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Modern Antisemitism in the Visegrád Countries – Countering Distortion

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– Countering Distortion Report

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INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE ALLIANCE

List of Contents

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Modern Antisemitism in the Visegrád Countries – Countering Distortion

REPORT

1. Background and main objectives of the project

Attempts to deny or distort the reality of the Holocaust can be observed at both ends of the political and ideological spectrum, from the far right to the hard left, as well as within radical Islamist circles. There is broad agreement among experts that hard-core Holocaust denial – rejecting the historical fact that the Holocaust happened – is a form of antisemitism (Heni 2008). However, Holocaust distortion excusing, minimizing or misrepresenting the historical facts of the Shoah is also often a manifestation of antisemitism. Even when such distortion is not connected to antisemitism, for example when it is caused by ignorance and uninformed remarks or comparisons, it feeds into narratives that can reinforce antisemitism and related biases (Lipstadt 2017).[1] Preventing and countering Holocaust denial and distortion therefore necessitates a more nuanced understanding of these phenomena and their relationship with modern antisemitism.

[1] The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) presents a similar argument: "[T]here are a few forms of Holocaust distortion that may not always accompany antisemitism, such as in the case of persons who are ignorant of the Holocaust or who make uninformed remarks and/or comparisons to the Holocaust. However, all forms of distortion invite even more dangerous forms of antisemitism by casting doubt on the actuality of the Holocaust and the realities of the dangerous antisemitism that led to these historical events." See IHRA Paper on Holocaust Distortion and Denial (2019), available at: *https://holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/inline-files/Paper%20on%20Distortion.pdf*

When it comes to the Visegrád countries,[2] however, there is a lack of region-specific understanding of modern antisemitism. While the main debates, topics and actors dominating the modern antisemitic discourse in the region have been explored (Barna and Felix 2017; Barna et al. 2018), it is still not properly understood how modern antisemitism is rooted in the cultural and political heritage of the region or how much it differs from Western European patterns. As yet, no detailed research has been conducted into the regional specificities of how different subtypes of modern antisemitism interrelate (Barna et al. 2018). Furthermore, there have been few efforts to collect concrete, empirical data from all Visegrád countries using the same methodology, which prevents systematic comparison between the four countries (Ibid.).

In addition to the scarcity of regional inquiry, there are other gaps in the research on modern antisemitism. While there are several important academic studies on antisemitism and attitudes towards Jews are regularly surveyed on a global scale, such statistical analyses rarely feed into social scientific research that is translated into evidence-based policy development (Staetsky 2017). Focus groups are seldom used in investigating attitudes towards Jews, despite their potential advantages. A key challenge of contemporary research into antisemitism is to combine the strengths of qualitative and quantitative methods to create research outcomes that can be of great value both analytically and in terms of informing policy.

In 2018, the Tom Lantos Institute (TLI) launched a research project entitled "Modern Antisemitism in the Visegrád Countries – Countering Distortion."[3] This qualitative study aimed to address current gaps in our knowledge and understanding of the relationship between modern antisemitism and Holocaust denial and distortion from a regional perspective. This inquiry focuses on four post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe known as the Visegrád Four. Focus group research was conducted in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia to explore how secondary antisemitism is manifested in Holocaust denial and distortion and how secondary and Israel-focused antisemitism (i.e. new antisemitism) can lead to Holocaust denial and distortion in the region.[4] More specifically, the focus group research was meant to explore: (1) how focus group participants in the Visegrád countries contextualize topics related to Holocaust denial and distortion; (2) how these arguments are framed and justified; (3) how narratives of Holocaust denial and distortion are linked to Holocaust remembrance; (4) how such narratives are embedded in the discussion on Israel-focused antisemitism; (5) how Holocaust distortion and new antisemitism can reinforce each other in these narratives; and (6) how social settings can give rise to manifestations of antisemitism, including Holocaust denial and distortion.

Drawing on the findings of this research, policy workshops were organized in each Visegrád country to formulate practice-oriented proposals that could inform policy development. The results of the qualitative research and the discussions in these workshops will contribute to the formulation of region-specific survey questions

[2] The Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland.

[3] This project was carried out in partnership with the Institute of Public Affairs (IVO) in Slovakia and the Never Again Association in Poland.

[4] The findings of TLI's earlier focus group research on conspiratorial antisemitism also informed the analysis.

that can serve as a basis for further research on modern antisemitism in the Visegrád countries. This report summarizes the qualitative research, its key findings and the resulting proposals to combat Holocaust denial and distortion in the region.

The structure of the report is as follows. First, we clarify the main concepts applied in the research. Next, we introduce the method employed for data collection and outline its benefits and drawbacks. Then, we present the findings of the focus group research on secondary and new antisemitism. This is followed by a summary of key conclusions drawn from this inquiry, which also served as a basis for the policy discussions. Finally, we describe the practice-oriented proposals that emerged from this process. The report concludes with a brief discussion of inputs gathered through the policy workshops. This can help specify region-specific survey questions on modern antisemitism for further research.

2. Main concepts and definitions

Due to the lack of consensus within and outside academic circles on the definition of the main concepts used in the research, we specify the meaning of these concepts and describe the complex interplay between them in the following sections. First, we define the concept of antisemitism and briefly introduce the various types of modern antisemitism that exist today. Next, we clarify the terms Holocaust denial and distortion, before explaining their conceptual relationship to secondary antisemitism. Then, we briefly discuss the connection between Holocaust denial and distortion and conspiratorial and new antisemitism. Finally, we define the concept of latency pressure and its relevance to the research.

2.1 Modern antisemitism

While there is no scientific consensus regarding its definition, antisemitism is often understood as a phenomenon that goes beyond personal attitudes or prejudices against Jewish people to encompass cultural ideas and social practices that often culminate in a conscious, crystallized worldview (Bergmann 2009). For the purposes of this research, we have employed the working definition of antisemitism adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). According to this definition, "antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."

In 2016, member countries of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance agreed on a working definition of antisemitism:

"Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."

To guide IHRA in its work, the following examples may serve as illustrations:

Manifestations might include the targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity. However, criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic. Antisemitism frequently charges Jews with conspiring to harm humanity, and it is often used to blame Jews for "why things go wrong." It is expressed in speech, writing, visual forms and action, and employs sinister stereotypes and negative character traits.

Contemporary examples of antisemitism in public life, the media, schools, the workplace, and in the religious sphere could, taking into account the overall context, include, but are not limited to:

- Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.
- Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as collective – such as, especially but not exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.
- Accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews.
- Denying the fact, scope, mechanisms (e.g. gas chambers) or intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of National Socialist Germany and its supporters and accomplices during World War II (the Holocaust).
- Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.
- Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.
- Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g. by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.
- Applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
- Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g. claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis.
- Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.
- Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.

To further narrow our focus, we investigated modern antisemitism in the region in question, namely Central and Eastern Europe. We define modern antisemitism as the form of antisemitism that came into existence with the modern age and is generally secular in character, being based predominantly on the concept of race rather than religion (Kovács 1999).

In the present research, we identify three subtypes of modern antisemitism, namely conspiratorial, secondary and new antisemitism. Conspiratorial antisemitism pertains to conspiracy theories about Jewish people. Its main elements include "the idea of a secret Jewish government, common intentionality, need of dominance, and the demonological tradition behind it" (Cohn 1967, cited in Bilewicz et al. 2013, 824).

Secondary antisemitism is a specific form of antisemitism that emerged immediately after the Second World War, and it can be described as "antisemitism not despite but because of the Holocaust" (Imhoff and Messer 2019, 2). It is widely understood to be caused by the socio-psychological after-effects of the Holocaust. Its core concept is that the Jews embody, just by existing, the inconvenient memory of the Holocaust, causing resentment against them. This resentment is further exacerbated by Holocaust remembrance, leading to the reproduction and regeneration of anti-Jewish sentiments (Adorno 1955; Schönbach 1961, quoted in Imhoff and Messer 2019, 2).

New antisemitism is defined as an expression of antisemitism projected onto Israel as a focal point (Chanes 2004). Criticism of Israel can function as a "politically correct" way to express antisemitic views (Wetzel 2017). In order to distinguish new antisemitism from legitimate criticism of Israel, the 3D test proposed by Natan Sharansky may be used. The three Ds stand for the employment of "demonization, double standards and delegitimization" in relation to Israel (Sharansky 2004). According to Sharansky, demonization refers to those cases where Israel is portrayed as being inherently evil. The use of double standards refers to cases in which the politics of Israel are judged differently to and through a more negative lens than those of other countries. Finally, delegitimization refers to those cases in which Israel's fundamental right to exist is questioned and/or rejected.

2.2 Holocaust denial and distortion

Holocaust denial is an attempt to reject or undermine facts about the extermination of Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators during the Second World War. Based on Lipstadt's conceptualization, our research distinguishes between two types of Holocaust denial. Hard-core Holocaust denial refers to the rejection or negation of the historical truth of the Holocaust. Soft-core denial questions some aspects of the Holocaust in a more covert form, including such rhetorical strategies as drawing false analogies with other historical events and downplaying the severity or the scope of the Holocaust (Lipstadt 1993).

Based on the IHRA's working definition of Holocaust denial and distortion and a paper on the topic published by the IHRA's Committee on Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial, Holocaust distortion is defined as an attempt to "excuse, minimize, or misinterpret the known historical records of the Holocaust" and takes many forms, including: intentional efforts to excuse or minimize the impact of the Holocaust; gross minimization of the number of victims; attempts to blame Jews for the Holocaust; using the term to

describe related atrocities or by engaging in false comparisons with other mass crimes; casting the Holocaust as a positive historical event; or blurring responsibility for the murders of the Holocaust (IHRA 2019, 1). Holocaust distortion mostly falls into the category of soft-core Holocaust denial, but in its most extreme form it can take the form of hard-core Holocaust denial (Lipstadt 2017).

In 2013, member countries of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance agreed on a working definition of Holocaust denial and distortion:

Holocaust denial is discourse and propaganda that deny the historical reality and the extent of the extermination of the Jews by the Nazis and their accomplices during World War II, known as the Holocaust or the Shoah. Holocaust denial refers specifically to any attempt to claim that the Holocaust/Shoah did not take place.

Holocaust denial may include publicly denying or calling into doubt the use of principal mechanisms of destruction (such as gas chambers, mass shooting, starvation and torture) or the intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people.

Holocaust denial in its various forms is an expression of antisemitism. The attempt to deny the genocide of the Jews is an effort to exonerate National Socialism and antisemitism from guilt or responsibility in the genocide of the Jewish people. Forms of Holocaust denial also include blaming the Jews for either exaggerating or creating the Shoah for political or financial gain as if the Shoah itself was the result of a conspiracy plotted by the Jews. In this, the goal is to make the Jews culpable and antisemitism once again legitimate.

The goals of Holocaust denial often are the rehabilitation of an explicit antisemitism and the promotion of political ideologies and conditions suitable for the advent of the very type of event it denies.

Distortion of the Holocaust refers, *inter alia*, to:

1. Intentional efforts to excuse or minimize the impact of the Holocaust or its principal elements, including collaborators and allies of Nazi Germany;
2. Gross minimization of the number of the victims of the Holocaust in contradiction to reliable sources;
3. Attempts to blame the Jews for causing their own genocide;
4. Statements that cast the Holocaust as a positive historical event. Those statements are not Holocaust denial but are closely connected to it as a radical form of antisemitism. They may suggest that the Holocaust did not go far enough in accomplishing its goal of "the Final Solution of the Jewish Question";
5. Attempts to blur the responsibility for the establishment of concentration and death camps devised and operated by Nazi Germany by putting blame on other nations or ethnic groups.

2.3 Holocaust denial and distortion as key aspects of secondary antisemitism

While it is important to note that not all cases of Holocaust distortion are motivated by antisemitism, Holocaust denial and distortion are key aspects of secondary antisemitism (Bergmann 2009). Secondary antisemitism is primarily driven by the desire to exonerate perpetrator societies from guilt and responsibility, which taints their positive moral identity. The need to repress and downplay the memory of the Holocaust leads to the externalization of guilt, including its projection on to survivors, and the distortion of other historical facts related to the Holocaust, resulting in its trivialization or relativization[5] (Gerstenfeld 2007; Heni 2008; Shafir 2012; Braham 2016). In addition, it is often accompanied by self-victimization, which depicts the perpetrators as the "true victims" of Nazism and the Second World War.

The perception of the Holocaust as "a distant issue unworthy of any further elaboration" and efforts to deny or downplay Jewish historical victimhood related to the Holocaust are closely linked to the "competitive victimhood mechanism" (Bilewicz et al. 2013, 824). In addition to being regarded by many experts as one of the main factors behind secondary antisemitism, competitive victimhood is a phenomenon that is particularly prevalent in the region, especially in Hungary and Poland (Barna and Knap 2019; Hirschberger, Kende, and Weinstein 2016; Bilewicz and Stefaniak 2013). In a previous study we conducted, competitive victimhood was found to be an important element in the rhetoric of both Polish and Hungarian far-right circles (Barna et al. 2018). Besides, post-communist societies are widely considered to be wary of facing questions of collective responsibility about past atrocities, including the Holocaust, although it should be underlined that attempts to avoid dealing with past events are not a regional specificity (Shafir 2012). "However, what is specific about the region is its former communist legacy. And this collective legacy partly facilitates, partly explains, and rationalizes Holocaust denial and its 'comparative trivialization'" (Ibid. 27).

Competitive victimhood, which is conceptually related to collective victimhood, is a social psychological term describing the "tendency to see one's group as having comparatively suffered relative to an outgroup" (Young and Sullivan 2016). Collective victimhood refers to a perception that one's nation is a victim of history. It can lead to ingroup favouritism and prejudice against outgroups, including efforts to downplay the suffering of outgroups (Antoniou, Dinas and Kosmidis 2017). Collective victimhood can thus lead to explicit competing victimhood claims, i.e. attempts by members of different groups "to prove that their respective ingroup suffered more than the outgroup" (Bilewicz and Stefaniak 2013, 2).[6] The comparison between an ingroup's victimhood

[5] Holocaust trivialization refers to the overuse of Holocaust analogies (Lipstadt 2017). In cases of Holocaust relativization, false analogies are made, for example, with the suffering of other people. It can also include claims to the effect that all parties carried out atrocities, "thereby denying its [the Holocaust's] essence act of wholesale extermination" (Litvak and Webman 2009: 161). Trivialization and relativization diminish the severity, scope and importance of the Holocaust.

[6] Indeed, competitive victimhood could also lead to Holocaust distortion and denial in cases where collective victimhood is not related to the Holocaust merely due to the fact that the Holocaust is often perceived as a benchmark for suffering and victimhood around the globe (Antoniou, Dinas and Kosmidis 2017; Bar-Tal and Halperin 2013).

and Jewish victimhood in relation to the Holocaust creates outgroup prejudice that often leads to antisemitism and Holocaust distortion. For example, groups that also fell victim to the Nazi regime – albeit to a different degree – often deny or question the extent of Jewish historical victimhood linked to the Holocaust "in order to protect the uniqueness of their ingroup's victimhood" (Bilewicz and Stefaniak 2013, 2). This may manifest itself in Holocaust trivialization or relativization. Similarly, competitive victimhood is a strategy often used by societies with a perpetrator history to absolve themselves of responsibility and guilt for past wrongdoings, restore their ingroup's moral identity and "create a sense of entitlement that allows yesterday's victims to behave unfairly with a clean conscience" (Bilewicz and Stefaniak 2013, 3).

2.4 Entangled narratives: the connection between Holocaust denial and distortion and conspiratorial and new antisemitism

Holocaust denial and distortion is often combined with pre-Holocaust antisemitic stereotypes, including those associated with conspiratorial antisemitism, or intertwined with new (i.e. Israel-focused) antisemitism. It is well documented in the academic literature that various forms of antisemitic arguments – including conspiratorial and new antisemitic ones – are often linked to narratives about Holocaust denial and distortion (Cesarani 2006; Heni 2008; Iganski and Sweiry 2009; Wistrich 2017). For example, Wistrich (2017) points out that far-right and militant Muslim groups both seek to merge Holocaust distortion and anti-Zionism in their rhetoric in order to destroy the memory of the Shoah, legitimize antisemitism and spread conspiracy theories about Jews or Zionists. The myth that Zionists collaborated with the Nazis (Cesarani 2006; Litvak 2006; Lipstadt 1993) is but one example of this.

Equally troubling and more widespread are attacks against Israel in which the Holocaust is relativized "through false analogies, especially with the current policies of the Jewish State" (Wistrich 2017, 42). Such false analogies, in which the roles of the victims and the perpetrators are reversed, are widely referred to as Holocaust inversion. The equation of the Nazis and Israel (Heni 2008; Iganski and Sweiry 2009) is one of the most obvious illustrations of this phenomenon.

The close connections between Holocaust denial and distortion and new antisemitism are also apparent from the examples of antisemitism provided by IHRA to complement its working definition of antisemitism, such as "drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis" and "accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust", and the examples in the working definition of Holocaust denial and distortion, including the accusation that "Jews [created] the Shoah for political or financial gain."

Furthermore, our earlier research on antisemitic actors suggests that, due to the Visegrád region's special historical and political context, conspiratorial, secondary and new antisemitism are more closely connected than in the Western part of the continent (Barna and Felix 2017). In contrast to Western Europe, where far-right parties usually have a strong anti-Islamic agenda and often use pro-Israel slogans, far-right groups in the Visegrád countries are the main antisemitic

actors and often base their rhetoric not only on anti-Jewish conspiracy theories and attacks on the memory of the Holocaust "but also on the anti-Zionist propaganda of the communist period" (Barna and Felix 2018, 331).

2.5
Latency Pressure

In addition to the interplay between Holocaust denial and distortion and different types of modern antisemitism described above, a core question in the present research concerns the issue of latency pressure. There is widespread consensus in the field of prejudice research – including antisemitism research – that the open expression of antisemitism is generally perceived as a strong sociopolitical taboo (Bergmann 2009). Antisemitism is therefore usually expressed only in intimate communicative situations (Kovács 2002). In addition, antisemitic remarks are often accompanied by "attempts to conceal or deny their anti-Semitic character, triggering heated public debate about what constitutes an anti-Semitic remark. This is particularly prevalent today in relation to criticism levelled at the political line pursued by Israel" (Bergmann 2009, 55). The latency of antisemitic attitudes is thus one of the key issues in antisemitism research in general, including this focus group research. Holocaust denial and distortion are also widely perceived as sensitive issues. Public attacks on the Holocaust, including outright Holocaust denial, are rare not only in the Western world but also in the Visegrád region (Barna and Félix 2017). Some participants might not say what they think about these sensitive issues during the discussion, especially if they perceive the focus group to be an arena for public discourse where they might be inclined to only express socially approved, conformist opinions. In other words, they might consider it risky to express openly anti-Jewish opinions, including Holocaust denial and distortion during these discussions if they perceive it as public rather than private situation.

3.
Method: online focus group research

Following a summary of conceptual considerations underpinning our research, we briefly introduce the research method applied, and its advantages and disadvantages for studying antisemitism and Holocaust denial and distortion.

Online focus group research was employed to gain insight into how the three types of modern antisemitism interconnect in people's minds and how Holocaust denial and distortion are embedded in narratives relating to secondary and new antisemitism. This research method, which offers a high degree of anonymity and creates a more open environment, was chosen to generate the broadest possible range of opinions. In an online environment, the threshold for expressing opinions otherwise sanctioned by social norms are widely considered to be lower than in a non-online setting.

By using this method, we intended to gain an understanding of how participants contextualize the relevant topics, how they frame and justify arguments and how attitudes are formed in various social settings. Moreover, through the group dynamic, we were also able to explore some social processes that lead to the formation of prejudices and common narratives.

To ensure the comparability of the data collected, the same guidelines and selection criteria were applied in all four countries. Experts from all four Visegrád countries helped develop the guidelines and align the concepts and questions to local contexts. In this way, we were able to ensure that the guidelines remained comparable and that country-specific perspectives relating to historical topics or issues concerning Holocaust denial and distortion were preserved. A guideline document was prepared in English and translated by the experts into the relevant local languages.

In each round of the research, two focus group sessions were conducted per country, with approximately ten participants in each focus group. In all four countries, participants were selected according to criteria such as gender, age, level of education and type of settlement. In order to ensure lively group discussions, the focus group members all belonged to a younger age group (25-40 years), meaning that they most likely had a high level of digital literacy. With regards to qualification levels, the aim was to have a group with a lower level of educational attainment (having only basic vocational qualifications) and a group with a higher level of educational attainment (at least completed secondary school) in each country. The ratio of the two groups was 60-65 per cent with lower education and 35-40 per cent with a higher one.[7]

To ensure open discussions and the spontaneous expression of opinions, participants received as little intervention from the moderators as possible. The online chat sessions started with neutral and general questions and topics that were not directly connected to the Holocaust or antisemitism. If anti-Jewish sentiments surfaced in reaction to these neutral questions, we labelled them "spontaneous" remarks or comments. Specific themes or questions related to the research – such as prevalent antisemitic stereotypes and narratives, including issues related to the Holocaust and Israel – were introduced gradually in order to gauge the participants' reactions to antisemitic content. In the final part of the discussions, we introduced topics that contained prevalent anti-Jewish statements or narratives distorting the Holocaust, much like the way in which quantitative surveys use items of antisemitic content to uncover or "trigger" opinions. It was obviously never implied that these narratives were correct or acceptable. Participants were only asked to state their opinions about such narratives. They were also encouraged to express counter-opinions if they formed any. If a participant expressed agreement with an antisemitic statement or a narrative distorting the Holocaust or made an antisemitic comment as a reaction, we interpreted this as meaning that the individual demonstrated some degree of "susceptibility" to such narratives.

The above-mentioned attributes of online focus group research make this approach a useful method for exploring the main topics and logic feeding Holocaust denial and distortion. In addition, it can provide valuable insights for survey development by shedding light on the specific ways in which the participants interpret well-established survey questions. However, focus group research is a purely qualitative method, based on small, non-representative samples. Therefore, it is not suitable for making generalized

[7] In some cases, slight deviations from the selection criteria occurred in the samples. However, as online focus group research is a qualitative method, it is not based on representative samples. These slight deviations from the selection criteria therefore did not affect our research plan.

claims about attitudes in the wider population.[8] Nor can its results be quantified, confidently establish causation or be used to build explanation models. It is only possible to identify certain tendencies and carefully draw some tentative conclusions. These are detailed in the following sections of this report.

4. Analysis of focus groups

In the following sections, we present the findings of the two rounds of focus group research conducted in the Visegrád countries. The first round investigated Holocaust denial and distortion as key aspects of secondary antisemitism, while the second round explored the relationship between Holocaust denial and distortion and new antisemitism. Each section starts by outlining the main sections of the guidelines for conducting the online focus groups and the specific questions we aimed to explore. Following this, we present the findings of the focus groups according to the main sections of the guidelines.

4.1 Focus group research: secondary antisemitism and Holocaust distortion

The guidelines developed for the first round of online focus groups, which focused on exploring the relationship between Holocaust denial and distortion and secondary antisemitism, included four main sections. The first section focused on ethnic and religious groups in each country, the second on victimhood and history, the third on the Holocaust as a historical event, and the fourth on the relevance of the Holocaust for society today. This round of online focus group research sought to examine the following specific questions:

- How is the link between victimhood and ethnic and religious groups made, and how are the relevant topics and narratives related?
- How do participants view the Holocaust? What do they know about its history? What do they think of Holocaust denial and distortion? How do they see the reference groups for these narratives?
- What are the justifications for and societal sources of Holocaust denial and distortion narratives?
- What are the motivations behind Holocaust distortion? Is it fuelled by remembrance or educational activities, historically-based competitive victimhood narratives or other causes?

The following paragraphs present the key findings from the focus groups according to the four main sections of the guidelines.

4.1.1 Ethnic and religious groups in the country

In order to start the focus group discussions with neutral and general questions, the first section focused on the topic of ethnic and religious groups in the four Visegrád countries. The participants were first asked to list and describe groups living

[8] That being said, existing survey findings are indispensable in the analysis of focus group research. Although one cannot directly compare findings based on representative (survey) samples with those of non-representative online focus groups, existing survey results provide an important basis for the interpretation of focus group results.

in their home countries that came to mind spontaneously, providing a basis for understanding where Jews as an outgroup were located on the mental map of the participants. In all four Visegrád countries, Jews were not part of the primary focus of the participants. In fact, during the discussions about "different groups of people living together in [Czech/Hungarian/Polish/Slovak] society", only an insignificant number of participants in the eight focus groups referred to Jews spontaneously. Furthermore, none of the comments mentioning Jews were antisemitic or offensive. In response to the question aimed at identifying the different groups in their society, the participants typically listed social groups or national, ethnic and religious groups. While they offered a wide range of possible categorizations of different groups, they did not associate the question with Jews spontaneously. This might indicate that issues relating to Jews were generally not of particular interest or importance to the participants.

4.1.2 Victimhood and history

The second topic of the group discussions was victimhood and history. At first, the participants were asked to list significant events from the twentieth century. On this basis, they subsequently discussed victimhood and the role of different actors in creating narratives of victimhood. In all four countries, most participants listed the Holocaust as one of the most tragic events of the twentieth century in their own countries and/or Europe, and no relativizing comparisons between the Holocaust and other tragic events of the period were made. In all four countries, participants typically referenced historical events linked to their country's ethnic majority – especially in the Polish discussions – but a considerable number of participants also spontaneously mentioned the Holocaust. In the Czech discussions, moreover, the Holocaust was mentioned quite a few times as one of the most tragic historical events of the twentieth century and was also explicitly discussed as part of Czech history. As one participant stated: "the Holocaust was very much related to us". At the same time, it is important to emphasize that various victim narratives featured prominently in the group discussions, such as the atrocities and mass killings committed against Poles during the Second World War and the negative consequences of the Treaty of Trianon for Hungarians. However, this did not lead to a competition of victimhood, the minimalization of the Holocaust or antisemitic expressions in general. To summarize, even though competitive victimhood is widely understood to be a major motivational factor behind secondary antisemitism, as well as being especially characteristic of the region, issues in the guidelines specifically designed to trigger narratives of victimhood did not lead to a competition of victimhood nor did they result in Holocaust denial and distortion or other kinds of antisemitic comments.

4.1.3 The Holocaust

In this section, the topic of the Holocaust was introduced. The participants were asked about the Holocaust, with a specific focus on its history. The section also included specific questions designed to explore the participants' thoughts about Holocaust denial and distortion. One of the key findings was that participants in all four Visegrád countries unanimously thought that the Holocaust was one of the most tragic events of the twentieth century. As in the previous section, issues relating to historical events did not lead to competing narratives of victim-

hood. However, the level of empathy expressed by the participants about the Shoah varied to a great degree. For instance, while many Czech participants spontaneously commented on the monstrous nature of the Holocaust, Hungarian participants often briefly described the Holocaust as a "genocide". Hard-core Holocaust denial did not feature in any of the eight online focus group sessions. This finding is in line with the assessments of scholarly works about latency (Kovács 2002), which argue that there is a strong social and political taboo against the open expression of antisemitic sentiments. Expressing antisemitic views about the very existence of the Holocaust could have been perceived by the participants as being particularly unacceptable.

In the Czech focus groups, the Holocaust was viewed by a significant number of participants as one of the country's most tragic historical events during the twentieth century. According to a typical comment, "everything is tragic, but most people have experienced hell on earth under Hitler :(". One participant explicitly ranked the Holocaust as the most tragic historical event to have occurred in the Czech Republic. In Slovakia, while most of the participants described the Second World War as the most tragic event, a number of them explicitly highlighted the Holocaust. In Hungary, discussions about the Holocaust typically included references to genocide, the extermination of a whole ethnic group, the stigmatization of an entire community, organized genocide, six million victims and senseless killings. The Polish participants likewise did not make any antisemitic or in any other sense offensive comments about the Holocaust. However, it is worth noting that the victims of the Holocaust, i.e. Jewish people, were rarely mentioned explicitly in the Hungarian and Polish focus group discussions.

4.1.4 The Holocaust today

The fourth main topic of discussion was the Holocaust's role in the present. In this section, the discussion moved on to the moral lessons of the Holocaust for society today. By linking the historical and contemporary discussions, we attempted to uncover the motivations for Holocaust denial and distortion. We expected that present-day Holocaust issues – such as remembrance, education and the question of responsibility – might potentially give rise to Holocaust denial and distortion. However, in the Slovak and the Czech focus groups, these issues did not generate any kind of Holocaust distortion, nor any other expressions of antisemitism. In contrast, the memory of the Holocaust was often discussed in antisemitic terms in the Hungarian and Polish focus groups, as demonstrated below.

While the survey data points to a relatively low level of prevalence of antisemitic attitudes within the Czech population, the absolute lack of anti-Jewish expressions – including Holocaust denial and distortion – in the group discussions was unexpected. Even more surprising were the Slovakian results, especially since the survey data draws a very different picture there. Despite existing survey results pointing to the prevalence of anti-Jewish attitudes in the whole region except for the Czech Republic, the Slovak focus group discussions generated no cases of Holocaust denial and distortion. Moreover, only a single antisemitic comment was made in the Slovak focus groups out of a total of hundreds of comments. While it is important to highlight that focus group research is a purely qualitative method that is not based on representative samples, the latency of such opinions could also have played a major role.

In stark contrast to the Slovak and Czech groups, the Hungarian and Polish participants often discussed Holocaust remembrance – and especially the alleged role of Jews in Holocaust remembrance – in clearly antisemitic terms. In a few cases, their comments amounted to Holocaust distortion. At the same time, the participants from all four Visegrád countries, including the Hungarian and Polish participants, firmly and unanimously rejected the claims of Holocaust deniers. Still, in the Polish focus groups, when the role of Jews in commemorating the Holocaust was introduced during the discussion, a significant number of participants resorted to stereotypes about the alleged Jewish exploitation of the Holocaust for financial gain at the expense of the Polish people. "They [Jews] want to take away from the Polish people what is Polish," one participant explained, adding: "they lay their hands on everything they can, they want to be paid, of course by who? By Poland which is expected to pay for their misfortune." During the Polish group discussions, Jewish people were also described as having "better access to the media," using it to "profile themselves as the only victims," and to "make a career out of their misfortune." Such attacks on the memory of the Holocaust clearly employ antisemitic rhetoric.

The tone of one of the Hungarian focus groups also turned markedly more hostile when issues relating to Holocaust remembrance were raised. Although the typical responses were not antisemitic, a number of participants reacted with anti-Jewish expressions. Some of them attacked the memory of the Holocaust by claiming that "it is certainly possible to overdo" the commemorations or that the Shoah is used for "political interests or making money." More than one Hungarian participant rallied against films about the Holocaust, commenting, inter alia, that "it is sometimes too much, all the films about it […] because they make money out of a genocide of a people […] it is like if they were making money by showing a sick child around." Another Hungarian participant commented that "many people use it [the Holocaust] only to make money, just like selling a product, and they make film after film in a row."

In addition, a few participants attempted to downplay Jewish victimhood related to the Holocaust or to draw false comparisons to other historical events. In the Polish group discussions, for example, participants stated that "not only Jews were murdered, but also Poles. Nationality is not important here, but people." In the Hungarian focus groups, one participant acknowledged that the Holocaust was a "genocide" but added that "this has been going on since humans climbed down from the trees." Similarly, it was claimed that the Holocaust "had happened many times, under different names […] like the Japanese internment in the United States […] or the encampment and starving of Ukrainians".

4.2 Focus group research: new antisemitism and Holocaust distortion

The guidelines developed for the second round of online focus groups, which focused on exploring the relationship between Holocaust denial and distortion and new antisemitism, included five main sections. The first section focused on ethnic and religious groups, the second on narratives about the Jewish diaspora and Israel, the third on the Holocaust and Zionism and the fourth on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in order to see whether criticism of Israel's conduct

towards the Palestinians was embedded in a discourse of Holocaust denial and distortion. The last section explored the issue of latency pressure as a possible motivation for new antisemitism. This round of online focus group research sought to explore the following specific questions:

- How do participants see Israel and the Jewish people? What are the narratives regarding Jews? Do participants perceive Israelis, Jews from the Visegrád countries and Jews living in other countries as separate entities or as a collective entity? Do participants question the loyalty of the Jewish community in their country?
- How do participants see the Holocaust and its relevance today?
- How are Holocaust remembrance, Zionism and/or Israel's policy towards the Palestinians embedded in the discourse of new antisemitism? In particular, how are new antisemitism and Holocaust denial and distortion entangled in these narratives?
- Is there a tendency among the participants to hide their opinions about Jews, the Holocaust and/or Israel?
- How receptive are the participants to antisemitic claims drawing comparisons between contemporary Israeli policy and that of the Nazis?

The following paragraphs present the key findings from the focus groups according to the main sections of the guidelines.

4.2.1
Ethnic and religious groups

To ensure comparability, the first section of the guidelines was identical to the one utilized for the earlier focus group research. The questions in this section thus explored the topic of ethnic and religious groups in each country, providing a basis for understanding where Jews as an outgroup were located on the mental map of the participants. The results were very similar to those in the previous round of focus group discussions. In all four Visegrád countries, Jews as an outgroup rarely appeared on the mental maps of the participants. In fact, only two participants mentioned Jews spontaneously, and none of the comments expressed anti-Jewish sentiments. Once again, most of the participants thought in terms of national and ethnic groups, religion or social factors. They accordingly provided diverse answers and did not spontaneously include Jewish people in any of the aforementioned categories. The results of this section could indicate that issues relating to the Holocaust and the Jewish people were generally not of particular interest or importance to the participants.

4.2.2
Israel and the Jewish diaspora

The second main topic of the online group discussions was Israel. The guidelines started with neutral questions. Participants were first asked to give their thoughts on Israel, followed by the gradual introduction of other related issues. We tapped into the subject of the international nature of the Jewish diaspora and attempted to introduce the myth about Jews being more loyal to Israel than to their own countries in order to see whether cases of Holocaust denial and distortion would surface spontaneously at this stage of the group discussions.

One of the key findings in this section is that participants in all four countries typically differentiated between Jewish people living in the Visegrád countries and Israelis. An overwhelming majority did not perceive Jewish people as a

collective entity and did not attribute common characteristics and interests to them. Nevertheless, the participants used a significant number of stereotypes when commenting on the Jewish population of their home countries and Israeli Jews. These included claims that Jews are "greedy", that they "rule the world", that they "consider themselves superior" and that they are "demanding towards other nations". Some of these negative, antisemitic comments also referred to the Holocaust. One Polish participant described Israel as "a closed society considering itself as a chosen nation […] considering itself to have suffered the most, because of World War II they think they can do whatever they want." This comment implies that Israelis profit from the Holocaust, thus constituting a clear case of Holocaust distortion.

Another participant described Jews as a "closed" group that is not willing to "integrate with other nationalities" due to a "grudge against everybody because of World War II." Even though some of the participants discussed Israel in negative or explicitly antisemitic terms, the overall opinion climate in all four focus groups was not hostile towards Israel. That being said, a few participants made claims that Jews living in Hungary and Israel are the "same" and that "they only differ in habitat, half of the bunch here, the other half over there." There were also claims concerning the supposed close connectedness of Jews: "it is true that unity is very strong among them." Another key issue in this section was the question of loyalty, which is a recurrent topic in surveys about antisemitic attitudes. An old and widespread antisemitic stereotype accuses Jews of being loyal to foreign, Jewish, or Israeli interests. The picture here was also mixed. Looking at all four Visegrád countries, the participants generally rejected the antisemitic idea of Jewish people not being loyal to their home countries. However, the topic also triggered some negative or even openly antisemitic responses, although none of the comments made any reference to the Holocaust.

4.2.3 Historical aspects: the Holocaust and Zionism

The third section of the guidelines introduced historical aspects: first the Holocaust and then Zionism. The section started with the same questions that we had successfully used in the earlier focus groups to assess the meanings attached to the Holocaust and its remembrance today. It also explored whether the participants linked the topic of the Holocaust to Israel and new antisemitism. Finally, the topic of Zionism was introduced to see how the right of Jews to have their own state was discussed and whether such issues are connected to Holocaust distortion.

One of the most important takeaways from this section is that there were no cases of hard-core Holocaust denial in any of the eight online focus groups. In the Czech Republic, all of the participants regarded the Holocaust as an exceptional tragedy. This even applied to those participants who were otherwise very critical of Israel, such as the participant who commented that the Holocaust "was undoubtedly one of the worst acts of barbarity, and I do not understand those who disagree. Auschwitz comes to my mind, what a dreadful place. I think that everyone should take a trip there…". In the Polish focus group discussion, one participant spontaneously listed the Holocaust as one of the three most tragic events in Polish history during the twentieth century. When the discussion turned specifically to the Holocaust,

the participants agreed that it was a horrible crime against the Jews that needed to be commemorated and talked about. In the Slovak and Hungarian focus groups there were likewise no pronouncements in support of Holocaust denial.

However, although there was no clear Holocaust denial in any of the eight online focus groups, as during the previous phase of focus group research, historical topics – including the Holocaust itself – were often discussed in antisemitic terms. While none of the participants explicitly denied the historical truth of the Holocaust in any of the four Visegrád countries, and while the overall opinion climate in the group discussions was emphatic towards issues related to the Holocaust, a significant number of antisemitic views were expressed, ranging from prevalent anti-Jewish stereotypes to Holocaust relativization and Holocaust inversion. In the Czech focus groups, the Holocaust was compared to other historical events of mass violence in a relativizing manner: "And Stalin did not happen? My family comes to mind." In the Polish focus groups, the participants unanimously condemned the Holocaust as an historical event. Still, the role of the Holocaust today was sometimes discussed in antisemitic terms, for instance by claiming that the alleged "influence" of Jewish people was partly based on their exploitation of the Holocaust: "I think that nowadays they [Jews] have a big influence on life because of their wealth […] Also they play on their tragedy too much." The Slovak online focus groups were somewhat different in this respect, as almost all participants saw the Holocaust as a tragic historical event and almost all of them supported the commemoration of the Holocaust. There was only a sole comment numerically comparing different victim groups: "And what about the more than 30 million Slavs?" In the Hungarian groups, there was likewise only one participant who expressed negative opinions about Holocaust remembrance, stating that commemorations were "too much." Another historical issue that triggered antisemitic comments was Zionism, although it was not linked to the Holocaust in any way.

4.2.4 New antisemitism and Holocaust distortion: Entangled narratives?

The next section of the guidelines focused on one of our main research questions, namely whether interplays between secondary and new antisemitism are connected to Holocaust denial and distortion. In this section, participants were asked questions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to see whether their criticism of Israel's conduct towards the Palestinians was embedded in a discourse of secondary antisemitism or, more specifically, in a discourse of Holocaust distortion. Questions relating to morality and the special status of Israel were discussed from many angles. The section ended with a discussion of several explicit and contradictory statements linking Israel to the Holocaust to see how such arguments were evaluated by the participants.

One of the most important findings of the focus group research on new antisemitism and Holocaust distortion was that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict often triggered expressions of antisemitism, as well as Holocaust distortion. The close connectedness of secondary and new antisemitism was apparent during the group discussions, and these entangled narratives were often reinforced by Holocaust distortion. Moreover, it was the issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that elicited the most anti-Jewish sentiments

during the group discussions. In fact, the most extreme manifestations of antisemitism were connected to the conflict. However, it is important to note that the guidelines for this section contained some content explicitly linking the above-mentioned topics. The results therefore only indicate a strong susceptibility to antisemitic content and cannot be generalized or interpreted to measure the extent of antisemitic attitudes among the participants.

Still, it is noteworthy that participants in all eight online focus groups made quite a few antisemitic comments, including many instances of Holocaust relativization and Holocaust inversion. In the Czech focus groups, for example, several participants explicitly compared Israel's policies to those of the Nazis during a discussion about whether one can openly criticize Israel: "Jews did to the Palestinians exactly what Hitler did to them, they expelled them, quickly expelled them, murdered them, the Palestinian hatred is quite understandable." The participants in the Polish focus groups were mostly against the idea of comparing the Holocaust and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, although one participant found it possible to draw a parallel, stating: "the aim is the same, [but] the methods are different." Participants in the Hungarian focus group demonstrated a high level of susceptibility to antisemitic content. A significant number of them agreed with the statement, "It is hard to criticize Israel because they always defend themselves with the Holocaust." After an antisemitic text including Holocaust inversion[9] was shown to them, most of the participants – indeed all of the participants in the second focus group – did not refute the statement, and many of them expressed at least partial agreement with the text or considered it plausible. One of the participants even commented that "it is a very mean-spirited thing to slaughter innocents [Palestinians] while hiding behind the fact that the same was done to them [Jews]. Then they are no better than Hitler." After the moderator asked in a follow-up question whether the participants thought the text to be truthful, later implying that the text was only an opinion, none of the participants in the second focus group changed their minds – all those who answered continued to perceive such antisemitic claims as plausible.

4.2.5 Latency pressure as a motivation for new antisemitism

The last section of the guidelines focused on the issue of latency pressure as a motivation for new antisemitism. Researchers of antisemitism agree that one motivational force behind new antisemitism is a desire to hide one's antisemitic views as they are seen as socially unacceptable. As anti-Jewish sentiments are often projected onto Israel, this section focused on latency pressure, i.e. how much participants feel that anti-Jewish statements cannot be openly expressed in public (or semi-public) discussions. In particular, it measured the possible latency of opinions based on two sets of questions. One set of questions focused on the participants' individual level of latency, while the other targeted the participants' perceptions regarding latency pressures. The results of the focus group discussions in all four Visegrád countries indicated that a significant

[9] The text in question reads as follows: "During the 2008 Israeli military operation in Gaza, many hundreds of innocent Palestinian civilians were killed. The issue of war crimes cannot be raised because Israel always points to the Holocaust and cries antisemitism whenever it is criticized. In fact, it is Israel that uses terror against the Palestinians in Gaza, which is the biggest concentration camp of all time."

number of participants felt latency pressures when expressing views about Jews and thus likely hid their negative opinions about Jewish people and related topics.

In the Hungarian focus groups, participants typically thought that a majority of Hungarians would be more cautious about expressing opinions about Jewish people than about themselves, pointing to the perceived existence of social pressure against making anti-Jewish sentiments. Obviously, individuals often regard themselves as unique and thus exempt from social pressures. The results in the Slovak and Polish focus groups were similar to those in the Hungarian focus groups. In the Czech focus groups, however, the results painted a mixed picture. In one of the groups, none of the participants stated that they felt afraid to express their opinions about Jewish people openly, and only a few participants claimed that they feared being labelled as antisemites as a consequence of expressing their views about Jews. To summarize, except for this one focus group in the Czech Republic, the results indicate that participants perceived some form of latency pressure and thus possibly suppressed their antisemitic sentiments. This outcome is significant, since it contextualizes the relative lack of spontaneous antisemitic manifestations during the focus group discussions, thus informing our analysis of the other key findings of the research.

4.3 Summary of findings of online focus group research

Having described the key findings of the online focus group research in detail, in this section we highlight the most important takeaways from the research, which also served as a basis for the policy discussions.

Hard-core Holocaust denial – i.e. the rejection of the historical truth of the Holocaust – was absent during the group discussions in all countries, and participants found claims of hard-core Holocaust denial absurd and unacceptable. Participants also unanimously condemned the Holocaust, viewing it as a tragic historical event, if not the most tragic event of the twentieth century, and perceived it as part of their history. Participants considered educational programmes about the Holocaust to be important. Indeed, participants, and the Czech focus group members in particular, overwhelmingly advocated more comprehensive school curricula that include teaching about the Holocaust. Despite differences between countries, a significant number of participants also supported more commemorations and compulsory school visits to places of remembrance or museums, as well as interactions with witnesses and survivors.

At the same time, there was some discomfort when it came to engaging with the topic of the Holocaust. Participants' emotional reactions towards the Holocaust demonstrated varying degrees of empathy. Furthermore, when discussing the Holocaust as an historical event – although this was less observable in the case of the Czech and Slovak focus groups – participants overwhelmingly avoided such words as Jews, terms describing the political ideologies of perpetrators or national collaborators, and even the word antisemitism. Instead, they typically utilized common narratives in which the Holocaust appeared as a symbol of universal suffering and as an historical event from the distant past, with the only present-day implication being a vague moral lesson of "never again", devoid of the actual victims, perpetrators and historical context.

While hard-core Holocaust denial was absent,

different forms of Holocaust distortion surfaced on a number of occasions during the discussions. With the exception of the first focus group discussions in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, issues relating to the remembrance of the Holocaust – especially when discussing its relevance today or the role of perpetrators – often elicited antisemitic remarks, ranging from common anti-Jewish stereotypes to downplaying Jewish victimhood as a result of the Shoah or making false comparisons with other historical events. Antisemitic comments relating to Holocaust remembrance were often linked to traditional antisemitic stereotypes of a conspiratorial nature, such as alleging that Jews are always in top positions in international politics, business, the media, and the film industry, combined with the claim that there is too much Holocaust remembrance, which is exploited by the Jews for political or financial gain.

Another factor affecting the way in which participants related to issues about the Holocaust was their typical perception of history and the role of historical events in the present day. This apparent contradiction between condemning the Holocaust while responding negatively to Holocaust remembrance was often linked to the participants' belief that historical events have no significance for society today. It is conceivable that this belief allowed them to distance themselves from "mere" historical discourses (i.e. discourses about the Shoah or the Jewish people), thus enabling them to acknowledge the enormity of the Holocaust while sidestepping the inconvenient memory of the Holocaust or even hiding their real – perhaps anti-Jewish – attitudes.

Even though competitive victimhood is widely understood to be a major motivating factor behind Holocaust denial and distortion, as well as having specific relevance in the region, questions designed to trigger and explore competitive victimhood narratives did not lead to anti-Jewish expressions during the discussions. Although victim narratives were very much present, the suffering of different ethnic and religious groups (including the Jews) were not compared to each other. It is posited that an important factor behind the lack of competitive victimhood was the participants' tendency to perceive the twentieth century as a coherent period defined first and foremost by its tragic nature. In the context of such a simple yet dark view of that century, the suffering of various victims was not interpreted through the logic of competitive victimhood but rather that of inclusive victimhood, as everyone was considered to have been a victim of the same historical period.

Another important finding was that, although the participants typically made relatively few spontaneous antisemitic remarks,[10] the level of susceptibility to antisemitic content was often high in all four Visegrád countries. Participants were particularly susceptible to antisemitic narratives in which the Holocaust was inverted and used against the state of Israel. Indeed, such antisemitic narratives were often accepted even by participants who otherwise made no antisemitic comments. This indicates a potential for Holocaust distortion to spread and gain recognition in a much wider population.

Finally, two important remarks should be made regarding the focus group discussions. First, there was an apparent lack of willingness to openly disagree with anti-Jewish comments. Antisemitic statements were often met with indifference and

[10] Ibid.

silence. Even seemingly non-antisemitic participants failed to present counter-arguments to antisemitic content. Second, while this was less observable in the Slovak focus groups, participants generally had insufficient knowledge of issues relating to Jews, Jewish culture and history, Zionism, the history of Israel (including the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), the Shoah and the different forms of and motivations behind antisemitism and Holocaust denial and distortion.

5. Policy workshops

Drawing on the findings of the focus group research, policy workshops were organized in each Visegrád country.[11] A diverse group of professionals with a good understanding of the local political context and social climate were invited to participate alongside the antisemitism experts. The aims of the workshop were twofold. We aimed: (1) to develop feasible proposals for social and policy action to tackle Holocaust denial and distortion; and (2) to generate insights for further research. To achieve these goals, we sought to initiate a process of collaborative conversation between academics and practitioners using the generative dialogue method. This method was chosen to enable collective thinking (Bohm 1990) and to generate new knowledge by opening up "a collective new learning space" among researchers and practitioners (Moir-Bussy 2010, cited in Petta et al. 2019, 54), where members of the group gain new insights, a new awareness and a deeper and more complex grasp of the problem while new ideas and solutions can emerge along with a commitment towards action (Senge 2015).

To ensure the implementation of a similar process in each country, facilitation techniques and pointers for conducting the workshops were shared with the country researchers in advance. The policy workshops were organized along the same principles, [12] with a diverse group of professionals[13] and local stakeholders in each country. All participants received materials relating to the research prior to the workshops to trigger reactions. [14] Following the workshops, a short summary of the discussions and main results was produced in each country. Afterwards, a meeting was convened to allow the researchers and the policy expert to compare the process and results in each country.

[11] Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the policy workshops were held online, which had multiple disadvantages compared to face-to-face meetings. Substantive dialogue on a virtual platform cannot be maintained for longer than three hours, while facilitation techniques are restricted and the depth of the connection between the participants is limited.

[12] A maximum of two sessions were held in each country. The workshops started with the sharing of key personal reactions and insights. The dialogue was open, creative and unstructured, with minimal facilitation, to enable participants to share ideas. Towards the end of the process, the generative thinking continued on key issues with a view to framing emerging new perspectives, connecting ideas and co-creating options for action in a more strictly facilitated dialogue.

[13] The group in Poland was composed of academics and civil society participants. In Slovakia, a psychiatrist and a journalist were also invited. The Czech group included a filmmaker, a curator/consultant for the Ministry of Culture and policy experts, in addition to academics and civil society participants. A highly diverse group was also recruited in Hungary, including social psychologists, sociologists, an artist, a curator, a museologist and professionals from the field of communication, adaptive leadership, human rights and education. It was facilitated by a policy expert.

[14] Before the workshops, the Hungarian, Slovakian and Polish participants read a short summary of the research findings regarding their countries. In the Czech Republic, the participants received reading material only between the two sessions. Participants had access to the following documents: longer versions of the research reports and findings concerning their own country and the other Visegrád countries; a short summary of the policy proposals of intergovernmental organizations; a detailed document of standard policy proposals focusing specifically on addressing antisemitism; and a short note on the generative dialogue method that also listed the composition of the group and the rules, process and objectives of the workshops.

5.1
Practice-oriented proposals developed by the policy workshops

Reflecting on the findings of the online focus group research, the workshops produced two main and interrelated sets of practice-oriented proposals. The first set focuses on building resilience against antisemitic content and narratives distorting the Holocaust, while the second centres on creating conditions for challenging such narratives. These proposals are summarized in the sections below.

5.1.1
Building resilience against susceptibility to antisemitic content and Holocaust denial and distortion

It was apparent from the focus group discussions that participants generally had insufficient knowledge of Jewish culture and history and that they lacked understanding of different forms of antisemitism. Such a lack of knowledge can increase the likelihood of reliance on stereotypes and the development of anti-Jewish prejudices. It can also increase the susceptibility of individuals to antisemitic content. Therefore, the following recommendations were made to tackle this issue:

- To develop intercultural understanding, learning about Jewish culture, traditions, diversity and history, including the history of the state of Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, should be promoted. The diversity and complexity of Jewish experience and the positive contributions of Jewish culture and individuals, including women, to society should be reflected in the curriculum. Educational content related to Jewish communities should be developed with their active participation.
- To increase understanding of antisemitic stereotypes and prejudice and how they develop, educational programmes should focus on learning about history, patterns and the social-psychological dynamics of stereotypes and prejudice, including antisemitism. Such programmes should also explore the impact of harmful stereotypes on individuals and their rights and highlight the importance of shared social responsibility for challenging them.

While promoting knowledge about the Holocaust is key in enabling individuals to identify and reject messages of Holocaust denial and distortion, the focus group research showed that many participants felt that the attention given to the Holocaust was disproportionate compared to other historical events and expressed negative feelings towards Holocaust remembrance. Therefore, actions aimed at including more Holocaust-related content in the curriculum and increasing the number of remembrance activities carry the risk of counterproductive overcharging, possibly leading to anti-Jewish resentment. An alternative approach that emerged from the discussions accordingly emphasizes the importance of "not more but different" Holocaust education and remembrance. While remembering and learning about the Shoah is an important tool for addressing Holocaust denial and distortion, in order for it to be effective the following considerations should be taken into account:

- The Holocaust should not be understood as a single event in the past. Instead, teaching should focus on the socio-historical processes that led up to it and its consequences for today's society as a whole.
- Students should learn basic concepts of social psychology adjusted to their age group to help

them understand the social dynamics that led to the Holocaust and continue to lead to prejudice and exclusion.

- Instead of merely aiming to transmit more factual knowledge on the Holocaust and antisemitism, educational programmes should combine cognitive learning with social-emotional learning.
- Teaching through arts and literature, local history and personal stories can play an important role in making learning about the Holocaust more meaningful to students. It could help young people understand the impact of past traumas on society as a whole and engender empathy for victims, while avoiding the perpetuation of Jewish victimhood and more accusatory forms of teaching. Teaching through such channels can also help facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of historical events, explored from multiple points of view.
- Teachers, who are often only trained to use traditional frontal education methods and who generally have a limited knowledge of antisemitic stereotypes and Jewish history and culture, should receive support and training to increase their knowledge in these areas and implement the methodological changes described above.
- It is important to increase awareness of the plurality of historical narratives and memory cultures and the reasons behind them when remembering and teaching about the Holocaust and events leading up it. This includes acknowledging all victims of Nazi regimes without downplaying historical Jewish victimhood and tackling overlapping victim and perpetrator roles in the tragic events of the Second World War. Equally important is to fully incorporate perpetrator legacies, including the role of bystanders, into official remembrance and education policies.

5.1.2 Effective approaches to tackle antisemitism and Holocaust denial and distortion

It was apparent from the focus group research that when antisemitic statements arose they were typically met with indifference and silence from other participants. The second set of proposals therefore focuses on creating conditions for challenging such narratives. Educational approaches to build self-confidence and the sense of agency necessary for standing up against antisemitism are crucial. These include efforts to advance citizenship education, promote a sense of solidarity and social responsibility, foster debate culture and develop the ability to have difficult conversations. In this context, the following proposals were developed:

- Children should be socialized from kindergarten onwards in institutions where the daily practice demonstrates dignity and respect and the importance of solidarity, social inclusion and coherence; where they can learn to voice their values and opinions; and where they can experience that their contribution to the community matters, thereby learning social responsibility, solidarity and agency.
- From primary school onwards, citizenship education should be strengthened. This should include but not be limited to advancing critical thinking and self-reflection skills that cultivate opinion-forming and debating culture, while fostering effective communication skills that allow for positive, respectful interaction with others.
- More specifically, teachers should nurture their students' competence and confidence to voice

values and opinions. They should create an atmosphere of trust in classrooms, cultivating a space in which students can express themselves freely and do not fear retaliation or condemnation because of their views.
- Moreover, instead of simply "transmitting knowledge", they should support the learning process using interactive and inclusive methods. This means encouraging analytical and critical thinking, active listening, empathy, sensitivity to the fate of others, cooperation, initiative, responsibility for decision-making and the ability to recognize the consequences of one's actions and non-actions.
- Approaches of experiential and transformative education should be applied. Knowledge should be contextualized in actual experiences, and students should develop their understanding of the world and themselves through reflection and active learning and by placing themselves into situations and creating a space for a potential change in their perspectives and frames of reference.

In addition, in order to reach out to broader audiences and convince them to challenge antisemitism and stand up against Holocaust denial and distortion, a compelling narrative needs to be articulated. Such a narrative should avoid being a repressive, taboo-generating and stigmatizing discourse (Bernáth 2017) that dictates what people should say and think, making them feel marginalized, ignorant and irrelevant. Instead, it should make them realize that speaking up against antisemitism and Holocaust denial and distortion aligns with their own personal interests. It also needs to convince them that theycan make a difference through their actions. Moreover, engaging individuals from outside the human rights circle who have more credibility with certain audiences is also crucial. The same applies to amplifying the voices of those who are willing to challenge antisemitism and Holocaust denial and distortion in order to produce a wider social impact. This will require:

- Developing activity-based narrative strategies by translating fundamental values into stories of positive impact that can mobilize others to take action and making those stories visible through dissemination in the media and social channels. Such strategies should ensure that the engagement of individuals provides them with positive emotional involvement, a sense of community, self-esteem and pride.
- Bringing the narrative to life by designing and implementing influencer campaigns to challenge antisemitism and Holocaust denial and distortion by:
  - identifying, bringing on board, educating, mentoring and supporting influencers who have the power to affect the decisions of others because of their authority, knowledge, position or relationship with their audience; and
  - providing them with the necessary infrastructure by involving communication experts, social scientists and social media professionals to enable them to develop and disseminate a narrative through their channels that conveys a positive message that can create a sense of agency and mobilize others to take action against antisemitism and Holocaust denial and distortion.

5.2. Policy workshop inputs for further research

In addition to formulating actionable proposals to tackle Holocaust denial and distortion, discussions during the policy workshops equipped the researchers with a more nuanced un-

derstanding of interconnected issues, practical considerations and inputs for further research. In these concluding paragraphs, we present the main takeaways from the policy workshops that will help future researchers formulate region-specific survey questions on modern antisemitism in the Visegrád countries.

A key finding of the focus group research is that participants were generally inclined towards high levels of susceptibility to antisemitic content. In addition, the research clearly shows that in several cases even those participants who otherwise did not make any antisemitic comments during the group discussions were susceptible to anti-Jewish narratives. The problem of varying levels of prejudice or antisemitic attitudes was also brought up during the policy workshops, which noted that it is not efficient to concentrate policy programmes on individuals with deeply anchored and/or extreme antisemitic views. Thus, future research should tackle the problem of susceptibility and the solidity of antisemitic attitudes. More specifically, it should explore the wide spectrum of antisemitic mindsets behind the phenomenon of susceptibility, ranging from ignorance and the availability of antisemitic stereotypes and narratives to crystallized and consciously antisemitic worldviews.

Another important input for future research articulated by the policy workshops is that policy programmes should target individuals who are opposed to anti-Jewish expressions but unable or unwilling to engage in counter-arguments. This assessment, which is in line with the findings from our focus group research, could serve as a basis for policy recommendations and also provides an important insight for future research on antisemitism. It would be highly beneficial to identify those individuals who are potential but still reluctant "transmitters" of counter-arguments and to assess their level of willingness to engage in debates concerning antisemitism. In this way, sufficient survey data could be obtained about the potential impact of planned policy programmes.

Finally, although narratives of collective victimhood featured prominently in the focus group discussions, specific questions relating to victimhood did not lead to a competition of victimhood or to Holocaust denial and distortion. Rather, they pointed towards a perception of "common victimhood" in which all groups are considered victims of the tragic events of the twentieth century. However, it is possible that, if the question of national responsibility for those events had been explored in relation to narratives of collective victimhood, the participants would have compared tragic historical events with each other, possibly leading to a competition of victimhood. The question of national responsibility, the prevalence of collective victim narratives and the widespread mentality of passivity and victimhood were all raised during the policy workshops. Collective victimhood is widely considered to be one of the key factors behind Holocaust denial and distortion in the region. For this reason, we believe that the question of national responsibility for past atrocities – including the Holocaust – should be explored together with narratives of competitive victimhood in future research on antisemitism, including in a forthcoming survey conducted by the Tom Lantos Institute and its partners, in order to test this hypothesis.

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The Tom Lantos Institute (TLI) is an independent human and minority rights organisation with a particular focus on Jewish and Roma communities, and on Hungarian and other ethnic or national, linguistic and religious minorities. It is a Budapest-based organisation with a multi-party Board of Trustees, an international Executive Committee, and Advisory Board. TLI operates internationally in terms of scope, funding, staff and partners. As a research and education platform, TLI aims to bridge the gaps between research and policy, norms and practice. TLI focuses on human rights and identity issues in general, and also works on three specific issue areas. these include: Jewish life and antisemitism; Roma rights and citizenship; and Hungarian minorities.

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