet is another story. Websites, such as Alain Soral’s Egalite et Reconciliation page, are major vectors of Holocaust revisionism and anti-Semitism.

### **Jewish Community**

The Jewish Community in France is about half a million strong, the third largest in the world after the United States and Israel. The majority live in Paris, while 70,000 live in Marseilles and the rest live in various other communities across the country.

A rise in anti-Semitic incidents, from the nationally covered shooting in a kosher supermarket in Paris or the attack on a Jewish school in Toulouse to the hundreds of small acts of violence, intimidation, or general anti-Semitic remarks, have left the Jewish community feeling unsafe.

Members of the Jewish community were particularly alarmed by murder of Mireille Knoll, an elderly Holocaust survivor. Not only was her death brutal, but the fact that the murder took place in her home and in the context of rising anti-Semitism has driven many Jews to either abandon visual indications of Jewishness, such as the kippah. French Jews perceive threats from across the political spectrum: on the right is traditional French anti-Semitism, newly resurgent with the Front National, and on the left is a refusal to condemn Holocaust denial and anti-Semitism from Muslim immigrants.

Author: Justin Jin

## GERMANY



**Germany has been the undisputed leader in Holocaust remembrance. Although the rise of a new nationalist right threatens to undermine much hard work, the majority of Germans remain ready to take responsibility for remembering the genocide.**

### **Overview**

Germany has a unique relationship with the Holocaust. No other country is nearly as universally accepting of its guilt, and no other country expends this amount of effort and will into commemorating their role in

this European tragedy. Germany has built thousands of memorials and museums, and takes a strong official stance about their responsibility towards the darkest period of their history.

No country is perfect, of course, and German Holocaust remembrance carries its own problems. Germany's quest to own up to its guilt has stoked reactionary populism in the form of the Alternative for Germany party (AfD), which received almost 13% of the national vote in 2017 and became the first far right party in the parliament since the Third Reich. While the party does not deny the Holocaust, nor German guilt, it does claim that the Holocaust is 'over-remembered' in comparison to other, more positive eras of German national history. Indeed, in May of 2018 a leading party member, Alexander Gauland, claimed that the Holocaust's significance amounts to 'a piece of bird shit' in the grand scheme German history.

The problems do not end with the Alternative for Germany party. The educational system mandates Holocaust education, but the depth and breadth of this education varies. Many students in non-college preparatory high schools, *Realschule*, say they don't remember any what they learned about it, whereas many students in prep schools, *Gymnasium*, feel they never strayed from the topic. The background students come from makes a big difference. Even third-generation Turkish-Germans do not view this part of German history as something that concerns them.

Yet to an extent unparalleled elsewhere, Holocaust remembrance remains a central aspect of German life. To some extent, this is owing to exigency; a reunified Germany may well not have been allowed to exist, let alone in the EU, without demonstrating that it had learned the lessons of its past. And so, the legacy of the Holocaust became a foundational part of the modern Germany identity. Other countries with a Holocaust history, as well as those with other unseemly histories, whether they be slavery or colonialism, would do well to follow Germany's example in this regard.

Germany is also an interesting case within the European context because its far-right populist party, the AfD, has won a real voice that cannot be ignored. As countries across Europe struggle to deal with the threat to the liberal traditions of tolerance and multiculturalism posed by these ethno-nationalist parties, all eyes are watching to see how the continent's greatest economy handles its own particular breed of right wing populism and the Holocaust revisionism that seems to inevitably follow.

### ***The Holocaust in Germany***

Germany's Jewish community was one of the most well integrated in Europe prior to the Nazis' ascent to power. The Nazis began discriminating against Jews almost immediately, enforcing a series of laws meant to drive the Jews from the country. Even so, by the beginning of the war in 1939 some 200,000 Jews remained in Germany. These Jews would continue to suffer harsh conditions, being systematically removed from the country over the next four years to work in labour camps.

In 1942 at the Wannsee Conference, the Germans officially enacted a policy of exterminating the Jews, the 'Final Solution.' By the end of the war, 180,000 German Jews would be dead. Wherever German soldiers invaded, they killed Jews. Germans built and ran Auschwitz and other death camps. All told, an estimated six million Jews perished.

Germany was slow to start a practice of Holocaust remembrance in the postwar era. In East Germany, the blame for all atrocities was put on the West, with Stalin's war crimes brushed under the rug for the duration of the new Soviet regime. Easterners were ostensibly all good socialists. In the West, the perpetrators of the Holocaust lived the rest of their lives peacefully, turning to hard work and rebuilding the economy in order to be accepted into the western international community.

When the postwar generation came of age in the 1960s, the Holocaust became a topic of discussion in society. The first memorial was built in Berlin in 1967 and the children of the perpetrators started a national discourse, asking their parents and grandparents about their role. According to several interviewees, the screening of the 1978 American miniseries 'Holocaust' was the catalyst for many Germans to begin speaking more openly about their roles during the war.

Anti-Semitism, neo-Nazism, and Holocaust minimization were all present in some form throughout the latter half of the century. President Reagan's speech in the Bitburg cemetery at the request of Helmut Kohl in 1985 underscored the popularity of the opinion that Germans, too, were victims of the Nazis.

Since reunification, Germans have worked hard to demonstrate that their state is willing to accept full responsibility, in part as a means of assuaging fears of Germany 'rising again.' State-sponsored memorials, such as *das Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* (Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe) near the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, began appearing in the 1990s and 2000s, and more remembrance sites continue to be created.

### **Timeline**

- 1967: First memorial to the Holocaust erected in Berlin.
- 1975: First meeting of the Society for a Jewish Museum in Berlin.
- 1987: First exhibition created at what would become the Topography of Terror at the former site of the Gestapo headquarters.
- 1989: Perspektive Berlin founded to advocate for a national memorial in the heart of Berlin.
- 1996: Federal President Roman Herzog declares January 27th the Day of Remembrance for Victims of National Socialism, marking the anniversary of the day Soviet troops liberated Auschwitz. Germany is the first country to dedicate a day to Holocaust remembrance.
- 2001: Jewish Museum opens in Berlin.
- 2005: Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe opens in Berlin.
- 2008: German Bundestag constructs panel of experts and academics to research and recommend best practices for fighting anti-Semitism in Germany.

- 2011: Commemorative events held in Munich, Frankfurt, Berlin, and Speyer for the 73rd anniversary of the November 1938 pogroms.
- 2012: 'Staying Together: Hungarian Holocaust Survivors Report' exhibition opens in Berlin.
- 2014: German Finance Ministry establishes fund to pay restitutions to child survivors of the Holocaust.
- 2015: Chancellor Angela Merkel visits Dachau for a commemorative event on the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the camp.
- 2016: Goethe University is the first worldwide to establish a professorship in Holocaust Research.
- 2017: Chancellor Angela Merkel receives the Elie Wiesel Award from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.
- 2017: Germany officially adopts the International Holocaust Remembrance Association's definition of anti-Semitism.
- 2018: The exhibit 'Closed Border: The 1938 international refugee conference of Évian' is opened to the public at the Memorial to the German Resistance in Berlin.
- 2018: Germany creates a new 'Anti-Semitism Commissioner' position to help the national government monitor and respond to rising anti-Semitism.

### **Government Attitudes**

Since reunification, the state's recognition of its responsibility has been unwavering, and the consensus is that the German people have a responsibility to be aware of their unique role as historical perpetrators. The government's education policies, foreign policy, and even parliamentary procedures are all constructed with Germany's Holocaust history fully in view.

Consider foreign policy and defence: the country's orientation towards pacifism stems from a recognition of its own bellicose past. German soldiers are allowed, indeed encouraged, to disobey orders they believe to be illegal or immoral. The Bundestag maintains an office, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, where military members can anonymously submit complaints, recommendations, and comments about the conduct of the military.

### **Education**

Holocaust remembrance begins with education. It is illegal to home-school students in Germany because of the concern that extremists will foster hate and revisionism; education is understood as the first means of affecting a positive remembrance culture and children in Germany are confronted with Holocaust education that is particular to the German nation.

Holocaust history is a requirement, as is the case in many countries, and textbooks are carefully reviewed to ensure for accuracy and accessibility. German students encounter the Holocaust in their literature classes as well, not only in their history lessons.

Germany has scores of memorial sites and museums at the original locations of the Shoah. The German Federal Agency for Civic Education compiled and released a database listing 219 Holocaust memorial sites. Police officers, government officials, military persons, and even nurses take Holocaust history courses at various locations, such as the Wannsee Conference house.

Non-native Germans of Turkish or other origins do not receive the same lessons according to Jutta Weduwen of Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste (Action Reconciliation Service for Peace). Until 2011, the German government had mandatory military or volunteer service, often related to atonement for the Holocaust. Organizations such as ASF and Erinnerung Verantwortung Zukunft (Remembrance, Responsibility, Future), say it has become more difficult to find volunteers than it was in the past.

### **Commemoration**

The International Holocaust Remembrance Day is formally honoured in German parliament by an hour of memory for the victims of national socialism'. This hour in the German parliament is a sombre setting where speakers, often Holocaust survivors, address the packed chamber. Speakers have included the likes of Elie Wiesel, Ruth Klueger, and most recently Anita Lasker-Wallfisch.

This Hour of Remembrance is not without its challenges. Dr Andreas Eberhardt of Erinnerung Verantwortung Zukunft, an organization dedicated to Holocaust remembrance, warns against Germany's Holocaust remembrance becoming static.

Germany is filled with sites commemorating the Holocaust. Perhaps the best known is the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, opened in Berlin in 2005. Located in central Berlin near the site of Brandenburg Gate, it consists of a field of 2,700 concrete stelae arranged in a tight grid and accessible day and night. It was designed by the Jewish American architect Peter Eisenman and includes an underground Information Centre.

Memorials and museums can be found at the sites of the former Nazi concentration camps such as Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, Bergen-Belsen, Dachau, Dora-Mittelbau, and Sachsenhausen-Ravensbrück. The Wannsee Villa near Berlin, where the machinery of the Final Solution was set in motion in 1941, has also been turned into a museum.

Germans don't just memorialize the destruction of Judaism. More than 30 museums celebrate the long, rich history of Jews in Germany. The Jewish Museum of Berlin, one of the most spectacular buildings in the city, attracts almost a million visitors a year.

### **Archives**

After the war, the Western allies established the International Tracing Service, an archive and centre for documenting Nazi persecution and the liberated survivors. Victims of Nazism and their families can find

information regarding their incarceration, forced labour and post-war Allied assistance. The archives count more than 30 million documents.

During the Cold War, the personal files, transport lists, several camps' death records, individual records, and mass graves served as evidence to help victims' families gain information and substantiate compensation and pension claims. For the general public and for researchers, however, the archives remained mostly inaccessible. Visitors were only allowed to see the famed 'Index,' and some of the buildings were off limits without the director's express authorization. Rumours were legion: it was alleged that Western secret services had always had access to the archives and didn't want it to transpire that there was information there about war criminals. It was also rumoured that the Germans were simply loathing to pay any more restitution for damages.

In 2007, after concerted international pressure, scholars and researchers were granted access to the documents. In 2017, the ITS announced that it had published its Holocaust-era inventory online, [offering an overview](#) of holdings. More detailed descriptions are being added gradually.

### **Financial Settlements**

Germany has historically supported Israel financially through payment of reparations. A first agreement was signed September 10, 1952 and entered into force on March 27, 1953. Under the agreement, West Germany paid Israel for the costs of 'resettling so great a number of uprooted and destitute Jewish refugees' after the war and for individual compensation.

West Germany paid Israel three billion marks over the next fourteen years. The payments were made to the State of Israel since most victims had no surviving family. The money was invested in the country's infrastructure.

### **Opposition Parties**

The far-right Alternative for Germany party seeks to redefine the culture of Holocaust remembrance in Germany away from what it has deemed a 'dictatorship of memory' and a 'guilt cult' around Holocaust remembrance. It claims that the overemphasis on Germany's crimes has obscured the larger narrative of the country's history. Although the mainstream of the party does not embrace radical Holocaust revisionism, the party remains a stronghold for those who do, and individual party leaders such as Wolfgang Gedeon have been found guilty of Holocaust denial in German courts.

Various AfD leaders have singled out specific memorials for criticism. Gedeon described *stolpersteine* (stumble stones) memorials by saying 'Who gives these obtrusive moralists the right to (create the public memorial)?' Björn Höcke, the party's head in the state of Thuringia, was widely criticized after making a speech in which he claimed 'Germans... are the only people in the world who have planted a monument of shame in the heart of their capital' in reference to the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe.



## **Civil Society**

The vast majority of German NGOs and university groups are dedicated to promoting a positive culture around Holocaust remembrance. There are institutions for the study of anti-Semitism, improving the quality of Holocaust education in schools, and providing opportunities for young people to volunteer with communities impacted by the Holocaust. The Center for Research on Antisemitism (ZfA) at the Technical University of Berlin sponsors research on the history of the Holocaust, Jewish history, and modern anti-Semitism.

NGOs organize volunteer efforts to aid the communities affected by Nazi crimes. Aktion Suhtesuchen Friedensdienste runs volunteer programs and summer camps in Germany, Poland, and Great Britain. By connecting young people to survivors, ASF helps facilitate Holocaust education while also giving young people an opportunity to grow through an intense experience. Executive director Jutta Weduwen characterized the work not as reconciliation, but rather atonement.

Immigrants are beginning to participate. According to Weduwen, there is broad interest among newcomers in Holocaust education programming. By providing opportunities for immigrants to learn this history, the ASF believes it is helping them integrate into German society.

Many independent organizations have conducted studies into the quality of education and educational materials. Partnering with UNESCO, the Georg Eckert Institute published a thorough study of the treatment of the Holocaust in textbooks all over the world. It was often critical of German textbooks, saying 'In some instances, the authors might be said to inadvertently perpetuate the viewpoint of perpetrators, as in a photograph reproducing anti-Semitic stereotypes which is not supplemented with any critical commentary.'

## **Media**

In a country where Holocaust denial remains punishable by law, mainstream publications take strong stands against revisionism. Just last year, *Der Spiegel* removed a book from its best-sellers list after it was deemed to be 'anti-Semitic and historically revisionist.' The book, *Finis Germania*, collects the thoughts of the late historian Rolf Peter Sieferle, who accused the Jewish people of offloading their own historical guilt on to the German people after the Holocaust.

The rise of social media and the decline of traditional journalism has transformed the way information about the Holocaust is disseminated and absorbed. According to Sigmunt Königsberg, the Anti-Semitism Officer for the Jewish Community of Berlin, the anonymity of the internet significantly reduces people's inhibition to posting about and participating in Holocaust revisionism and anti-Semitism. In 2018, Germany imposed arguably the world's strongest law against illegal online hate speech, the so-called NetzDG law. It threatens Facebook, Google and Twitter with fines up to EUR50 million if they fail to take down illegal content within an hour.

## ***Jewish Community***

The Jewish community in Germany numbered 100,000 in 2017, making it the eighth largest Jewish community in the world and the fourth largest in Europe, according to the World Jewish Congress. Several thousand Israelis also live in Germany.

From 1990 onwards, the German government encouraged the resettlement of Jews from the former Soviet Union. These immigrants injected new life into the aging community and most Jews living in Germany today are originally from the former Soviet Union. In places such as Berlin, Bremen, Hamburg, Potsdam or Schwerin, more than half of German Jews are now native Russian-speakers.

**Authors: Jeremy Epstein and Nicholas Haeg**

## GREECE



**Despite the country's deep recession, Greece has avoided slipping into Holocaust revisionism. It remains committed to honouring the loss of its Jews.**

### *Overview*

The Greek government has made strides to repent for the government's complicity and individuals' participation in the genocide of the Jews.

Thessaloniki Mayor Yiannis Boutaris officially apologised in 2014 for the responsibility of his predecessor authorities in deporting the city's tens of thousands of Jews. The mayor is working with the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki to establish the new Holocaust Museum, currently under construction.

The Greek government collaborates with Jewish organizations to organise regular Holocaust commemoration events. Museum and memorial visits are encouraged for schools, and thousands of schoolchildren visit Jewish and Holocaust museums around Greece.

Like many other European countries, Greece recognizes January 27th as Holocaust Remembrance Day and annually holds commemorative events that are organized and attended by both government officials and members of the local Jewish community. March 15th is also recognized legally as a day of remembrance, marking the deportation of Jews from Thessaloniki to Auschwitz.

Holocaust denial and revisionism remains a problem outside of the government, particularly in the far-right Golden Dawn party. The Anti-Defamation League ranks Greece as the most anti-Semitic country in Europe, but Jewish groups claim this reflects Greeks' beliefs in anti-Semitic stereotypes and note that the country has recorded few actual incidents of anti-Jewish violence.

### *The Holocaust in Greece*

Fascist Italian forces invaded Greece on October 28, 1940, only to be pushed back by Greek troops. A stalemate ensued. The next year on April 6, 1941, Hitler ordered German troops to invade Yugoslavia and Greece.

The Germans conquered mainland Greece within a few weeks. Although resistance on the islands lingered for a few more months. The Greek government fled the country, continuing to operate in exile first in Crete and eventually in Cairo. Germany installed a puppet government with General Georgios Tsolakoglou as Prime Minister.

The Axis powers divided the country into three zones: Italy held Athens and the majority of mainland Greece, Bulgaria took Western Thrace and North Macedonia, and Germany controlled Western Macedonia. The three occupying powers had different priorities and plans regarding Greece's Jewish population, which meant that the fate of Greece's Jews varied by region.

Germany occupied Thessaloniki, formerly known as Salonika, the cultural hub for Sephardic Jews who had been expelled from Spain in 1492. The city counted 50,000 Jews, about two-thirds of Greek Jewry. Thessaloniki Jews were politically, economically, and socially well-integrated into Greek society.

Thessalonikan Jews suffered a terrible fate. Germans confined them to ghettos, forced them to wear a yellow star on their clothes and banned them from public spaces. Jewish newspapers were closed, and synagogues, businesses, and hospitals looted. In 1942, German authorities demolished an ancient Jewish cemetery counting about 350,000 graves with the assistance of the local authorities. Today, the campus of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki sits on its remains.

On July 11<sup>th</sup>, 1942, a day that would come to be known as "Black Shabbat," Jewish men aged 18-45 were called to Eleftherias Square for forced labour and made at gunpoint to perform humiliating physical activities. Some 54,000 Jews were sent to Nazi extermination camps in 1943, mainly Auschwitz-Birkenau. More than 90% of the city's Jewish population was murdered.

The Bulgarian authorities in Thrace deported Thracian Jews to the Treblinka death camp and fewer than 10% survived. Italian forces in Athens largely ignored Germany's plan to eliminate the city's Jews. Some Italian generals even protected Jews. Although the situation in Athens was much safer for Jews than in the north, Italy surrendered to the Allies on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1943 and its occupied zone was turned over to the Nazis who deported Jews to their death.

The local population participated little in the destruction of the Jewish community. About two thirds of Athens' Jewish population survived the war due to the actions of Athens' Archbishop Damaskinos and Police Commissioner Angelos Evert who issued fake identification cards and implored Athenian citizens to help Jews. On the island of Zakynthos, the city's mayor and bishop hid all 275 Jews. Today, hundreds of Greeks are honoured as "Righteous Among the Nations," a title awarded by Israel to non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jewish populations from extermination at the hands of the Nazis.

Some 60,000 Greek Jews died in the Holocaust, about 86% of the total Jewish population, one of the highest percentages in all of occupied Europe.

### ***Timeline***

- 1945: KIS established (Central Board of Jewish Communities of Greece)
- 1946: Greek government relinquishes right to inherit Jewish property, sets up fund to return property to Jewish community.
- 1949: OPAIE established by Royal Decree (restitution fund)
- 8 May 1947: Ministerial Council votes on granting 8 million drachmas to "fill urgent educational and religious needs of the Jewish communities" (207, "Righteous")
- Late 40s: civil war
- 1945-46: jailed Prime Ministers for collaboration: Tsolakoglou (1945, died in prison), Logothetopoulos (1946, released in 51), Rallis (1946, died in prison)
- 2003: Greek Deputy Minister of Interior, Nikos Bastis declared January 27th to be Holocaust Remembrance Day in Greece  
(<https://www.nj.gov/education/holocaust/curriculum/greece/Unit6.pdf>)
- 2009: Greece endorse Terezin Declaration (program of activities geared towards ensuring assistance, redress and remembrance for victims)
- 2011: Greek government gives Jewish community EUR 10 million for confiscation of land  
(<https://www.nj.gov/education/holocaust/curriculum/greece/Unit6.pdf> page 3) (Law 3943/2011)
- 2014: Thessaloniki Mayor Yannis Boutaris apologises for responsibility of local authorities
- 2014: Anti-Racism law passed
- 2016: Special Envoy for Holocaust issues Photini Tomai appointed
- 2018: PM lays foundation stone for Holocaust Museum in Thessaloniki  
(<https://primeminister.gr/en/2018/01/30/19342>)

### ***Government***

The Greek government has made extensive efforts to remember and commemorate the Holocaust. It emphasizes Greece's historical position as resisters to German occupation and its role as protector of Greek Jewry.

Postwar Greek governments put Greek war criminals and collaborators on trial. A special court convicted the three Prime Ministers of the German-instituted Greek puppet government, Georgios Tsolakoglou, Konstantinos Logothetopoulos, and Ioannis Rallis. Another court handed down a 25 year sentence to Max Merten, a German officer responsible for the deportation of tens of thousands of Jews from Thessaloniki to extermination camps.

These tough punishments soon were lightened. Tsolakoglou's sentence was commuted from death penalty to life imprisonment. Logothetopoulos was released from prison in 1951. Merten was granted amnesty and extradited to West Germany in 1959. That same year, Greece passed a law ordering the cessation of all war crime trials.

Since 2014, Holocaust negation and denial is illegal, punishable by jail and fines. The Parliament also voted in 2017 to pass a law of return that made descendants of Greek Holocaust survivors eligible for Greek citizenship, expanding on a 2011 amendment that reinstated citizenship for all Jews born in or before 1945.

Greece recognizes crimes of other individual Greeks and local authorities who collaborated with the occupiers. In 2014, Thessaloniki Mayor Yiannis Boutaris issued a formal apology for his predecessor's role in registering and deporting the city's Jews. When Mayor Boutaris took the oath for his second term, he wore a yellow "Jude" star reminiscent of the ones that Nazis forced Jews to wear.

In 2018, Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, along with the Israeli President Reuven Rivlin, laid the foundation stone for Thessaloniki's new Holocaust Museum which is expected to be completed by 2020. The museum will be built at the Old Railway Station from where 55,000 Jews were deported.

### ***Education***

Greece's school curriculum mandates Holocaust education. The Ministry of Education recommends to all schools that students visit the Jewish Museums in Athens and Thessaloniki and the various Holocaust memorials across the country, though this is not a requirement and participation in these activities is decided at the school level. Academic, economic and cultural achievements of Greek Jews pre-World War II are included in courses about Greek history, literature, politics, and culture.

School museum visits at the Jewish Museum of Greece in Athens and the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki rely on testimony from local survivors. Museum curators show children the lists of names of the thousands of Jews deported and systematically killed and share photos, videos, and objects that convey the scale of Jewish loss. Young children visiting the museum often learn about the stories of resistance fighters who risked their lives to save Jewish children.

The Jewish Museum in Athens will soon be starting training programs for police, border guards, paramedics, and firefighters. Although voluntary, these programs are recommended for all law enforcement officers. In October 2017, the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki organized a workshop for secondary education professors and high school history teachers.

### ***Commemoration***

In November 2003, Deputy Minister of the Interior Nikos Bastis declared January 27th to be Greece's Holocaust Remembrance Day. On this day, Greek cities that were home Jewish populations hold commemorative events funded by the government. The Ministry of Education instructs all Greek schools to participate in Holocaust remembrance activities for two hours. These include showing a video, giving a speech, or hosting a Holocaust survivor or a tour guide from one of Greece's Jewish museums.

March 15 is recognized as another important commemorative day in Greece. It marks the day that the first deportation to Auschwitz left from Thessaloniki. Each year, the government and the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki organizes a march from Eleftherias Square, where Germans once forced Jewish men to perform embarrassing physical labour, to the Old Railroad Station from where Jews were deported.

The Greek government funds Jewish community groups, commemorative events, Holocaust museums and memorials. It also has appointed a Special Envoy for Holocaust issues. Many memorial sites commemorate locations where Jews and other Holocaust victims were deported or killed, or where Jewish cemeteries, schools, or synagogues once stood. Almost all Greek towns with historical Jewish populations devastated by the Holocaust have erected a monument or memorial.

In 2016 the Greek Parliament unveiled a monument to memorialize the eight Jewish Parliament members deported and murdered by the Nazis.

The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece has started sponsoring an annual contest. Students produce a report or video on the Holocaust, and winners receive a trip to Auschwitz. The Central Board

of Jewish Communities in Greece has started sponsoring an annual contest. Students produce a report or video on the Holocaust, and winners receive a trip to Auschwitz.

### ***Archives***

Greece has an extensive and easily accessible collection of wartime archives. Jewish community groups, university departments, museums, and government agencies manage them.

Unfortunately, a large part of information is missing about pre-war Jewish communities, since the occupiers destroyed many documents.

The government requires an application to make copies of archival materials and there are laws in place regarding the accessibility of personal or sensitive data. Many museum and Jewish community archives are either digitized or in the process of digitization. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs files are digitized. There have been no notable legal cases in which access to materials has been denied.

In 2009, the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki published a list with more than 37,500 names of Thessalonian Jews deported to concentration camps. Another important endeavour in remembering the tragedy that befell Greek Jewry is the Jewish Museum of Greece's Oral History Archive, which contains the oral testimonies of more than 115 Holocaust survivors to preserve their stories.

### ***Restitution***

After the war, the Greek legal system made extensive and immediate efforts to provide Holocaust survivors and victims families' with financial and legal restitution. In 1945, the Greek government implemented Compulsory Law 808, which ordered "the immediate return, by the trustees, of Jewish properties to their rightful owners or their inheritors." A year later, Greece passed Compulsory Law 846, in which the government waived its right to inherit heirless property that had been seized from Jews, opting instead to use these items of property for "special humanitarian purposes, mainly to serve the needs of the Jewish community."

Restitution continues into this century. In 2011, the Greek Parliament voted to provide the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki with EUR9,943,697 as compensation for the Nazi destruction of a historic Jewish cemetery.

### ***Opposition***



Holocaust denial and revisionism is most visible in the far-right party Golden Dawn which currently has 15 members in Greece's 300 delegate parliament. Polls show its support falling and now stands at only 6 percent of Greek voters.

Golden Dawn is ultranationalist and xenophobic, engaging in violence against immigrant communities and scapegoating Jews for Greece's recent economic crisis. In 2000, party supporters vandalized Jewish cemeteries, synagogues, and Holocaust memorials in Thessaloniki and Athens, tagging the sites with Golden Dawn's symbol. Golden Dawn lawmaker Ioannis Lagos called International Holocaust Remembrance Day "unacceptable," and demanded that the government acknowledge the "real" Holocaust of Greek victims.

### ***Civil Society***

Greek civil society emphasizes the country's active Nazi resistance movement and cases of Greeks saving Jews. It honors the heroes in the fight against fascism, while sometimes falling short in acknowledging the Jewish victims. It fails to account for local Nazi collaborators and the fact that Greece has one of the highest death rates among its Jewish population in all of Europe.

The Greek Orthodox Church highlights examples of figures such as Bishop Chrysostomos of Zakynthos, who saved the town's 275 Jews, and Archbishop Damaskinos of Athens, who helped issue fake identification card for Jewish citizens.

### ***Jewish Community***

About 5,000 Jews live in Greece, with about 3,000 in Athens, 1,000 in Thessaloniki, and 1,000 in smaller towns such as Larissa, Volos, Corfu, and Ioannina. Before the Holocaust, Greeks lived in 29 communities across the country. Greek Jewry is represented by the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece. The community combats anti-Semitism in Greece, cooperates with non-Jewish organizations, organizes educational programs, and cares for Jewish sites in places where there is no longer an active Jewish community.

AUTHOR: Ilana Luther

## HUNGARY



**Under the government of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Hungary has gained the dubious distinction of rewriting history to rehabilitate war criminals and diminish its own guilt.**

### *Overview*

Hungary suffers from grave deficiencies in its Holocaust education, memory, and commemoration.

The country's right-wing government has attempted to rehabilitate wartime figures as anti-communist icons. It inflates Hungary's role in "saving" the Jews of Budapest and minimises discourse on their own complicity in deporting and killing Jews. State-appointed "historians" have relativized the horrors of the

Holocaust, and often depict their own people as victims of what they say was Jewish-supported Communism.

Hungary has a large Jewish population of around 100,000 and is the home to some of the most beautiful Jewish sites in Europe, including the continent's largest synagogue.

### ***The Holocaust in Hungary***

Hungary grew close to fascist Germany and Italy in the 1930s, and German and Italian assistance helped it regain territory lost after World War I. The country joined the Axis alliance in November 1940 and helped the Germans invade Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union in 1941.

From 1938 onwards, Hungary passed its own race laws to control Jewish life. In the summer of 1941, however, Hungary deported around 20,000 Jews from their annexed territories. Despite this initial step and mounting German pressure, Hungary's Prime Minister Miklos Kallay refused to deport additional Jews.

Hungary suffered losses together with the Nazis at Stalingrad. The defeat signalled to the Hungarian leader Miklos Horthy that the Axis were going to lose the war. Horthy negotiated a separate armistice with the Allies after 1943. Germany responded by occupying Hungary. This began efforts to deport the Jews en masse from the country. In April 1944, the Hungarian authorities began rounding up Hungarian Jews. Within a few months, around 440,000 Jews were deported from Hungary; most would die in Auschwitz.

After Horthy attempted to halt the deportations and negotiate with the Soviets, the Germans organised in October, 1944 a coup d'état, installing the far-right Arrow Cross party. The Arrow Cross regime forced the remaining Jews in Budapest into a ghetto and terrorised Jewish citizens across the city.

In January 1945, Hungary signed an armistice with the Soviets. The last of the German and Arrow Cross forces were driven out by April 1945.

In 1941, around 825,000 Jews lived in Hungary, including the newly acquired territories. Around 565,000 Jews were killed during the war, leaving only 260,000 survivors. Many of these Jews chose to emigrate to Israel in the early post-war years, and after the failed 1956 revolution. Today, around 50,000 – 100,000 Jews live in the country, almost all in Budapest.

### ***Timeline:***

1989–1990: End of Communist Dictatorship  
2000-2001: Introduction of the observance of Holocaust Remembrance Day in public schools  
2002: Hungary joins the IHRA  
24 February 2002: House of Terrors established  
April 2004: Inauguration of the Holocaust Memorial Centre in Budapest  
2004: Opening of the new permanent Hungarian exhibition at the Auschwitz Memorial  
16 April 2005: Shoes on the Danube Bank erected  
November 2012: MP Marton Gyöngyösi's (Jobbik) hateful remarks  
March 2013: The Fourth Amendment of the Hungarian Fundamental Law  
November 2013: Horthy bust unveiled  
2014: 70th Anniversary of Deportations in Hungary  
2 January 2014: Inauguration of Veritas Institute  
20 July 2014: Erection of "Memorial to the victims of the German Occupation"  
2 August 2014: Inauguration of the Centre for Gypsy History, Culture, Education and Study of the Holocaust  
2015: Hungary chairs the IHRA  
27 January 2017: Closing of the Centre for Gypsy History, Culture, Education and Study of the Holocaust

### ***Government***

After the collapse of communism, Hungary made a good start in coming to terms with the Holocaust. During Viktor Orban's first term as Prime Minister (1998-2002), the coalition government that he led established a national Holocaust Commemoration Day and brought Hungary into International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance or IHRA. The government also appointed a commission to create a Holocaust Memorial and Documentation Center in Budapest.

Although the Socialist Party governments from 2002 to 2010 remained on this positive path, storm clouds formed during this period. The neo-Nazi, Holocaust revisionist far-right Jobbik, formed in 2003, emerged as a powerful force. It started a militia reviving Arrow Cross symbols and uniforms. Fidesz party failed to join with other major political parties in forceful condemnation of Jobbik's anti-Semitic and anti-Romani sloganeering. The stage was set for Viktor Orban return to power - and Holocaust revisionism.

Today, Hungary's ruling Fidesz party engages in dangerous memory politics. When the party came to power in 2010, it appointed Andras Levente Gal to direct the Holocaust Memorial and Documentation Center in Budapest. According to Paul Shapiro of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Gal's first

proposal was to eliminate mention of Miklos Horthy's alliance with Adolf Hitler and participation in the dismemberment of three neighbouring states—Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia—as “irrelevant” to the Holocaust.” Gal's second proposal, Shapiro recounts, “was to sanitize the record of Hungarian participation in the ghettoization and deportation of the country's Jews and placed full blame for the destruction of Hungarian Jewry on Germany.” The resulting international outcry led to Gal's dismissal.

Fidesz persisted in rewriting history. Alongside whitewashing Hungarian collaboration and complicity, the government has rehabilitated individuals involved in the Holocaust, including Admiral Horthy. Prime Minister Orbán has praised him for reconquering lost territories. Several towns have erected statues or placed plaques on buildings in his honour. Busts of Horthy still stand across the country, despite his record of virulent anti-Semitism. According to Shapiro, Horthy wrote “with pride to his Prime Minister in 1940, ‘I have been an anti-Semite my whole life,’ and to Adolf Hitler in May 1943, , “The measures that I have imposed have, in practice, deprived the Jews of any opportunity to practice their damaging influence on public life.”

In 2014, parts of the Jewish community broke from the government over Holocaust revisionism. Most of the community refused government money, particularly because of the statue in Liberty Square and the comments of Veritas director, Sandor Szakály, in calling the deportation of 23,000 Jews a “police action against aliens.” Over the past few years, Orbán has supported thinly-veiled anti-Semitic campaigns, particularly against Hungarian born financier and free market civil activist George Soros.

Not all developments are negative. Hungary has good infrastructure to combat antisemitism and Holocaust revisionism. The 2013 amendment of the Hungarian Fundamental Law criminalised hate speech and allowed individuals to file civil lawsuits for Holocaust denial. Hungary has no statute of limitation for Nazi crimes and it has outlawed the use of totalitarian symbols, including those of the Arrow Cross. The government has even acknowledged that Hungarians had a role in the Holocaust, a step which has proven difficult for some other post-communist countries.

### ***Education***

In 2012, Fidesz proposed a problematic revision of Hungary's national public school curriculum.

The main concern was the inclusion of books by three interwar anti-Semitic authors: Jozsef Nyiro, Albert Wass, and Deszo Szabo. “Jews are the most serious and deadly enemy of Hungarians,” designating Judaism “a tribal superstition exalted as a religion, Deszo Szabo wrote. The Romanian government convicted. Albert Wass of war crimes, including complicity in the documented murder of two Jews.

Teachers were not be required to provide any political biographical information about the authors. Hungarian Jewish organizations petitioned the government to remove these “anti-Semites” from the curriculum, without success.

The curriculum revisited the Holocaust itself. It identified Hungarian losses in World War I as their greatest national tragedy and suggested equivalency between the Holocaust and Hungarian military losses at Stalingrad during World War II. Information relating to Jewish history and the contributions of Jews to Hungarian intellectual, cultural, and economic life were minimised.

The new curriculum undermined considerable progress made after the fall of communism. Hungarian elementary school students are introduced to how hate can lead to the Holocaust. By the time students reach secondary school, the focus of Holocaust education turns to the persecution of Hungarian Jews and the genocide. Although the Holocaust is taught primarily within the history curriculum, the topic spills over into the literature curriculum, when secondary school students are assigned Imre Kertész’s novel *Fateless* about the experiences of an adolescent boy in concentration camps.

The United States Embassy sponsors training sessions on Holocaust education for teachers in Hungary. Annually in July, the USC Shoah Foundation holds six day Holocaust lesson seminars at Central European University. But these training sessions seem to have little impact. Only 17 Hungarian teachers attended the July 2018 seminar. No training sessions serve to specifically combat the issue of removing blame on Hungary for its participation in the Holocaust.

### ***Commemoration***

Hungary demonstrates serious deficiencies in its commemorating of the Holocaust. On August 2 2014, for the 70th anniversary of the deportations in the country, the government funded the “Centre for Gypsy History, Culture, Education and Study of the Holocaust”. On January 27 2017, the same centre closed its door, defunded without controversy, criticism or prior warning.

Other Hungarian museums are controversial.

The House of Terror recounts “terror” of totalitarian regimes, Communist and Nazi alike. It has only one room on the Holocaust and around twenty on the Communist period, diminishing the unique tragedy of the Holocaust and relativizing its horrors with those of the Communist era. The competition of victimhood is therefore the guiding philosophy behind the house.

The exhibition carries the undertone that the communists were Jews, with the Jewish origins of the perpetrators “clearly evident”. Maria Schmidt, a state-appointed historian, has been the director of the museum since its founding. In 1994, Schmidt published a paper trying to “prove” that the postwar Communist regime in Hungary was more oppressive than the pro-Nazi wartime Hungarian government. In response, renowned Holocaust scholar Randolph L. Brahm dubbed Schmidt “a formerly budding Holocaust scholar turned into an ardently nationalist Holocaust distorter”.

Schmidt’s influence extends beyond the House of Terror. She has been appointed the director of the House of Fates, a new museum under construction. The name, House of Fates, derives from Imre Kertesz’s *Fatelessness* about a child’s experience in Auschwitz. Some fear the new museum’s name implies it was the fate of the Jews to die in the Holocaust. The museum is scheduled to be housed in the former train station from which many Jews were deported during the war.

Holocaust-era crimes against Jewish citizens are often compared to the crimes against non-Jewish citizens. In the government’s 2014 “Memorial to the Victims of the German Occupation,” a German eagle swooping down upon Archangel Gabriel, who represents Hungary, downplaying Hungary’s complicity and role in the Holocaust and the deportation of Jews. At the time it was unveiled, 16 Jewish organisations withdrew from the project and the leadership of the Jewish community cut off all formal relations with the government, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recalled Israeli Ambassador to Hungary. The statue still stands, frozen with no official opening ceremony because of the protests. It symbolizes the government’s refusal to acknowledge the Holocaust as a unique violence committed against groups of people.

Despite these controversies, the government is responsible for some positive initiatives. April 16th is commemorated as National Holocaust Remembrance Day, and August 2nd as the Commemoration of the Roma and Sinti Genocide. On April 16th, it is mandatory for school children to commemorate the Holocaust. Finally, the Shoes on the Danube Bank monument, erected in 2005, commemorates murdered by Arrow Cross rule, their bodies dumped into the Danube.

### ***Archives***

Archives in Hungary are open and free, although one needs to prove they are connected to an academic institution. There is still work to be done on the digitisation of archives, although the National Cultural Fund of Hungary has been funding the digitisation process. The various archives are all state-owned, with the exception of the Archive of the Jewish Museum, which has some useful material on survivors of the Holocaust.

## ***Restitution***

As in other post-communist countries, the government nationalised Hungarian Jewish property nationalised after the end of the war. Since the end of communism, communal properties including synagogues have been returned.

Personal property disputes have proved difficult to settle. In 1994, Hungary created MAZSOK to address property claims. In 2007 an additional \$21 million was promised to MAZSOK. Compensation bonds only amounted to a small portion of the actual value of the lost estate, were only redeemable in Hungary, and have now devalued.

Hungary's record of returning stolen art is poor. Heirs of the Hungarian banker Baron Mor Lipot Herzog filed a lawsuit in 2010, demanding the return of more than 40 pieces, including paintings, sculptures and other works by masters such as El Greco, Lucas Cranach the Elder, Zurbarán, van Dyck, Velázquez and Monet. Lawyers are also asked the Hungarian government for an accounting of all art from the Herzog family in its possession. The case remains unresolved.

In December, 2018, Stuart E. Eizenstat, an expert adviser to the State Department, singled out Hungary for foot dragging on returning art stolen during World War II. The wartime Hungarian government had "sanctioned the confiscation of artworks and cultural property" from its Jewish citizens. Speaking in Berlin, Eizenstat said "Unfortunately, I cannot report any change of attitude by the current Hungarian government. They have refused to return these artworks to their rightful owners. They have refused to take their historic responsibility for the systematic looting of art from their Jewish citizens."

Some museums in Hungary have researched the provenance of works in their collections but that research has not been made public. And while there is a state order in Hungary about restituting artworks in public museums. Eizenstat said, "only claimants of non-Jewish origin have received any works back."

## ***Opposition***

Jobbik is an ultra-nationalist party, which in its early days made explicit anti-Semitic statements. Forming in 2003, Jobbik's leader has a neo-Nazi track record, founding the Hungarian Guard in 2007 – a paramilitary organisation that struck a chilling resemblance to the Arrow Cross and was banned in 2009. Despite this ban, Gabor Vona, the leader of the party, threw off his jacket in a swearing-in ceremony in 2014 to display the Guard's "fascistlike uniform".



One report on antisemitism in Hungary claimed that there is a strong statistical relationship between party preference and anti-Semitism, with 40% of their respondents who supported Jobbik strongly anti-Semitic, and another 20% moderately anti-Semitic. Among supporters of Fidesz and left-wing political parties, this proportion was purportedly much lower.

Jobbik is undergoing a change. Since 2013, its leaders have attempted to reform their image and have become more centrist. Empirical research done on parliamentary speeches of the party even revealed that anti-Roma sentiment virtually disappeared and the party now, while still highly conservative, has been lauded by some members of the Jewish community and heralded as a way to fight Fidesz. The far-right within the party have since split, to form the fascist Force and Determination Movement (Erő és Elszántság Mozgalom). Jobbik became the second largest political party in Hungary in the April 2018 elections, a continuation of the growth they have undergone since 2010.

### ***Civil Society***

Civil society has a mixed record when it comes to Holocaust memory

The Church plays a large role in civil society, with over 50% of the country identifying as Christian, and the KDNP (Christian Democratic People's Party) in a ruling alliance with Fidesz, although the party itself is more of a satellite of Fidesz. Correspondingly, the position of the Church leaders reflects government: while they acknowledge the horrible suffering that the Jews underwent, they do not take any responsibility. Certain churches contribute to the rehabilitation of wartime criminals. Near to the "Memorial to the victims of the German Occupation" is a Calvinist Church which in 2013 unveiled a statue to Horthy at whose ceremony Jobbik MP Márton Gyöngyösi praised the leader.

Hungary has, however, quite a few positive and proactive educational groups. The Tom Lantos Institute, which is partly government funded, has great international ties and works independently as a research institute and think-tank with a focus on human and minority rights in Central-Eastern Europe and the Western Balkan.

### ***Media***

Hungary's government has moved to shackle its press. Freedom House reports: While private, opposition-aligned media outlets exist, national, regional, and local media are increasingly dominated by pro-government outlets, which are frequently used to smear political opponents. The closure in 2016 of Hungary's largest independent daily, Népszabadság, represented a

serious blow to media diversity. State media heavily favors the government and government initiatives. Journalists have been banned from the parliament building at times. The U.S. State Department has [raised similar concern](#) over laws “broadened the range of views whose expression was illegal” and “concentrated authority over the media in a single government body with wide-ranging authorities.” A report for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe warned that the legislation introduced “stricter regulation, more pervasive controls and limitations on freedom of expression.”

The crackdown extends to dealing with the Holocaust, Roma and Jews. History cleansers created a documentary in December 1998 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”, and played this film on Hungarian television. Sándor Szakály, the future director of the Veritas Institute, was one of the “experts” involved in the documentary.

In July 2018 Beatrix Siklósi was appointed the director of the Hungarian National Television's cultural channel, M5. In one [post](#) on her personal Facebook page, Siklósi warned of an imminent Israeli attack on Iran and called on Hungarians to “defend their homeland” because “Israel is coming”. In another, she posted a [racist joke](#) about a fire in a Montreal high-rise, according to which the Black-Caribbean, Roma and Pakistani families all died but the whites survived because they “went to work.” The largest Hungarian Jewish organization Mazsihisz protested. The station withdrew religious shows from Siklósi's purview, but left her in charge of content concerning national minorities and Hungarians abroad.

Theater poses similar problems. In June, 2018, the play Trianon Rock, was performed, portraying Horthy as a hero, and Hungary as a nation sympathetic to the Jews. The Kava Theatre presented trauma project covering all of the great national traumas – Trianon, Roma murders, and the Holocaust. The heads of theatre are increasingly government appointed, leading the Financial Times to lament the politicisation of Hungarian theater: “There is the outspoken theatre director unable to make a speech because no venue manager dare grant him a stage for fear of official reprisals.”

In contrast, a bright sign is visible in film. In 2017, the film 1945 was released. It deals with two Jewish men who have returned to a village after the Holocaust, and the villagers' reactions to them, and was met with critical acclaim. The 2015 film, Son of Saul, is centred on a Hungarian-Jewish prisoner in Auschwitz and won the Grand Prix in the 68th Cannes Film Festival.

### ***Jewish Community***

The Jewish community counts around 100,000 Jewish members, and is divided.

The traditional Mazihisz leadership criticises the government, breaking with it over the issue of Holocaust revisionism. In contrast the Chabad -un EMIH seems more cooperative. It even endorsed a Fidesz candidate, much to the criticism of other Jewish leaders. EMIH is taking over the House of Fates from the government while still granting Maria Schmidt a position. They have therefore been accused of complicity in whitewashing the Holocaust and have been involved in bitter fights with Mazsihisz.

A larger issue concerns religious freedom. In July, 2018, the parliament, with little debate, hurriedly adopted the “Law on the Right to Freedom of Conscience and Religion, and on Churches, Religions, and Religious Community.” The Institute on Religion and Public Policy warned that the legislation “is the most egregious example of a disturbing trend in Hungary to undermine human rights.”

Under the law, only 14 of 362 Hungarian religious organizations registered under the earlier law (passed in 1990) will be officially recognized. As a number of Hungarian human rights activists pointed out in an open letter, “Among the churches that were discriminated against are, to mention only a few, Hungary’s Methodist, Pentecostal, Adventists and reform Jewish churches; the Salvation Army and Jehovah’s Witnesses; and all the Islamic, Buddhist, and Hinduist congregations.” The law represents discrimination more characteristic of “countries such as Russia and Malaysia” rather than liberal democracies, noted Paula Schriefer of Freedom House.

Author: Caderyn Owen-Jones, research assistance by Lauren Watrobsky.

## ITALY

**Italy continues to believe that it holds little responsibility for the destruction of its Jewish community. Its performance in restituting art treasures is troubling and the new extreme right-extreme left wing government shows little interest**

**in change.**

### ***Overview***

Italy's Holocaust memory is coloured by its own relatively benign wartime experience. The Italian Jews suffered little anti-Semitism before World War II, and despite being allied with Nazi Germany, Italian fascism was little concerned with the fate of the Jews and generally left intact their communities.

After Germany took control in 1943, the Nazis deported 9,000 Jews to concentration camps. Around 15-20% of the population perished. Many Italian citizens, Catholic Church organizations, and local authorities refused to collaborate with anti-Semitic demands and saved Jews.

Today, Italian government commemoration and remembrance events focus on German rather than Italian guilt. They choose to highlight the Italian resistance movement. The national school curriculum requires mention of World War II, leaving the Holocaust as a footnote in textbooks and does not warrant much discussion time.

Italian Jews today are well-integrated in the country. Although they face threats and violence from far-right nationalist organizations, these groups represent a fraction of Italian society. The governments and civil society are committed to remembering and commemorating the Holocaust. But few are willing to investigate Italy's dark past as a complicit fascist regime.

### ***The Holocaust in Italy***

The Italian Fascist Party consolidated a single party dictatorship in 1922. At its inception, the party was not explicitly anti-Semitic and Jews could join. In 1938, the fascists implemented its first batch of anti-Semitic legislation, purging Jewish workers from government jobs, banning interfaith marriage, incarcerating foreign Jews, and dismissing Jews from the military. The state began to confiscate Jewish property and land.

These laws were arbitrarily enforced, existing more for show to impress their German allies than for practical implementation. Italy officially joined the Axis powers in 1939 and declared war on France and Britain in June 1940. Despite their alliance with Nazi Germany, Italian authorities were hesitant, and in some cases outright refused, to implement Germany's anti-Semitic legislation and to concentrate and deport Jews. From 1941 to 1943, thousands of Jews in German occupation zones escaped to Italian

ones, seeing the latter as much safer. In Greece, the Italian occupation zone was friendlier to Jews than the German and Bulgarian occupations.

In 1943, the Italians entered secret negotiations with the Allied forces and officially surrendered. Germany responded by occupying much of north and central Italy, as well as Italy's former occupation zones in Yugoslavia and Greece. German occupiers arrested 43,000 Italian Jews. They established transit camps and concentration camps across northern Italy, one of the most notable being Risiera di San Sabba, a former rice-husking facility turned death camp for political prisoners and transit camp for Jews. In total, the Germans deported 8,564 Jews from Italy and Italian-occupied France to death camps in German-occupied Poland, mostly Auschwitz-Birkenau.

The Italian populace's unwillingness to participate made it difficult for the Germans to carry out their plans, although in some cases the Italian police and Italian citizens aided in the deportations. Although the Roman Catholic Church issued no official statement during the Holocaust, individual clergy members made exhaustive efforts to protect their Jewish countrymen. By the end of the war, more than 40,000 Italian Jews had survived.

### ***Timeline***

- 1922: Italy becomes fascist, Mussolini consolidates power in dictatorship
- 1938: Anti-Semitic legislation passed, Jews forbidden from joining fascist party
- April 1945: Communist partisans capture and kill Mussolini
- 1946: Referendum passed to change Italy from a monarchy to a republic
- 1960: new fascist party founded
- 1961: First widespread restitution initiative undertaken
- 2000: Law of Remembrance establishes January 27th as National Day of Remembrance
- 2000: Presidential Decree establishes Museo della Deportazione in Prato
- 2001: Special committee organizes archives and finds financial damages caused to Jewish community
- 2003: Federal law establishes The National Museum of the Italian Judaism and of the Shoah ) in Ferrara
- 2016: Law 115 passes, criminalizes Holocaust denial
- Dec 2017: MEIS museum opens in Ferrara (ordered by law in 2003)
- 2018: Interior Minister Salvini wants to make Roma registry

### ***Government***

Much of the government's commemoration and remembrance activities absolve Italy of guilt for their fascist alliance with Nazi Germany and its role in the Holocaust. Politicians point out that Italian fascism was relatively unconcerned with the fate of Italian Jewry and party leaders often refused to implement German anti-Semitic legislation and orders to deport the Jews.

No Nuremberg-style trials took place, although individual war criminals in Italy were prosecuted in the immediate postwar period, most notably Guido Buffarini Guidi, the Minister of the Interior. A military prosecutor in 1994 discovered a cabinet containing 695 files documenting Nazi war crimes in Italy. Italian magistrates promptly left the files in a dusty cabinet, facing the wall, in an unused room. Whether intentionally malicious or simply careless, the treatment of these files demonstrates how postwar Italian governments failed to punish Nazi crimes

Although the federal government promises that it has learned from the heinous past of World War II, far-right elected officials have proclaimed a desire to create a registry of all of the Roma citizens of Italy, reminiscent of the Jewish registries that enabled Nazis to easily round up and deport Jews during the war. Roma were also targeted and persecuted during the Holocaust, and politicians' determination to revive discrimination of Roma implies fascist nostalgia.

Some politicians have implied that they have no responsibility to apologize for Italy's actions during the war, since a 1946 referendum established the modern Italian Republic as a new country. The Republic's 1948 constitution criminalized fascist parties but in 1960, a neo-fascist party formed fascist supporters, became part of the national congress. Fascist leader Benito Mussolini's birthplace, Predappio, has become a pilgrimage site for fascists, and a major source of fascist souvenirs.

In 2018, the far-right Northern League and far-left Five Stars formed a government, running on an anti-immigrant, anti-migrant platform. Like other European nationalist leaders, Northern League leader Matteo Salvini spoke out in favour of Israel and visited Jerusalem in December, 2018. Arriving to Yad Vashem Holocaust museum, Salvini told journalists he discussed cooperation between Israel and Italy in the fields of anti-terrorism, illegal migration, as well as "changing the EU's attitudes toward Israel." Calling Israel a "bulwark of Western rights and values," Salvini said there is an "obvious risk of aggression by Islamic extremism." Asked about a purported anti-Semitic incident in Rome, where stepping stones dedicated to the memory of Holocaust victims were vandalized, Salvini said he will do whatever is in his powers to catch those responsible.

At Yad Vashem, the president of Italy's Union of Jewish Communities Noemi Di Segni spoke to Salvini about a "trend" among Italians who brush off responsibility for persecutions against Jews during WWII, casting blame upon the Germans alone. Di Segni also warned Salvini, who has repeatedly claimed that

the new type of anti-Semitism comes from Islamist extremists, saying that he should not discount the power of far-right anti-Semitism and should take a strong position against that too.

### ***Education***

Twentieth-century history is covered in the last year of high school, and the Holocaust is one of the required topics. This often means little more than a cursory introduction; quality and depth of Holocaust education in Italian schools varies drastically by the school and the teacher.

On January 27th, the National Day of Remembrance, schools are required to dedicate time to discussing the Holocaust. Teachers plan visits to memorial sites or museums and invite guest speakers. One notable effort is an annual nationwide art and writing competition, in which more than 5,000 students submit artistic work, writing, and film to commemorate the Holocaust. The winners of this contest meet with the Italian President in a ceremony on January 27th.

The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Union of Italian Jewish Communities and the Fondazione Museo della Shoah, organizes student trips to Auschwitz-Birkenau and members of the government often attend these trips. The Museo della Deportazione in Prato funds trips to Auschwitz every other year and around 700 students attend, many chosen by teachers who believe that the children may harbour fascist or anti-Semitic sympathies.

### ***Commemoration***

Memorial sites dot the country. Venice has the Jewish Museum and a Holocaust memorial in the central square of the historic Jewish ghetto. Milan has a memorial at platform 21 in the central train station, from which hundreds of Jews were deported to concentration camps. Florence has a museum at the Great Synagogue and a memorial at the Santa Maria Novella train station from which many Jews were sent to extermination camps. The city of Prato, near Florence, has the Museo della Deportazione. The Museo della Shoah is located in Rome, and the National Museum of the Italian Judaism and of the Shoah (MEIS) in Ferrara opened in 2003.

The United National Holocaust Memorial Day January 27th is commemorated as National Remembrance Day. Events are also coordinated with local Jewish communities, and survivors. April 25th is celebrated as "Liberation Day" for the liberation of Milan and Turin from German occupation. October 16th is commemorated in Rome to remember the mass deportations of Roman Jews in 1943. On this date, the local Jewish community holds a walk of remembrance in collaboration with the Catholic community.

## ***Archives***

Nearly all wartime archives are available to the public and the largest archive “Archivo Central” is managed by the state and contains information about the fascist Italian regime and its victims. The State Archive in Rome also has a list of all trials against Italian Nazi collaborators. The Catholic Church refuses to release primary sources about their institution’s role in the Holocaust or resistance movements.

Individual archives can be found at various museums and memorial sites, as well as Jewish communities in Florence, Rome, and Milan. The Museo della Deportazione in Prato has an archive of survivor testimonies. The Museo della Shoah in Rome has a public archive that is largely digitized and a library with 8,000 books documenting the Holocaust in Italy.

## ***Restitution***

In the immediate postwar period, many Jewish survivors were uninterested in pursuing restitution, since their suffering was so recent, and they were not ready to relive or confront their trauma. The first restitution law was passed in 1961 but fell short because so little was known about how much property was lost or what the values of the properties.

Eventually, the majority of Jewish buildings were returned, although many of these had been practically destroyed or had nothing left inside. The Italian Economic Ministry has a standing committee that offers reparations to survivors born between 1938-1944, although these are usually small and symbolic. Survivors can also apply for pensions or income for life if they apply on the basis of discrimination against a race or religion.

The main open, unresolved issue remains art. In December, 2018, Stuart E. Eizenstat, an expert adviser to the State Department, singled out Italy for foot dragging on returning art stolen during World War II. Italy, too, started off well enough — publishing a catalogue of art treasures lost during the war, including those that once belonged to Holocaust victims. “Unfortunately, there has been no provenance research or listing of possible Nazi-looted art in their public museums by the Italian government,” Eizenstat complains., adding that Italy seems only to care about “what the Italian government lost.”

## ***Opposition Parties***

Various radical right political parties have been gaining traction in Italian parliament such as Fratelli d’Italia, Forza Nuova, and CasaPound. Many of these parties take conspiratorial worldviews, blaming Jews and immigrants for the problems ailing Italian society and decrying the Holocaust as a Zionist



conspiracy to direct world attention away from Israeli atrocities against Palestinians. These groups frequently promote Holocaust denialism and claim that the Holocaust is exaggerated and over-emphasized because of apparent Jewish control of the media and government. These ultra-nationalist parties harbour many anti-Semitic and denialist sentiments, making them dangerous to Italian Jews and Holocaust survivors.

### ***Civil Society***

Catholic institutions have made strides in past years to commemorate the Holocaust, with many clergymen visiting Auschwitz and synagogues. Despite the Vatican's silence during the Holocaust, many individual Catholic leaders and congregations made significant efforts to hide and protect Jews and. The Church officially apologizing for their inaction to challenge the Nazi regime in 1998 but defended the actions of Pope Pius XII, who served during the Holocaust and did little to protect Jews. The Vatican also refuses to open church archives from the wartime period.

The Italian Muslim community has displayed interest in remembering the Holocaust and fostering interreligious dialogue, seeing Jews as a fellow religious minority experiencing religious discrimination in a heavily Catholic country. Many Muslims see parallels between anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant violence. But Muslim commemoration of the Holocaust is complicated by their opinions on Israel, and there have been incidents of anti-Semitic violence and desecration of Holocaust memorials tied to Palestinian liberation movements.

### ***Media***

Most media and news outlets in Italy have healthy relationships with local Jewish communities and frequently report on Holocaust commemoration and remembrance events. At the same time, unlike in the Netherlands or Germany, the media has not taken an aggressive campaign to investigate Italian guilt. It has been near silent on the controversial issue of Italian hesitation over art restitution.

In addition, many outlets conflate Jews with Israel, or claim that the Holocaust is talked about too much over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

### ***Jewish Community***

The Italian Jewish community numbers between 40,000 and 50,000 members. Around 15-20% of the Jewish population died in the Holocaust. The largest contemporary Jewish community in Italy is in Rome, which has about 10,000 Jews. The next largest communities are in Milan and Florence. Each of these

cities have active synagogues and Jewish schools and some Jewish communities have newspapers, museums, historical archives, and cemeteries.

Author: Ilana Luther

## LATVIA



**While Latvia has made progress in coming to terms with its tortured history of collaboration, it still has a long way to go. Too many Latvians continue to believe they suffered at least as much as their murdered Jewish co-citizens.**

### *Overview*

Like its Baltic brethren, Holocaust memory in Latvia remains a work in progress. Soviet and Nazi occupations often continue to be mentioned in the same breath. Controversy remains over the scale of Latvian collaboration and resistance to acknowledge it remains. Each year, growing numbers march in memory of the Latvian SS unit responsible for killing many of the country's Jews.

Progress is visible. Books, newspapers, and plays including discussions of Holocaust collaboration. Most Latvians interviewed agreed that the public has been introduced to the subject, and that the concept of a joint Latvian and Jewish history is beginning to spread. Research is trickling down into general conversation. A new Europeanized young generation demonstrates interest in grappling with the hard questions and difficult dilemmas raised by Latvia's guilt in the Holocaust.

### *The Holocaust in Latvia*

At the beginning of the Second World War, Latvia's Jewish population was in decline. From a high of about 190,000 on the eve of World War I, emigration caused the number to fall to about 80,000 in 1939. By the end of the war, when the Soviets re-occupied the country, only a few hundred remained.

German units entered Latvia on the night of June 22, 1940 and the killing of Jews began. The Latvian fascist Perkonkrus Thunder Cross Party and other Latvian nationalists took part in rounding up, humiliating, and murdering Latvian Jews, especially those considered close to the Communist regime, such as lawyers, doctors, and professionals. While many were beaten to death or shot, others were herded into synagogues, locked inside, and set afire. The most well-recorded atrocity took place on July 4th, when Jews, including Lithuanian refugees, were herded into the great Choral Synagogue of Riga and burned.

Germans imposed anti-Jewish laws and arrested Jews for violating them. Latvian gangs killed several Jewish inmates. When the Gestapo took over the prisons, they imposed a reign of torture and

starvation. By October 1941, some 34,000 Jews in Latvia were dead. The remaining 32,000 squeezed into ghettos.

Nazi commanders received orders to liquidate the Riga ghetto, as well as the nearby Dvinsk and Liepaja ghettos. Between November 30 and December 8, Germans murdered 25,000 Jews in the Rumbula forest, just outside of Riga. The Arajs Kommando assisted the German SD in their killings. They served as guards at various concentration camps, and appeared in Nazi propaganda. In other mass killings, Latvian collaborators and the Nazis killed most of the country's remaining Jews, as well as some 21,000 foreign deported Jews.

Latvians manned their own unit in the Waffen SS. These Latvian Legionnaires were conscripts given the opportunity to either to fight as Wehrmacht auxiliaries, members of the SS, or be sent to slave labour camps. Only about 15-20% of the members were volunteers. Anti-Soviet fervour and a desire to regain Latvian independence motivated many volunteers. Others, especially those who had previously been members of the Perkonkrust party, fought because they sympathized with the Nazis. The questions of which motivation dominated, as well as those of whether or not the Legion committed war crimes, continue to provoke historical and political controversy.

Similar debates are taking place in Latvia's Baltic neighbours, particularly in Lithuania, which long had been a centre of Jewish life and culture.

### ***Timeline***

- 1946: Soviet War Crimes trials begin
- 1946-49: Members of Einsatzgruppen A are tried in Nuremberg
- 1961: Jewish Activists begin creating graves at the Rumbala mass killing site
- 1964: Jewish activists obtain permission to put up a memorial stone at the Rumbula killing site
- 1965: Mossad assassinates Herberts Cukurs, the "Butcher of Riga."
- 1979: A West German court tries Victors Arajas, leader of the Arajas Kommando.
- 1988: The first study on the Arajas Kommando published
- 1989: Museum and documentation centre "Jews in Latvia" founded.
- May 1990: Latvia regains independence.
- July 1990: Commemoration Day of Genocide against the Jews observed for the first time
- September 1990: Latvia adopts a declaration condemning genocide and anti-Semitism
- 1993: Latvia issues a proclamation condemning the Holocaust
- July 1998: Judaic studies department founded at the University of Latvia

- November 1998: Commission of the Historians of Latvia established alongside similar commissions in Lithuania and Estonia
- 2004: Latvia joins IHRA
- 2008: “Names and Destinies” project launched by the Center for Judaic Studies
- 2010: Latvia begins sending teachers to training at Yad Vashem
- 2012: The Center for Judaic Studies launches the project “Education in Jewish History and Culture in Latvia”
- 2013: Zanis Lipke museum opens in Riga
- 2016: Candle lighting at the Freedom monument commemorating those shot at Rumbala held for first time

### ***Government***

A reconsideration of Latvian Holocaust memory was set in motion by a need to join NATO and the EU. Today, the Latvian government is committed to preserving the memory of the Holocaust. While it emphasizes the positive – for example, the Latvia’s Righteous who saved Jews - it has made strides in acknowledging Latvian guilt. It needs to take additional measures to make academic research more accessible to the public.

Latvia’s recognition of its responsibility is tied to its membership in the European Union. “We recognize collaboration” because our “older brothers in Europe, United States are watching us,” says Ilya Lensky, director of the Museum “Jews in Latvia. In his opinion, “Latvia 2018 is a good place for Latvian memory.”

In 2014, the Latvian government passed a law prohibiting “glorification of genocide, crimes against humanity, crimes against peace or war crimes, including glorification, denial, justification or gross derogation of genocide, crimes against humanity, crimes against peace or war crimes against Latvia perpetrated by the Soviet Union or Nazi Germany.”

During the early years of independence, few hate crimes cases were prosecuted. Prosecutions under section 78 intensified from 2004-2006, with the most recent prosecution taking place this August. Much like similar Lithuanian legislation, this law makes no mention of collaboration.

### ***Education***

Holocaust education is compulsory in all schools, including the minority Russian-language classes. Teachers spend four classes covering the Holocaust, two about the large Europe-wide picture and two focusing on the specific Latvian Holocaust. Although not mandatory, some schools take students to

memorial sites. Discussion of the Holocaust begins in the 9th grade, where students study the Holocaust in the context of World War II, the beginnings of the Latvian Republic, and the interwar period.

Like its fellow Baltic countries, Latvia sends teachers to Yad Vashem in Israel and the Memorial de la Shoah in France for training. Some 125 teachers received training trained between 2010, when the program began, and 2015, with an additional 45 teachers in 2016. Many of the teachers trained at either Yad Vashem or the Memorial de la Shoah teach other teachers.

### ***Commemoration***

The Latvian government holds extensive commemorative events. These include January 27, international Holocaust remembrance day, May 8, German surrender, July 4, the burning of the Riga's Great Choral Synagogue, and the November 29 for the Rumbala massacre.

The July 4 commemoration takes place in front of the ruined foundations of the Choral Synagogue in Riga. In 2018, under a clear blue sky, an assortment of government leaders, scholars of Holocaust memory, and leaders of the Jewish community gathered. Brightly coloured bouquets and wreaths of flowers were laid on the foundations behind a row of speakers, and even more were laid at the nearby monument to those who sheltered Jews. Each leader delivered a speech honouring the fallen and those who helped them, condemning the atrocities of the Nazis, and either pledged that it would never happen again or, in one case pointed to concerning modern day attempts at revisionism and anti-Semitism.

Other commemorations are similar, but sometimes have problematic overtones. On June 16, the first Sunday in December, the government remembers victims of "Communist Genocide" celebrates the "Commemoration Day of Victims of Genocide Against the Latvian People by the Totalitarian Communist Regime," and on March 16, an unofficial ceremony honours those who fought in the Latvian Volunteer division of the Waffen SS. On August 23, Latvia honours victims of Stalinism and Nazism. Along with the other Baltic countries, Latvia pushed the European Union to mark this day and note the impact of "totalitarianism of the Soviet Union."

In Latvia, the mention the Soviet occupation often comes in the same breath as that of the Nazis, even in speeches commemorating Nazi massacres of Jews. A genocide is the attempted extermination of an ethnic, religious, or racial group, and while the Soviets targeted political and social classes for extermination, it does not seem as if they were trying to eliminate Latvians (or Lithuanians, or Estonians) as a people. About 150 Holocaust death sites exist in Latvia. While major gravesites, particularly Rumbula, host new memorials, smaller sites often still have the old Soviet memorials, either a plaque or

sculptures, which commemorate “victims of fascist terror.” and neglect the Latvian role in perpetuating the Holocaust.

An effort is being made to correct this legacy. The government is working with the Baltic Mass Graves Project to mark and build monuments on the over 300 sites on Latvian soil. It anticipates completing the memorial building project within the next few years. On the local level, regional authorities are encouraged, though not mandated, to monitor and care for the “main Holocaust sites.”

### ***Archives***

Two decades ago, Latvia established a historical commission to evaluate and research the crimes of both Nazi and Soviet regimes. Since then, this commission has produced 28 volumes both the Nazi and Soviet occupations.

The commission is divided into two sub commissions, one dedicated to each occupation. It employs more than 30 historians, split between native Latvians and assorted international historians. The commission faced divisions between its Latvian and international members. And the reports themselves are academic, with limited readership.

In 1998, the government established a Judaic studies program at the University of Latvia. It offers classes on both the history of Jews in Latvia and the Holocaust. Since 2000, the department has been publishing student research and essays. This body, in conjunction with the History Commission, are organizing international events highlighting the dangers faced by those who aided Jews in their efforts to protect Latvian Jews. Less mention is made of collaboration.

### ***Restitution***

Although Latvia has a program for restitution of Jewish property, it has expired, with little money paid out. A large proportion formerly Jewish property tends to be heirless. Legislation is now making its way through the Latvian Parliament to address the issue of heirless property, developed in consultation with the Jewish community and the relevant local municipalities.

### ***Opposition***

Latvia’s large Russian minority - ethnic Russians make up more than a quarter of the country’s population - impacts the country’s push for Holocaust memory.

Latvian nationalist parties, most notably the National Alliance, are staunchly anti-Russian and tend to equate Russian and Nazi crimes. Anti-Russian attitudes affects the Jewish community, since many are descendants of Russian Jews who came to live in Latvia post Holocaust. Sometimes those who push especially hard for controversial topics, such as collaboration, are branded as Russian agents.

### ***Civil Society***

A far greater proportion of the population has first-, second-, or third-hand experience with the Soviet occupation and deportations than with the Holocaust, and many still see those who joined up with the Nazis as national heroes who fought against Soviet oppression. As a result, few large-scale organizations mobilizing people to memory beyond the Jewish community.

Non-official commemorations stoke nationalist fires. Ever since 1998, Latvian Waffen SS veterans and supporters have marched on November 30th, the anniversary of the Rumbula massacre. According to historian and activist Monica Lowenberg, the marches have been growing in size.

The Latvian government allows the march under the European Convention of Human Rights. It officially offers no support for the march, stating that “the chapters of history are not written only in black and white. It is vital that a difference be drawn between those who perpetrated crimes and soldiers that fell in combat at the battlefield.”

Government waffling shows a certain discomfort. The language in the government’s position on the issue also makes frequent reference to *both* the Nazi and Soviet occupation. This would make sense in a general discussion of history, but it seems odd that it appears in a discussion of a march dedicated to SS veterans and their supporters.

In contrast, the other major civil society action commemorates the Rumbula massacre. Launched by civic activist Lolita Tomsone, it began in 2016 and consists of a laying of candles at the base of the Freedom Monument in central Riga, followed by a vigil. Tomsone is the director of the Janis Lipke museum, an institution dedicated to the memory of the dock worker Lipke who saved dozens of Jews. Tomsone says she wanted to “not just let Jews mourn Jews, but let’s commemorate them at the most Latvian site there is...they were ours too.”

Another positive development is the construction database, known as “names and destinies,” which provides indexed information on the pre-war Jewish communities of Latvia, as well as an archive of their fates. This project is run by Ruvin Farber of the Centre for Judaic Studies of the University of Latvia.



These projects have saved more than 90% of the Jews who died in the Holocaust from oblivion, ensuring that their names, at least, survive.

### **Media**

In recent years, two books, *Adieu Atlantis*, by Valentina Freimane and *The Taste of Lead*, by Māris Bērziņš about collaboration. They discuss the experience of living through first Soviet then German occupations, and either the experience of persecution at the hands of the occupation or of the forces driving an individual towards collaboration, respectively. *Adieu Atlantis*, in particular, received high praise and attention, in part due to the high regard Freimane was held in Latvian society and in part because of its adaptation into the opera "*Valentīna*."

This success follows the presentation of a musical *Herberts Cukurs*, celebrating the life of a mass murderer. Cukurs was deputy commander of Arajs Kommando, a unit which killed around 26,000 Jews. A Mossad agent assassinated him in Uruguay. The musical celebrated Cukurs as a hero for resisting the Russian invasion and occupation during the Second World War. Latvia's Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs criticised the musical on behalf of his government but emphasised that it is the responsibility of an independent producer and falls within the bounds of free speech.

### **Jewish Community**

After the Soviet Union reconquered Latvia, Russian Jews began settling there. Numbers peaked at almost 37,000 in 1970. Latvia's Jewish population significantly declined in the 1990s after the fall of Communism when many Latvian Jews left and moved to other countries, especially they made aliyah to Israel and the United States.

The Jewish community is engaged with local Holocaust memory projects and documentation. The community itself between two different factions, each of which is associated with one of the major Holocaust museums in Riga. One runs the Riga ghetto and Latvian Holocaust museum. The other is aligned with the Museum "Jews in Latvia," which is housed in the former Riga Jewish Community Center. "It's very unfortunate," noted Einars Mikelsons, the deputy head of Latvia's IHRA delegation. "Memory is not an issue to have this type of competition [over]." He notes further that the competition is a source of "confusion" for Latvian society.

Author: Justin Jin

## LITHUANIA

**Lithuania continues to grapple with a tragic uncomfortable history. Progress is visible, but resistance remains, particularly in acknowledging the extent of Lithuanian collaboration with the Nazis.**

### *Overview*

Lithuanian Holocaust memory is intense and difficult.

The traditional nationalist narrative of Lithuania's wartime experience equates Nazi and Soviet occupations. Developed as a response to Soviet narratives, it considers Lithuanians as almost equal victims to Jews. In this view, the Soviets and Nazis were evil and the Lithuanians were a decent people

who deserved a nation. The myth claims good Lithuanians had nothing to do with the crimes of either regime and resisted at every opportunity.

Soviet historiography and the USSR's prosecution of "war criminals," some of whom were innocent, provides additional, incorrect, evidence for this narrative. Soviet sources tended to exaggerate Lithuanian fascism and collaboration to justify the occupation of the country. Lithuanians, especially older generations, tend to view research on potential collaboration by partisans with suspicion. Some interviewed continue to believe that the emphasis on the Holocaust and crimes committed by Nazis is unfair, and that the crimes of the Soviet Union remain underplayed. While public trials of Nazi collaborators have taken place, few, if any, prominent trials of Soviet collaborators have been held.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the newly freed Lithuania rehabilitated war criminals and propagated the nationalist narrative. Yet in the runup to European Union and NATO membership, the government made some progress in recognizing Lithuanian responsibility. It has formed the Genocide and Resistance Research Center and the International *Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes* in Lithuania. It sponsors conferences on Holocaust history and seminars on how to teach it, and funds a wide range of research into both Nazi and Soviet crimes.

The old nationalist historiography is beginning to be expunged, but still has substantial influence. Nazi collaborators, and likely war criminals, are still honoured for their anti-Soviet resistance. The government has created a definition of genocide, unique to Lithuania, designed so that the Soviet deportations can be described as equal to the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, and other actual genocides. It has also proposed passing a law that critics say will effectively forbid discussion of controversies around the Holocaust. Periodically, attempts to discuss collaboration, either Nazi or Soviet, by Lithuanian nationalist heroes will be met with a wave of anger, abuse, and scorn. Most infamously, the Museum of Genocide and Resistance, the flagship museum of both Nazi and Soviet memory, did not mention the Jewish victims of Genocide until 2011.

Before the Holocaust, Lithuania was one of the world's great centres of Jewish life and learning. Today, Lithuanian civil society, at home and abroad, shows a rising interest in this history. Where Lithuanian Jewish history was once seen as a separate entity, it is increasingly embraced as a part of "actual" Lithuanian history. Holocaust memory is increasingly driven by non-Jewish Lithuanians looking for ways to bring Jewish life and the legacies of the Holocaust into greater focus

### ***The Holocaust in Lithuania***

In 1940, Soviet forces occupied the country and began purging much of the local intelligentsia, business owners, and government officials. Some Jews even welcomed Soviet forces with flowers. Jews, previously excluded from the civil service, found themselves presented with the opportunity to work for better wages in the Soviet occupation government. Many also saw themselves as facing a choice between oppressive Soviet rule and anti-Semitic Nazi rule and chose what they saw as the lesser evil. Lithuanians who committed atrocities against Jews after Soviet forces withdrew frequently characterized their actions as just retribution against Soviet secret police NKVD informants and other collaborators.

Though the overall number of Jews as a proportion of the population, at 7.6% (approximately 160,000 Jews in total) was not as high as in Poland or Ukraine, Vilnius was such a centre of learning and worship that it was known as the Jerusalem of Lithuania. Nearly every major Lithuanian town was at least 30% Jewish, and in many small towns the proportion of Jews in the population reached 75, or even 80%. Such density often meant that Jews were rounded up by their neighbours and killed in pogroms, rather than sent to the ghettos or camps which tend to dominate Western Holocaust memory. This “Holocaust by bullets” was orders of magnitude more brutal than any Western roundup or massacre and left proportionally deeper scars. Depending on which source you believe, the killings either began before the Germans arrived, during the period of the provisional government just after the Soviet withdrawal, or after German forces had entered the country.

The killing site at Paneriai, largest of its kind in Lithuania, saw up to 100,000 deaths, including 20,000 Poles and 8,000 Soviet prisoners of war. Though ghettos in Vilnius and Kaunas held up to 70,000 Jews at their peak, most of the killing took place within the first nine months of German occupation. These killings often involved large parts of the Lithuanian community. In the most notorious example, the Lietukis garage massacre, Lithuanians beat to death several dozen Jewish men, while a gathered crowd watched, clapping and cheering. After the massacre, accordions were brought out, and the Lithuanian national anthem played while the crowd danced on the dead bodies.

Other massacres, especially in the countryside, were less well documented but just as bloody. “The willingness! The readiness! The joy with which Lithuanians killed Jews!” recalled Rachel Konstanian, a Holocaust survivor and the former director of the Green House Holocaust exhibition in Vilnius, “That is the main point.” She recalls accounts of Lithuanians lined up near the killing sites, waiting for a chance to sift through the discarded belongings of the victims for clothes and valuables to take home, and of crowds which gathered to watch and cheer as the killings took place.

By November 1941, only 40,000 Jews, as well as the very rare few who managed to escape into the woods, were left. It is worth noting that the Germans only moved to disband independent Lithuanian

organizations in August and September 1941, *after* the destruction of much of Lithuania's Jewish population.

The remaining Jewish population was concentrated in ghettos in Vilnius, Kaunas, Siauliai, and Svencionys. In 1943, these ghettos were either liquidated, their inhabitants killed or transferred to other camps, or transformed into concentration camps in their own right. Roughly 90 to 95% of the Jewish population in Lithuania at the beginning of the occupation perished, leaving only about 20,000 survivors.

### ***Timeline***

- 1944: Soviet occupation of Lithuania resumes
- 1945: Monument for Jewish victims erected at Paneriai. This Jewish community erected this small monument without official support from the Soviet government. The inscription read "Ponary, everlasting rest for the murdered saints, the Vilner and other Jews, exterminated by the Hitlerist Fascist murderers, hated by humanity. The blood of innocents cries out from the ground. Revenge the spilled blood of the saints. July 1941 - July 1944"
- 1944: First Soviet War Crimes Trials Begin. These trials, held in the wake of the Nuremberg trials and aimed at prosecuting mid- and low-level participants in the Holocaust, were used by the Soviets as a political tool. (Prusin, p. 4-5) They served as tools of vengeance and to delegitimize the partisan movement and continued on and off until 1980. (Kulikauskas; Shtetl Skud)
- 1948: Soviets erect official obelisk at Paneriai site. The monument reads: "For the victims of Fascist terror 1941-44"
- 1952: Jewish monument at Paneriai removed; Jewish museum shut down. Under Stalinist policy, any sign of nationalist ideas was seen as a deviation from the party line and snuffed out. The promotion of national histories, such as commemorations of the Lithuanian or Jewish experience, was shut down whenever possible, and sometimes punished.
- 1960: Soviets open museum at Paneriai
- 1985: Soviets redesign Paneriai memorial site
- 1989: The Lithuanian government begins to issue pardons for those convicted of war crimes by Soviet courts.
- 1989: Monument to Polish dead created at Paneriai
- 1990: Supreme Council of Lithuania condemns the Holocaust and expressed regret for Lithuanian participation
- 1991: Lithuania becomes independent
- 1991: The Holocaust Exhibition, known as "the Green House" opens
- 1991: New memorial stones erected at Paneriai

- 1992: The Lithuanian government begins revoking pardons following an intense campaign by the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the international community. By 2006, about 160 pardons had been revoked.
- 1993: Monument to Lithuanian dead created at Paneriai
- 1994: First Day of Jewish Genocide commemoration
- 1995: President Algirdas Brazuiskas apologizes for Lithuanian participation in the Holocaust at Yad Vashem
- 1998: The Commission established
- 2000: Polish organizations raise a memorial cross at Paneriai
- 2004: Lithuania joins IHRA
- 2008: Jewish Holocaust survivors prosecuted by Lithuanian government for war crimes
- 2008: Work of the Commission suspended
- 2009: March of the Living begins. A commemorative march starting in Vilnius and ending at the Paneriai
- 2010: Lithuanian activists involved in Holocaust memory begin public readings of the names of Holocaust victims
- 2010: Declared Year of Remembrance for victims of the Holocaust
- 2013: Work of The Commission resumes
- 2016: Ruta Vanagaite publishes "Our People," a book discussing the collaboration of Lithuanians
- 2016: March to Moletai
- 2019: Anticipated release date of Izaokas. This movie about a Lithuanian activist who kills a Jew in the infamous Lietukis garage massacre is expected to bring issues of collaboration and the Holocaust into public discourse.

### **Government**

Official Lithuanian Holocaust memory is caught between the memory kept alive under Soviet occupation and the more nationalistic memory of the emigre community, between domestic and international demands, and between the national identity it crafted for itself from the stories of that era and the less flattering historical reality.

In 1990, just before independence, official recognition of the Holocaust took place. On May 8, the Supreme Council of Lithuania "categorically condemned the Holocaust in the name of the Lithuanian nation and expressed regret that there had been 'Lithuanian citizens' among the killers"

At the same time, the new free democratic Lithuanian government issued pardons from surviving convicted war criminals. These pardons took the form of certificates proclaiming the innocence of the

person in the eyes of the Lithuanian government and their right to compensation. While this process was in line with other efforts to undo the legacy of Soviet occupation, the rate at which they were issued (nearly 2,000 in a year) suggested that the process represented a wholesale repudiation of the Soviet era rather than a thorough attempt to judge historical claims. This drew the ire of the international community. By 1992, the Lithuanian government had begun reversing some of the rehabilitations.

Ever since, these swings between controversy and commemoration have continued. On the plus side, government programs in Holocaust memory, ranging from research to establishing memorials at mass killing sites to further education, are expanding. On the down side, the government recently considered a bill banning selling materials “distorting historical facts about the nation,” which many worry will allow conservatives to shut down discussion about Lithuanian collaboration.

A second source of controversy lingers over the commemoration of national heroes with checkered histories. Two major flashpoints are Kazys Skirpa and Jonas Noreika. Both are honoured as national heroes. Both participated indirectly in the murder of Jews. Skirpa has a street named after him in Vilnius, and Noreika received the nation’s second highest military medal. Despite protests, the government still has not acknowledged their guilt or revoked their awards. In general, Lithuania has difficulty discussing those who collaborated, particularly those who later joined the resistance.

After independence, the Lithuanian government defined both Nazi *and* Soviet killings as genocide. In 1998, crimes against social and political groups were added. This definition allows the government to refer to the Soviet deportations of Lithuanian intelligentsia and upper classes as a genocide, which is reflected in the former “Museum of Genocide Victims.” This museum focuses almost exclusively on Lithuanian suffering and resistance during Soviet occupation, with only passing reference to the extermination of Lithuania’s Jewish population.

The Lithuanian government has prosecuted Jewish members of anti-Nazi resistance groups as war criminals. In 2006, a Lithuanian state prosecutor even opened a case against Yitzhak Arad, an Israeli historian, retired IDF brigadier general, former director of Yad Vashem - and a former Soviet partisan who fought the Nazis and their Lithuanian collaborators. Following an international outcry, the investigation was dropped in the fall of 2008. This investigation had the side effect of disrupting the until-then highly productive work of the *International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes*, which shut down for years following that case.

In contrast, no prosecutions have taken place Lithuanians accused of collaboration with the Nazis since the Soviet war crimes trials. Efraim Zuroff, the head Nazi hunter for the Simon Wiesenthal Center, has made long-running, but ultimately futile, efforts to spur the Lithuanian government into action on

collaborators. According to Dovid Katz, an American-born Vilnius based scholar, this "Holocaust obfuscation" involves a series of "false moral equivalences: Jews were disloyal citizens of pre-war Lithuania, helped the Soviet occupiers in 1940, and were therefore partly to blame for their fate. And the genocide that really matters was the one that Lithuanian people suffered at Soviet hands after 1944."

Lithuania made Holocaust denial illegal with the amendment of the country's criminal code in 2010. Unfortunately, the language once again mentions Soviet and Nazi crimes in one breath. The offence is punishable by a fine or imprisonment for up to two years.

Though Lithuania has this law on the books, it only enforces it "sporadically." Another 2008 law bans the display of Nazi and Soviet symbols, though it was undermined by a 2010 judicial ruling in the city of Klaipeda that the swastika is a centuries old symbol which depicts the sun and nothing more.

Another source of controversy is the June 23rd uprising. When [Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union](#), the Lithuanian population rose up against the Soviet regime, declared renewed independence, and formed the short-lived [Provisional Government](#). Within a week, the German Army took control of the whole of Lithuania. Many Lithuanians celebrate June 23 by much like July 4th is in the United States.

For Jews, the provisional Lithuanian government unleashed indiscriminate and gruesome excesses, often before the Nazis arrived to take control, most notably characterized by the Kaunas pogrom. Even though participation in the June 23rd celebrations of the Uprising has been discouraged, if not prohibited, some (MPs and former officials, including Vytautas Landsbergis, Lithuania's founding head of state, still attended this year's celebrations.

### ***Education***

On paper, Lithuania strikes the right notes in teaching the Holocaust. It has rigorous measures to train teachers, as well as a system to design materials for schools based on the latest research. The subject is covered extensively in the curriculum.

After independence, the subject was avoided. Both Mantas Siksniunas, head guide at the Paneriai memorial, and Rachel Konstanian, founder of the Green House Holocaust exhibition, note a lack of willingness to engage with Holocaust memory and discussions of collaboration during the 1990s.

Since then, major progress has been made. Almost 100 government-funded Tolerance Education Centers support educational programs, tend to Jewish memorial sites, such as cemeteries and organize



regional events, seminars, and conferences. Between 2002 and the end of 2013, the government organized more than 100 workshops on teaching the Holocaust. Teachers and education workers have attended workshops at Auschwitz and at the National Holocaust Museum in Washington. In 2013, more than 84 percent of Lithuanian schools took part in commemorations around the Holocaust.

Under the official curriculum, Lithuanian teaching examines the Nazi and Soviet the episodes of occupation: the destruction of the population, the masses of Jews massacres, deportations and resistance to the occupants. "Students often tell personal family stories and a teacher only should encourage them," says Roma Diktaraite, a teacher at the Utena Aukštakalnis middle school. Given the ratio of families which survived Soviet persecution to those which survived Nazi persecution, this well-intentioned policy accidentally overstates the effects of the Soviet occupation relative to the Holocaust.

For all these positive trends, comparisons between Soviet and Nazi occupations continue to pose serious problems. Tenth graders are tasked with "using various sources of information, [to] examine the peculiarities of Soviet and Nazi occupations." Dovid Katz, the creator and editor of the Holocaust history site [defendinghistory.com](http://defendinghistory.com) derides the government's "Red-Brown commission" tasked with Holocaust education of being a part of an effort to create a false equivalence between the Nazi extermination and Soviet deportations.

The Austrian government sends two students a year to working at the Green House Holocaust exhibition. They travel to schools around the country giving workshops that present an overview of the Holocaust and start a conversation about collaboration. Overall, they enter a mixed verdict about the teaching they observe. Occasionally, students are surprised that there were so many Jews killed in Lithuania, or even that there were so many Jews in Lithuania. "About 50% of teachers go above and beyond [on Holocaust education] while the other 50% just show the slideshow and do what they have to," says one volunteer Gregor Ladler.

Another program, the 50 schools initiative, familiarizes students with the lost Lithuanian Jewish heritage: <http://litvakphoto.org/fifty-schools/>. Despite material on the lost Litvak community being less controversial than material on the Holocaust itself, many teachers still feel uncomfortable. Omission of material is not uncommon, and teachers occasionally "teach things which are untrue and flat-out bigoted," says Mark Harold, a Vilnius city councilman. "If you look at the curriculum, Lithuanian Holocaust education looks brilliant," says Richard Schofield, director of the 50 schools project. "And it would be, if it were taught properly."

### ***Commemoration***

Government commemorations of the Holocaust in Lithuania are well-established, supplemented by a vast number of local commemorations. Many villages tend to mass murder sites and Jewish cemeteries. Commemorations often include a moment of silence, a laying of flowers and/or wreaths on the memorial, and speeches by attending dignitaries. At most ceremonies, President Dalia Grybauskaitė and other government speakers place more emphasis on the tragedy of losing the Litvak community or the bravery of the Lithuanian Righteous among nations rather than on Lithuanian participation. These speeches often commemorate victims of both the Soviets and Nazis.

Until the late 90s, few of the small killing sites scattered around the Lithuanian countryside were marked. In some cases, locals joked about keeping the sites obscured since the murdered Jews must have had some gold with them. This attitude is now gone. Today, some 95% of sites are at least marked with a sign indicating their location, with most commemorated by monuments or plaques. The most prominent memorial is in Paneriai (Ponary), site of the country's largest mass murder in Lithuania. It contains not only monuments to those Jews killed on the site, but also to Polish citizens and Lithuanian partisans executed there. An atlas of memorial sites is in the process of digitization.

Debate continues over the extent and direction of Lithuania's commemoration efforts. In 2018, Vigilius Sadauskas, ombudsman for academic ethics and procedures, offered a EUR1000 reward for anyone who published a thesis on war crimes or killings committed by Jews. When the speaker of the Lithuanian parliament called on him to resign, Sadauskas refused.

Just as official apologies can inadvertently create a sense of "we apologized already, what are we doing still remembering the Holocaust," concern remains that these monuments will serve as indulgences, evidence of (ineffective) action which entirely absolves the government. "If you build the monument, you can forget the place at once," worries Neringa Latvyte-Gustaitienė, Head of History at Vilna Gaon State History Museum. "It's like you finish your duty and are done...that's not memory."

### ***Archives***

The Lithuanian State Archives are open to anyone who presents an ID, while private archives donated to the state are accessible based on the conditions stipulated by the original owners of the materials.

As with other archives, information about people's private life and personal data is protected and can only be accessed and made public with their consent. Should the person have died, there is a 30-year restriction, starting from their date of death, on access to documents. If their date of death is unknown, that restriction applies 100 years after their date of birth, or 70 years after the creation of the documents.

There are also private archives, worked on by such organizations as YIVO institute for Jewish research, which subscribe to similar rules.

### ***Restitution***

Lithuania has made efforts at restitution and recompense, but the issue remains controversial. The complicity of some Lithuanians, and their willingness to profit from the slaughter of local Jews by taking their property means that many households had, and may have, Jewish property. The Lithuanian government has provided symbolic compensation of \$622 to Lithuanian Holocaust survivors for “both the Holocaust and the Soviet occupation.”

The government has returned a few buildings to the Jewish community, three in Vilnius and five in Kaunas. In 2011, the Jewish community created the Goodwill Foundation to provide compensation for private property owners and to distribute government restitution. As of the 2016 audit, EUR 15.3 million or 40% of the eventual total, has been paid out.

The Goodwill foundation is responsible for directing the money from the government to survivors, descendants of survivors, and the Jewish community, as well as making payments to those who saved Jews in Lithuania. Some rabbis who work in both Lithuania and Latvia praise the Lithuanian government for going beyond the efforts of their neighbour, while noting that the restitution which has been promised scratches the surface of what was lost. “Looking at all the real estate Jews owned in Lithuania,” says Rabbi Krelin, head rabbi of Lithuania, “says EUR 40 million hardly covers it.”

Another issue is citizenship, which is a precondition for restitution. Israeli Jews from Lithuania are considered ineligible for reclaiming their Lithuanian nationality, and Jewish applications for citizenship based on Lithuanian ancestry are frequently delayed. Grant Gochin claims this is a deliberate policy to limit restitution claims from descendants of murdered Lithuanian Jews.

### ***Opposition***

While outright Holocaust denial is rare, neo-Nazi groups exist and their membership numbers in the hundreds. Regular Neo-Nazi parades have taken place. Yet, by and large, most figures interviewed for this report expressed the sentiment that the number of Lithuanians interested in the story of the Holocaust, and in Lithuanian Jewish culture is rising. Young people tend to be more willing to question the established narrative. Western pressure and the process of acceding to Western organizations, has played an important role in advancing Holocaust memory.

## ***Civil Society***

A growing population of Lithuanians are taking an interest in Jewish history and the memory of the Holocaust. Since independence, the perception of Jewish history and Lithuanian history being separate entities has faded. Lithuanian Holocaust memory, which long attracted only expats and Jews, today appeals to Lithuanians with no Jewish family background.

Activists organize many private commemorations. The Vardai, or names, initiative, began in 2010 with the reading the names of Jewish Holocaust victims at a local church and community centre. Today, the name readings have spread across Lithuania, taking place in more than 20 towns, and driving interest even beyond the liberal and academic circles of the “Vilnius bubble.” The vast majority of participants are not Jewish. Politicians have even begun to show up, drawn by the crowds and a chance to demonstrate their commitment to Holocaust memory.

A prominent Lithuanian director, Kama Glinkas, wrote a passionate appeal for Lithuanians to join Jews in their annual commemoration march on the 75th anniversary of the massacre at Moletai. Some 3,000 people joined. The march now takes place each year.

Many projects aim to reclaim and restore the Litvak culture to Lithuania, working to end the perceived division between Lithuanian and Jewish history. These range from restoring synagogues to entire shtetls. A Litvak photo project aims to document Litvak culture wherever it can be found, and the Lost Shtetl project, which aims to restore the Seduva shtetl to its pre-war state. ([www.litvakphoto.org](http://www.litvakphoto.org)).

Defendinghistory.com, a website run by Professor Dovid Katz, is dedicated to preserving the memory of the Holocaust and countering what its authors see as assaults of Lithuanian Holocaust memory.

The presence of Russia also skews conversations within Lithuania. The government says Russian television and online activities sow discord, falsely overemphasize the scale of nationalism and Holocaust denial in Lithuania. Internet trolls also accuse anyone critical of a nationalist narrative of pro-Russian agitation, poisoning discourse.

Controversy surrounds the treatment of Lithuanian Nazi collaborators such as Jonas Noreika, who wrote a deeply anti-Semitic pamphlet, issued orders for the sequestration of Jews, and instructed his men on how to execute them. Grant Gochin, a South African of Lithuanian descent who has calculated that he lost 100 family members to the Holocaust in Lithuania and dozens of them in territory under Noreika’s control, has spent years fighting for government recognition of Noreika’s crimes. In 2018, he filed a suit

against the director of the Lithuanian commission on Holocaust research for distorting the facts of the Holocaust in a further attempt to force the government to strip Noreika of his honours.

### ***Media***

In 2016, Ruta Vanagaite book *Our People: Travels with the Enemy*: recounts the non-Jewish Vanagaite's research and travels in her homeland with Nazi-hunter Efraim Zuroff, director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Israel office, confronting the ways in which Lithuanians were an integral part of the Nazi killing machine. She visited 40 sites of mass murder in Lithuania, interviewing eyewitnesses and piecing together the role of different elements of wartime Lithuanian society, being forced to come to terms with the fact her uncle and grandfather, among others, played a role in the Nazi killing machine. The book was an unexpected best seller, breaking taboos and triggering a national conversation.

It also triggered a backlash. In 2018, after she criticized a Lithuanian resistance hero for collaborating with the Russians, the Lithuanian national archive took away permission for its photographs to be used in translated editions of "Our People." Vytautas Landsbergis – Lithuania's first head of state after the country declared independence in 1990. wrote a scathing Op-Ed that included chilling words that she interpreted as calling for her death: "You so-called writer, you should go to the forest, find a tree, pray and condemn yourself," he wrote. Internet trolls then asked if she had gone to the forest yet, threatening to "help her along" if she hadn't gotten the message.

Despite this backlash, nuanced discussions of the Holocaust are beginning to emerge in national media. Most prominent among these is Izaokas, a movie about a Lithuanian activist who kills a Jewish man at the Lietukis Garage massacre and how he handles his guilt years later.

### ***Jewish Community***

The Lithuanian Jewish community numbers between 3,500 and 5,000 strong. This represents a dramatic decline in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, where many Jews emigrated to either the United States or Israel. The government supports this small community.

Author: Justin Jin

## LUXEMBOURG



**Although tinges of resistance remain to acknowledge Luxembourgish collaboration, the Grand Duchy has made big strides in recent years to acknowledge and commemorate the loss of its Jewish citizens.**

### *Overview*

As a small country sharing a border with Germany, Luxembourg served as a transit point for Jewish deportation. The Luxembourgish government long excused collaboration with the Nazis due to their small size and inability to resist the Nazis. Within the last two decades, however, the government taken a more active role in commemorating the Jewish victims, acknowledging their responsibility, and educating their population.

For most of Luxembourg's post-WWII history, those conscripted into the Wehrmacht were regarded as the war's central victims. The first WWII monument erected in the city of Luxembourg in 1971 refrains from acknowledging Jewish suffering at the hands of the Nazis, and recognizes the Luxembourgish resistance as the heroes.

Over the past few decades, the country's attitude has been transformed. The government has established committees to dig into the truth and expanded the memory of the Holocaust and WWII. Collaboration between civil society and the government has yielded improvements in how the Holocaust is taught in schools and memorialised.

The Government and Parliament of Luxembourg have issued an official apology. In 2016 a special commemoration ceremony took place, with the Grand Duke attending the ceremony for the first time. The government has established a special committee for memory. In June, 2018, a memorial to Holocaust victims was inaugurated in Luxembourg city on the site of a former synagogue.

### *The Holocaust in Luxembourg*

When the Germans invaded in May of 1940 and occupied Luxembourg, the government went into exile in London and Canada. The Nazis annexed the country, considering Luxembourgers as Germans, not a separate nation.

Some 1,000 Jews fled in a secret operation to France and Portugal. The use of French was banned. Nuremberg laws were introduced by the German civil government and the Nazis seized 355 Jewish-owned businesses.

The Germans introduced compulsory military service in 1942 and forced more than 10,000 Luxembourgers to join the Wehrmacht. When strikes broke out in opposition, the Germans responded by executing 21 strikers. After a second strike in which more than a third of the conscripted soldiers refused to wear the German uniform, the Germans deported men to concentration camps and executed others.

The question of collaboration remains debated. The government tends to emphasize the extent of resistance; Joanna Sloame, writing for the AICE Jewish Virtual Library claims this is exaggerated.

Before World War II, 3,700 Jews lived in Luxembourg. About 2,500 Jews fled to France, where the French police later deported most to their death. Some 800 Jews were held at Fuenf Brunnen AG: Fuenfbrunnen (*Cinqfontaines*) transit camp in northern Luxembourg, 674 of whom would be sent to Lodz, Auschwitz, or Theresienstadt.

### ***Timeline***

- 1953: Germany gives 1,000 Luxembourgish victims
- 1969: Launch of l'Amicale des Rescapés d'Auschwitz
- 1969: Inauguration of Cinqfontaines monument
- 1991: Creation of the Comité Auschwitz
- 1971: World War II Memorial dedicated in Luxembourg city
- 1974: Amendments to Social Security Code translating victims' persecution time into social security pension
- 1985: Esch stood renames site of city's first synagogue as Place de la Synagogue
- 2004: a monument was erected in memory of the Jews of Esch who were deported and killed by the Nazis.
- 2008: Government commissions Artuso Report to study Holocaust in Luxembourg
- 2015: Artuso report is published
- 2015: Government issues an official apology to the Jewish population for collaboration with the Nazis
- June 2016: Committee for the Remembrance of the Second World War is created.

- 2018 RIAL : Recherche et Information sur l'Antisémitisme au Luxembourg“ is founded: <https://www.journal.lu/top-navigation/article/luxemburg-ist-keine-insel/>
- June 2018 : Fondation luxembourgeoise pour la Mémoire de la Shoah was established.
- June 2018: Commemorative monument of Jewish victims deported from central station unveiled
- November 2018: a memorial plaque is inaugurated at the site of the synagogue of Luxembourg City demolished during the WWII.
- July 2018: Fondation du Judaïsme Luxembourgeois was established.
- December 2019: Luxembourg assumes presidency of IHR

### **Government**

After the publication of the Artuso report in 2015, the government officially recognized the responsibility of the Luxembourg state in the persecution and deportation of Jews. A special session was held in parliament to make apologies to the Jewish community.

In 2016, on a parliamentary initiative was, the government created a committee dedicated to preserving the wartime memory. The committee advocates on behalf of three groups: resistance fighters, those who were forcibly conscripted into the Wehrmacht, and Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

In December, 2018, Xavier Bettel started his second term as Prime Minister, leading a coalition of his liberals along with Socialists and Greens. It will remain much the same as the outgoing government, with Socialist veteran Jean Asselborn holding on to his position as foreign minister and Pierre Gramegna as finance minister. No changes in Holocaust memory politics are expected. Bettel has been a vocal opponent of anti-Semitism, participating in the UN campaign against anti-Semitism in the fall of 2018.

### **Education**

Holocaust education is mandatory at the secondary school level. It is most often taught in history courses along with WWII lessons, but is also taught under religious science or language.

The Ministry of Education offers annual teacher training sessions on human rights, including a brief section on Holocaust education. A program with Yad Vashem is also offered.

Luxembourgish schools observe January 27th as the official day for Holocaust Remembrance.

### **Commemoration**



Although Luxembourg has no national Holocaust museum, the Holocaust is incorporated into two other museums in the country. Le Mémorial de la Déportation à Luxembourg-Hollerich, which marks the site where deportations from Luxembourg took place during the war, and Le Musée National de la Résistance à Esch-sur-Alzette, which houses permanent exhibits about the Holocaust in Luxembourg.

On January 27th, a remembrance ceremony is held at Le Mémorial de la Déportation à Luxembourg-Hollerich, followed by a public discussion of Holocaust commemoration by historians, survivors, and researchers. The 2013 photo exhibit *Between Shade and Darkness* debuted at Le Musée National de la Résistance à Esch-sur-Alzette, which separated the history of Jewish persecution in two parts: 1940-41 the expulsion of Jews, October 1941-45 the deportation of Jews.

A full list of remembrance ceremonies can be found [here](#).

In addition to International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27, Luxembourg hosts a National Day of Remembrance on October 10 to commemorate those who resisted Nazi occupation and those who fell victim to the Holocaust. This date was set by the Council of Europe.

In 2017, the Grand Duke lit an eternal day began at Le Monument National de la Solidarité when the Grand Duke lit the eternal flame. Wreaths were laid at the *Gëlle Fra* and Le Mémorial de la Déportation (National Resistance and Deportation Monument), before a remembrance ceremony

On June 17, 2018, the Luxembourg State and City of Luxembourg unveiled a new monument designed by Holocaust survivor Franco-Israeli sculptor Shelomo Selinger. The monument commemorates 658 Jewish victims deported from Luxembourg central station between October 16, 1941 and June 17, 1943. It is located on the site of the city's first synagogue on Boulevard Roosevelt.

### ***Legal Environment***

Luxembourg has not passed its own law criminalizing Holocaust denial, but an EU Framework Decisions criminalizes genocide denial when that denial aims to incite hatred or violence. Luxembourg has had no notable incidents of Holocaust denial.

### ***Archives***

Luxembourg archives from the Holocaust period are available to the public. More than 30,000 pages of documents have been shared with Yad Vashem. Some archives are sponsored by the Consistoire Israelite, an administrative body representing the Luxembourg Jewish community.

MemoShoah has made their own effort to document the Jewish population in Luxembourg at the outset of WWII. The organization identified 3,997 Jews living in Luxembourg as of May 10th, 1940 and the locations to which these people fled after the Germans invaded. The Consistoire Israelite organizes their own collection of documents within the national archives, of which the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum has copies.

Improvements could be made. Researchers say they experienced difficulty accessing the archives from the Holocaust, noting that some archives disappeared after the war and the government has neglected the archives they do keep. Few historians are allowed access to the archives, but are restricted from studying the entire library and are not given reasons for such restrictions.

Though the archives are sparse, what has been released to the public has been influential. After a journalist uncovered a never before seen set of documents from the archives that implicated Luxembourgish collaboration with the Nazis, the government commissioned historian Vincent Artuso to undertake his groundbreaking in-depth study.

### ***Restitution***

Financial settlements to Jewish victims of the Holocaust was written into an amendment of the Social Security Code in 1974. The amendment allows “victim of Nazi persecution to count their persecution time toward a social security pensions.”

Foreign nationals are excluded from compensation for the theft or destruction of personal property during the war. The only instance in which foreign nationals are eligible to receive compensation is if they had done exceptional deeds in favour of the nation during the war, a feat virtually impossible to attain and subject to personal interpretation by the individual deciding whether a deed was “exceptional”.

Talks are ongoing on the question of the restitution. The primary motor behind this is Henri Juda and association MemoShoah <http://www.memoshuah.lu/wpmsl/>.

### ***Opposition***

When in power during the 1990s and early 2000s, the opposition Christian Democrats began the process of living up to its Holocaust remembrance responsibilities.

Further to the right, the ADR holds few seats in parliament. Rather than rewriting the Holocaust or minimizing Luxembourg responsibility, it focuses on the country's pro-Palestinian policies. ADR MP Fernand Kartheiser recently accused the Jewish chairwoman of the Comité Pour une Paix Juste au Proche-Orient (CPJPO) of anti-Semitism, arguing that the committee too often criticises the Israeli government.

### ***Civil Society***

Civil society was largely uninterested in the legacy of Jewish suffering in the Holocaust until the 1990s. Since then, both historians and NGOs have made concerted efforts to raise awareness of Luxembourg's role.

The independent organization MemoShoah works to expand access to, topics covered, and frequency of Holocaust education in Luxembourg. Recently, MemoShoah sponsored the rotation of photos from the Holocaust shown in the Between Shade and Darkness exhibit around Luxembourgish secondary schools.

The Consistoire Israelite works with the government in their official January and October commemoration ceremonies. Both MemoShoah and the Luxembourg Auschwitz Committee work on commemorative ceremonies at the Abbey of Cinqfontaines.

### ***Media***

Major media outlets accept articles from Jewish interest organizations like MemoShoah. The Jewish community releases its own monthly paper, the Trait d'Union, by mail to members of the community. It is not sold or available to those outside the community.

The media has been influential in changing public attitudes about Luxembourg in the Holocaust.

Dennis Scuto, a radio host, used his broadcast in the early 2000s to criticize Luxembourgish memory of the Holocaust. His statements encouraged the government to commission the Artuso report to look deeply into how Jews were treated in Luxembourg before and during the war.

### ***Jewish Community***

Approximately **1,200** Jews live in Luxembourg. There are two official Jewish communities in Luxembourg, in Esch and in Luxembourg city. The Luxembourg city community follows the Orthodox Jewish tradition. In Esch, the community is progressive, a member of the European Union for Progressive Judaism. Women can read from the Torah and women and men sit together.

The state pays the salaries and pensions of rabbis for both communities, making Luxembourg one of the few countries in Europe to treat orthodox and non-orthodox Jews as equals.

Author: Lauren Watrobsky

## THE NETHERLANDS

**The Dutch are leaders in Holocaust Remembrance. Few signs of a nationalist or anti-Semitic backlash are visible.**

*Overview*

The Holocaust devastated Dutch Jewry, killing 75% of the country's Jews. Many local Dutch authorities and police departments participated in the Nazi occupation, helping to round up and deport the country's Jews.

The Netherlands is committed to Holocaust remembrance and commemoration, funding various remembrance activities, memorial sites, commemoration events, and museums. Dutch commemoration efforts are undertaken with active collaboration with the Jewish community. A monument celebrating Amsterdam's Jewish community recently was erected and the National Holocaust Museum was opened in 2016.

Yet some issues remain. Although the government has recognized and expressed sorrow over this collaboration, it still has not issued an official apology. The belief of the liberal Dutch accepting of minorities allows Dutch people to continue seeing themselves protectors of liberty, rather than enablers of the Holocaust.

### ***The Holocaust in the Netherlands***

Germany invaded the Netherlands on May 10, 1940 and the Dutch army surrendered four days later. The invasion was so swift that only a small proportion of the country's Jews were able to flee. Jews accounted for 1.41% of the country's population, with 50% of the Jews clustered in Amsterdam, making up 8.65% of the city's population.

After capitulation, Queen Wilhelmina fled to Great Britain and established a government-in-exile, leaving behind the Dutch civil service and municipal authorities. Dutch police and local authorities collaborated with the Nazi forces in registering, rounding up, and deporting Jews. Dutch civil authorities fell under the control of SS Reichskommissar Dr. Arthur Seyss-Inquart. Nazis enjoyed support from Dutch far-right anti-Semitic political parties.

Jews were forced to register themselves in 1941 and 159,000 Jews were listed on national documents, around 25,000 of whom were recent immigrants. German occupying forces established the Zentralstelle für Jüdische Auswanderung (Central Office for Jewish Emigration) to round up and deport all Jews. In 1940 and 1941, German authorities issued anti-Semitic legislation and in March 1942, they instituted the Nuremberg Laws in Holland.

Before the war, Westerbork was established in the northeast of Holland as an internment camp for Jews fleeing Germany in the wake of Kristallnacht. When Nazi forces arrived, they turned the camp into a transit centre where Jews were detained before being deported to death camps. Around 25,000 or

30,000 Jews managed to evade deportation by hiding with assistance from Dutch partisans, and about two thirds of those in hiding survived.

The best known case of a Dutch Holocaust victim is that of Anne Frank, a young German-Jewish girl who went into hiding with her family in Amsterdam in 1942 after her sister was served a deportation notice. A Dutch collaborator was most likely for betraying the family. When discovered, the Germans deported the family to Bergen-Belsen, where Anne, her sister, and her mother died, with her father left as the sole survivor.

In all, 107,000 Jews from the Netherlands were deported to concentration camps. Less than 5,000 survived. By liberation, 75% of Dutch Jewry had been exterminated.

### ***Timeline***

- 8 May 1945: The State Institute for War Documentation (RIOD) is created to study Holocaust history in the Netherlands, fund independent research
- 27 November 1987: National Committee for the 4 and 5 of May created by royal decree
- 1999: the Netherlands joins IHRA
- 1999-2000: "under a settlement agreed with the Jewish community, the Dutch state made a sum of EUR181.5 million available in recognition of failures in the past treatment of the victims of WWII persecution, the shortcomings in post-war restitution, and the impact of this on people's subsequent lives."
- 2005: "government supervision of the allocation of these funds ended but collective project applications can still be submitted"
- 2011: appointed an independent advisory committee to assess individual art restitution claims
- 2016: Amsterdam City Council approves memorial of 102,000 victim's names
- 2016: National Holocaust Museum opens (still under construction)
- 2017: government officials approved and supported the building of a Holocaust memorial in Amsterdam, including a 'memorial of names'
- 2017: Dutch Red Cross apologizes for inaction to protect Jews
- 2018: Dutch Railroad says it will pay compensation to victims it transported to camps
- 2018: Dutch Foreign Ministry apologizes to Family of 'Dutch Schindler,' Who Was Rebuked for Saving Thousands of Jews

### ***Government***

In the immediate postwar period, Jews who returned to the Netherlands were discouraged from talking in public about their trauma or the persecution of Jews. The Dutch were also victims of a brutal occupation, and many risked their lives or even died to protect Jews. The May 4th commemoration originated as a day of remembrance of the members of the resistance and Dutch soldiers fighting against the Germans, rather than a day dedicated to the memory of the Jewish victims.

Many Dutch citizens felt that Jews should be grateful for the activity of the Dutch resistance. The postwar period was primarily interested in discussing Dutch heroism and resistance and recognizing the suffering of the country under German occupation rather than the unique pain felt by Jews at the hands of the Nazis

Starting in the 1960s, Jewish community groups and victims' organizations pushed for the ceremony to emphasize the unique suffering of the Jewish victims. By the 1970s and 1980s, World War II education had shifted from a focus on Dutch heroism and Dutch suffering to an emphasis on the Jewish victims and willingness to understand and confront Dutch complicity and collaboration with the Nazi regime.

The government has come a long way. In December, 2018, the Dutch Foreign Ministry has apologized to the family of diplomat Jan Zwartendijk ("the Dutch Schindler") who saved thousands of Jews during the Holocaust but after the war was rebuked for his actions. Dutch Foreign Minister Stef Blok acknowledged this week that his ministry's treatment of Zwartendijk was "inappropriate," expressed Holland's admiration for his actions during World War II and relayed an apology to his family. According to the Yad Vashem website, in the summer of 1940 Zwartendijk issued from 1,200-1,400 forged documents to Jews in the city of Kovno, Lithuania, where he was the Dutch consul, to enable them to enter the Dutch colony of Curacao.

The Dutch government has yet issued a formal apology for the country's complicity and collaboration with German occupiers, despite repeated calls from the international community and opposition parties. In 2005, Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende made a statement calling the Holocaust a "pitch-black" chapter of Dutch history and lamented Dutch complicity in the deportations - but without formally apologizing for the actions.

Aside from his lack of official apology, considerable efforts are made to accept and atone for Dutch guilt. The federal and local governments cooperate with museums, memorials, community organizations, and commemorative sites to plan and fund Holocaust-related education and events. In 2016, many government officials approved and supported the building of a Holocaust memorial in Amsterdam, including a 'Memorial of Names'.

The government funds commemorations on UN Holocaust Remembrance Day and Yom HaShoah, which are well attended by government officials, members of the Dutch royal family, and citizens. No recent efforts of official revisionism are visible.

The incitement of hatred or discrimination against a group on the basis of race or religion is illegal and Dutch courts have ruled Holocaust denial as hate speech, criminalizing it. No official law makes genocide denial a crime although a coalition party in Parliament has been working on legislation. Dutch courts have made efforts to try Dutch Nazis and Nazi collaborators for war crimes. In 1945, the Netherlands set up special courts to process war crimes, and sentenced a total of 14,562 people by 1950, when the courts ceased operations.

### ***Education***

The federal government provides schools with a list of subjects to be covered including World War II, for which it requires that primary school students learn the “certain consequences of German occupation during the Second World War and the process of Nazification and the persecution of the Jews.”

Most textbooks describe the Holocaust as a brutal result of the painful German occupation, but few examine Dutch complicity or collaboration in the tragedy. According to a study by the newspaper *Algemeen Dagblad*, many students “lack both a factual and conceptual understanding of the Holocaust.”

The Anne Frank House Foundation organizes various education initiatives for the thousands of students who visit the museum every year. The annual Anne Frank Newspaper reaches over 100,000 11 to 12 years old students.

A new proposal is to include Holocaust education within federally-mandated citizenship education. In this regard, the Holocaust would be used to demonstrate that tolerance and freedom are vital and to discuss the evils of racism and discrimination. Many citizenship education efforts use the Holocaust to learn about violence, persecution, and discrimination.

### ***Commemoration***

The biggest Holocaust commemoration event occurs annually on May 4th and 5th when the Dutch mark the end of German occupation. The Netherlands also recognizes the United Nations’ International Remembrance Day on January 27th, and Dutch Jewish communities commemorate Yom HaShoah.



On May 4th, the emphasis is on commemorating the suffering of the Dutch Jews. More than 20,000 attend a ceremony, which is broadcast live on national TV, on Dam Square in Amsterdam. The Royal Family lays a wreath along with Holocaust survivors, initiating a two-minute silent period that is recognized throughout the country. The winner of a national poetry contest reads their poem and prominent politicians give speeches. Flags are commanded to be flown at half-mast.

May 5th is Liberation Day, recognition of the date that the German army capitulated in the Netherlands. It commemorates Dutch heroes and the resistance movement to fought for Dutch freedom. The day also provides an outlet for reflection on the state of freedom across the world. Liberation Day began immediately after the war which demonstrates political strength and efficient organization of the Dutch resistance that they were able to set up this event so soon after freedom. This day is celebrated separately from May 4th's Remembrance Day, since planners thought that it was "inappropriate to mourn the victims of war and celebrate the liberation on the same day." In the annual lecture, which is held in a different province each year, a prominent figure is invited to speak on the vulnerability of freedom. At night, a huge concert is arranged on the Amstel River, and the Prime Minister, government representatives, and representatives of the monarchy are in attendance. The concert is broadcast to over a million Dutch citizens each year.

Another commemoration initiative is the Jewish Monument managed by the Jewish Cultural Quarter in Amsterdam. This project explores personal and local stories and invites Dutch people to discover the history of their family, house, town, or city in the Holocaust. More than 8,000 people have online profiles associated with the Jewish Monument. Additionally, the Jewish Historical Museum organizes the Oral History Project which collects stories from survivors and victim families and holds storytelling events annually on May 4th.

### ***Archives***

The Jewish Historical Museum in the Jewish Cultural Quarter of Amsterdam has an extensive collection of documents and photographs pertaining to persecution and deportation. Another source of non-government archives is in the library at NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, an organization which carries out research on the Second World War, the Holocaust, and other genocides. The NIOD archives are all digitized and accessible online.

Many government records are held in municipal archives, owned and operated by individual cities across the Netherlands. Documents regarding the federal government and the Holocaust are available in the central archives in The Hague. Dutch archives are easy to access and almost all are available to the

public. By the year 2020, 70 years since the archives were created, all government archival materials will be available.

### ***Restitution***

In 1996, an international investigation into restitution efforts to Jewish victims proved that the Dutch government had been “insufficiently sensitive to the damage inflicted on the Jewish community during the war.” In 1999, a series of discussions between the Dutch Jewish community and the government, culminating in a settlement in which the Dutch government issued EUR181.5 million. The Jewish community managed the money, with prospective beneficiaries submitting applications. Although this program was discontinued in 2005, individual project applications can still be submitted.

When Dutch Jewish survivors returned from the concentration camps, they found their property repossessed. Many were even fined for not paying property taxes on their land during the German occupation. In 2017, the Dutch government finally offered the Jewish community \$2.7 million in restitution for the “immoral” implementation of taxes, as part of a reparation fund for Jewish property and land that had been repossessed or had taxes still calculated during the war.

The government also implemented a Restitutions Committee in 2001 to evaluate individual art restitution claims, after the government received criticism for displaying seized Jewish artwork. In many ways, the Dutch are leaders in art restoration, having established an archive detailing provenance. In 2018, this [Museale Verwervingen](#) project reported that it had found 170 works of art that they suspect may have been stolen or confiscated under duress during the Nazi era. At the same time, Anne Webber of the Commission for Looted Art in Europe and Wesley Fisher of the Jewish Claims Conference complains that the restitution committee prioritises the interest of a museum in keeping a work of art against the claimant’s interest in recovering it. The policy in handling Nazi-looted art claims for works in public museums puts the Netherlands “at risk of becoming a pariah” as the “smallest and most chilling distinctions are being made in order to allow museums to keep their collections intact,” they wrote in an opinion piece published in December, 2018 on the website of NRC Handelsblad, a Dutch newspaper.

### ***Opposition***

Opposition parties follow the government lead in commemorating the Holocaust. Even Geert Wilders, the far-right leader of the Party for Freedom, supports remembrance and commemoration and has demanded that Prime Minister Mark Rutte issue a formal apology.

At the same time, Wilders and other Party for Freedom members often cite instances of Holocaust revisionism and anti-Semitism in the Arab community as a reason why the Netherlands should not accept Muslim immigrants. Wilder's party's xenophobia has led many critics to wonder if the party is a real ally of Jews and if the party is as committed to Holocaust remembrance as they claim to be, since they seem to be repeating the same xenophobia and intolerance that Jews faced in the Holocaust.

### ***Civil Society***

Holocaust revisionism and even denialism tend to be found only in discredited extremist groups or the far reaches of the Internet and revisionists are shunned by the vast majority of Dutch society. Some politicians and citizens do draw parallels between the Holocaust and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or are unwilling to confront the Holocaust because of the complicated political entanglements that it has with Israel.

Several public organizations have recently made attempts to atone for their role in the Holocaust. In particular, the Dutch Red Cross apologized in 2017 for their inaction in protecting Dutch Jews during the German occupation. Additionally, the railway firm Nederlandse Spoorwegen (NS) apologized in 2005 for the role of the company in deporting 107,000 Jews to death camps in Germany and Poland. In 2018, the railways agreed to set up a commission to compensate Holocaust survivors and their relatives.

### ***Media***

Dutch media coverage of Holocaust commemoration efforts is encouraging. Most pieces written about commemoration and remembrance projects, such as the recently unveiled Memorial of Names, are published by Jewish or Israeli news sources although Dutch figures are often consulted and interviewed.

The Dutch press covers incidents of vandalism and protest of commemorative sites, always with the intent of protecting the memory and legacy of these sites. The press also covers Remembrance Day and Commemoration Day, on the 4th and 5th of May.

### ***Jewish Community***

Sources estimate that there are anywhere from 30,000-50,000 Jews in the Netherlands, with a sizable proportion living in and around Amsterdam. Although the community is overwhelmingly Ashkenazi, about 270 Sephardic Jewish families from the Netherlands' historic Portuguese Jewish community. There are about 30 active synagogues around the country and various Jewish day schools, summer camps, community organizations, and youth movements mostly located in Amsterdam.

Even before the Holocaust the Dutch Jewish community was well integrated into Dutch society and there were high levels of integration. This situation still stands today, with most Jews being secular.

Authors: Lindsay Dougherty and Ilana Luther

## POLAND

**Under its right-wing nationalist government, Poland has engaged in competitive victimization, emphasizing the experience of Polish victims over that of Jewish victims. The government spends considerable effort on rewriting history rather than acknowledging and learning from it.**

### *Overview*

Holocaust remembrance is under clear threat in Poland.

The task of remembering the Holocaust was postponed throughout the communist era, in no small part because much wartime suffering was also Soviet-inflicted, and against Poles. After communism's fall, a liberal administration made significant progress in initiating the process of remembrance. Poles began to have conversations about their past and engaged in public discourse and debate about Polish complicity in the Holocaust.

In 2015, the nationalist, populist Law and Justice party secured a majority in parliament as well as the presidency. The party is opposed to the forms of Holocaust remembrance introduced after communism. In the last three years, the government has limited Holocaust education. Public expressions of anti-Semitism are on the rise, despite the country having a tiny Jewish community, as the government moves to restrict debate and insist that Poles suffered as much as Jews during WWII.

This movement culminated in the passing of an amendment to the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance in January 2018. The act prohibited the false attribution of blame for Nazi crimes to the Polish state or nation, provoked in part by outrage over use of the term “Polish death camps” to refer to Nazi-administered concentration camps. Critics saw it as an egregious denial of the role which many individuals in Poland played in the capture and killing of Jews and the international community reacted swiftly. The parliament modified the amendment in June 2018, replacing the original criminal penalty with a civil one. Although this appeased some in the international community, Polish Jews and leaders in the Holocaust remembrance community remain frightened of the current government’s intentions and capabilities.

The memory of the Holocaust in Poland is defined by competing narratives of suffering. Anna Wencel, Education Manager at the Galicia Jewish Museum in Krakow, explained that in every group of Poles, “you will always find one person who says that Polish people also died in the concentration camps.”

Poland’s historic understanding of itself as the ‘Jesus of the Nations,’ a deeply religious country which has suffered for too long under the might of its powerful neighbours, renders its status as a country of victims, rather than oppressors, core to its self-understanding. Thus, attempts to nuance the role of Poles in the war by suggesting that they may have been at once victims and perpetrators threatens many Poles’ understanding of their national identity.

In the first few years after the war, anti-Semitism was spontaneous and ground-level. The Soviet Union supported the establishment of Israel, hoping that Israel would act as a Soviet satellite in the Middle East. When it became clear that Israel would not cooperate, the Soviet Union partnered with other Arab countries and turned anti-Zionist. This stance ushered in a new era of anti-Semitism. From 1956-1968, most of the country’s few remaining Jews fled from Poland to Israel.

The main act of Holocaust remembrance during communist rule was an annual commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. In 1970, West German chancellor Willy Brandt visited Warsaw and kneeled in front of Warsaw ghetto memorial. The act was understood as an apology for the Holocaust, exonerating Poland of guilt.

### ***The Holocaust in Poland***

Germany attacked Poland in September of 1939, crushing the Polish army and setting off World War II. The same month, the Soviet Union occupied eastern Poland, leaving the west to Germany. The Germans incorporated part of their territory into the Reich, and incorporated another part as the ‘General Government,’ to be administered by the Nazi lawyer Hans Frank. The Polish government did

not comply at any time with German rule and attempted underground resistance efforts while exiled in Britain.

Before the war, Poland was home to Europe's largest Jewish population. About 3.5 million Jews lived in Poland, constituting about 10% of the Polish population. This fact, along with the country's proximity to Germany, made Poland the ideal location for German execution of its "final solution." The Nazis established six death camps in Poland: Chełmno, Sobibór, Bełżec, Treblinka, Majdanek, and Auschwitz-Birkenau. Jews from all over Europe were deported to Poland and murdered in these camps and almost three million Polish Jews were killed in the Holocaust.

The process of genocide in Poland began with German occupation in 1939. Just months after occupation began, the Germans required Jews to wear the yellow star on their clothing. Soon after, Nazis began relocating Jews to ghettos. Jews then lived under strict regulations. The Nazis enforced curfews, food rations, and work requirements. The Warsaw Ghetto, along with other similar ghettos across Poland, was sealed off in 1940. Jews lived in harsh conditions within the ghettos and many died of starvation and disease.

The "final solution" began in Poland in 1941 when Germany invaded the Soviet Union. During this initial "Holocaust by bullets" the German police massacred some 700,000 Jews living in the newly acquired eastern territory.

In the next stage of the Holocaust in Poland, the Nazi used "gas vans," vehicles equipped to kill Jews by piping carbon monoxide directly from the engine to an airtight chamber. This technique was mostly used at Chełmno.

In 1942, the Nazis began using some existing concentration camps as extermination camps for Jews, installing crematoria and gas chambers. The Nazis transported Jews via an extensive railway system as the ghettos were liquidated and about 90% of all Polish Jews were murdered.

German occupation was brutal for non-Jewish Poles as well, but never reached the genocidal extent of Jewish suffering. No "final solution" existed for ethnic Poles, although the Nazi's *Generalplan Ost* called for removing vast numbers of ethnic Poles to remote areas in Russia. Poles were regarded as second-class citizens under the Nazis' ethnic worldview and Poles were given curfews and food rations, but the restrictions placed on them were often less strict than those put on the Jewish population.

The Germans prohibited Poles from assisting Jews. Unlike in other European countries, the penalty for helping Jews in Poland was death without trial for the individual's entire family. Amid these dangers,

the Polish resistance organized into a Home Army to fight German occupation. In 1944, the Home Army led the Warsaw Uprising, which was the largest military resistance effort of WWII. The uprising lasted more than 60 days before being brutally suppressed by the Nazis. In retaliation, the Nazis killed more than 16,000 Polish resistance fighters and destroyed most of Warsaw, additionally killing 150,000 Polish civilians.

While the Polish government had no role in the perpetration of the Holocaust, individual Poles were involved in both the persecution and protection of Jews. Historical research has shown that some non-Jewish Poles murdered their Jewish neighbours, most infamously in the Jedwabne massacre, where the ethnic Poles of the town of Jedwabne killed more than 300 Jews, most of whom they rounded up in a barn which they then set on fire. Many of these acts of murder were executed without German instruction or assistance, although in some cases German officers may have influenced and encouraged the local population. At the same time, perhaps due to being the site where so much of the Holocaust played out, Poland is home to the greatest number of Righteous Among the Nations, the honorific bestowed upon gentiles who saved Jews during the war. Almost 7,000 Poles have been recognized by Yad Vashem for their role in protecting the Jews.

### ***Timeline***

- 1943: Poet Czeslaw Milosz writes "A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto," already anticipating the burden of guilt that will haunt Christian Poles.
- 1947: The first parliamentary elections held since before the War gives power to the Soviet-aligned Polish Workers' Party.
- 1956: A wave of emigration to Israel is sparked by the anti-Semitism provoked by political unrest.
- 1967-68: The Polish government wages an anti-Semitic campaign following Israel's victory over Soviet allies in the Six-Day War and the cessation of diplomatic relations between Israel and the USSR. Half the country's remaining Jewish population is stripped of citizenship and forced to emigrate.
- 1970: West German Chancellor Willy Brandt visits Warsaw and kneels before the memorial to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.
- 1979: John Paul II comes to Poland, the first time a pope visits under Communism, and holds mass at Auschwitz.
- 1987: Inspired by Milosz' 1943 poem, Jan Błowski publishes "The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto," pleading Poles to reckon with what he sees as their collective responsibility in the Holocaust.

- 1993: Steven Spielberg releases *Schindler's List*, a film about a German industrialist who hides hundreds of Jews at his factory in Krakow, further stoking conversations about Jewish wartime experience in Poland.
- 1997: The Law on the Relation of the State to Jewish Communities passes, initiating a five-year period during which Jewish communities can apply for the restitution of property.
- 1998: The government establishes the Institute of National Remembrance.
- 2001: Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński found the Law and Justice party.
- 2001: Jan Gross publishes *Neighbors*, a historical account of the massacre of the Jews of Jedwabne by their non-Jewish neighbours.
- 2002: The National Institute of Remembrance completes an independent investigation into the events at Jedwabne in aftermath of debate following *Neighbors*, affirming Gross' findings.
- 2003: *The Neighbors Respond*, a collection of articles from the debate following *Neighbors* is published.
- 2015: The right-wing populist Law and Justice party wins a plurality in the election and takes control of government.
- 2018: The amendment to the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance makes it a criminal offense to claim complicity of the Polish state or nation in Nazi crimes against humanity. Several months later the law is amended to excise the criminal punishment after widespread condemnation by the international media and several of Poland's strategic allies.
- 2018: President Andrzej Duda formally apologizes for the expulsions of 1968, though makes clear that the communists are to blame, and that today's Poles bear no responsibility to the Jews for past events.

### **Government**

Changes in the country's approach to Holocaust remembrance were exacerbated by the rise of the populist right-wing Law and Justice party (PiS), which won almost 38% of the vote in the 2015 parliamentary elections. Under its leadership, the government has pursued a controversial approach to Holocaust remembrance. According to PiS, Poland has been maligned as one of the perpetrators of the Holocaust, rather than one of its victims. As evidence, it points to Western media usage of the phrase "Polish death camps."

A desire to assert the country's lack of complicity in Nazi crimes drove the now famous amendment to the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance. The amendment, signed into law in February 2018, made it a criminal offense (punishable by a fine and up to three years in prison) to ascribe 'against the facts' crimes committed by the Nazis to the Polish State or the Polish Nation. In defence of the bill, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the head of PiS, said that it was not intended to target 'someone who says that



somewhere, in some village, some place, a Jewish family or one Jewish person was murdered.’ Rather, it aims to stop people blaming the Polish nation.

This defence leaves unanswered questions such as what is the Polish nation? As prominent Polish journalist and activist Konstanty Gebert points out, the word “nation,” takes a distinctively ethnic connotation in Polish. It appears is in the preamble of the country’s constitution, referring to all legal citizens of Poland. If this is the definition the government has in mind, then it remains unclear how the law can be applied; nobody would ever claim that every single citizen of Poland is responsible for Nazi crimes. This fundamental impracticality regarding the law’s structure points to the essentially symbolic importance of the amendment. Even if nobody can actually be prosecuted for breaking the law, its existence is meant as a further statement of Poland’s status as a victim, rather than a perpetrator, of suffering during the war. Because ethnic Poles were sent to concentration camps, suffered the evils of military occupation, and were considered inferior under the Nazi’s pseudo-scientific worldview, Poles feel that their plight during the war has been overshadowed and underappreciated.

Auschwitz represents in some ways a perfect symbol of these sparring perspectives, according to British journalist Christian Davies, correspondent for the *Guardian* in Warsaw. Internationally, Auschwitz has become synonymous with the Holocaust, and especially the suffering of Europe’s Jews. And yet, Auschwitz was many things, among them, a destination for political prisoners, many of whom were ethnic Poles. About 70,000 ethnic Poles were killed at Auschwitz, or 5.8% of the total victims (Jews constituted 91% of the victims). Visitors to Auschwitz pass through a long hallway with hundreds of headshots of these Polish victims. As Davies put it, “For many here Auschwitz is a symbol of the Nazi occupation of Poland, and for rest of the world it’s a symbol of the Holocaust.”

For two key Polish allies, the United States and Israel, the amendment to the remembrance law created alarm because of the possibility that it would encourage Holocaust revisionism and minimization. In response, the amendment was itself amended in June, 2018. Instead of a criminal offense, use of the term ‘Polish death camp’ became a civil offense.

Many Poles interviewed expressed deep concern about the manner in which the June amendment was passed, with the entire legislative process beginning and ending in one day. The expediency of the process was seen as symptomatic of the Law and Justice party’s crusade to destroy the legal system and liberal democratic values such as open debate.

### ***Education***

The Law and Justice government has greatly reduced Holocaust education.

Before the party took power, Holocaust education had been mandatory in Poland since 1999. In 2017, under its watch, thousands of teachers were fired and as a result of curricular restructuring, the number of times that students would learn about the Holocaust was reduced from three (once each in elementary, middle, and high school) to two (once in eighth grade and again in 12th grade).

The new curriculum altered the way the Holocaust is addressed. Before 2017, it focused on the suffering of the Jews during WWII. Today, it requires teachers to instead discuss the role of Poles in saving Jews during the Holocaust. Jewish history is only taught in reference to the Holocaust.

The new administration has introduced a specific list of organizations that are banned from entering or presenting at Polish schools. Included on this list is POLIN, Poland's largest and most prominent museum of Jewish history. Another worrisome curricula change is the removal of anti-discrimination education. Taught since 1999, the government contends that Polish students do not need anti-discrimination education because Poland is already a highly tolerant and equal society.

The result is that it has become dangerous for teachers to teach the Holocaust. Government inspectors pay random visits to schools and classrooms to ensure that students are learning Holocaust history in the prescribed manner. Headmasters of schools that violate the national curriculum or the inspector's wishes face the threat of job loss and as a result, many headmasters have taken preventative measures to limit Holocaust education within their schools.

The Catholic church represents another powerful influence on education. As Anna Wencel put it, 'The school has two headmasters. The official headmaster and the local priest.'

### ***Archives***

Holocaust archives in Poland are open to the public. Yad Vashem and POLIN have worked to digitize some of the archives and to secure video testaments of survivors.

The POLIN museum in Warsaw holds a five-day teacher training program called "Teaching with Testimony in 21st Century" through which teachers learn to access these digital archives.

The National Archives are kept in the Central Archives of Historical Records (AGAD) in Warsaw, and anyone can gain access by approaching the institute with a reason for inquiry. There have been no known recent cases of denial to any documents. Even the controversial amendment on the Law on the

Act of National Remembrance explicitly excluded academic research from its scope, suggesting that unimpeded access to historical materials is not under threat.

### ***Restitution***

The government has returned some property to the country's Jewish communities, including synagogues and cemeteries. It is far more common for cemeteries to be returned than developable land, according to Rabbi Yehoshua Ellis, National Head of Education and Outreach for the Jewish Communities of Poland.

Restitution for individual Jews is murky. No restitution law exists, leaving Jews who seek to regain their property at the mercy of judges. According to the World Jewish Restitution Organization, Poland is the only major European country that has not created a legal framework for helping Jews to recover the property they lost both during the Nazi era and Communist times.

### ***Opposition***

When the amendment to the Law on the Institute of National Remembrance was proposed, the main opposition (and Pro-European) party Civic Platform opposed it. Since the divisive term "Polish death camps" was seen as the catalyst for the bill, Civic Platform suggested making the bill refer exclusively to the misattribution of Nazi camps to the Polish state. Civic Platform has continued to fight Law and Justice's attempt to rewrite history, highlighting the country's deteriorating international reputation.

### ***Civil Society***

The most prominent social organization in Poland is the Roman Catholic church. In 1979, John Paul II visited Poland and relayed the message that Christians are responsible for remembering and commemorating the suffering of the Jews. In 1987, Jan Błóński's article 'The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto' was published in *Tygodnik Powszechny*, a Catholic Polish newspaper. The article, which called for Poland to reckon with the crimes committed against its Jews, inspired mass debate over the responsibility of Poles in the Holocaust.

In recent years, however, the church has not supported Holocaust remembrance. Many local priests are actively involved in schools and discourage Holocaust education.

### ***Commemoration***

Although recent developments have changed the culture around the politics of memory in Poland, the country has an inspired history of searching for truth around the history of the Holocaust. Sara J. Bloomfield, director of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum writes:

Poland was ground zero for the post-Soviet reclamation of the truth about the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes, much of which happened on Polish soil under the brutal German occupation. Since the fall of communism, successive Polish governments of various political parties extended – and often expanded – the nation’s commitment to the preservation of the six German killing centers in Poland. The Germans and several other countries provided some funding, but Poland assumed the major financial, historical and moral responsibility.

Poland is filled with official Holocaust memorials, and commemorations remain regular occurrences. In addition to observing January 27th, the International Holocaust Remembrance Day marking the liberation of Auschwitz, the government observes April 19th, the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. In 2014, Chief Rabbi of Poland Michael Schudrich remarked, ‘The country is becoming a model of how to deal with lost memory, and to get it right.’

Under the Law and Justice government, the Ministry of Culture, has shifted its focus away from memorializing Jews and toward commemorating the plight of ethnic Poles. For instance, the Ministry of Education has historically kept a list of sponsored museums that it recommends to students and teachers but since the new administration took control, POLIN, Warsaw’s museum of the history of Polish Jews, has been conspicuously removed.

Deputy Minister of Culture and National Heritage Jaroslaw Sellin even endorsed the idea of building a museum to the ‘Polocaust,’ a term coined by academic Marek Kochan to refer to the suffering of Polish victims of Nazism. Sellin later retracted his support, citing the negative effects such a museum would have on the government’s relationship with the Jewish community.

Another episode indicative of the government’s attitude to Holocaust remembrance is controversy surrounding the World War II museum in Gdansk. The Law and Justice government criticized the project, initiated by the former government, as neglecting the ‘Polish experience.’ In 2017, the government fired museum director Paweł Machcewicz. From a former willingness to interrogate its past mistakes and unseemly episodes, the Polish government’s narrative around the country’s wartime history has shifted to near exclusive emphasis on Polish suffering and Polish heroism.

Some of the most significant commemoration efforts still originate in the country’s museums. Although many are supported financially by the government, they represent independent and diverse perspectives. Museums host various events to commemorate and teach about the Holocaust. For

instance, the Galicia Jewish Museum in Krakow has a mobile exhibition in a bus that it takes to rural communities that might not otherwise have good access to museums. Educators customize the exhibition to teach about the local history of each region the bus visits.

While institutions like the Galicia Museum, POLIN in Warsaw, and the World War II museum in Gdansk have all made important strides in teaching about the Holocaust, other new government-supported institutions focus on other narratives of Polish history. The Markowa Ulma-Family Museum of Poles Who Saved Jews in World War II almost exclusively details – as the name implies – the efforts of ethnic Poles to save Jews. Some have criticized the museum, claiming it suggests an exaggerated narrative of Polish heroism and neglects to mention the examples of Poles who killed Jews or otherwise abetted their demise.

### ***Media***

Since the 2015 elections, the Law and Justice Party has embarked on a campaign to limit freedom of the press. “PiS’s attempts to tame the media form part of a broader push by the party to weaken the checks and balances that guarantee Poland’s democracy,” reports Freedom House. The party has replaced key staffers at public media companies and pushed the media environment away from that of a liberal democracy and toward that of a more authoritarian regime.

Even so, Polish media runs the gamut when it comes to Holocaust remembrance. Established dailies such as the liberal *Gazeta Wyborcza* have been critical of the present government’s approach to Holocaust remembrance. When Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki referred earlier this year to the ‘Jewish perpetrators’ who participated in the Holocaust, the paper headlined its critical coverage as ‘Political Bungling’). Right wing paper *Nasz Dziennik* was very supportive of the remarks, saying “The collaboration between Jewish institutions and individual Jews with the Germans... is a fact known to Holocaust historians and researchers for many years.”

*Nasz Dziennik* is not the only outlet embracing revisionist history. The Catholic outfit Radio Maryja, for instance, has been widely panned as anti-Semitic both for remarks made on its programs and its endorsement of convicted Holocaust deniers such as Ryszard Bender. The station is not on the fringes of society; it has hosted former PM Jarosław Kaczyński and other mainstream conservative politicians.

Many Poles are distrustful of Western media outlets, which they see as biased against Poland. They are not wrong; in the aftermath of the controversial Holocaust bill, many articles in American outlets failed to mention key parts of the amendment, such as the fact that it made exceptions for all academic and

artistic publications, and that it was only false statements, those ‘against the facts,’ which would become illegal – not *all* claims about Polish complicity in Nazi crimes.

### ***Jewish Community***

According to the World Jewish Congress, fewer than 10,000 Jews live in Poland. The number is an estimation because any sort of registration by religion or race raises red flags within the Jewish community and throughout Europe.

During communism, no reparations were made. Anti-Semitism persisted during communism and afterwards. Today there is anti-Semitism without Jews, which many believe is possible because Poles have variously equated Jews to Communists and Zionists, despite the historical antagonism between the two groups.

Jewish life in Poland improved after 2003. The liberal government returned cemeteries and other property to the communities. The number of Jewish community activities increased. The Holocaust Bill unsettled the Jewish community. While many, including Rabbi Ellis, believe that the bill was not motivated by anti-Semitism, the law was announced on Holocaust Remembrance Day, which many Polish Jews felt to be particularly insensitive. Some felt that the Israeli Embassy should have been more proactive in responding to the amendment. The community feels powerless to impact the national discussion. Polish Jews feel insignificant, Rabbi Ellis said. ‘We almost don’t exist.’

Authors: Jeremy Epstein and Lindsay Daugherty

## ROMANIA

**After a slow start, Romania has become a model of success in acknowledging and confronting its role in the Holocaust. It is a rare positive story among new European Union Central European member.**

### *Overview*

Romania represents an optimistic tale of positive progress and Holocaust memory.

In 2003, the Romanian government appointed Nobel Peace Prize laureate and Romanian Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel to preside over an International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania. The Commission found Romanian civilian and military authorities responsible for the murder of up to 380,000 Jews and more than 11,000 gypsies. The Romanian government recognized the report's findings.

Since then, Romanians have, for the most part, come true about the dark spots in their past. The country has created alternative and unprecedented educational programs at the National College of Defence. It has instituted laws to protect against revisionism and rehabilitation of war criminals.

The archival situation stands to be improved, and restitution of seized property suffers from bureaucratic inertia and general reluctance. Even so, Romania's increased maturity as a member of the European Union has generated a positive trajectory in coming to terms with its troubled history.

### *The Holocaust in Romania*

Romania grew closer to fascism throughout the 1930s. In 1938, King Carol II established a royal dictatorship, and remained neutral in the first year of the war. In July 1940, the Soviets issued an ultimatum to Romania, and annexed Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. The Nazis and Italians in August 1940 negotiated the transfer of Northern Transylvania to Hungary, who had lost the territory in the Versailles Treaty. In September 1940, Bulgaria then received Southern Dobruja. After these disastrous territory losses, a coalition government of the Iron Guard and General Ion Antonescu came to power and deposed the king, replacing him with his son Michael.

In November 1940, Romania officially joined the Axis alliance. Anti-Semitic laws proliferated. The Iron Guard attacked the Jewish population. On January 21, 1941, the Iron Guard rose against the regime, while at the same time instigating the Bucharest Pogrom.

Antonescu, with the help of the German Army, defeated the Iron Guard and took complete power. Romania then joined forces with the Germans in June 1941 for the invasion of the Soviet Union, with the aim of reoccupying the territories annexed by the Soviets.

Shortly into the invasion, the Romanian government instigated a pogrom in Iasi, killing thousands of Jewish residents. The German and Romanian army pushed deep into the territory of the Soviet Union, and the Romanians recovered not only Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, but also Transnistria, a region between the Dniester and Southern Bug rivers.

For the region's Jews, the takeover meant death. Romanian and German troops began a systematic massacre of the Jewish population in Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, deporting the survivors to Romania operated concentration camps. The Antonescu regime extended the deportations to Southern Bukovina and Dorohoi. Plans were made for the deportation of all of Romania's Jews by the summer of 1942, but Antonescu cancelled them, fearing repercussions. Most of the Jewish population living in the pre-Soviet invasion territory survived, though subjected to appalling treatment, the confiscation of property, and forced labour.

In the spring of 1944, the Soviet army retook Transnistria, moving on to Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. King Michael, with the support of an opposition movement, overthrew Antonescu and signed an armistice with the Soviet Union. After the end of the war, Romania was locked into the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union until 1989.

According to a national census of 1930, more than 750,000 Jews lived in Greater Romania, with over two thirds of the country's Jews living in cities and towns. The Wiesel Commission concluded that between



280,000 and 380,000 Romanian and Ukrainian Jews were murdered or died during the Holocaust in Romania, with an additional 135,000 Romanian Jews in Northern Transylvania perishing. At least 290,000 Jews survived after the war, with more than 100,000 leaving for Israel by 1951. The emigration continued until 1989, and the current Jewish population of Romania is estimated to be somewhere between 3000 and 12,000.

### ***Timeline***

- 10 February 1947: Paris Treaty of Peace, one article of which was dedicated to the restitution or compensation for Jewish heirless property
- 1989: End of Communism
- 1990: Establishment of Marshal Ion Antonescu Foundation by Corneliu Vadim Tudor and Iosif Constantin Drăgan
- 1991: Minute of silence in Parliament to commemorate forty five years since the execution of Antonescu
- 1993: 'Everything for the Fatherland [Country]' Party re-established
- 1995: Ziua (popular daily) campaign to name one of Bucharest's main boulevards after Antonescu
- 1995: Radu Theodoru revisionist article appears in Europa
- 1997: Establishment of the Caritatea Foundation
- 1998: Educational Reform
- 1998: Exoneration of Colonel Radu Dinulescu
- 1999: Exoneration of Colonel Gheorghe Petrescu
- 13 March 2002: Emergency Ordinance 31 banning the activity of fascist-like organizations and the display of racist and xenophobic symbols, as well as the cult of personalities found guilty in court of "crimes against peace and humanity"
- June 2003: Naming of a street in Bucharest "Dr. Traian Popovici" after Romanian Righteous Among Nations
- 12 June 2003: in communication between the National Archives of Romania and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, a sentence stated that Romania's government "... strongly emphasizes that between 1940-1945 no Holocaust took place within Romania's boundaries."
- 25 July 2003: Iliescu interview
- October 2003: Establishment of Elie Wiesel Commission
- 29 March 2004: Romania joins NATO
- 5 May 2004: Government adopts October 9 as Holocaust Commemoration Day
- 11 November 2004: Presentation of Final Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania

- 13 December 2004: Romania becomes a member of IHRA
- 7 August 2005: Establishment of the Elie Wiesel National Institute for Studying the Holocaust in Romania
- 30 June 2009: Terezin Declaration
- 8 October 2009: Bucharest Holocaust Memorial unveiling
- 2010: Discovery of Jewish mass grave in Popricani
- 28 June 2011: Iasi Holocaust Memorial unveiling
- March 2012: Dan Şova interview
- April 2014: Decision by investigators that the Romanian Army had committed genocide in 1941 in the forest of Popricani
- 18 September 2014: 'Everything for the Country' Party registered officially
- May 2016: Approval of legislation to give priority to restitution claims by Holocaust survivors
- 25 May 2017: Adoption of IHRA's working definition of Antisemitism
- June 2018: Law to prevent and combat episodes of anti-Semitism, revision of Emergency Ordinance 31

### **Government**

Under the communists, Jewish victims were ignored. In 1957, a court convicted Radu Dinulescu, a notorious war criminal who was responsible for organising and carrying out the deportations of Jews from Bukovina and Bessarabia. His second sentence was not for killing Jews, but for his "intense activity against the working class and the revolutionary movement."

After communism fell, Antonescu was rehabilitated as a great military strategist, a fighter against communism, and often credited with saving the Jews in Romania. The country began to rehabilitate war criminals. In 1998 and 1999 respectively, the Supreme Court of Romania acquitted notorious war criminals Radu Dinulescu (chief of the Second Section in the General Staff of the Romanian Army) and his assistant, Gheorghe Petrescu. In 2001, Corneliu Vadim Tudor, the leader of an ultranationalist party, stated that Romanians "are awaiting the time when the Holocaust perpetrated against Romanians, by no means a lesser one than the Holocaust perpetrated against the Jews, will be officially acknowledged." In 2003, President Ion Iliescu stated that "the Holocaust was not unique to the Jews."

When Romania negotiated entry into NATO and the European Union and both organisations demanded that the country come clean about its past. Romania responded like a star student. It joined the International Holocaust and Research Alliance (IHRA) in 2004, chaired the alliance in 2016, and adopted the IHRA's working definition of Antisemitism in 2017. The government set up the Elie Wiesel National Institute for Studying the Holocaust in Romania. Romanian generals and police study the Holocaust at

the Romanian Defence College. The main threat to Holocaust memory no longer comes from government, but from individuals and local councils who have not yet embraced Romania's official stance and education on the Holocaust.

In the summer of 2015, the Romanian Parliament amended the Ordinance to explicitly incriminate the promotion of legionary (Iron Guard) ideology and symbols, and includes a separate definition of the Holocaust in Romania. In June 2018, penalties were proposed was made to prevent and combat episodes of anti-Semitism.

### ***Education***

The National Defence College was one of the first institutions in the country to address Holocaust history. Since 2002, the college has trained Romanian military leaders about what their predecessors did during World War II. Three years ago, it began to organise training with magistrates, policemen, judges, and prosecutors.

Similarly, the Elie Wiesel Institute organises training with police officers and each year holds a summer course. Police officers can choose from among various topics, one of which is on the Holocaust.

For high school students, Romania has set up excellent and innovative educational programs. In conjunction with the NGO Centropa, every year a number of students in Romania submit entries to a contest on Holocaust education and research. The Elie Wiesel Institute offers teachers the opportunity to come to the Institute where there are pre-prepared didactic activities.

On National Holocaust Remembrance Day, October 9, the Ministry of Education requires all schools to organise an activity to commemorate the Holocaust. Contained within the core curriculum is a mandatory education on the Holocaust Romania is also one of few countries in Europe to have introduced education on the Roma Genocide, taught in eighth grade. Elementary school children participate in a special anti-discrimination program.

Concerns, however, remain. In the core curriculum, the number of hours of history teaching has decreased, so only two hours now are devoted to the Holocaust. No university department of history in the country offers courses on the Holocaust. New history teachers therefore have not been educated properly in order to prepare them to teach the Holocaust. The Holocaust is sometimes taught within the faculty of Political Science. At universities even today, however, some professors retain remnants of Romania's 1980s revisionism and nationalistic propaganda.

## ***Commemoration***

The establishment of the commemoration day was among the recommendations made in the Wiesel Commission report. In 2004, Romania observed its first Holocaust Remembrance Day, established by the Parliament to take place on or around October 9. On that date in 1941, Romanian Jews were sent to ghettos and forced labour camps.

The most important current initiative is a new Museum of the Holocaust in Bucharest, which is under construction and soon to be opened. A small Museum of the History of the Jews and the Holocaust already exists in a synagogue.

Romania is erecting Holocaust memorials and putting commemorative plaques in train stations and other significant sites. Bucharest has unveiled a seven million dollar Holocaust Monument, and Iasi, the site of a 1941 massacre, has a monument dedicated to the victims of the pogrom. Smaller cities such as Gherla are also erecting memorials dedicated to Holocaust victims. A Bucharest street is named after "Dr. Traian Popovici," a Romanian Righteous Among Nations.

## ***Archives***

Under communism, many public archives in Romania were purged or selectively split up. This legacy means that the country's archives are fragmented. The national archives are subordinated to Ministry of Interior, the military archives subordinated to the Ministry of Defence. There are also some private archives, and the archive of the Centre for Jewish Studies is subordinated to the Jewish Federation.

Military archives are difficult to access, because they are located far from Bucharest, will grant access after multiple screenings and then allow access to only five files per day., and have a tight schedule of 9AM to 2PM.

Secret policies documents before 1972 are declassified, but still must be checked to ensure they don't contain secret documents. Researchers must know the names of the individuals to investigate. Its archives contain files from military and civil tribunals, as well as documents from Securitate about war criminals and collaborators.

The national archives provide digital copies. There is a small cost associated with access. A partnership with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has digitised in excess of 100,000 pages per year.

## ***Restitution***

Romania has made respectable advances in restitution, but several important issues remain outstanding.

From 2001 Romanians could begin to reclaim property confiscated during the war or under communism. Although no special provision was made for property looted from Jews, Jewish families were able to reclaim stolen estate.

The government created a Property Fund. In 2010, the case of *Maria Atanasiu and Others v. Romania* in the European Court of Human Rights (led to a pilot judgment to deal with the extended delays in returning seized Jewish private property. Romania responded with a law aimed at speeding the restitution and compensation for existing private property and communal property claims. In May 2016, Romania passed legislation which enabled Holocaust survivors to request prioritized processing.

### ***Opposition***

Romania is the only central European country with minimal far-right nationalist presence.

Since the 2004 elections, no political party in Romania deserving to be labelled anti-Semitic has held seats in the legislature. The “Everything for the Fatherland” Party, re-established by former members of the Iron Guard, received less than two percent of the popular vote in 2015, well below the threshold needed enter Parliament. According to Dr. Michael Shafir, the Head of Romania’s delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance, the remaining far-right today focuses on homophobic, and xenophobic sentiments, rather than anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial.

### ***Civil Society***

While the Romanian government has made significant steps towards better Holocaust memory, the public seem to have lagged behind. A survey commissioned by the Wiesel Institute, released in October 2017 found that only 41% of adults believed the Holocaust had occurred in the country, while 44% considered Antonescu a hero. The survey revealed an increase of 6% in the percentage of people who believed minorities had more rights than Romanians. Romanian football stadiums are often the site for anti-Romaslogans, such as “one million crows [Roma], a single solution: Ion Antonescu.”

The Legionary Movement historically was linked to the Orthodox Church. In 2015, various Orthodox Church organisations claimed that the Iron Guard had been “at the forefront of the struggle against

communism.” In 2017, the Wiesel Institute accused church officials of making statements that praised members of the Legionnaire movement.

Despite a ban on Legionary symbols, they persist. A January 2016 symposium was dedicated to the memory of a prominent Iron Guard leader, Gogu Puiu. Multiple Legionary organisations, including the Bratianu Foundation which recently hosted the launch of the anti-Semitic book, *The Nazi Zionism*, written by retired general Radu Theodoru.

### ***Media***

Prominent members of the Legionary Movement make regular appearances in the media.

At the same time, a new openness and acceptance of Romanian guilt is also often discussed. In July 2018 a film by Radu Jude titled “*I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians*” was released. The film portrays a director looking to re-enact the massacre of the Jews in Odessa and the challenges she faces.

### ***Jewish Community***

Before the war, the Jewish community numbered roughly 800,000. After the war, the remaining population of around 350,000 dwindled as Romania “sold” its Jews to Israel. Today, the Jewish population numbers between 3000 and 12,000 - while the Romanian Jewish population of Israel numbers around 400,000.

The Federation of Jewish Communities represents Romanian Jewry, and publishes a fortnightly review, the *Revista Culturii Mozaic*. As one of eighteen minorities recognised by the state, the Jewish community receives representation in Parliament. The government also gives grants to the community for books, newspapers, and projects.

Author: Caderyn Owen-Jones

# SLOVAKIA



**Slovakia came close to a green rating. Its government seems committed to Holocaust remembrance, including the responsibility of its puppet wartime government. But resistance from the Church and the emergence of a far-right fascistic party explains the caution yellow rating.**

## *Overview*

Slovakia infamously paid Germany for the service of taking away its Jews - 500 German marks per person. Whereas its neighbours to the north and west, Poland and the Czech Republic, can claim that they were occupied and without autonomy, the Slovaks had their own country and elected to join Hitler's war effort.

Holocaust revisionism in Slovakia revolves around how to consider the wartime republic. The far-right claims that the wartime state, essentially a Nazi puppet regime, was the first independent Slovak state and should be celebrated. The main proponent of this narrative is the far-right party Kotleba. It is anti-Islam, anti-immigrant, and its members have been known to embrace dress, speech, and symbols linked with Nazism. In the last parliamentary elections, Kotleba won 8 percent of the vote.

Question marks remain over the Church. So far, it has far refused to censure the wartime state's leader, Jozef Tiso, who was an ordained priest.

At the same time, the institutions of government and civilian life seem to be intent on improvement. The government supports education programs and teaching training seminars, participates in international remembrance occasions, and has taken significant steps toward financial restitution.

## *The Holocaust in Slovakia*

The Nazis invaded Czechoslovakia in 1938. Hitler established the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia from what remained of the Czech lands and invited Slovak leader Jozef Tiso to Berlin to talk about the future of Slovak independence. After consulting with the Slovak parliament, Tiso agreed to align with the Reich. Slovakia joined the Axis powers in 1940.

At the beginning of the war, Slovakia was home to nearly 89,000 Jews, a large portion of whom lived in

Bratislava. From the beginning of the Nazi-backed Slovak State, official measures were taken to discriminate against them. In March of 1942, Slovakia began deporting its Jewish population. The Hlinka Guard militia along with Slovak police and the Slovak branch of the Volunteer SS carried out the deportations to work camps in Slovakia and then to the border where German officials took over. It was the first Axis country to agree to deport its Jews, and one of only two in the war that paid Germany a 'relocation' fee for each Jew deported. Allegedly the money was to ensure deportees' living conditions in their new homes.

When the Catholic Church's Bratislava representative informed Tiso that the Nazis were murdering the deported Slovak Jews, the deportations were halted. Slovakia became a relatively safe place for Jews to reside for a time. In August 1944, democrats and Communists undertook an unsuccessful armed insurrection aimed at overthrowing the Nazi puppet state. In retaliation, the Nazis began a full military occupation of the country and resumed deportations of the Jews. More than half of the country's remaining Jews were deported by the SS and thousands other were killed by the Slovak Hlinka Guard or the SS.

The Red Army occupied Slovakia in April 1945, driving out the Nazis shortly before the end of the war in Europe. In total, more than 70,000 of Slovakia's 89,000 Jews were killed. The vast majority of survivors emigrated after the war. Today, about 3,000 Jews live in Slovakia, with the largest communities in Bratislava and Košice.

### ***Timeline***

- June 1945: Czechoslovakia reestablished.
- 1946-47: Trials held for war criminals. Tiso executed.
- 1948: Czechoslovakia incorporated as a Soviet Socialist Republic.
- 1952: Communists hold Slánský trials against 'bourgeois nationalists.' 11 Jews (out of 14 total defendants) convicted of conspiracy and are mostly executed.
- 1968: Following the Prague Spring, the country is under military occupation until 1989.
- 1989: Czechoslovakia secedes from Soviet Union.
- 1990: Slovak government passes "Declaration on the deportation of Jews from Slovakia to concentration camps in 1942 and 1944" apologizing for the crimes committed against the Jews.
- 1993: Czechoslovakia dissolves in the "Velvet Divorce" and the first independent Slovak state is formed.
- 1993: First President of the Slovak Republic weeps apologetically at opening of USHMM in Washington DC.
- 2000: Slovakia begins commemorating victims of the Holocaust and racial persecution on September 9<sup>th</sup>, the anniversary of the passing of the Jewish Codex, the 1941 law that



consolidated and expanded anti-Semitic policies.

- 2001: Holocaust denial made illegal.
- 2003: Ministry of Education begins commemorating September 9<sup>th</sup> in schools throughout the country with field trips to museums and memorials, meetings with survivors, and facilitated discussions about anti-Semitism.
- 2004: Slovakia joins European Union.
- 2005: Town of Topolcany officially apologizes for a pogrom which occurred there shortly after the war.
- 2013: Catholic church begins participating in September 9<sup>th</sup> events commemorating the passing of the Jewish Codex.
- 2013: Marian Kotleba, leader of far-right party "Our Slovakia" becomes governor of Banska Bystrica province.
- 2016: Sereď Holocaust Museum opened at the site of former concentration camp (the only preserved camp in Slovakia).
- 2016: Our Slovakia party wins 14 seats in national parliament with 8% of the vote.

### **Government**

The current government, led by the Slovak National Party, has demonstrated a willingness to confront the facts of history and to make amends with the remaining Jewish population. Andrej Danko is the chair of the party and the Speaker of the National Slovak Council, has led the charge against Kotleba, the far-right politician whose party ("Kotleba - The People's Party Our Slovakia") harbors fascist tendencies.

Danko wants to create a commission of intellectuals, judges, and politicians to draw up laws that will abolish Kotleba's party and make the formation of such groups illegal. He is pushing for the Council to adopt a motion with a clear definition of anti-Semitism. All of the other parties in parliament support him in rejecting the Kotleba party.

The Slovak government has apologized multiple times for Slovakia's role in the Holocaust. In 2004, then Prime Minister Robert Fico said, saying "I am not able to tell you anything stronger or more personal, but that I express a sincere apology for all those that were such a failure. Only the descendants of those who suffered and died may forgive them."

This represents a giant change. Under the Communists, no acknowledgement was offered to Jews. They had no interest in highlighting the particular experience of the Jews; it was counterproductive to their vision of a world without religion. Under the Communists narrative, the Nazis served as the villain against all of Slovak society and highlighting the persecution of the Jews would have distracted from this

point.

During the 1950s, the Communists held the Slánský trials against 'bourgeois nationalists,' 11 out of 14 of whom were Jews. Most of those convicted were executed. Jews had long been victim of anti-Semitic myths alleging international Jewish conspiracies, and so they were a perfect target for the Communists' campaign against "cosmopolitanism."

During the brief period of 1964-1968 during which Czechoslovakia began to open up a little there was a short break in the silence about the war's Jewish victims. After the Soviet invasion, Jews stopped existing again. Only in the 1990s, following the Velvet Divorce and the formation of a truly independent Slovak state, was the country's wartime history pried open and examined.

At first, the dominant narrative propagated by historians and laypersons alike was that Tiso had had no choice but to bow to Hitler's pressure. The newly reemerged Catholic church made it clear that it felt Tiso should never have been executed. This led to a rehabilitation of sorts, in which even liberal politicians were sympathetic to Tiso.

This narrative has fallen out of the mainstream, driven in no small part by the pressures of the European Union's membership requirements. While the Church has continued to stay quiet about Tiso with the exception of a few priests, the mainstream political establishment has acknowledged the country's culpability and been supportive of efforts to improve understanding of the Holocaust in Slovakia.

### ***Education***

Education efforts have benefited in recent years from concerted efforts by both government and NGOs. The country has a nationalized curriculum, so schools must include the history of the Shoah in their curricula, though there is a fair amount of leeway for teachers. While many teachers are eager to tackle this difficult topic, the Shoah is often taught as something that happened elsewhere, not to or in Slovakia, but rather abroad in Poland. Slovakia, the narrative goes, was merely another victim of a brutal war and subsequent Communist occupation.

Another obstacle is the country's religious history. Because Jozef Tiso was a priest and still has standing in the Catholic community, teaching the Holocaust feels to some like an attack on a figure who remains a religious and political hero.

To its credit, the government is taking concrete steps to improve Holocaust education. It pays for seminars for teachers to learn about how to teach the Holocaust and funds free education programs for students at Sereď Memorial and Museum located at the former labor camp.

Slovakia still lacks university level studies about Judaism. While an institute of Jewish studies existed at Comenius University in Bratislava, there was not enough interest to sustain the program.

### ***Commemoration***

The Sereď Holocaust Museum opened in 2016. Located at the site of a former concentration camp, the museum represents a significant achievement.

The Ministry of Culture also operates the National Museum of Jewish Culture in Bratislava. Open in 1994. It documents and teaches about Jewish history in Slovakia as well as the Holocaust. In addition to hosting educational programs, performances, lectures, and seminars for teachers, the museum attracts many tourists and is visited by thousands of school children each year. The museum assists with the creation of Holocaust memorials around the country and abroad, including a permanent exhibition on Slovakia's Jews at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

### ***Legal Environment***

Holocaust denial has been illegal since 2001. The law states that

who(ever) publicly denies, denies, approves or tries to justify the Holocaust, crimes of regimes based on fascist ideology, crimes of regimes based on communist ideology or crimes of other similar movements that use violence, the threat of violence or the threat of other serious harm with the aim of suppressing the fundamental rights and freedoms of persons shall be punished by imprisonment of six months to three years.

The same statute functions as both the ban on Holocaust denial and the law against siding with or denying the crimes committed by the Communists. Nazi atrocities are framed not as a unique effort to exterminate a people based on their ethnicity, but another one in a series of efforts to make life more difficult for the people living in Slovakia.

### ***Archives***

As far as public state-run archives are concerned, all materials on the Shoah are available and can be accessed by the same protocols as all other documents. This is true of archives all over the country including publicly run or funded institutions and museums. Documents are freely accessible to Slovaks and foreigners alike, and through a partnership with the United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum, documents are being digitized for posterity.

Church archives are a different situation. There is no federally guaranteed access to archival materials. Rather, the terms of access are determined on a case-by-case basis. Researchers need to get permission from the founders of each individual site whose resources they wish to consult.

### ***Restitution***

The government adopted measures to provide compensation to victims in 2002. The Jewish community was to receive 8.5 million Slovak koruna, divided into three parts: one for those living outside Slovakia in Israel, the US, and elsewhere; one to compensate for property; and one for the Slovak Jews who remained after the war. Some communal properties had been restored in 1989 but there had been a deadline to apply by and many never reclaimed their rightful property and only 10% of Jewish property was returned.

### ***Opposition***

The most prominent platform for Holocaust revisionism in Slovak politics comes from Kotleba - The People's Party Our Slovakia, which is named for its leader, Marian Kotleba. The right-wing conservative Christian party, considered by many to be bona fide neo-Nazis, wants Slovakia to leave the EU and NATO, which it has repeatedly called a terrorist organization. The party platform includes preserving "traditional Christian values instead of western liberalism which encourages atheism, materialism, consumerism, dangerous sects and sexual deviations." It also mentions taking measures to make sure that citizens are not "terrorized by gypsy or other extremists."

While Kotleba's embrace of Tiso and his regime are ample evidence of the party's problematic stance on the Holocaust, the affinities toward Nazism go even further. Only recently did Kotleba stop dressing in a uniform styled after the Hlinka Guard, the Nazi-sponsored militia of the wartime Slovak State. In addition to using the symbols of the wartime state, Kotleba and his followers have additionally been known to use greetings and sayings associated with the Nazis. For instance, he has promised to solve the problems created by "Gypsy parasites."

Kotleba's MP Stanislav Mizik was recently tried in court for hate speech after a Facebook post appeared on his account criticized the President's decision to bestow honours on Jewish Slovaks. The post claimed that such an act "turns logic on its head (because the nation's founders) had a negative relationship to the Jews due to their selling out of the Slovak nation, usury and also because of religious issues." Mizik was ultimately found not guilty after the judge ruled it could not be definitely established whether Mizik was the one who has posted the text in question to his account.

### ***Civil Society***

The Church has a troubled relationship to the Holocaust in Slovakia, as Jozef Tiso, the leader of the Nazi-aligned state, was a priest in addition to a politician. As a result, there has been a struggle since the war ended over how to properly remember Tiso. Because of the Church's historic protection of Tiso as one of their own, interfaith reconciliation has perhaps been slower to get off the ground in Slovakia than in other countries such as, say, Poland, where there is a long if not popular tradition of Christians embracing their own moral responsibility to the Jews and the crimes committed against them. See Czeslaw Milosz' 1943 poem "A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto" or John Paul II's 1979 speech at Auschwitz.

After 1989, the Church voiced strong criticism of Tiso's 1947 execution, saying that it had been wrong to kill a priest, regardless of his role in the wartime state. In 1990, Bishop Ján Korec (who has since been made a Cardinal) inaugurated an elementary school named for Tiso in his hometown. The Church, in a response that would be repeated time and again in such situations, stated that it was Korec's individual initiative, declining either to support or excoriate Tiso.

This pro-Tiso sentiment clearly has not disappeared. In 2007, Korec said of Tiso, "I would say he foiled, and wanted to foil, many bad things," and in 2008, Ján Sokol, Archbishop of Trnava celebrated a mass on the anniversary of Tiso's execution. Again, Church officials declined to cast judgement, merely referencing the Church's regular practice of honoring priests and referring any further questions or criticism to Sokol.

While Catholic officials began attending the September 9 commemoration Holocaust remembrance exercises in 2013, the Church continues to avoid commenting on Tiso's legacy. In 2014, Catholic priest Emil Floris said during a ceremony to commemorate the National Slovak Uprising: "they took the Jews to concentration camps. And do you know why? Because there was hatred toward them, but those who are hated often do it to themselves." In a country as deeply religious as Slovakia, the Church exercises an outsized influence. Its reticence to officially address the terror inflicted by Tiso not only reveals its attitude towards its own role in the war, but additionally suggests a larger resistance by Slovaks generally to come to terms with their history.

### ***Commemoration***

A slew of organizations research, commemorate, and teach about the Holocaust in Slovakia. In Bratislava, the Jewish Community Museum, located in an old synagogue and run by the community offers seminars and workshops to students about the Shoah. The Holocaust Documentation Center civic association, affiliated with the Federated Jewish Communities of Slovakia, conducts research and prepares educational materials not only on the Holocaust but also on topics such as xenophobia and racism.

EDAH is an NGO that creates educational films about Jewish history in addition to completing research and maintaining memorials (and identifying prospective ones). The Milan Šimečka Foundation holds educational programs and has even created an online training course for teachers called “Holocaust as a Tool in Attitude Education.”

There are also *stolpersteine* (stumbling stones) commemorating the homes where Jews lived before being deported, sponsored by various organizations and individuals.

### ***Media***

Since 1989, there have always been a few anti-Semitic publications. Today, one called *Zem & Vek* (Earth and Age), a typically anti-Western, pro-Russian publication fond of castigating all-powerful Jews and the LGBT community, such as in one issue titled “Israel, Holocaust, and anti-Semitism: On the Altar of Zionism.” The main personality behind the publication, Tibor Eliot Rostás, is an admirer of Vladimir Putin and *Zem & Vek* has received Russian funds.

Such publications represent the fringe of the media landscape, though, and should not be taken as indicative of the overall climate. According to Professor Pavol Mešťan, Director of the Museum of Jewish Culture, “Journalists in the majority of newspapers and magazines, and in electronic media as well, have accomplished a great deal of work in commemorating and remembering the history of the Jews in the period of the Holocaust with profiles and memories of the people who personally went through the ordeal.”

### ***Jewish Community***

The two rabbis working in Bratislava are transplants from abroad. They have come to Slovakia to help lead a revival. According to the website maintained by the community, “Bratislava does not have any special kosher stores or restaurants. To purchase kosher food, we either follow kosher lists compiled by the rabbinate or travel to kosher shops in Vienna.”

The community is quite small – about 3,000 in Slovakia and just 500-800 in Bratislava – and according to those interviewed for this report, today Jews live in peace for the most part. The main targets of the alt-right’s bigotry are clearly the Roma and the (almost nonexistent) refugee population of Slovakia.

Author: Jeremy Epstein

# SLOVENIA



**Slovenia was late in acknowledging the Holocaust on its territory and continues to worry more about communist crimes against its collaborationist Home Guard than about Nazi mass murder.**

## *Overview*

After a slow start, Slovenia is moving to come to terms with its role in the Holocaust.

The Jewish tragedy long was pushed to the margins of Slovenian public life. To an extent, this omission is understandable. Although almost all of Slovenia's small 900 person Jewish community were killed, this was far less than the hundreds of thousands of Slovene victims of fascism and communism.

Slovenia's 2006 membership in the European Union and its decision to join the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance in 2011 has kickstarted support for Holocaust commemoration. New textbooks are being assigned to history classrooms that emphasize that Slovenia, too, had Jewish citizens who died in the Holocaust. While the previous right wing government has led many to fear a rise in so called "anti-Semitism without Jews," it was consistent in support of international norms.

At the same time, Slovenia's commemoration of the Holocaust often remains mixed with commemoration of ethnically Slovenian victims and soldiers. The issue of relative victimization persists in many occupied countries, and the schizophrenic nature of Slovenia's wartime occupation by three different powers complicates the story. While the Holocaust is not at the centre of public consciousness in Slovenia, many related issues are, from refugee policies, to Israel, to right wing nationalism.

More work must be done to continue to spur public debate about the relationship Slovenes have with the Holocaust, why it matters, and what changes can be made on a societal level to ensure that Slovenians understand the importance of Holocaust remembrance. Civil institutions, including the Roman Catholic Church, have a responsibility to recognize Slovenia's role in this dark history.

## *The Holocaust in Slovenia*

On April 6, 1941 German, Italian, and Hungarian invaders divided the country. The German occupiers instituted their standard racial policies and measures against Jews. After the fall of Italy's fascist government in September 1943, Germany occupied the Italian zone, persecuting the few remaining Jewish inhabitants. The Nazis occupied Hungary in the spring of 1944, initiating a mass persecution of Jews under Hungary's jurisdiction, including the Jewish community in Prekmurje in Northeastern Slovenia where most Slovenian Jews resided. Ninety percent of Slovenia's small Jewish population died in the Holocaust, most of them at Auschwitz.

While Germany was the main perpetrator of the genocide, the Slovenian Home Guard played a significant role in fighting partisans, opposing communists - and deporting the Jewish population. Founded by right wing Slovenes, the Home Guard functioned like most collaborationist forces in Axis-occupied Europe during World War II, assisting the Germans in anti-Partisan operations. After the war, the Home Guard fled to Austria, but were turned away and forced to return to Slovenia, where the new communist regime killed them en masse.

This massacre complicates Slovenia's Holocaust remembrance. For many Slovenes, the execution of the Home Guard stands as a testament to the cruelty of communism. Commemoration of the Home Guard often is accompanied by attempts to absolve the Home Guard of their sins in the war itself, in order to make their execution all the more tragic. This kind of commemoration started after the fall of Yugoslavia in 1991 and continues to this day.

### ***Timeline***

- 1945-50: Executions of Domobranci (Slovenian Home Guard) take place by victorious Yugoslav forces. This event shapes Slovenia's remembrance culture.
- 1983: 'Auschwitz', an encyclopedia of Slovenian victims of Nazi concentration camps is published. No Jews are included in the volume.
- 1991: Slovenia garners independence from Yugoslavia, precipitating an increase in national remembrance.
- 2001: Maribor Synagogue is officially opened as a Jewish museum.
- 2011: Slovenia joins IHRA.
- 2013: Levana synagogue becomes a Holocaust museum.

### ***Government***

Slovenia's political climate is in flux. Elections were held in June, and it remains unclear how the new government will handle Holocaust remembrance. A left-wing government led by former comedian



Marjan Sarec instead has formed a government. Interviewees who worked in the Holocaust Remembrance field expressed relief that this government was formed in lieu of a right-wing nationalist government.

The key question concerns the Slovene Home Guard. According to historian Luthar of the University of Maribor, the state funded Study Center for National Reconciliation is responsible for systematically removing historical references to Slovenia's collaboration in the Holocaust from official accounts.

### ***Education***

Although the Holocaust is typically taught in schools, Maribor Synagogue curator Boris Hajdinjak says textbooks are antiquated and do not address the topic for younger students. The textbooks focus on facts and figures rather than doing work in trying to elicit emotional reactions. According to historian Oto Luthar, a growing number of teachers are neglecting the Holocaust subject, or only briefly covering it, due to the controversial nature of the material.

### ***Commemoration***

Slovenia cares about its past, and memorials are common. The Study Center for National Reconciliation, a department of the Ministry of Justice, sponsored a plaque that "commemorates victims of totalitarian violence, including fascism, Nazism and communism." This memorialisation risks creating a false equivalence between the suffering of Slovenians and Jews.

Despite this dedication, state sponsored memorials for Jewish victims remain scarce. A memorial at the train station in Murska Sobota, where Jews were first deported from Slovenia, was inaugurated in 2010; before no memorials existed dedicated to the Holocaust. Another museum in Levanda opened in 2013. It focuses on the Holocaust but is located in a remote region and unheard of by most Slovenians.

The country's main research and remembrance institution is the Maribor Synagogue, a 15th century synagogue-turned museum. The synagogue is a strong symbol of the long history of Jewish life in Slovenia, but its main mission is to curate local Jewish history, not pursue Holocaust remembrance.

The curators at the Maribor Synagogue are working to correct this by publishing record of Slovenian Jewish victims. Stolpersteine have been installed in Maribor, and more are on their way thanks to the synagogue researchers' work. Other Jewish historical sites are being renovated and memorialized with both private and public funds, particularly at graveyards in such places as Nova Gorica.

Even so, few reminders exist testifying to the Jewish presence in Slovenia. Maribor Synagogue curator Hajdinjak, points to the efforts to rename streets after prominent Jewish citizens of the city, such as lauded post Holocaust Slovenian-Jewish author Berta Bojetu. Despite the Jewish influence on the history of the city of Maribor, no political or civic will exists to name a street after her, or any of a number of other former Jewish persons of interest from the city.

### ***Restitution***

Restitution is difficult in Slovenia's situation since acceptance of guilt is not taken as a given. Further, the small size of the Jewish population and the poor records kept through the past seven decades of postwar history have made finding and restoring lost property difficult. Still, historian Oto Luthar and others have helped with several Jewish families and heirs and almost a dozen cases have successfully reallocated lost property or damages.

### ***Opposition***

The main opposition party in Slovenia, and indeed the largest party receiving 24% of the vote, is the Slovenian Democratic Party. It is a right wing party with a track record of vilifying communists, exonerating the Slovenian collaborationist Domobranci (Home Guard), and being associated with neo-Nazi groups such as the so called "Blood and Honor" group.

Most of this rhetoric is on the fringes of the party, and this connection to Nazism is ostensibly anti-communist rather than anti-Jewish. It remains to be seen whether the party will step back from this kind of radicalization and denounce all forms of totalitarianism, or whether it will continue to glorify the country's fascist past.

### ***Civil Society***

The Holocaust remains a marginal topic in everyday Slovenian life. It most often arises in discussions and debate about Slovenian nationalism and with regard to current events in Israel. While this dialogue is not a significant part of the national discourse, it is a growing matter of concern. A number of institutions in civil society fail to their influence to enact positive change, namely the Roman Catholic church.

Notable problems in civil society exist with regard to its fascist past. The Home Guard, the Nazi collaborationist force, is commemorated at sites such as Grahovo in the Notranjsko region. These are

soldiers who collaborated with the Nazis, yet it is still acceptable to commemorate them. public commemoration of the Home Guard still takes place openly. In the media, too, this commemoration of Nazi apologists and collaborators lingers.

According to anthropologist Irena Sumi, anti-Semitism remains a significant concern, but it is directed against new forces. Slovenia's relationship to Israel, for example, is often questioned by anti-Semites both on the right and left wings of the political spectrum. Even among the intellectual community it seems that there is a feeling that Israel is not treating Slovenia with respect. Maribor synagogue curator Hajdinjak described how members of Yad Vashem went to Belgrade to get information about the Holocaust in Slovenia, and Sasa Petejan described how, when a group of Slovenian teachers visited Yad Vashem, they were disappointed to see little recognition of the plight of Slavic peoples in the concentration camps alongside the Jews.

While no significant private institution dedicates itself to Holocaust remembrance in Slovenia, religious communities have significant influence on the public discourse and shape remembrance in the country. Chief among these is the Catholic church. Almost 75% of Slovenes are Catholic. According to Irena Sumi, the Catholic church has been known to bless memorials to collaborators, such as the one at Grahovo. The Slovene church was often complacent during the Holocaust, and church leaders have not made any statements of regret for this complacency.

### ***Jewish Community***

Though the community is small, Slovene Jews play an important role in Holocaust remembrance in Slovenia remains strong. The community serves as a watchdog against the rising tide of anti-Semitism, and their media presence and influence is significant relative to their size. Above all, the Jews in Slovenia serve as a reminder of the long history of Jewish life in Slovenia.

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