

ANTI-SEMITISM IN POSTCOMMUNIST CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

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Introduction¹

A number of high-profile gatherings on anti-Semitism have been organized in Europe over the past two years.² With some variations in focus, they all addressed the wave of anti-Jewish incidents that spread across the European Union member states in recent years, reaching its climax in the spring of 2002 when several synagogues and other Jewish institutions in Paris, Brussels, Berlin, and London were burned, Jewish cemeteries profaned, and individual Jews attacked.³ The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) commissioned three reports on anti-Semitism in Europe in the past two years: *Manifestations of Anti-Semitism in the EU 2002-2003*; *Perceptions of Anti-Semitism in the European Union*;⁴ and *Evaluation of available data on Anti-Semitism in the 10 candidate countries of Eastern and Central*

Europe,⁵ relying mainly on data gathered by several research centers that monitor anti-Semitism around the world, maintain databases of anti-Jewish incidents, and publish studies and country reports.⁶

Judging by the findings of the controversial⁷ EUMC report on *Manifestations of Anti-Semitism in the EU 2002-2003*, anti-Jewish incidents in Western Europe have been connected to extreme nationalist and fundamentalist response to the Israel-Palestinian conflict and committed predominantly by “disaffected young

⁵ Šumi, Irena and Hannah Starman (2004) *Evaluation of available data on Anti-Semitism in the 10 candidate countries of Eastern and Central Europe : EUMC Report*. Ljubljana: INV.

⁶ For example, the Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Anti-Semitism and Racism at Tel Aviv University, The Coordination Forum for Countering Anti-Semitism, The Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Anti-Semitism, Zentrum für Anti-Semitismusforschung Technische Universität Berlin, La Ligue Internationale Contre le Racisme et l'Antisémitisme, and others.

⁷ The EUMC was at the center of controversy when it was accused by European Jewish leaders of trying to shelve an original report which pointed to young Muslims and pro-Palestinian groups as the main perpetrators of the attacks. The report that was finally published concludes that “the largest group of the perpetrators of anti-Semitic activities appears to be young, disaffected white Europeans,” and adds that “a further source of anti-Semitism in some countries was young Muslims of North African or Asian extraction.”

¹ I would like to thank Dr Irena Šumi for a thorough reading of the first draft of this article.

² The OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism was held in Vienna in June 2003 and in Berlin in April 2004. The European Commission organized a seminar on Anti-Semitism in Europe in Brussels in February 2004, and the UN Conference on Anti-Semitism was held in June 2004, to name just a few.

³ For a list of Anti-Semitic incidents (with links to full accounts) see <http://www.haaretzdaily.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=169625&contrassID=2&subContrassID=15&sbSubContrassID=0&listSrc=Y>.

⁴ Both reports are available at the EUMC website: <http://eumc.eu.int/eumc/index.php>.

Muslims” of North African or Palestinian origin (EUMC 2004: 20). The volatile mix of anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli hostility transmitted through new means of communication such as the Internet⁸ has become known in the wider media as the ‘new anti-Semitism’ and has gained enough currency to claim several monographs⁹ and numerous articles to its name.¹⁰ Anti-Jewish incidents perpetrated in Western European countries such as Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Germany, and Great Britain have attracted considerable attention and raised great concerns, both because of the unprecedented violence of the attacks, and the shift of public perception of their perpetrators from neo-Nazi skinheads to young Muslim immigrants. As noted above, the responses of national public authorities, international organizations such as the OSCE, and of the European Commission have been swift.¹¹

⁸ A special OSCE meeting explored the relationship between racist, xenophobic, and anti-Semitic propaganda on the Internet, and hate crimes (Paris, June 2004).

⁹ Chesler, Phyllis (2003). *The new anti-Semitism: the current crisis and what we must do about it*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; Iganski, Paul and Barry A Kosmin (2003). *The new Anti-Semitism?: debating Judeophobia in 21st-century Britain*. London: Profile; Foxman, Abraham (2003) *Never Again? The Threat of the New Anti-Semitism*. San Francisco: Harper; Taguieff, Pierre-André (2004). *Rising from the Muck: The New Anti-Semitism in EU*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publisher (original title: *La Nouvelle judéophobie*); Drad, Raphaël (2001). *Sous le signe de Sion : L'antisémitisme nouveau est arrivé*. Paris : Michalon ; Goldnadel, Gilles William (2001). *Le Nouveau bréviaire de la haine*. Paris : Ramsay; Finkielkraut, Alain (2003). *Au nom de l'Autre : Réflexions sur l'antisémitisme qui vient*. Paris : Gallimard ; Attal, Sylvain, 2004, *La plaie : Enquête sur le nouvel antisémitisme*. Paris : Editions Denoël.

¹⁰ See also a discussion on new anti-Semitism in the EUMC report *Manifestations ...* (pp. 24-25).

¹¹ The Hessian CDU politician Martin Hohmann was promptly expelled from his parliamentary group for his anti-Semitic remarks in November 2003. Jürgen Möllemann, deputy chairman of the

The situation in Central and Eastern Europe is different in several regards that I propose to discuss in this article. In contrast to Western Europe, where the Holocaust has been incorporated into public conscience and has thus delineated the contours of acceptable public discourse about the Jews, the collapse of communism in an “area basically devoid of democratic traditions and traditions of tolerance and pluralism” (Braham 1994: 9) has engendered a fierce xenophobic, nationalist reaction, which endorsed anti-Semitic pronouncements as an acceptable feature of public discourse. It is important to note that those who promote anti-Jewish discourse would not recognize their pronouncements as anti-Semitic, which has led to what Volovici called a “paradoxical situation” (1994: 4) of “antisemitism without Jews and without antisemites” (Cornea 1993).

Another notable difference between anti-Semitism such as it was displayed in recent years in Western Europe and that of the former communist Europe is that the latter’s sometimes vehement anti-Jewish rhetoric, and the absence of any political correctness with regard to Jews and the Holocaust, seldom translates into overt and violent manifestations of anti-Semitism (Braham 1994). Instead, anti-Semitic and anti-Jewish remarks are used in various contexts, ranging from political (‘unmasking’ political opponents as Jewish, for example) to economic, ideological, national, theological, etc. (Volovici 1994). The break with communism in Eastern Europe in many cases produced “a specific reinvention of anti-Semitism without Jews in which Jews remain categorically alien, a threat” (Luthar and Šumi 2004: 30). As Yehuda Bauer put it, “the non-existent Jews have become a

liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP), was forced to resign after voicing anti-Semitic remarks in August 2002. In December 2001, an international spat has developed over disparaging comments about Israel (“that shitty little country Israel”), allegedly made by the French ambassador to London at a private dinner party, to give just a few examples.

major issue in public discourse” (Bauer 1992: 8).

In some fringes of domestic politics, Jews were openly held responsible for both communism and the hardships caused by its collapse (unemployment, decline of living standards, etc; see Braham 1994). The latter sentiment was further exacerbated in some cases by the debates connected to the restitution of Jewish property (Levin 1998; Karadjova 2004), while the former often figured prominently in propaganda campaigns of extremist parties that incorporated “traditional anti-Semitic and Jewish-conspirational themes” focusing on the communist-Jewish linkage (Braham 1994:11), but also on capitalist-Jewish linkage that culminated in the concept of globalization as the ‘new Jewish world order’ (Vago 2002). Furthermore, manifestations of anti-Semitism generally intertwined distortions or denial of the Holocaust, and various efforts at deflection of responsibility for the local persecution of Jews (Luthar and Šumi 2004; Shafir 2002; Braham 1994), as well as ‘history cleansing’ (Braham 1994; Vago 2002). Last but not least, Central and East European countries’ heritage of anti-Zionism and criticism of Israel (Sekelj 1997) lent itself nicely to a channelling of anti-Semitism to virulent criticism of Israel.¹²

Legacies of communism and patterns of anti-Semitism in postcommunist Central and Eastern Europe

Among the many legacies of communism in Central and Eastern Europe that have been studied in the abundant literature on post-socialism, two are of particular importance for the subject under scrutiny here: the

¹² The best approach to distinguish between anti-Semitism and legitimate criticism of Israel that I have come across was proposed by the Former Swedish Deputy Prime Minister Per Ahlmark who said: “The line is crossed when people begin to use anti-Semitic terminology to describe Israel’s actions” (quoted in Yair Sheleg, “A Campaign of Hatred,” in *Ha’aretz*, May 5, 2002).

legacy of organized or systematic forgetting and deflective negationism of the Holocaust, and the legacy of anti-Zionism/anti-Israelism.¹³

The “state-organised forgetting” (Shafir 2002: 4) that marked the former communist regimes’ uptake on the Holocaust was characterized by “de-Judaization of the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis and/or their local emulators or official elites” (Shafir 2002: 4). As Peter Novick (1999) persuasively claimed, de-Judaization of the Holocaust was also present in the post-WWII United States where it was employed to achieve two immediate and closely linked political goals: the fight against communism, and rehabilitation of Germany. Both foreign policy priorities rested on a conceptualization of WWII that represented the Nazi atrocities as an inherent aberration of totalitarian regimes, and ignored the specificity of the Nazi assault against European Jewry. The purpose of this conceptual move was to pave the way for Germany’s rehabilitation by essentially representing it as a victim of totalitarianism, equivalent to that practiced in the Soviet Union (i.e. communism).

The treatment of the Holocaust in communist Central and Eastern Europe was also subject to serious political consideration, albeit with a different spin to it. It was characterized by two main features: on the one hand, the Jewish victims were denied their Jewishness and were aggregated in the count of local victims, and on the other hand, local perpetrators were conveniently assimilated to the ‘Nazi aggressor.’ Jewish victims were thus incorporated in the general category of victims of fascism (Deák 1994: 118), while the own-nation participation in the persecution of Jews was minimized (represented as insignificant and marginal) and externalized (transferred to members of other nations, namely Germans). Michael Shafir (2002) offers several examples of

¹³ Authors mostly use the terms anti-Zionism and anti-Israelism interchangeably.

both. Boris Tepulchowski's book *History of the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945)* which passes as representative of post-Stalinist Soviet historiography, for example, provides a telling illustration of the former: referring to the gas chambers in Auschwitz, Maidanek, and Treblinka, the author never once mentions that they were constructed mainly to physically eliminate the Jews; instead, he wrote that six million "Polish citizens" had been murdered by the Nazis (Vidal-Naquet 1995). Similarly, the monument that was erected at Auschwitz in the 1960's carries the inscription "Four million people suffered and died here at the hands of the Nazi murderers between 1940 and 1945." Jews were subsumed under other nationalities, and – due to the Polish term for Jews¹⁴ – came last on the alphabetically ordered list (Steinlauf 1996). The example of the Jedwabne massacre¹⁵ of 1,600 Jews killed by their Polish neighbors in July 1941 (Gross 2001) provides an eloquent illustration of the deflection of guilt to the Nazis. Although the facts of the massacre were not unknown in the first decade of Poland's communist rule (Fox 2001) and reports that some of the Jedwabne perpetrators had been put to trial and even convicted in 1949 and 1953, the monument that was erected on site by the communist authorities in the 1960's claimed that "Jews were burnt alive by the Gestapo and Hitlerite gendarmerie" (Fox 2001: 90).¹⁶

Both the denial of the victims' Jewish identity and minimization/externalisation of responsibility for their persecution helped the communist leaders to consolidate

communism as a bulwark against fascism, and represent their countries as the only true victims of the fascist aggression. István Deák's remarks (1994: 111) on the situation in Hungary could apply across the board in Central and Eastern Europe: "World War II was officially remembered as the era when 'communists and other progressive elements' had struggled against, or became the victims of, 'Hitlerite and Horthyite fascism.' Somehow, there seemed to have been no Jews among these heroes and victims; instead, all were 'anti-fascist Hungarians.'" Considering the fact that the great majority of Jews perished in the territories of Central and Eastern Europe and that their annihilation was also "made possible by crimes initiated and committed at the order of Nazi-allied authorities; by those initiated and perpetrated by local fascists; or by collaboration, indeed the effective participation in their perpetration by individuals from among the populations conquered by the Reich" (Shafir 2002: 24), coming to terms with the WWII past was a particularly delicate issue in the postcommunist period.

According to Shafir's typology of deflective negationism which characterized both the communist and the post-communist era, the guilt for the Holocaust was either deflected onto the Nazis (as the Jedwabne case illustrates) or a nation other than one's own, to the non-representative and marginal 'fringe' that committed 'aberrations' "in the country's otherwise spotless history of relations with the Jews" (Shafir 2002: 37), or to the Jews themselves.

The example of Romanian communist historians' treatment of the massacre of some 8,000-12,000 Jews carried out in Iași in late June 1941 by local authorities, the Romanian army, members of the Iron Guard, and the SS (Shafir 2002) is significant. These historians either deflect the responsibility to the Nazis (Minei 1978: 26; quoted in Shafir 2002), or claim that only "some stray Romanian soldiers" (Karetki and Covaci 1978: 75, quoted by Shafir 2002: 37), "some Legionnaires and

¹⁴ Żydzi in Polish.

¹⁵ For the first full account of the massacre that triggered the longest and the most important debate on the Holocaust in postcommunist Poland see Gross (2001); for an account of the debate see Michlic (2002).

¹⁶ It was not until 2001 that the Polish president Aleksander Kwasniewski officially apologized for the part played by Poles in the 1941 pogrom and unveiled a new monument: its inscription remembers those who died, but refrains from naming their murderers.

other declassified elements” (Simion 1979: 132, quoted in Shafir 2002: 37) had joined the perpetrators “at their own initiative” (Karetki and Covaci 1978: 75, quoted in Shafir 2002: 37), and “organized a pogrom in Iași over the head of the Romanian authorities, which has practically lost control over the town” (Simion 1979: 132, quoted in Shafir 2002: 37). Examples of deflections to the ‘fringe’ are abundant (Braham 1994) and are on the increase since the collapse of communism, especially in countries that sought to rehabilitate national leaders who collaborated with the Nazi Germany in the war against the Soviet Union, namely Marshal Jean Antonescu in Romania (Eskenasy 1994; Ioanid 1994), Father Josef Tiso in Slovakia (Meštan 2000), and Admiral Miklos Horthy in Hungary (Deák 1994).

The guilt for the Holocaust is frequently attributed to the Jews themselves, and this particular type of deflection features an array of anti-Semitic affirmations. Although the deicidal justification according to which the Holocaust was the price that the deicidal people had to pay for having crucified Christ (Meštan 2000) has not yet lost its currency, the most widespread arguments blaming the Jews for the Holocaust are grounded in conspiracy theories that vary in sophistication and ingenuity. A Hungarian publisher of *Mein Kampf*, Aron Monus, for example, argued in his book *Les secrets de l'empire nietzschéen*¹⁷ (1992) that the Jews paid Hitler to carry out the Holocaust, portraying Hitler as a Zionist agent who worked towards the creation of the State of Israel.¹⁸ Similarly, Arvéd Grébert's contribution to the volume *An Attempt at a Political Profile of Jozef Tiso* (1992) argued that the international Jewry and the Zionists supported Hitler and provoked the war in order to bring about the establishment of the Jewish state (quoted in Shafir 2002: 43). A

¹⁷ Translated as *Conspiracy: The Empire of Nietzsche*.

¹⁸ A variant of this claim would have Adolf Eichmann pass for a Zionist agent.

variation on that theme claims that Zionism prevented assimilation, the failure of which in turn provoked the Holocaust (Meštan 2000).

Another cluster of conspiracy-type arguments focuses on the claim that Jews forced Hitler into self-defense by boycotting German goods, and driving towards the war that Hitler desperately sought to avoid (Vidal-Naquet 1995), or that it was Jewish disloyalty and even aggression that triggered a defensive response. Shafir (2002) quotes several examples of the latter from Romania, including the argument that Antonescu's punitive measures were triggered by the alleged Jewish support for the Soviet occupation forces in Bessarabia and northern Bukovina in 1940, and the claim that the aforementioned Iași pogrom was a reaction to Jewish disloyalty vis-à-vis Romanian and German forces.¹⁹ Similarly, the Slovak national uprising that started on 29 August 1944 (it was crushed by the Nazis in October), and in which some Jews participated,²⁰ was quoted as Jewish aggression that provoked their deportation (Meštan 2000).

The postcommunist modulation of the argument of Jewish antagonism and disloyalty to the ‘host nations’ rests on the widespread identification of Jews with communism. This claim is “used to deny responsibility for national failures and crimes during the fascist period, the war, and the communist period which followed it” (Volovici 1994: 8). The equation Jews = Bolsheviks not only pertained to the Jews who began to appear in public functions, in politics, in the military and in the secret services after the war,²¹ but also to the “alleged Jewish culpability for the misdoing

¹⁹ Allegedly, Jews signalled to enemy planes and spied for the Soviets.

²⁰ Given that the internment in Slovakian camps started on 26 March 1942, thus before the uprising, Jewish participation in the uprising could hardly have been massive (Hilberg 2003).

²¹ Their ranks were subsequently purged of Jews, but this fact does not change the extent and the intensity of this belief.

and disasters of the communist regimes” (Volovici, 1994:8). Marxism was and continues to be presented as “a ‘Jewish’ ideology, emanating from Judaism as a tool to rule the world and enslave other nations” (Volovici 1994: 8). The allegation that the Jews who rose to higher echelons of the communist regimes and its security forces in the first years after the war used the repressive apparatus at their disposal to take revenge against the local population²² is especially well-suited for vilification of the Jews because it puts a more immediate and personable spin on the issue.

Last, but not least, Jews were sometimes accused of executing their own annihilation. In his infamous book *The Wasteland of Historic Reality* (1989), Franjo Tudjman, the first President of independent Croatia, went a step further by claiming that the Jews imprisoned in the Jasenovac concentration camp in Croatia during WWII assisted the Ustasha in perpetrating the Holocaust: “In the Jasenovac camp the management was in the hands of the Jews;” quoting a witness, Vojislav Prnjatovic, he wrote that the Jews “managed to grab all the more important jobs in the prisoners hierarchy,” concluding that “The Jew remains the Jew, even in the Jasenovac camp ... Selfishness, craftiness, unreliability, stinginess, deceit, are their main characteristics” (Tudjman 1989: 160, 172-3; Sekelj 1997). Furthermore, Tudjman claimed that the Jasenovac concentration camp in which several hundred thousand Jews, Roma, and Serbs were killed, was a “myth” blown out of proportion to castigate the Croatian nation (Shafir 2002). Meštan (2000: 188) quotes other examples of similar claims, for example, the one put forth by Gabriel Hoffman in a 1998 article for the Slovakian *Zmena*, where the author ‘revealed’ that the Serei forced labor camp was run by a certain “Hauptobersturmführer Zimmermann” who was no one else than “the dreaded Simon Wiesenthal” who

²² For a compassionate account of Jewish revenge against the Germans in occupied Poland see Sack 1993.

allegedly ordered the murders of Jews suspected of collaboration with the Nazis.

The legacy of organized or systematic forgetting of the Holocaust, coupled with post-1989 efforts to rehabilitate the nationalist leaders who collaborated with the Nazis or came to terms with the dark patches of the national WWII pasts, produced patterns of anti-Semitism that range from minimalization and/or externalization of the atrocities committed, deflections of responsibility to comparative trivialization,²³ and outright denial of the Holocaust. The communist legacy of anti-Zionism and anti-Israelism dates back to the 1967 Six-Day War when all the members of the Warsaw pact (with the exception of Romania) broke off diplomatic relations with Israel in protest against ‘Israel’s imperialist policies towards the Arab states.’ Since the communist ideology “as a matter of principle rejected anti-Semitism” (Fatran 2002), anti-Zionism and anti-Israelism became a convenient disguise for anti-Semitism during the communist rule. Poland’s thinly disguised ‘anti-Zionist’ campaign of 1967-1968 (Stola 2000), which resulted in the in the forced exodus of most of the remaining Jews left in the country, some 15,000 to 20,000 people, is a telling example of anti-Zionism that was used as a pretext for anti-Semitic measures. Although anti-Zionism and anti-Israelism had the status of official communist foreign policy doctrine, the sources of its ideations were clearly rooted in ‘old anti-Semitic’ imagery, except that the Jew was replaced by the collective incarnation – Israel.²⁴ A

²³ Shafir (2002: 60) defines comparative trivialization as the “willful distortion of the record and of the significance of the Holocaust, either through the ‘humanisation’ of its local record in comparison with atrocities committed by the Nazis, or through comparing the record of the Holocaust itself with experiences of massive suffering endured by local populations or by mankind at large at one point or another in recorded history.”

²⁴ For a discussion of anti-Zionism, anti-Israelism and new anti-Semitism, see Klug (2003).

new element is thus added to the ‘classical’ conspiracy theories, that of “the malign and dominant role of Israel in present day conspiracy scenarios, especially in the work of the Mossad” (Volovici 1994: 4). With the collapse of communism, anti-Semitism soared, while seriously biased and uninformed media reporting on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the official anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli pronouncements remained unchallenged.

Anti-Semitism, anti-Zionism, and treatment of the Holocaust in contemporary Slovenia: some remarks

As the head of the Institute for Ethnic Studies’ Task Force for Jewish Studies and Anti-Semitism, I was invited to accompany the Slovenian Minister of Foreign affairs, Dr Dimitrij Rupel, to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Conference on anti-Semitism that was hosted by the German Ministry of Foreign affairs in Berlin on 28-29 April 2004. Dr Rupel delivered a speech that assured his high-ranking audience that

no violent anti-Semitic acts by authorities or by the media have been reported in Slovenia. There has also been no court case or charge for a criminal act connected with anti-Semitism. It has to be stressed that cases of radical, classical negation of the Holocaust are not detectable in Slovenian public discourses. Slovenian public school textbooks present the Holocaust adequately.²⁵

After his presentation, the Minister told me that he did not deem it necessary to consult me on the content of his speech because he had judged that Slovenia was not immediately concerned with the issues discussed at the conference. He substantiated his observation with the

statement of popular belief that the existence of a small and relatively well assimilated Jewish community precludes anti-Semitism.

Dr Rupel’s statement at the conference and his above-reported comment are significant to the extent that they reveal the scope of understanding of anti-Semitism in Central and Eastern Europe in general, and in Slovenia in particular. The narrow definition of anti-Semitism as *violent* anti-Semitic acts followed by criminal charges, *radical* Holocaust denial, and inadequate treatment of the Holocaust in textbooks, underpins the belief that anything short of burning synagogues or assaulting Jews in the streets does not qualify as anti-Semitism. Given that there are no synagogues in Slovenia²⁶ and that Slovenian Jews have not retained any external sign that would make them recognizable as such, even the narrow definition of anti-Semitism cannot apply, because the Jewish identity of the hypothetical victim would be simply dismissed as irrelevant or even doubted. In contrast to the situation in many other Central and East European countries, where the ‘unmasking’ of political opponents has been an effective tool of political battle, Slovenia’s Jews have always been ‘masked’ as non-Jews and their Jewishness unrecognized or ignored. Public display of Jewish ancestry of public figures is discouraged in Slovenia and, even when prominent people of Jewish origin publicly acknowledge their ancestry, their declarations are ignored or dismissed as irrelevant (Luthar and Šumi 2004: 42).

This is because of the deeply rooted belief that Slovenia as a notoriously “ethnically homogenous” country is entirely devoid of Jews, corroborated by the persuasion that Jewishness and Slovenianess are mutually exclusive. Therefore, even Slovenians who

²⁵ Address by Dr Dimitrij Rupel, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia, at the Berlin OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism. <http://www.osce.org/events/conferences/Anti-Semitism2004/>.

²⁶ There is an old synagogue in Maribor that is today used as a cultural center, but does not function as a place of worship, and there is a prayer room in Ljubljana, located in an office complex that bears no outside signs of Jewish presence.

are halachically²⁷ Jewish themselves often perceive their family genealogy as either belonging to such a distant past as to have no impact on their lives, or a datum that does not at all affect their “ethnicity.” Although it can sometimes be made into an item of exotic personal charm, it is in turn likely to be perceived as a pretentious ‘monkeyshine.’ This range of postures testifies to the fact that the obliteration of the memory of the Jews after the deportations in 1944 has been thorough,²⁸ but also that the externalization of Jews has been consistent: the Jews of Prekmurje were thus considered primarily Hungarians, and the Jews from the Gorenjska region were assimilated to Germans. Conversely, non-Jewish Slovenians have very little or no notion at all about Jewishness and what constitutes it, as well as about other ‘things Jewish.’

An average Slovenian would thus very likely consider, as did the Slovenian Minister of Foreign Affairs, that Jews and everything related to them – especially anti-Semitism – are so remote from Slovenian concerns they are not even worth addressing. The following example illustrates that: I participated in a lunch organized by a foreign ambassador to Slovenia, during which a Slovenian official had to be reminded by his foreign counterpart that his statement “we do not need the Jews, we have Gorenjci,”²⁹ intended to dissipate any concern about anti-Semitism in Slovenia, was itself anti-Semitic. The narrow definition of anti-Semitism is thus coupled with a ‘natural’ proficiency in manipulating Jewish stereotypes that is considered neither anti-Semitic nor politically incorrect by the

speakers. The fact that the majority of Central and East European states, including Slovenia, do not have any specific legislation that would even allow prosecution on grounds of anti-Semitism³⁰ (and therefore precludes any charges connected to anti-Semitism that are always cited as a proof of its absence), is as telling as is the singularly unfortunate wording of Dr Rupel’s observation to that effect (“There is no specific anti-Semitic legislation in Slovenia”³¹). Furthermore, the treatment of the Holocaust that is considered adequate in public schooling follows the strategies of denial, deflection, and comparative trivialization described above. As is the case of several other Central and East European states, Slovenia has some dark chapters in its WWII history to deal with; however, all official or otherwise influential discourses had so far opted for a defensive, deflective approach to the matter. Despite the fact that the Slovenian Homeguard movement was molded after the Nazi party and therefore explicitly anti-Semitic, featuring slogans like “Jews are out to enslave the world,” and “the [communist] partisans were drugged and sold to Jews in order to [...] destroy the Slovenian nation” (quoted in Luthar and Šumi 2004: 40), the defenders of Slovenian collaboration both downplay the anti-Semitic component and trivialize what happened to Slovenian Jews by comparing the Holocaust to the post-war atrocities committed by the communists.

Last but not least, the media reporting on the Israel-Palestinian conflict that the IES’s Task Force for Jewish Studies and Anti-Semitism has been monitoring very closely over the past year, has been extremely biased against Israel, and contains statements and expressions of opinion that are clearly anti-Israeli, even anti-Semitic: vilifying Israel, comparing it to Nazi

²⁷ According to the Jewish law.

²⁸ The synagogue in Murska Sobota was leveled by the communist authorities in 1954; the Jewish cemetery was left to decay, but remnants of the gravestones were later arranged into a memorial park; and the Jewish cemetery in Beltinci also disappeared.

²⁹ Gorenjci are the inhabitants of the Gorenjska region, represented in the popular culture as particularly stingy.

³⁰ See Šumi, Irena and Hannah Starman, *Evaluation of available data on Anti-Semitism in the 10 candidate countries of Eastern and Central Europe : EUMC Report*. Ljubljana: INV, 2004.

³¹ *Address by Dr Dimitrij Rupel.*

Germany,³² openly glorifying Palestinian suicide bombers,³³ etc. Very limited knowledge of the Holocaust, of the establishment of the State of Israel, and the genealogy of the Israel-Palestinian conflict even among students of international relations and history³⁴ combined with the traditionally anti-Israeli media reporting add to the negative appraisal of the Jews that can take the direction of various conspiracy-theories, especially when coupled with esoteric, New Age anti-Semitism that has

³² See for example, Zlobec, Jaša, 2004, *Ostre senca dolgih nožev* (Sharp shadows of the long knives) in *Mladina*, no. 44.

³³ Numerous articles by the daily *Delo* correspondent in Jerusalem, Barbara Šurk, depict Palestinian suicide bombers as national heroes, liberators of their nations, justified in their actions, etc. The recent illness and death of Yasser Arafat led to a climax of journalistic lyricism that is familiar to the Slovenian audience from the times of Marshal Tito's dying, endless speculations about his health, and his eventual death on 4 May 1980. Tormented eulogies written to commemorate Yasser Arafat's life and achievements have included such poetic rambles as: "Over the last two weeks we [journalists] counted his [Arafat's] last hours only to see him like a smiling ghost, in the dusty cloud rising from the debris of the Israeli destruction, rise his index and his middle finger into the letter V, as we were walking to his funeral" (Šurk, Barbara, *Smo danes lahko vsi Palestinci* (Can we all be Palestinians today?) in *Delo*, 12 November .2004, p. 1.). The aggregate number of articles devoted to the Middle East conflict in three major daily newspapers rarely surpasses 15 per week. During the weeks of Arafat's illness and his death, the number rose to an average of 50, reaching its peak in the week of November 7-13 when 64 articles were devoted to Yasser Arafat alone.

³⁴ I had the privilege to observe the level of acquaintance with the subject when I guest lectured at several faculties in Ljubljana. During one of the lectures on the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel, one of the students had a sudden illumination that the creation of Israel happened only three years after the Holocaust!

been gaining ground in Slovenia since its independence in 1991.³⁵

Conclusion

This brief review of anti-Semitism in Central and Eastern Europe hopefully demonstrated the existence of some general trends that partly stem from the common communist legacy, and partly from the postcommunist national (and distinctly nationalist) projects. Despite the apparent commonalities that can be perceived at the level of public discourse however, the analysis of anti-Semitism in the region begs several questions that will need to be addressed, both within the project *Post-colony and post-socialism contexts in social scientific writing and teaching* and within the ongoing research dealing specifically with anti-Semitism in the area: given the disparities in the WWII experience, the collective memory of the Jews, Jewish presence in the countries today, to name just a few, to what extent is it analytically productive to treat Central and Eastern Europe as one bloc? Where do ideations of Jews come from in environments like Slovenia, where the Jewish presence is systematically misapprehended? What are the hypothetical scenarios of possible change of these ideations?

The answer to the first question is a categorical 'no.' This simple comparative perspective can serve as a starting set of hypotheses for the forthcoming research on Jews and anti-Semitism, but is not in itself fruitful, because it is not analytical. The *Post-colony and post-socialism contexts in social scientific writing and teaching* project's main aim is thus a rethinking of the assumptions on which these comparative claims rest, namely the existence of a relatively homogenous habitat called post-socialist context. With regards to anti-Semitism in the region, the most often-cited

³⁵ It is featured, for instance, in the widely read monthly *Aura* magazine, namely in the form of translations from the Swiss *Zeitschrift* famous for its conspiratory analysis of world politics, especially in the Middle East.

exception to the patterns of anti-Jewish attitudes is the example of Bulgaria, where all of the Jews were saved during the Holocaust (Todorov 1999), but also the above-sketched example of Slovenia indicates that a study of attitudes towards Jews needs to go beyond an analysis of political and media discourses and explore how these discourses are translated into people's intimate understandings and ideations of Jews.

The ongoing research project, based at the IES, is thus based on two hypotheses: that Jews in the Slovenian territory have been marked by their physical absence, but that this 'cryptic presence' (Luthar and Šumi 2004) did not preclude the every-day formation of ethnic ideation and differentiation at all levels of public in a manner akin to what Paul Lendvai (1971) termed 'anti-Semitism without Jews.' The project draws its primary empirical evidence in support of these hypotheses from a fieldwork research that consists of gathering testimonies from three groups of informants: Jews who are nowadays citizens/residents of Slovenia and who have survived the Holocaust, and their offspring; 'neighbors,' witnesses, rescuers, and bystanders who in different ways remember the persecution of Jews in their immediate vicinity; people whose personal and family genealogies include Jewish ancestors, but who relate very differently to this 'ancestral complex.' One of the main aims that the project seeks to achieve is to determine the ways in which the attitude towards Jews and everything deemed Jewish functions as a component of ethnic declarations in the relations that are based in construction of impassable, ethnic differentiations on the one hand, and the relations of passable, cultural difference on the other (Šumi 2000) in contemporary Slovenia.

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