

# Illiberalism and Antisemitism under Post-Communism

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## Abstract:

Illiberalism dates way back to the aftermath of the French Revolution but its post-communist resurrection may be approximately traced to the second decade of the new millennium. After reviewing several attempts to analyze the phenomenon and its causes, the article underlines the oft-neglected Carl Schmitt roots of the friend-enemy boundary common to illiberals such as Viktor Orbán, Jarosław Kaczyński, Benjamin Netanyahu and Donald Trump. While illiberalism does not necessarily trigger antisemitism, it might foster it. Shared illiberal values may quash differences in attitudes towards antisemitism and official postures on antisemitism are insufficient to be guided by when examining differences between official and popular discourses.

**Key words:** illiberalism, counter-revolution, usable history, friend-enemy, antisemitism.

In an article published online in August 2021, the evergreen Yehuda Bauer presents a depressing image of what he calls “the struggle of our time”, involving liberals, illiberals, and waverers. The latter two, he convincingly argues, by now far outweigh the former.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this article is far more modest (but who can compare with Bauer?). It (first) aims to scrutinize older and more recent definitions of illiberalism, contending that, by-and-large, they are unsatisfactory (Bauer’s including), and that all of them leave out the important roots of Carl Schmitt’s friend-enemy boundary shared by illiberal leaders of the likes of Viktor Orbán, Jarosław Kaczyński, Benjamin Netanyahu, and Donald Trump. The article’s economy does not leave room for adding other examples, such as Slovenia’s Janez Janša or Serbia’s Aleksandar Vučić. The article then proceeds to examine to what extent illiberalism is necessarily linked to antisemitism, concentrating on examples from Poland and Hungary.

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<sup>1</sup> Bauer, ‘Liberals, Illiberals, and Waverers...’.

If I were a “protochronist”<sup>2</sup>, I might be easily tempted into adding one more claim to the long list of illustrious people and concepts allegedly emanating from the local genius, for in its modern utilization the concept of illiberalism was born on Transylvanian soil. Fortunately, however, its progenitor was no Transylvanian. It was first utilized by Hungarian Premier Viktor Orbán at the traditional summer school organized yearly by the Hungarian Democratic Union of Romania at Băile Tușnad (Tusnádfürdő) on 26 July 2014.<sup>3</sup> Orbán’s speeches on this occasion often have the status of “doctrine”, and it is not surprising that the address aroused in the region – and not only – an echo resembling post-seismic vibrations. Faced with generally negative echoes, Orbán soon gave up using illiberal democracy, replacing it with the notion of “Christian Democracy”, which in turn must have caused some of the founding fathers of postwar Christian Democracy<sup>4</sup> to turn in their graves.

### What Is Illiberalism – and What Is Not

But the notion of illiberalism was not as new as it seemed to some. Fareed Zakaria had already launched it in an article published in 1997, which would become a volume published in 2003.<sup>5</sup> It goes without saying that Orbán never quoted Zakaria, for all his references on illiberalism pertained to the dangers faced by classic democracy at present. In a book titled *Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, published in 1993, University of Chicago professor Steven Holmes employed the notions of anti-liberalism and illiberalism alternately<sup>6</sup>, referring, in fact, to the negative reaction aroused among some prominent intellectuals by the French Revolution, the Enlightenment, and positivism. Hence the notion of *reactionary*, a concept whose original meaning was distorted by the communists by using it as an epithet against any political opponent. Viewed from this perspective, illiberalism, in both its original, and contemporary senses, undoubtedly belongs to the category of concepts called by the late Zeev Sternhell “the anti-Enlightenment tradition”<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> On protochronism, see Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism...*; Tomiță, *O istorie „glo-rioașă”...*

<sup>3</sup> English translation of the speech in *Budapest Beacon*, 29 July 2014, republished in *Hungarian Spectrum*, 31 July, 2014 (<http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/07/31/viktor-orbans-speech-at-the-xxv-balvanyos-free-summer-university-and-youth-camp-july-26-2014-baile-tusnad-tusnad-furdo/>).

<sup>4</sup> See Durand, *L’Europe de la démocratie chrétienne*; Kaiser, *Christian Democracy and the Origins of European Union*; Schirman, *Robert Schumann et les pères de l’Europe...*

<sup>5</sup> Zakaria, ‘The Rise of Illiberal Democracy’; Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom, Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*.

<sup>6</sup> Holmes, *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, 34, 53, 75, 79, 90

<sup>7</sup> Sternhell, *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition*.

At the same time, illiberalism can be perceived as a *counter-revolution* – it is indeed perceived as such by its second prominent representative after Orbán, the Polish politician Jarosław Kaczyński.<sup>8</sup>

But what revolution do the illiberals want to liquidate? And if we are dealing with a counter-revolution, to which *status quo ante* do they want to return? Finally, by what means?

In an important article published in 2020, Jan Zelionka and Jacques Rupnik emphasized that the counter-revolutionary movement haunting the region is by no means aimed at a return to Communism, stressing that both Orbán, and Kaczyński were among those who put their shoulder to the wheel at the disappearance of the former regime. What they both claim (and are by no means the only ones to do so) is the urgent need for a so-called “return of Europe” to itself.<sup>9</sup> In other words, the two respond to the accusations that they had moved away from the European values enshrined in several basic documents of the European Union by counter-accusing that the EU has moved away from the true values that in their eyes, are the nation-state (hence their membership in the stream of the so-called “sovereignists” within the EU) and Christianity. The latter, as a European value, implies in this interpretation (but is not limited to it) the rejection of immigrants and of homosexuality perceived as endangering family as a basic unit of society.

But how did it get here, when we know that Poland and Hungary were among the first states in the region to embrace Western liberalism after 1989? In a volume published in 2020, Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes trace the emergence of the illiberal current in the region towards the end of the first decade of the new millennium. According to the authors, one is dealing with a great disappointment – hence the title of the volume, *The Light That Failed*, which (not accidentally) recalls the volume edited by Richard Crossman in 1949, including articles published by prominent intellectuals disillusioned by Communism.<sup>10</sup> The book is about the former communist countries’ gradual disillusionment with the Western model in general and with Western Europe and the EU in particular. Here or there, some of their remarks may be contested, but not ignored. The authors point out that after the 1989 collapse of Communism, all over the region the Western model “signified democratization, liberalization, [EU] enlargement, integration, harmonization, globalization, and so forth”, always signifying “modernization by emulation and integration by assimilation”<sup>11</sup>. This liberal model was “generally associated with the ideals of individual opportunity, freedom to move and travel, unpunished dissent, access to justice, and government responsiveness to public demands”<sup>12</sup>. This liberal

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<sup>8</sup> Zelionka / Rupnik, ‘From Revolution to “Counter-Revolution”...’, 1074.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, 1073.

<sup>10</sup> Crossman, *The God That Failed*.

<sup>11</sup> Krastev / Holmes, *The Light That Failed: The Reckoning*, 7

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, 21.

model dubbed by the two authors as the “Age of Emulation” explains its rejection as well, in what Krastev and Holmes call “the Age of Resentment”: “Populism’s political rise cannot be explained without taking account of widespread resentment at the way (imposed) no-alternative Soviet Communism, after 1989, was replaced by the (invited) no-alternative Western liberalism”<sup>13</sup>.

However, they write, “by 2010, the Central and Eastern European versions of liberalism became “indelibly tainted by two decades of rising social inequality, pervasive corruption, and the morally arbitrary redistribution of public property into the hands of small numbers of people”<sup>14</sup>.

Krastev and Holmes state that two important factors contributed to this involution, namely the global financial crisis of 2008, which led to a loss of confidence in the Western model in general and in neo-liberalism in particular as the only possible path to economic sustainability; and the massive emigration to the West of the elites of the most prominent advocates of the Western model, to which will soon be added the perceived danger of losing one’s identity in the face of mass immigration from third-world countries. Thus, according to the two authors, the quasi-consensual Western model of emulating the West underwent a radical transformation over time and nowadays the populists in Central Europe “constantly lament the imposition of Western values, attitudes, institutions, and practices imported from the West as imperative and obligatory”<sup>15</sup>. Yet both statements are debatable. As Zelionka and Rupnik point out, the financial crisis of 2008 hit the southern part of the European continent much harder than Central and Eastern Europe, where the crisis mainly affected the Baltic States. It is true that in Poland the 2015 elections brought to power the Kaczyński-led Law and Justice (PiS) party, but the economic crisis did not bring about this change, since under the predecessors in power of PiS, the Civic Platform (PO), the economy had grown over 20%.<sup>16</sup>

Neither did emigration and immigration necessarily play the role attributed to these factors by the two authors. Not that the *perceptions induced by the illiberals* would not play an important role in 2015 and later, but they were rather the *catalyst* for trends already existing in society and in its political leadership. Budapest suffered a brief invasion by several thousand refugees, but they did not intend to stay (and did not stay) in Hungary. The Poles witnessed the “invasion” on their TV screens and even today Polish economy would be in poor state without the thousands of, well... “Islamists” from the Ukraine or, more recently, Belarus.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Krastev / Holmes, *The Light That Failed: The Reckoning*, 14.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, 21.

<sup>15</sup> Ivan Krastev, Stephen Holmes, ‘How liberalism became “the God that failed” in Eastern Europe’, *The Guardian*, 24 October 2019 (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/24/western-liberalism-failed-post-communist-eastern-europe>).

<sup>16</sup> Zelionka / Rupnik, ‘From Revolution to “Counter-Revolution”...’, 1076.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

None of these dissociations, however, diminish the validity of Krastev and Holmes's statement that today:

“[m]any of the democracies that emerged at the end of the Cold War have been transformed into conspiracy-minded majoritarian regimes. In them, political opposition is demonized, non-government media, civil society, and independent courts are denuded of their influence, and sovereignty is defined by the leadership's determination to resist pressure and conform to western ideals of political pluralism, government transparency, and tolerance for strangers, dissidents, and minorities”<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps the shortest description of the essence of illiberalism does not belong to political scientists, but to the most prominent living Holocaust historian, Yehuda Bauer, who wrote in an article published in 2019:

“Liberalism means an independent judiciary that can veto the legislative branch, when there is a danger of undemocratic subversion by a majority (all majorities in a liberal democracy are temporary). It means freedom of research and teaching, aspiring to gender equality, and striving for negotiated solutions to internal and external conflicts – but it also means defense by force when necessary to protect society and state. Liberalism means the rule of law, and the right and duty of a police system to enforce it; however, it also means protecting the individual from arbitrary police intervention and from torture and humiliation.”

Up to this point, I believe Bauer cannot be contested. But he adds: “The opposite of all of this is called ‘illiberalism’ by many”<sup>19</sup>. On this point, I think he's wrong, and we'll soon see why.

In a different article published in 2020, Bauer places Hungary, Poland, Russia, and China in the same illiberal category. In the first three states, he writes, “more or less free elections are held, and the majority of voters support their authoritarian rulers, as most Chinese probably support theirs.” One is allegedly dealing in Hungary, Poland, and Russia with illiberal democracies, whose main feature is based on “nationalist authoritarianism”<sup>20</sup>.

But Hungary and Poland are rather “competitive authority” regimes, to use the term coined by Levitsky and Way and used by Zelionka and Rupnik.<sup>21</sup> In the volume published by the same Levitsky, together with Daniel Ziblatt, in 2018, titled *How Democracies Die*, Hungary and Poland fall into the category of *mildly authoritarian* regimes, Turkey into the category of *authoritarian regimes*, and Russia (today we would add, of course, Belarus), into the category of *highly authoritarian*

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<sup>18</sup> Krastev / Holmes, ‘How liberalism became “the God that failed” in Eastern Europe’.

<sup>19</sup> Bauer, ‘Global Trends in a Complex World...’, 319.

<sup>20</sup> Bauer, ‘Creating a “Usable” Past...’, 214-5.

<sup>21</sup> Levitsky / Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die...*, 188.

regimes.<sup>22</sup> The main difference between the first and the last two categories? There are no political prisoners in Poland and Hungary.<sup>23</sup>

Political culture is, of course, relevant in explaining illiberalism, but at the same time it turns out to be too broad a concept. After all, Donald Trump (the declared admirer of Orbán and vice versa<sup>24</sup>) also belongs to the category of illiberals (and it would be difficult to argue that Orbán and Kaczyński belong to the same political culture, although this is not the case when examining sub-cultures, as the Hungarian Prime-Minister, the PiS leader and the former US president partly owe their success to the under-educated and rural electoral segments (in both Poland, and Hungary, some 40% of the population dwells in rural areas).<sup>25</sup>

I am inclined to believe that success is mainly due to another factor, too rarely mentioned or taken into account: the manufacture of the enemy. I do not suspect

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<sup>22</sup> Levitsky / Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism...*, 188; Zeligson / Rupnik, 'From Revolution to "Counter-Revolution"...'

<sup>23</sup> Rupnik, 'Le variant illibéral'.

<sup>24</sup> Benjamin Novak, Patrick Kingsley, 'Trump tries to bring Hungary's Orban in from the cold', *The New York Times*, 12 May 2013 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/12/world/europe/orban-trump-hungary-white-house.html>); Aime Williams, Valerie Hopkins, 'Trump praises Hungary's Orban in White House visit', *The Financial Times*, 13 May 2019 (<https://www.ft.com/content/06f69c6c-75a8-11e9-bbad-7c18c0ea0201>); 'Trump praises "respected" Hungary PM Orbán', *BBC News*, 13 May 2019 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-48260165>); Mike Eckel, 'Trump praises hard-line Hungarian PM in closely watched White House meeting', *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 13 May 2019 (<https://www.rferl.org/a/trump-hungary-orban/29936876.html>); Chris Riotta, 'Trump says Orban doing "tremendous job" in Hungary during White House visit despite concerns of illiberal democracy', *The Independent*, 14 May 2019 (<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/trump-viktor-orban-hungary-prime-minister-white-house-visit-a8912451.html>); Charles Gati, 'Two adventurers in the White House', *Hungarian Spectrum*, 15 May 2019, (<http://hungarianspectrum.org/2019/05/15/charles-gati-two-adventurers-in-the-white-house/>).

<sup>25</sup> Bauer, 'Creating a "Usable" Past...', 225; Ernst Hillebrand, "'The Close Election Result is Quite Surprising'", *International Politics and Society*, 13 July 2020 (<https://www.ips-journal.eu/index.php>); Shaun Walker, 'Standing up for the "real" Poland: How Duda exploited rural-urban divide to win re-election', *The Guardian*, 18 July 2020 (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/18/andrzej-duda-poland-rural-urban-re-election>); Claudia Ciobanu, 'Election blues; Why Poland's opposition keeps losing', *BalkanInsight*, 22 July 2020 (<https://www.balkaninsight.com/2020/07/22/election-blues-why-polands-opposition-keeps-losing/>); Edit Inotai, 'Governing, not winning, seen greater test for Hungarian opposition', *BalkanInsight*, 24 March 2021 (<https://www.balkaninsight.com/2021/03/24/governing-not-winning-seen-greater-test-for-hungarys-united-opposition/>); Nate Silver, 'Education, not income, predicted who would vote for Trump', *FiveThirtyEight*, 22 November 2018 (<https://www.fivethirtyeight.com/features/education-not-income-predicted-who-would-vote-for-trump/>); Niskanen Center, 'Explaining the urban-rural political divide,' 17 July 2019 (<https://www.niskanen-center.org/explaining-the-urban-rural-political-divide/>); Will Jennings, 'Educated urban voters are key to success in a deeply divided America', *The Guardian*, 8 November 2020 (<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/nov/08/america-deeply-divided-educated-urban-voters>); Edit Inotai, 'Hungary's opposition embarks on difficult journey to bridge urban-rural divide', *BalkanInsight*, 21 June 2021 (<https://balkaninsight.com/2021/06/21/hungarys-opposition-embarks-on-difficult-journey-to-bridge-urban-rural-divide/>).

Trump ever read Carl Schmitt, and the other two illiberals probably did not either. But Schmitt is rightly considered one of the leading illiberal thinkers, mainly due to the distinction made in *The Concept of Politics*, between “Friends” and “Enemies”. That book dates from 1928, so before the author made himself available to the Nazis who (and no wonder) used him abundantly, while he zealously served them. For Schmitt, having an enemy is the very coagulant that gives meaning to community life, and, where it does not exist, it must be invented, even by mythologizing it.<sup>26</sup> I am, of course, simplifying, but I do it to get back to today’s illiberals.

One would rarely find a book or scientific article that does not refer to Viktor Orbán’s war against the Jewish billionaire of Hungarian origin George Soros, a war successfully exported to almost all neighboring countries, including Romania.<sup>27</sup> However, not many are aware that we are dealing here with a Schmittian invention that belongs to the late (2017) American-Jewish “spin doctor” Arthur J. Finkelstein. And it is no coincidence that the same Finkelstein was also an electoral adviser to Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu. After losing the 2008 elections, Orbán was searching for a formula suitable to bring him back to power. Finkelstein found it, advising him to attack (we are right after the global financial crisis) multinationals, foreign capital, and corruption among left-wing parties, greatly exaggerating the reality of the latter. Which would not stop him from becoming one of the most corrupt politicians in the region today.<sup>28</sup> The following blueprint dates from 2014, and its name was Soros. As one of Finkelstein’s collaborators (George Eli Birnbaum, also a Jew) admits, it was a “Mephistophelean” invention that brilliantly fabricated the required enemy. And when the anti-Soros ammunition seemed to have somewhat lost its penetration might, Finkelstein advised him to find a new “enemy”: the homosexuals – although Finkelstein himself was gay.<sup>29</sup> The Finkelstein legacy also contributed (albeit indirectly) to coining illiberalism into an alleged political virtue, for he advised his clients to not talk about themselves, but instead to focus on destroying opponents. Finkelstein became notorious for turning “liberal” into a dirty word. In TV campaigns that no 1990s American could avoid, his clients’ opponents were branded as “ultra liberal”, “crazy liberal”,

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<sup>26</sup> Holmes, *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, 37-60; Scheuerman, *Carl Schmitt: The End of Law*; Müller, *A Dangerous Mind*....

<sup>27</sup> See Shafir, ‘Light onto Europe or Darkness at Noon?...', 264.

<sup>28</sup> See Shafir, ‘Corruption and Populism in East-Central Post-Communist Europe...', 176.

<sup>29</sup> Eva Balogh, ‘The genesis of Orbán’s anti-Soros campaign’, *Hungarian Spectrum*, 15 January 2019 (<https://www.hungarianspectrum.org/2019/01/15/the-genesis-of-orbans-anti-soros-campaign/>); Ovidiu Năhoi, ‘Cum a fost inventat „Soros, evreul cel rău“’, in Ungaria’, *RFI*, 17 January 2019 (<https://www.rfi.ro/politica-108550-inventat-soros-evreul-rau-ungaria>); ‘Cum a fost inventată conspirația Soros de Arthur Finkelstein. Dezvăluirile omului care a lucrat alături de celebrul consultant politic’, *Digi24*, 26 January 2019 (<https://www.g4media.ro/cum-a-fost-inventata-conspiratia-soros-de-arthur-finkelstein-dezvaluirile-omului-care-a-lucrat-alaturi-de-celebrul-consultant-politic.html>); Gati, ‘Two adventurers in the White House’.

“embarrassingly liberal”, or “too liberal for too long”. Campaigners named his ideology “Finkel-Think”<sup>30</sup>.

Kaczyński also excels in inventing and reinventing enemies. He was probably the first politician to refer to what in Romania and elsewhere would be coined as the “parallel [or deep] state”. The Polish political rhetoric launched by Jarosław Kaczyński himself and his late presidential brother Lech has been enriched by the term *układ*, that they successfully used in the 2005 parliamentary and 2007 presidential elections. Initially, the meaning of the term had been close to the Romanian *pile, cunoștințe, relații* (“strings, connections, relationships”) or the Russian *svyazy* (“relationships”), *blat* (“influence”), *tolkach* (“insistence or arrangement”).<sup>31</sup> However, the Kaczyński brothers reinvented it in a post-communist sense, understanding by it the “traitors” who had allegedly “sold” Poland to the former communist elites at the “Round Table” negotiations (February-April 1989) – although at the time they had themselves participated in the parleys as members of the *Solidarność* leadership.<sup>32</sup> Under its new usage, the meaning of the term has come to encompass a conspiracy formed by informal networks that include politicians, former and current members of the security services, businessmen, and criminals. In fact, the targeted clientele is countered by an *anti-clientele*, by which is meant nurturing one’s own clientele networks (economic, but also political and intellectual) and/or allying with them with the purpose of replacing the earlier postcommunist networks.<sup>33</sup>

Although he never gave up *układ*, before the 2015 elections the main enemy underwent a radical metamorphosis: the migrants from the Middle East, said the Polish leader, endanger the health of the European continent, bringing with them cholera, dysentery, and the risk of spreading “all kinds of parasites and protozoa”. After all, he was sort of keeping his word, for after the loss of the 2011 elections Kaczyński had promised that “the day will come when we have Budapest in Warsaw”<sup>34</sup>. Finally, before the 2019 election (and here Warsaw preceded Budapest), the no. 1 public enemy became homosexuality (the LGBTQ community). As Polish analyst Stanisław Mocek explained, the attacks on homosexuals was “fuel for PiS”,

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<sup>30</sup> Hannes Grassegger, ‘The unbelievable story of the plot against George Soros’, *BuzzFeed News*, 20 January 2020 (<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/hnsgrassegger/george-soros-conspiracy-finkelstein-birnbaum-orban-netanyahu>).

<sup>31</sup> See Shafir, *România comunistă, 1948-1985...*, 359.

<sup>32</sup> Christian Davies, ‘The conspiracy theorists who have taken over Poland’, *The Guardian*, 16 February 2016 (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/16/conspiracy-theorists-who-have-taken-over-poland>). The two brothers left the party in 1991, following President Lech Wałęsa’s dismissal of Jarosław as chief of the presidential chancellery. They founded the Center Agreement Party in the same year and PiS, in 2001.

<sup>33</sup> Shafir, ‘Neo-Populism in the Post-Communist Zodiac’, 327.

<sup>34</sup> Shafir, ‘Corruption and Populism in East-Central Post-Communist Europe...’, 179.

allowing the party to “reaffirm its political identity, its attachment to traditional values in the face of the wave of Westernization”. And here PiS benefitted from the support of the Catholic Church. Kraków archbishop Marek Jędraszewski warned, in a sermon, that “the red plague of Communism has been replaced by a new, neo-Marxist plague that wants to conquer our souls, hearts, and spirits. A plague that is not red, but a rainbow.”<sup>35</sup>

## **Illiberalism and Antisemitism**

The bulk of Bauer’s 2020 article deals with the Polish and Russian official (and some unofficial) collective memory of World War II and is construed around the two sides’ utilization of “usable pasts” to advocate their respective arguments. As I have employed the concept for longer than fifteen years<sup>36</sup>, I should be the last to object to its utilization. The concept was first coined by American literary critic and historian Van Wyck Brooks, and it basically refers to “an invention or at least a retrospective reconstruction to serve the needs of the present”<sup>37</sup>. Bauer does not deviate from the original meaning. His readers are told that under illiberal systems “[h]istorical misrepresentations and distortion thrive”, because “[i]n order to fortify national consciousness, and therefore the nationalist political leadership, a past has to be found that can be used to educate – more precisely, to indoctrinate – the nation, young and old”. If and “[w]hen such an uplifting past is unavailable, it has to be invented” for any nation’s “real past is always a mixture of the good, the bad, and everything in between”<sup>38</sup>.

He supplies plenty of evidence on how the search for a usable past affects both sides’ official memories, insofar as the distortion of the Holocaust is concerned. Holocaust distortion begs at least three other questions. First, is it a reflection of antisemitism? – for, after all, distortion may also stem from plain ignorance. Should one take it for granted that a regime such as Singaporean Premier Lee Hsien Loong’s would also be necessarily antisemitic? Thus far, there is no indication to back such a claim. Illiberalism, then, does not always trigger antisemitism, just as liberalism may not forego altogether antisemitic nuances among some. It might, however, foster it, and this leads to the second question, as well as to the third one:

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<sup>35</sup> AFP, ‘Pride and prejudice: Poland at war over gay rights before vote’, *Channel NewsAsia*, 9 August 2019 (<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/world/pride-and-prejudice—poland-at-war-over-gay-rights-before-vote-11795132>).

<sup>36</sup> For example, Shafir, ‘Memory and History in Post-Communism’; ‘Ideology, Memory, and Religion in Post-Communist East-Central Europe...’; ‘The Nature of Post-Communist Antisemitism in East-Central Europe...’

<sup>37</sup> Olick, ‘From Usable Pasts to the Return of the Repressed’.

<sup>38</sup> Bauer, ‘Creating a “Usable” Past...’, 215.

Are shared illiberal values capable of quashing the differences in attitudes towards antisemitism and are official postures on antisemitism a sufficient yardstick to be guided by? My answer is positive on the first query and negative on the second.

As Sam Sokol convincingly showed<sup>39</sup>, although Israel has always perceived itself as guardian of Holocaust historical memory, its foreign policy has been heavily influenced by *Realpolitik* considerations. One may argue with some justification that such influences may be traced back to the early days of the state and that “the endorsement of narratives at odds with those propounded by reputable historians is certainly not limited to the [then] ruling party”<sup>40</sup>. One need not even go that far back to demonstrate that *Realpolitik* considerations bridged personal political differences. On a visit to Romania in 2010 (the first paid by an Israeli president), Shimon Peres saw it fit to thank Romania for “saving” 400,000 Jews who emigrated to Israel, avoiding any mention of the between 250,000 and 350,000 Jews exterminated under Romanian rule.<sup>41</sup> Romanian far-right negationists would not miss the chance to grab Peres by his words even beyond his grave.<sup>42</sup> According to Sokol, “Netanyahu has pursued a foreign policy aimed at strengthening relations with a number of Central and Eastern European nations in order to... erode the consensus among EU members regarding the Palestinian and Iranian issues”. He was partly successful. Just recently (June 2021), Hungary went so far as to veto a European Union declaration on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, followed by a demonstrative visit to Jerusalem by its foreign minister.<sup>43</sup> Sokol is also correct when he points out that Netanyahu actually engaged in Holocaust distortion (even in Holocaust obfuscation) himself, when it suited his political purposes.<sup>44</sup>

Where we part ways is where he writes:

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<sup>39</sup> Sokol, ‘The Tension between Historical Memory and *Realpolitik*’, 311-24.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, 319.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Wiesenthal Center criticizes Peres for thanking Romania for saving Jews’, *Ha'aretz*, 13 August 2010 (<https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/1.5099933>); International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, *Final Report*, 381.

<sup>42</sup> ‘Shimon Peres, președintele Israelului: „România a salvat 400.000 de evrei. Mulțumesc poporului român”’ (‘Shimon Peres, President of Israel: “Romania saved 400,000 Jews. I thank the Romanian people”’), *RostOnline.ro*, 3 August 2015; Narcis Popescu, ‘Biografia lui Shimon Peres, omul care a mulțumit României pentru salvarea a 400.000 de evrei în timpul celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial’ (‘Biography of Shimon Peres, the man who thanked Romania for having saved 400,000 Jews during World War II’), *ActiveNews*, 28 September 2016 (<https://www.activenews.ro/externe/Biografia-lui-Shimon-Peres-omul-care-a-multumit-Romaniei-pentru-salvarea-a-400.000-de-evrei-in-timpul-celui-de-al-doilea-razboi-mondial-136868>).

<sup>43</sup> ‘Hungary criticized for blocking EU statements on China, Middle East’, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 4 June 2021 (<https://www.rferl.org/a/hungary-criticized-eu-statements-china/31290741.html?lflags=mailer>); ‘Foreign Minister: Hungary stands by Israel’, *Hungary Today*, 2 June 2021 (<https://www.hungarytoday.hu/foreign-minister-szijjarto-hungary-stands-by-israel-netanyahu/>).

<sup>44</sup> Sokol, ‘The Tension between Historical Memory and *Realpolitik*’, 318.

“[t]he primary distinction between the revisionism of an Orbán and that of Netanyahu is that the Orbáns and the [former Ukrainian President Petro] Poroshenkos of the world are actively distorting history in order to whitewash their countries respective historical records, while the Israelis act as enablers abroad, but, for most part, largely refrain from actively using state power to promote ahistorical narratives at home”<sup>45</sup>.

My argument rests on two pillars. First, the so-called Israeli “new historians” demonstrated that Israel is no exception when it comes to employing “usable pasts”<sup>46</sup>. Second, and more important, the illiberals’ common system of egocentric values seems to go well beyond mere transitory *Realpolitik* interests. Not only that they turn foes into friends and friend into foes as best serves their interests (witness the post-pre-coalition and post-coalition formation of Arab Ra’am party<sup>47</sup>), but they obviously engage in aiding one another in times of need.<sup>48</sup> What never changes,

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<sup>45</sup> Sokol, ‘The Tension between Historical Memory and *Realpolitik*’, 319.

<sup>46</sup> Among them, see Morris, *1948 and After... and Righteous Victims...;* Shlaim, *Collusion across the Jordan...; The Politics of Partition...; The Iron Wall...; Israel and Palestine...;* Pappé, 1979; Pappé, 1987 (there are no such references); Segev, *Israel, the War, and the Year That Transformed the Middle East, The First Israelis, A State at Any Cost...;* Kimmerling, *Zionism and Territory...; Politicide: Sharon’s War Against the Palestinians;* Kimmerling and Migdal, *The Palestinian People: A History.*

<sup>47</sup> ‘Netanyahu hosted Ra’am head at Balfour residence several times in bid to woo him’, *The Times of Israel*, 12 June 2021 (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-hosted-raam-head-at-balfour-residence-several-times-in-bid-to-woo-him/>).

<sup>48</sup> On the eve of Poland’s 2020 presidential elections Donald Trump hosted Polish president and PiS candidate-president Andrzej Duda at the White House and publicly expressed the hope that he would win. Poles were obviously disappointed with the outcome of the US presidential scrutiny. As Donald Trump was contesting the result, all Duda managed was to congratulate Joe Biden on his “successful presidential campaign” [emphasis mine]. Four years earlier, he had sent “warmest congratulations” to Trump very soon after his victory was confirmed. Polish state television, TVP, which is under strict governmental supervision, described Biden as a politician “referred to by some US media as the winner of the Presidential election”. Referring to the US election coverage by TVP, political scientist Marcin Zaborowski said the Polish state television was “more engaged than Fox News” in them (Bernard Osser, ‘Trump ally Poland conflicted over Biden win’, AFP report, *Digital Journal*, 9 November 2020 [<http://www.digitaljournal.com/news/world/trump-ally-poland-conflicted-over-biden-win/article/580832>]). Still, the Poles did better than illiberal Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša, a veritable scion of Viktor Orbán, who congratulated Trump before the vote-counting had ended, not before stating that in the event of a victory of the Democrats, Biden would be “one of the weakest US presidents in history” (Alexandra Brzozowski, ‘Slovenian PM congratulates Trump despite unfinished vote count’, Euractiv.com [[https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short\\_news/slovenia-pm-congratulates-trump-despite-unfinished-vote-count/](https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/slovenia-pm-congratulates-trump-despite-unfinished-vote-count/)]). As for Hungary, its leadership and governmental media, rallied behind Trump and his policies to no one’s surprise (See Eva Balogh, ‘The FIDESZ media rails against Biden, the Democratic Party, and Blacks’, *Hungarian Spectrum*, 7 July 2020 [<https://hungarianspectrum.org/2020/07/07/the-fidesz-media-rails-against-biden-the-democratic-party-and-blacks/>]; ‘Hungary Foreign Minister hits Biden: Answer for Ukraine before attacking us’, *Newsmax*, 19 October 2020 [<https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/hungary-biden-ukraine-Peter-Szijarto/2020/10/19/id/992609/>]). Although Orbán expressed confidence in a Biden victory, he was

however, is the perpetual search for an enemy, at times common (Soros), at other times different. According to Krastev, Donald Trump's November-2020 electoral defeat and Netanyahu's failure to stay in power the following March were both deplored by the Central European illiberal leaders, but "America's political convulsions are less relevant for Eastern Europe than the fall of Mr. Netanyahu in Israel", a country they viewed as the "true dream of European nationalists" – an "ethnic democracy with a strong economy, capable military, and an ability to resist outside pressure". The "negative coalition against Netanyahu", Krastev said, deeply shocked Europe's right-wing populist leaders, "because Israel was their model"<sup>49</sup>. Beyond *Realpolitik*, there seems to be a common ideological bond among illiberals.

Official postures on antisemitism are certainly insufficient a yardstick to be guided by. However, they may well reflect unofficial (popular) attitudes: in Poland, Premier Mateusz Morawiecki is on record for arguing that Jews can be counted among the perpetrators of the Holocaust, just as some Poles can.<sup>50</sup> In an interview published soon after, his father, *Sejm* member Kornel Morawiecki, asked the interviewer: "Do you know who chased the Jews into the Warsaw Ghetto? The Germans, you think? No. The Jews themselves went, because they were told that there would be an enclave, that they would not have to deal with those nasty Poles."<sup>51</sup>

Rafał Pankowski (see *infra*) was kind enough to cite me when he brought this as an example of deflecting the guilt for the Holocaust on the Jews themselves.

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experienced enough not to make Janša's mistake (Miroslava German Sirotnikova, Edit Inotai, Tim Gosling, and Claudia Ciobanu, 'Democracy digest: Abortion restrictions votes succeed in Poland, fail in Slovakia', *BalkanInsight*, 23 October 2020 (<https://balkaninsight.com/2020/10/23/democracy-digest-abortion-restriction-votes-succeed-in-poland-fail-in-slovakia-just/>); 'Hungary's Orban congratulates Biden as his "Plan A" for Trump win flops', Reuters report, *Today Online*, 8 November 2020 (<https://www.todayonline.com/world/hungarys-orban-congratulates-biden-his-plan-trump-win-flops>).

<sup>49</sup> Andrew Higgins, 'Populist leaders in Eastern Europe run into a little problem: Unpopularity', *The New York Times*, 21 June 2011 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/21/world/europe/eastern-europe-populist-leaders-unpopular.html>).

<sup>50</sup> Lydia Smith, 'Poland moves to make phrase "Polish death camps" a criminal offence', *Independent*, 27 January 2018 (<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/poland-polish-death-camps-nazi-germany-holocaust-auschwitz-criminal-offence-a8180471.html>); Marci Shore, 'Poland digs itself a memory hole', *The New York Times*, 4 February 2018 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/04/opinion/poland-holocaust-law-justice-government.html>); Anne Applebaum, 'Commentary: The absurdity of Poland's Holocaust law', 5 February 2018 (<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/commentary/ct-perspec-poland-nazis-death-camps-0206-20180205-story.html>); Valerie Berkley, 'Polish Prime Minister defends controversial Holocaust bill', *Jerusalem Online*, 17 February 2018 (<http://www.jerusalemonline.com/news/world-news/around-the-globe/polish-pm-jews-were-responsible-too-34633>); Tamar Pileggi, 'Polish Prime-Minister says Jews perpetrated Holocaust, too', *Times of Israel*, 17 Feb. 2018 (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/polish-prime-minister-says-jews-perpetrated-holocaust-too/>).

<sup>51</sup> 'Polish PM's father says Jews willingly walked into ghettos', *AP/Ynet*, 22 March 2018 (<https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-5187985,00.html>).

It certainly is so, but, at the same time, one is dealing here with what Dovid Katz calls “Holocaust inversion”<sup>52</sup>.

To the best of this author’s knowledge, and in contrast to Hungary, Poland has never enounced “zero tolerance toward antisemitism”. Before Netanyahu practically surrendered on the (in)famous Amended Act on the Institute of National Remembrance (the so-called Polish “Holocaust Law”)<sup>53</sup>, his cabinet had urged Warsaw to “act with zero tolerance in the face of antisemitism”<sup>54</sup>. Earlier, Interior Minister Joachim Brudziński had told Parliament there was “zero tolerance for any displays of promoting, affirmation, glorifying of criminal totalitarian regimes”<sup>55</sup>. Rather than signifying rejection of either antisemitism or neo-Nazism, as the misleading title of the Reuters report would have it, the minister merely reiterated his country’s support for the so-called 2008 Prague Declaration, which reflects the “Double Genocide” theory and facilitates a competitive martyrdom Holocaust obfuscation.<sup>56</sup>

The extent to which it was wrong to consider Brudziński’s declaration as “zero tolerance for neo-Fascism” was conveyed by the marches of November 11 Independence Day in 2018 (the year the Holocaust Law was produced) when Polish officials marched side by side with neo-Nazis and representatives of other shades of the Polish far-right. What is more, in 2018 (marking the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Polish Independence), there had been attempts to thwart the extremists’ participation (including by Warsaw Mayor Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz of the opposition Civic Platform whose ban was overturned in court), but they were ignored by the PiS officialdom, which merely moved the march on the following Sunday. Presidential spokesman Błażej Spychalski invited all Poles to march with national flags to show that “we are one white-and-red team”, a reference to the flag’s colors.<sup>57</sup> Negotiations between the authorities and nationalist organizations led to an agreement in which participants in the state-sanctioned section of the event would march first, followed closely behind by participants in the nationalist march, separated by a cordon of military police. All sides listened to a patriotic address by President Duda lined up

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<sup>52</sup> Pankowski, ‘The Resurgence of Antisemitic Discourse in Poland’, 21-37. Dovid Katz, ‘Primary Holocaust Inversion and East-European Antisemitism’, 207-18.

<sup>53</sup> For details see Bauer, ‘Creating a “Usable” Past...’

<sup>54</sup> Isabel Kershner, Joana Berendt, ‘Poland and Israel in tense talks over law likened to Holocaust denial’, *The New York Times*, 1 March 2018 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/01/world/europe/poland-israel-holocaust.html>).

<sup>55</sup> Marcin Goettig, ‘Poland says it has zero tolerance for neo-Fascism’, *Reuters*, 25 January 2018 (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-politics-farright-idUSKBN1FE2MZ>).

<sup>56</sup> See Shafir, ‘The Nature of Postcommunist Antisemitism in East-Central Europe...’ and Shafir, ‘Four Pitfalls West and East...’

<sup>57</sup> Vanesa Gera, ‘Poland blocks far-right march, will hold inclusive event’, *Associated Press*, 7 November 2018 (<https://www.apnews.com/article/e9176ebc5afb49f581c6cd1623823807>).

in parallel columns, with soldiers standing side-by-side with members of the National-Radical Camp (*Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny*, ONR), successor to a pre-war Polish fascist movement whose flag has a Falanga, a far-right symbol from the 1930s, showing a stylized hand with a sword. One of the co-organizers of the march was the far-right All-Polish Youth (*Młodzież Wszechpolska*), that posted a video of a EU flag being set on fire, while some people chanted “down with the European Union”. As every year since the day began to be marked in 2009, there were also representatives of far-right movements from abroad.<sup>58</sup> As Rafał Pankowski, a Polish sociologist and political scientist who is co-founder of the “Never Again” (*Nigdy Więcej*) NGO, remarked: “The president and the other members of the political elite legitimized the far right as the host of Poland’s national day celebrations”<sup>59</sup>.

According to Pankowski, “[s]ome of the crudest examples of antisemitic speech appeared in the public sphere very soon after the passage of the controversial [2018] law” Prominent among them was the myth of the *Żydokomuna*. Paweł Kukiz, a former punk-rock star who headed the third-largest faction in the *Sejm* between 2015 and 2018, said on a TV debate on 28 January (the day after Israel protested the new law): “I don’t call the [postwar communist] camps in Świętochłowice and Jaworzno led by Mr. [Salomon] Morel of Jewish nationality ‘Jewish concentration camps’,” claiming that whereas Poles (his own mother included) helped Jews during the war, Jews not only lacked gratitude, but “all senior personnel in the security services, the NKVD and the judiciary” at communist onset were Jews.<sup>60</sup> Seconding him, Marek Jakubiak, a leading member of the Kukiz movement, went one step further. In an interview on Polish state radio, he claimed that, while Poles had rescued Jews during the Holocaust, the Jews allegedly refused to reciprocate during the Soviet occupation, thus emphasizing the link between Jews and Communism: “On 17 September 1939, we were attacked by our eternal enemy, Soviet Russia. The Jews welcomed them with flowers. I’m asking where the Jews were when 500,000 Poles were murdered in front of their eyes and two million Poles were put on the death trains to Siberia. I’m asking if there was even a single Pole saved by Jews in a situation like that.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Christian Davies, ‘Poland’s president addresses far right at independence march’, *The Guardian*, 11 November 2018 (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/11/poland-far-right-independence-centenary>); Vanessa Gera, ‘Far-right nationalists congregate on Polish Independence day’, *Associated Press*, 11 November 2018 (<https://apnews.com/article/7078d71fb3c64bfc974151836c2caec0>).

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Claudia Ciobanu, ‘Poland’s Independence Day march, a “Litmus test of far-right support”’, *BalkanInsight*, 11 November 2019 (<https://balkaninsight.com/2019/11/11/polands-independence-march-a-litmus-test-of-far-right-support/>).

<sup>60</sup> Pankowski, ‘The Resurgence of Antisemitic Discourse in Poland’ (quote on page 5). Morel had indeed commanded the two camps mentioned by Kukiz, where prisoners were brutally treated. He fled to Israel in 1992, following charges brought against him.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*, 6

Time to turn to Hungary, where on numerous occasions the “zero tolerance towards antisemitism” has been bragged about by the Premier. While Viktor Orbán has repeatedly stated, since 2013, that Hungary has “zero tolerance for antisemitism”<sup>62</sup>, one must ask what value carry such declarations in face of the (not-so-coded) antisemitic reference to Soros made by the Premier in 2018, that hardly left out any stereotype:

“We are fighting an enemy that is different from us. Not open, but hiding; not straightforward, but crafty; not honest, but base; not national, but international; does not believe in working, but speculates with money; does not have its own homeland, but feels it owns the whole world.”<sup>63</sup>

For Netanyahu, Orbán amply proved that a friend in need is a friend indeed. Not so for his country’s Jewish community. Tensions with MAZSIHISZ (*Magyarországi Zsidó Hitközségek Szövetsége*), the umbrella-organization uniting the bulk of Jewish communities, can be traced back to the year 2002, when the “House of Terror” Museum (*Terror Háza Múzeum*) first opened its doors under the directorship of Mária Schmidt, a close ally of Orbán’s, whom some consider to be his chief ideologist. Located in a building that had been used by both the pro-Nazi “Arrow Cross” Party (*Nyilaskeresztes Párt*), and the communist secret police ÁVH, on the majestic Andrassy Avenue, the museum pays far less attention to Nazi terror (to which merely two rooms are dedicated) than to terror under Communism. The “usable past” is, however, striking, for, as Anna Manchin emphasizes, the curator’s approach is that of “double occupation”, whereby “the Holocaust is a stand-in for general Hungarian victimhood”, despite the fact that it is hardly addressed at all.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> ‘Hungary’s Viktor Orban condemns antisemitism as WJC meets’, *BBC News*, 6 May 2013 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22423812>); website of the Hungarian Government, Prime Minister’s Office, ‘The Hungarian Government maintains a stance of zero tolerance against anti-Semitism’, 19 June 2015 (<http://www.kormany.hu/en/prime-minister-s-office/news/the-hungarian-government-maintains-a-stance-of-zero-tolerance-against-anti-semitism>); website of the Hungarian Government, Prime Minister’s Office, ‘Hungary is committed to combatting every form of antisemitism and hatred without compromise’, 10 March 2016 (<http://www.kormany.hu/en/prime-minister-s-office/news/hungary-is-committed-to-combatting-every-form-of-anti-semitism-and-hatred-without-compromise>); website of the Hungarian Government, Prime Minister’s Office, ‘Government proclaims zero tolerance on antisemitism’, (<http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/government-proclaims-zero-tolerance-on-anti-semitism>); ‘Orban’s first Israel visit: Hungary has “zero tolerance” for antisemitism’, *i24news*, 19 July 2018 (<https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel/179779-180719-orban-s-first-israel-visit-hungary-has-zero-tolerance-for-anti-semitism>).

<sup>63</sup> Cited in Marc Santora, ‘Orban campaigns on fear, with Hungary’s democracy at stake’, *The New York Times*, 7 April 2018, (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/07/world/europe/hungary-viktor-orban-election.html>).

<sup>64</sup> Manchin, ‘Staging Traumatic Memory...’

In more than one way, the “House of Terror” Museum antedated the 2014 controversies of Freedom Square (see *infra*). As I witnessed on several visits, nowhere can the visitor learn anything about the Hungarian state’s own responsibility for the persecution of Jews and for collaboration in their extermination. On the contrary, the first leaflet one picks up when stepping into the museum (there are leaflets in every room) speaks of Horthy’s Hungary as having been involved in “desperate attempts” to maintain “its fragile democracy”. Until the Nazi occupation of 1944, one is told, Hungary “had a legitimately elected government and parliament, where opposition parties functioned normally”. Not a word about the anti-Jewish legislation, not a word about the 64,000 Jews who had perished under Horthy’s rule before the Nazis occupied the country.

As Jakob Mikanovski has pointed out, the “House of Terror” Museum “is a visual blueprint for how FIDESZ... has been busy rewriting the country’s history”. One deals here with an effort aimed at

“...equating Fascism with Communism, and dismissing both as foreign intrusions – [that] is typical of Orbán’s rhetoric. It is also central to the museum’s mission. Its exhibits deliberately avoid making distinctions between perpetrators. They argue that Fascism and Communism both lie outside what FIDESZ calls ‘authentic Hungarian history’, despite the fact that Hungary had its own fascist party and its own Communists. This narrative provides absolution for the worst parts of the twentieth century: since both movements were foreign imports, Hungary bears no responsibility for either the Holocaust, or the Gulag. At the same time, it promotes a vision of history in which Hungary is a perennial victim, with FIDESZ being its long-awaited savior.”<sup>65</sup>

In January 2014, the government announced its intention to erect a memorial marking 19 March 1944 as the day of Hungary’s loss of sovereignty in the wake of its occupation by Nazi German troops. Most countries celebrate victories, not occupation and the loss of sovereignty. Even less do they do so by placing monuments in a central square of their capital cities, not far from the building that embodies precisely sovereignty – namely the Parliament. Soon after, MAZSIHISZ distanced itself from the decision, stating that it had been taken without any prior consultation with it<sup>66</sup>, which “raised worries in the Jewish community at home and abroad”. This reaction marked the beginning of a long tug-of-war between MAZSIHISZ and the cabinet headed by Prime-Minister Viktor Orbán.

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<sup>65</sup> Jacob Mikanowski, ‘The frightening politics of Hungary’s house of terror’, *The Awl*, 30 March 2012 (<http://www.theawl.com/2012/03/the-frightening-politics-of-hungarys-house-of-terror>).

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in Eva Balogh, ‘The end of Hungarian sovereignty on March 19, 1944?’, *Hungarian Spectrum*, 2 January 2014 (<http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/01/02/the-end-of-hungarian-sovereignty-on-march-19-1944/>).

Within a brief period of time, another issue of contention emerged: that of the planned “House of Fates” – European Educational Center (*Sorsok Háza – Európai Oktatási Központ*). On 9 February 2014, the MAZSIHISZ leadership adopted an unprecedented resolution, stating that it would stay away from participating in all state-sponsored events planned for that entire year, unless the government changed its position as to the planned monument for Freedom Square and the planned new museum “House of Fates”, dealing with Hungarian-Jewish relations, without the consultation of MASZIHISZ experts and deliberately ignoring all calls to clarify its concept. The February 9 resolution, furthermore, said MASZIHISZ would use the grants it received from the government’s Civil Fund for the planned 2014 memorial events “only if the Hungarian Government changes its attitude toward the memory and research of the Holocaust”<sup>67</sup>.

The intention to erect the memorial was initially presented as being part and parcel of events marking the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the deportation of Hungarian Jews to the Auschwitz death camp, where some 430,000 of them perished in a very short time span, between 15 May and 15 July 1944.<sup>68</sup> Protests both at home, and abroad led, first, to postponing its inauguration from 19 March to sometime after the elections scheduled to take place in early April, then to “after 31 May”, and finally to its being set up in July, in full secrecy, under the cover of night and with police protection.<sup>69</sup>

Designed by sculptor Imre Párkányi Raab, the 7.5 meters (24.6 feet) tall construction represents the Archangel Gabriel (symbol of an innocent and virtuous Hungary) being attacked by the German Imperial Eagle.<sup>70</sup> As it was explained by Párkányi Raab, unlike the archangel’s statue that stands on a column in the middle

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<sup>67</sup> ‘Hungary’s main Jewish umbrella votes to boycott state Holocaust commemorations’, *JTA*, 9 February 2014 (<http://www.jta.org/2014/02/09/news-opinion/world/hungarys-main-jewish-umbrella-votes-to-boycott-state-holocaust-commemorations>). Soon after, different Jewish foundations announced that they would return the money received for the purpose, and so did several non-Jewish NGOs and individuals. In April, Jewish and non-Jewish organizations headed by MAZSIHISZ launched a fund-raising campaign to help financing commemorations independent of governmental funding. See ‘Groups to forgo govt Holocaust funds’, *politics.hu*, 18 April 2014 (<http://www.politics.hu/20140418/groups-to-forgo-govt-holocaust-funds/>); Ruth Ellen Gruber, ‘Boycotting government Holocaust commemorations, Hungary’s Jews forge new path’, *JTA*, 10 June 2014 (<http://www.jta.org/2014/06/10/news-opinion/world/boycotting-government-holocaust-commemorations-hungarys-jews-forge-new-path>).

<sup>68</sup> Braham, *The Politics of Genocide...*, 920.

<sup>69</sup> Marton Dunay, ‘Hungary delays war memorial until after April vote’, *Reuters*, 20 February 2014 (<http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/20/us-hungary-jews-memorial-idUSBREA1J1LS20140220>); Erik d’Amato, ‘Government makes midnight move to finish controversial WWII memorial following court decision’, *politics.hu*, 20 July 2014 (<http://www.politics.hu/20140720/government-makes-midnight-move-to-finish-controversial-wwii-memorial-following-court-decision/>).

<sup>70</sup> ‘Statue of limitations’, *The Economist*, 1 February 2014 (<http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21595515-row-about-statue-reignites-controversy-over-nazi-occupation-statue-limitations>).

of Budapest's Heroes' Square, with widespread wings and surrounded by statues of legendary kings, in his own composition "a culture, its wings are broken, is being crushed by a greater power... The Imperial Eagle is an assemblage of mass-produced icons and symbols. It sweeps in flight across the world. Soon it will reach us and engulf Hungary, putting its inhabitants in chains."<sup>71</sup>

But which inhabitants? The statue aims precisely to obscure any difference between those who suffered as a result of the German invasion and the bystanders, profiteers of despoliation<sup>72</sup>, or active collaborators. Its inscription reads: "The German occupation of Hungary, 19 March 1944, in memory of the victims" – as Viktor Orbán himself emphasized in a letter addressed to US members of Congress who had protested against the monument's ambiguity. The construction, the Premier wrote, was not a Holocaust memorial. It was intended to "remind us all that the loss of our national sovereignty led to tragic consequences"<sup>73</sup>. "Memorializing the victims of Nazism in general – a reporter for *The Jerusalem Post* observed –, it omits specific mention of the Jewish people."<sup>74</sup> Viewed from this perspective and paradoxically for a government that perceives itself as fighting the remnants of Communism, the monument thus falls in line with the communist policies that had transformed the Jewish victims of the Holocaust into "anti-Nazi freedom fighters". But, what is more, it is part of a longer series of museums and commemorative attempts at demonstrating that rather than having been Nazi Germany's last ally, Hungary was its last victim.<sup>75</sup>

But it is a "constitutional" victim. Having won in 2010 a crushing victory that ensured it of a parliamentary supermajority of more than two-thirds of the seats<sup>76</sup>,

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<sup>71</sup> Quoted by Krisztián Ungváry, 'Az élő borzalom' ('The living horror'), *Heti Világgazdaság*, 21 January 2014 (English version in *Hungarian Spectrum*, 24 January 2014 – <http://www.hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/01/24/krisztian-ungvary-on-the-memorial-to-the-german-occupation-of-hungary-the-living-horror/>).

<sup>72</sup> "The German invasion did not put the country in chains. Rather, it opened the way for its right-wing elite to redistribute the possessions of some 800,000 people. Very many people received some share of the spoils, and for that reason they are unlikely to have felt oppressed" (Ungváry, 'Az élő borzalom'). For further details, see Kádár and Vági, *Hullarablás. A magyar zsidók gazdasági megsemmisítése*; Kádár and Vági, 'The Economic Annihilation of the Hungarian Jews, 1944-1945'.

<sup>73</sup> Eva Balogh, 'An exchange of letters between US Congressmen and Viktor Orbán', *Hungarian Spectrum*, 5 June 2014 (<http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/06/05/an-exchange-of-letters-between-u-s-congressmen-and-viktor-orban/>).

<sup>74</sup> Sam Sokol, 'Study: Up to 1/5 of Hungarians, "extreme antisemites"', *The Jerusalem Post*, 5 March 2014 (<http://www.jpost.com/Jewish-World/Jewish-News/Study-Up-to-15-of-Hungarians-extreme-anti-semites-346454>).

<sup>75</sup> Randolph L. Braham, 'The assault on the historical memory of the Holocaust', *Hungarian Spectrum*, 22 March 2014 (<https://hungarianspectrum.org/2014/03/22/randolph-l-braham-the-assault-on-the-historical-memory-of-the-holocaust/>).

<sup>76</sup> This allowed FIDESZ a free hand in passing undemocratic legislation, including an electoral reform aimed at liquidating opposition to FIDESZ "for the next twenty years" and silencing criticism in the

the Orbán regime changed Hungary's basic document, whose preamble reads, among other things:

“We date the restoration of our country's self-determination, lost on the nineteenth day of March 1944, from the second day of May 1990, when the first freely elected body of popular representation was formed”<sup>77</sup>.

It is important to note that the constitution not only deflects responsibility, but also places the Nazi and communist regimes on equal footing, thus implicitly embracing the Double Genocide approach. In the course of the 2014 dispute over the Budapest Freedom Square monument, defenders of the regime's decision pointed out that FIDESZ might hardly be suspected of negationist motivations, since it was under the Orbán government that legislation forbidding the denial of the Holocaust was passed, in February 2010. This is correct, but, only a few months later, that legislation was extended to cover “the genocides committed by national-socialist or communist systems”, omitting specific reference to the Holocaust.<sup>78</sup> Consequently, the placing of the memorial in Freedom Square may be considered to be part and parcel of a Holocaust obfuscation effort now inscribed in the constitution. Other former communist countries also approved legislation placing denial of both the Holocaust, and communist crimes on the same footing. But Hungary is the only one to have “sanctified” this aspect of Holocaust obfuscation in its basic document.<sup>79</sup>

Not everyone has noticed early enough Mária Schmidt's role in heralding the significance of these departures. As early as 1999, and in a manner akin to that of French radical leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, she said the Holocaust had been but a marginal issue in the history of World War II. “The Holocaust, the extermination or rescue of the Jews represented but a secondary, marginal point of view not among the war aims of either belligerent”, was the exact quote in her address at a symposium held under the auspices of the Tibor Eckhardt Political Academia in Budapest in November that year. Not by accident, she spoke of “holocausts” (plural) in this

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mass media. For details, see Zoltán Tibori Szabó, ‘Hungary under the Orbán regime’, an unpublished paper cited with its author's permission. Combined with a number of populist measures passed before the elections, this ensured FIDESZ a nearly similar victory in the 2014 scrutiny, resulting again in a two-thirds majority in the legislature. See also Iván Bajomi *et al.*, *Hungary Turns Its Back to Europe...*

<sup>77</sup> ‘The fundamental law of Hungary’, 25 April 2011 (<http://presidentialactivism.wordpress.com/2011/03/28/full-english-text-of-the-new-hungarian-constitution/>).

<sup>78</sup> Ben Cohen, ‘Jobbik leader remains a Holocaust denier, says Jewish journalist and Holocaust survivor’, *The Algemeiner*, 6 December 2014 (<http://www.algemeiner.com/2014/12/15/jobbik-leader-remains-a-holocaust-denier-says-jewish-journalist-and-holocaust-survivor/>).

<sup>79</sup> As early as January 2014, in a letter addressed to the MAZSIHISZ leadership that had made public its first apprehensions, Prime-Minister Orbán drew attention to the basic document's preamble. Sam Sokol, ‘Hungarian PM defends controversial WWII memorial’, *The Jerusalem Post*, 22 January 2014 (<http://www.jpost.com/LandedPages/PrintArticle.aspx?id=339040>).

context. The word “holocaust”, she said, should not be applied only to the extermination of the Jews during World War II, since the communists had also committed genocide. Yet the West, which was Stalin’s ally during the war, refuses to confront its own responsibility, as this would “endanger the legitimacy of Western democracies”. In the face of protests, Orbán issued a statement largely exonerating Schmidt and expressing his “full confidence” in her.<sup>80</sup>

Holocaust obfuscation in its various aspects transpired more than once in a collection of articles Schmidt published in 1998, called *In the Devil’s Cauldron of Dictatorships*.<sup>81</sup> Among other things, the Hungarian historian (in an article titled ‘The Place of the Holocaust in the Modern History of the Hungarian Jewry (1945-1956’) fully embraced the “Double Genocide” approach. The Hungarian liberal nobility and the leadership of the Hungarian Jewry, she wrote, had “signed a pact in the middle of the nineteenth century”, entailing a separation of functions in the state: the Jews would act only in the economic sphere and the professions, while the nobility would provide political leadership. It was the Jewry that had infringed on the pact by taking over the leadership of the 1919 Hungarian Soviet revolution. Yet, according to Schmidt, not only did not the Hungarian elites of the time retaliate, but between 1928 and 1938, one witnessed “the second flowering of Hungarian Jewry”. The local Jewry supposedly bloomed under anti-Jewish legislation and discrimination, if one were to believe Schmidt. According to her, Horthy’s regime “was not friendly to the Jews, but until 1938 its representatives were not antagonistic either.” Fully in line with what would soon be turned into an official “constitutional” claim, Schmidt then ventures the opinion that “On 19 March 1944, Hungary’s sovereignty ceased to exist” and “the country that was directed by Nazi puppets no longer defended its Jewish citizens”. That the “puppets” were by and large the same with those who had directed the fate of “sovereign Hungary” seems immaterial.

It is when Schmidt addresses the postwar period that her views fully reveal themselves. After the war, she claims, practically all political parties of left or center were in Jewish hands. Depending on how one defines “center”, this is still a gross exaggeration, but the contemporary context of the assertion is clear: liberals and left-wingers are supported by Jews or in their hands. She goes on to cite the Italian political scientist Roberto Michaels’ assertion that “in Hungary, the parties of the working class were entirely in Jewish hands”, to which she adds: “in Hungary’s case, this statement, with more or less modifications, was true until 1956”. In other words, Stalinist crimes in Hungary were Jewish crimes, just as the fascist crimes had been German crimes.

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<sup>80</sup> Mária Schmidt, ‘Holokauszok a huszadik században’ (‘Holocausts in the twentieth century’), *Magyar Hírlap*, 13 November 1999 ([https://www.schmidtmaria.hu/cikkek\\_publikaciok\\_holokauszok\\_a\\_huszadik\\_sz](https://www.schmidtmaria.hu/cikkek_publikaciok_holokauszok_a_huszadik_sz)). See also Hanebrink, ‘The Memory of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Hungary’, 275.

<sup>81</sup> Schmidt, *Diktatúrák ördögsekerén*.

To “demonstrate” it, Schmidt mentions the names of communist leaders with Jewish origins, such as Mátyás Rákosi, Mihály Farkas, Ernő Gerő, or József Révai, while passing over in silence non-Jewish leaders. She also adds that most of the judges who passed sentences on the four hundred or so war criminals in the postwar years had Jewish origins. In such a situation, according to Schmidt, it was to be expected that antisemitism would arise, since those who were in power came from “the persecuted” – a word put by her in citation marks. The reader is thus led to conclude that in interwar Hungary there had been only marginal antisemitism, but in postwar Hungary there was plenty of it, provoked by the Jews themselves. What is more, in post-1989 Hungary, antisemitism has the same cause, for after the change of the regime “the comrades of Jewish origin managed to get themselves into important positions in the new democracy”, in which they “received important, well-paid jobs, uniforms, ranks, fabulous careers”.

It is against this background that one must understand why Mária Schmidt raised the suspicion of the MAZSIHISZ leadership, once her being appointed as curator-director of the planned “House of Fates” was announced at the end of 2013. This was supposed to be an educational project that aimed to perpetuate the memory of Hungarian children in the context of the memorial year relating to the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Holocaust. Its name was apparently intended to be a response to Holocaust survivor Nobel Prize winner Imre Kertész’s novel *Fatelessness*. In other words, this new museum of the Hungarian Holocaust was to demonstrate that the children who had perished did have a fate, after all – which *Yad Vashem* does in its very denomination (“Monument and Name”). Though MAZSIHISZ had originally welcomed the idea, Schmidt’s designation as head of the project raised apprehensions that the hidden intention would repeat the “House of Terror”’s “performance” of cleansing Hungary of guilt, all the more so as the project’s announced intention was to also emphasize the actions of the rescuers.

It very soon became clear that, as envisaged by Schmidt, the “House of Fates” project belonged to the same “cleansing” endeavor. She envisaged to present the Hungarian-Jewish relations as basically a long love-story interrupted by “totalitarian episodes” and to emphasize the rescue rather than the persecution of Jews during the Holocaust. “We have a problem [with] why Mária Schmidt is leader of this project, and... a lot of problems with the ‘Terror House’, particularly with its ideology”, said András Heisler, who had been appointed as one of the members of the “House of Fates” advisory board. Heisler would soon replace Gusztáv Zoltai as MASZIHISZ chairman. In December 2013, the Budapest Jewish Community (*Budapesti Zsidó Hitközség*), led by Péter Tordai, requested that the advisory board be expanded to include its own nominees, a demand that Schmidt refused to heed.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Braham, ‘The assault on the historical memory...’, note 80. The request was for the inclusion of Chief Rabbi Alfred Schöner; Imre Lebovits, as representative of the survivors; historian Tamás Ungváry; Holocaust expert Zoltán Vági, and Zsuzsanna Toronyi, of the Hungarian Jewish Archives.

To make a very long story (too) short, in 2021, the project is still incomplete. And while Schmidt has been relieved of directing it<sup>83</sup>, following foreign Jewish intervention, it has been passed on to Rabbi Shlomo Köves of the Chabad/Lubavich, who fights MASZIHISZ (although representing but a small minority of Hungarian Jews<sup>84</sup>) and defends Orbán against accusations of antisemitism.<sup>85</sup> Its basic premises are unlikely to change. Köves heads EMIH (*Egységes Magyarországi Izraelita Hitközség* – United Hungarian Jewish Congregation), which is generously supported by the Hungarian government – out of proportion for its membership numbers.

Like Schmidt, journalist Zsolt Bayer often makes use of the *Žydokomuna* myth to explain away the Hungarian interwar antisemitism, allegedly caused by the “Red Terror” carried out by Béla Kun’s followers, whom they call the “Lenin boys” (*Lenin-fiúk*). Like Schmidt, no word is said about the “White Terror” of the pro-Horthy followers, which made a lot more victims.<sup>86</sup> Soon after the Hungarian authorities unveiled in Budapest busts of Bálint Hóman, one of the drafters of the World-War-II-era anti-Jewish legislation, and of racist and supporter of the same legislation György Donáth, for which they faced domestic (Jewish) and Western criticism, Bayer wrote in the Orbán-supportive daily *Magyar Hírlap*: “Why are we surprised that the simple peasant whose determinant experience was that the Jews broke into his village, beat his priest to death, threatened to convert his church into a movie theater, why do we find it shocking that twenty years later he watched without pity as the gendarmes dragged the Jews away from his village?” This was but one among numerous attempts by Bayer to deflect onto Jews the guilt for what had happened in Hungary during the Holocaust. In Bayer’s opinion, there is no justification for denying cultural figures of the likes of Hóman and Donáth their rightful place for having contributed to Hungarian culture. As for their views on Jews, Bayer cited Zsigmond Móricz, a rampant antisemite of Transylvanian origins: “Their noses and ears are big, their mouths strange, the lower lip is swollen: the kind of mouth I always see with disgust so that I have to avert my eyes. Such a mouth

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<sup>83</sup> Bajomi *et al.*, *Hungary Turns Its Back to Europe...*, 52.

<sup>84</sup> Most of whom are either Neologs or religiously unaffiliated.

<sup>85</sup> Jean-Pierre Filiu, ‘Orban réécrit l’histoire de la Shoah en Hongrie’, *Le Monde*, 12 April 2020 (<https://www.lemonde.fr/blog/filiu/2020/04/12/orban-reecrit-lhistoire-de-la-shoah-en-hongrie/>).

<sup>86</sup> According to historian Gergely Bődök, Albert Váry, the Budapest General Royal Prosecutor, estimated in the early 1920s the number of “Red Terror” victims at 587. Between 1,200 and 1,300 can be counted as victims of “White Terror”. One hundred persons were sentenced to death from among the supporters of the Kun regime, out of whom 74 were executed. See his ‘Vörös és fehér – Terror, retorzió és szamonkérés Magyarországon, 1919-1921’ (Red and White – Terror, retaliation, and demoning in Hungary, 1919-1921 ([https://www.academia.edu/13274441/V%C3%B6r%C3%B6s\\_%C3%A9s\\_feh%C3%A9r\\_Terror\\_retorzi%C3%B3\\_%C3%A9s\\_sz%C3%A1monk%C3%A9r%C3%A9s\\_Magyarorsz%C3%A1gon\\_1919\\_1921\\_](https://www.academia.edu/13274441/V%C3%B6r%C3%B6s_%C3%A9s_feh%C3%A9r_Terror_retorzi%C3%B3_%C3%A9s_sz%C3%A1monk%C3%A9r%C3%A9s_Magyarorsz%C3%A1gon_1919_1921_))). French historian Catherine Horel, on the other hand, estimates the number of “White Terror” victims at 5,000, of which 3,000 were Jews. Horel, *L’Amiral Horthy, Régent de Hongrie*, 123.

makes my throat nauseous.”<sup>87</sup> As Éva Balogh pointed out, in the eyes of the pundit antisemitism in Hungary after 1919, this was a “natural” state of mind “because of the Jewish preponderance in the leadership of the Soviet Republic. And with this assertion he absolves all antisemitism between the two world wars.” This is nothing short of Holocaust obfuscation. In Bayer’s own words, “it is important when we ponder the question of antisemitism, which poses further questions. For example, who can have a statue in this country and who can make such a decision.”<sup>88</sup>

But quoting Móricz is not enough. Bayer has opinions of his own on the Jews. Reacting to a *Washington Post* letter to the editor published by world-famous pianist András Schiff, who vowed not to return to his native country as long as the rehabilitation of Nazi-supporting figures is ongoing<sup>89</sup>, Bayer wrote in January 2011, in an article titled ‘The same stench’:

“A stinking excrement called something like Cohen from somewhere in England writes that a ‘foul stench wafts’ from Hungary. Cohen, and Cohn-Bendit, and Schiff. *Népszava* [opposition daily] appears with the red figure of the man with the hammer and demands freedom of the press. Most people think that this is something new and that war like that didn’t take place before. Nonsense. There is nothing new under the sun. Unfortunately, not all were buried up to their necks in the Orgovány forest.”<sup>90</sup>

Orgovány, a small village on the Great Plains, is where the Hungarian “White Terror” leaders committed massacres in 1919-1920; as Balogh observed, “[i]n plain language”, Bayer expressed his sorrow that not all Jews were killed in those days.

Fast forward to the November-2020 change of the U.S. Administration. Bayer ridiculed the assertion that Blinken had “Hungarian roots”, even though his mother’s family were Jewish Hungarians who had immigrated to the United States. He rudely addressed the new Secretary of State and exclaimed: “You are completely a *rootless* Hungarian, as you are a rootless American”<sup>91</sup>. As Ira Forman, the author

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<sup>87</sup> Quoted in *JTA*, ‘Israel’s envoy to Hungary blasts mainstream daily’s “antisemitic” columns’, on 15 April 2016 (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israels-envoy-to-hungary-blasts-mainstream-dailys-anti-semitic-columns/>).

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in Eva Balogh, ‘Zsolt Bayer: It’s all the Jews’ fault’, *Hungarian Spectrum*, 14 March 2016 (<https://www.hungarianspectrum.org/2016/03/14/zsolt-bayer-its-all-the-jews-fault/>).

<sup>89</sup> See Tim Franks, ‘Andras Schiff: Why I won’t perform in Hungary’, *BBC News*, 23 December 2013 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-25450716>).

<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Eva Balogh, ‘Zsolt Bayer vents against Hungarian Jews and the foreign press’, *Hungarian Spectrum*, 5 January 2011 ([https://www.hungarianspectrum.org/2011/01/05/zsolt\\_bayer\\_vents\\_against\\_hungarian\\_jews\\_and\\_the\\_foreign\\_press/](https://www.hungarianspectrum.org/2011/01/05/zsolt_bayer_vents_against_hungarian_jews_and_the_foreign_press/)).

<sup>91</sup> Ira N. Forman (*JTA*), ‘Hungarian journalist leveled an antisemitic attack on Antony Blinken’, *The Jerusalem Post*, 28 May 2021 (<https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/hungarian-journalist-leveled-an-antisemitic-attack-on-antony-blinken-669452> – author’s emphasis). See also Eva Balogh, ‘Zsolt Bayer: Blinken is in a hurry’, *Hungarian Spectrum*, 2 May 2021 (<https://www.hungarianspectrum.org/2021/05/02/zsolt-bayer-blinken-is-in-a-hurry/>).

of the report, remarked, one should keep in mind that “Hitler maligned Jews as a ‘rootless international clique that incites nations against each other’”, while “Stalin employed the “rootless cosmopolitan” charge to question the patriotism of Soviet Jews and as a prelude to begin purges against prominent Soviet Jews in the 1940s and ’50s”<sup>92</sup>.

Among the Hungarian pundits, Zsolt Bayer is on record for being the most hate-filled, racist, anti-Roma and antisemitic journalist. A record of sorts, given the fierce competition. As Bayer’s commentaries often make the headlines in negative international media coverages of Hungary, one has to explain his presence in the columns of the Orbán-supportive *Magyar Hírlap*. As he is a founding-member of FIDESZ and a close confidant of the Premier (according to some reports, he carries a FIDESZ party card numbered 8), that explanation is not difficult to find. Not only does Orbán refrain from distancing himself from Bayer, but in 2016, the latter was awarded the Order of Merit of the Knight’s Cross, one of the highest in Hungary, for his “exploration of several national issues” and “in recognition of his exemplary journalistic work”<sup>93</sup>. In protest, some thirty recipients of the same award, including András Heisler, returned theirs.<sup>94</sup> Later, the number of protesters grew to over eighty.<sup>95</sup> Yet there seems to be more to it, for in 2018 the newly established Ferenc Herczeg Prize (named so after the most popular writer of the Horthy period) has been awarded by a jury made up of three ultra-nationalists. One of them was historian Ernő Raffay, whose works are full of antisemitic stereotypes. Questioned on the choice, Orbán’s chief of staff Gergely Gulyás answered: “We don’t want to imitate movements, incidentally borrowed from America, which topple statues of Churchill, because one could quote much rougher antisemitic texts from Churchill”, and added that it was wrong to pick out a few sentences from someone’s entire oeuvre. As far as he was concerned, “Ernő Raffay is a respectable and honorable historian whose historical knowledge no one has questioned in the last three decades”. Sándor Czinkóczi, of the news site *444.hu*, asked Gulyás whether anyone had checked into Raffay’s antisemitic statements over the years and “to what extent these views can be reconciled with the government’s alleged zero tolerance of antisemitism.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Forman, ‘Hungarian journalist leveled an antisemitic attack on Antony Blinken’.

<sup>93</sup> Eva Balogh, ‘The baffling story of Zsolt Bayer’s decoration’, *Hungarian Spectrum*, 24 August 2016 (<https://hungarianspectrum.org/2016/08/24/the-baffling-story-of-zsolt-bayers-decoration/>).

<sup>94</sup> Felix Schlagwein, ‘Rising antisemitism in Hungary worries Jewish groups’, *Deutsche Welle* (in English), 17 December 2020 (<https://www.dw.com/en/rising-anti-semitism-in-hungary-worries-jewish-groups/a-55978374>).

<sup>95</sup> Balogh, ‘The baffling story of Zsolt Bayer’s decoration’.

<sup>96</sup> All quoted in Eva Balogh, ‘The Orbán government’s strange zero tolerance of antisemitism’, *Hungarian Spectrum*, 19 August 2020 (<https://hungarianspectrum.org/2020/08/19/the-orban-governments-strange-zero-tolerance-of-anti-semitism/>).

## Conclusion

Illiberalism might not necessarily be prompted by antisemitism, but it easily fosters it, since Jews so easily fit into the traditional enemy category. The official narrative on antisemitism in Poland seems to be connected to, and influenced by, the vernacular discourse, while in Hungary the official narrative must be checked against the gap between need and deed. Once that aperture is closed, the “usable past” is revealed as fully functional in both cases.

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