

The Nature of Postcommunist Antisemitism in East Central Europe: Ideology's Backdoor Return

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Abstract

This article analyzes contemporary antisemitism and Holocaust distortion in Eastern Europe. The main argument is that Brown and Red, Nazism and Communism, respectively are not at all equal. In Eastern Europe, in particular, antisemitic ideology is grounded on the rehabilitation of anticommunist national “heroes.” The history of the Holocaust is thereby distorted. Based on Maurice Halbwachs’s theory of “social frameworks,” the author shows how “competitive martyrdom,” the “Double Genocide” ideology, and “Holocaust obfuscation” are intertwined. Empirically, the paper examines these concepts in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Hungary, Serbia and Croatia, and Romania.

Keywords: Double Genocide, Holocaust Distortion, East European antisemitism, Holocaust, Gulag, anticommunism, national identity

INTRODUCTION

We are currently facing a huge struggle over history and collective memory of the twentieth century. Antisemitism plays a crucial role in this struggle, as we see tendencies to compare or equate the Holocaust to the history of Communism. Therefore, we need to investigate East European trends in particular. The Holocaust, as Yehuda Bauer repeatedly told us,¹ would have never become possible in the absence of an ideology that both prompted and justified it. Its “basic motivation was purely ideological, rooted in an illusionary world of Nazi imagination, where an international Jewish conspiracy to control the world was opposed to a parallel Aryan quest.” The defeat of the Nazis led to a partition of Europe.

In the postcommunist era, the legacy of Stalinism often meant the nearly explicit rehabilitation of prominent anticommunist figures, such as Marshal Ion Antonescu in Romania’s case or (less obvious) Roman Dmowski in Poland’s case. As is well known, communist regimes

everywhere subjected the Holocaust to oblivion or, at best, to manipulation. To use Shari Cohen’s terminology,² they indulged in “state-organized national forgetting.”

New regimes are engaged in what has been termed the search for a “usable past.” As Jacques Rupnik observed in the early 1990s, the “demolition of [communist] statues, restoration of former denomination to streets” then witnessed all over the former Soviet zone of influence was nothing “but the exterior aspects of the search for a ‘usable past,’ whose force is proportional to the fragility of national identity and uncertainty in face of the future.”³ The search for a “usable past” is particularly strong in societies uncertain of what should replace their left-behind identity and who should be chosen to symbolize the new identity. This is precisely the case of East Central Europe after the fall of communism. The West (or what they believed the West stood for) was only an exogenous, and therefore insufficient, legitimization instrument. Which past was deemed as worthy to be “used”

or “re-used” from among the indigenous pasts was just as important. What Romanian historian Andrei Pippidi called the “macabre comedy of posthumous rehabilitations all over Eastern Europe after 1989” demonstrated that the past was undergoing a process of being reshaped “by partisan passions, with each political family introducing in the national pantheon those historic figures in whom it can recognize itself or whom it abusively claims [as its own].” The 1990s were a time when “all Central East European countries” rejected “the Soviet model, searching for an own (old or new) national identity,” a time when historians and politicians competed “for the reinterpretation of the past.”⁴

This competition, however, entailed an ideological remix above all. Against the background of the communist *tabula rasa* regarding the Holocaust, why should Iron Guard leader Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and Marshal Ion Antonescu, Admiral Miklós Horthy and Arrow Cross leader Ferenc Szálasi, Slovakian President Jozef Tiso, Croat Ustasha leader Ante Pavelić or (though the historical context is somewhat different) the Slovene Domobranci not reemerge as “model figures” of national heroes, whose only fault rests in their having supported or allied themselves with those who were fighting communism and/or the traditional enemy of their nation? Why, furthermore, would even lesser historically tainted figures such as those of Roman Dmowski⁵ not reemerge as the valiant defenders of their nations? Their crimes having been ignored, why shouldn’t the Baltic Waffen-SS volunteers who fought the Soviets emerge as hero models, as it was hardly common knowledge that the same people participated in the extermination of Jews even before the Nazis’ arrival to oversee the massacres and that they served as guards in extermination camps?

However, the ideological remix called for the transformation of these interwar and war-time leaders into patriots defending the same values as those of the West, and thus implicit democrats who had fallen victims to the West’s betrayal, epitomized at Yalta. Rather

than witness a deideologization of a region saturated with ideology in the Stalinist period, ideology returned to the region as powerfully as ever. It did so, however, via the back door. More precisely, it waged what Dan Stone and (independently) the author of these lines termed as “wars of memory.”⁶

Most former communist countries are currently witnessing a “competitive martyrdom” struggle between the memory of the Holocaust and that of communist oppression. Coined by several scholars in the context of debates around the extent, limit, or the desirability of emulating the alleged⁷ postwar de-Nazification in Western Europe, competitive martyrdom is a complex issue, influenced not only by the immediate communist past and its treatment of the Holocaust in official history but also, and above all, by sociopsychological factors linked to collective memory and to the social frameworks of the memory⁸ of specific groups within society. One such element is the “cognitive” or “mental mapping” of the actors.⁹ Under “actors,” we mean politicians and cultural elites strategically placed to articulate collective perceptions, but we also mean those under their influence. All of these are both subjects and objects when it comes to the forging of what is called collective or historic memory.¹⁰

After World War II, antisemitism was by and large denounced everywhere, except for the lunatic fringe. Yet it survived under different guises, from outright denial and comparative trivialization in the West to anti-cosmopolitanism and anti-Zionism in the East. In East Central Europe, it resurged after the fall of communism, particularly in different modalities of Holocaust denial, which aimed to wash away the “dark pasts”¹¹ of collaboration, though more common and more vulgar forms (desecration of cemeteries, violence against Jews, and more) emerged as well. Outright denial was successfully imported from the West almost as soon as the former regime had disappeared.¹² Side by side, regionally specific forms of old and new forms of antisemitism developed

in the first decade or so. Deflective negationism, for example, transferred the responsibility for the perpetuation of crimes to members of other nations and minimized own-nation participation in them to insignificant local “aberrations”; the deflection comprised either attribution of responsibility to Germans alone or to “fringes” in one’s own society, but also the transformation of victims (the Jews) into perpetrators. A more recent, but particularly blatant, example was offered by Polish Premier Mateusz Morawiecki’s claim that not only Poles but Jews as well could be counted among the “perpetrators” of the Holocaust.¹³ A breed between outright and deflective negationism, selective negationism excluded any participation of one’s own nation, presenting it as some sort of lonely island in a stormy ocean. While encompassing many forms encountered in the West as well, comparative trivialization sought to demonstrate that the Holocaust was neither without precedent in humankind’s history nor did it stop with the end of World War II. Communization, according to some of these latter versions, had been a continuation of state-organized crime on par with the Holocaust and even worse.¹⁴

Three interlinked features characteristic of postcommunist antisemitism in the region were born as a result. These three features are constitutive, that is to say, each enforces the new ideology and is dependent on the other two.

COMPETITIVE MARTYRDOM

The first feature is competitive martyrdom.¹⁵ As the region as a whole strove to integrate at the international-regime level,¹⁶ it became clear that Holocaust denial and Holocaust trivialization were likely to stir negative reaction. Indeed, in cases such as Romania’s, official distancing from the phenomena was a clear precondition for admission to NATO and the European Union (EU).¹⁷ For, as Zoltán Dujisin points out, international regimes are simultaneously also mnemonic regimes (or memory regimes or regimes of remembrance)

that employ “institutionalized rituals that express” their members’ “approach to providing a [common] framework for citizens to relate to their histories.”¹⁸ While in the early 1990s the Western mnemonic regime was largely constructed on “the one and only negative myth of remembrance” based on what Jeffrey Olick called “the politics of regret,”¹⁹ the East Central European collective memory sought to *attribute* guilt rather than assume it, substituting a positive myth of anticommunist resistance for the negative myth of the Holocaust, which emphasized bystanding and collaboration.²⁰ Once more, the legend of the *Żydokomuna* was revived for this purpose, though one may doubt that it had ever died.

Consequently, a new ideological formula was sought, one likely to squeeze in unsanctioned by the joint regime of remembrance; a formula that managed to enlist the support of figures hardly likely to be suspected of antisemitism (as in the case of the deniers) or of subjectivity, ill will or ignorance (as in that of the trivializers). The 2008 Prague Declaration, signed (if not co-initiated), among others, by such prominent former anticommunist dissidents as the former Czech and Lithuanian presidents Václav Havel and Vytautas Landsbergis, fit the bill from this perspective. Among other things, the Prague Declaration called for establishing August 23 (the date of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in 1939) as the European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism²¹ (meanwhile introduced in several European countries and in one form or another heeded by several European international organizations). The Declaration reflected both reminiscences of the “totalitarian model” that placed the Nazis and the Communists on par²² and apparently legitimate calls stemming from East Central Europe for a “democratic memory” that would take into accounts the ordeals of nations subjected to Stalinist-imposed rule.

In what could be viewed as the “first shot” fired at the target, a conference titled “United Europe, United History” was held in Tallinn

on January 22, 2008. The keynote speaker was European Parliament Member (MEP) György Schöpflin; his MEP colleague Landsbergis, one of the future initiators of the Prague Declaration, also addressed the meeting. The conference called for the formation of a working group named “United Europe, United History,” tasked with dealing “with the most important developments of European twentieth-century history, including unrecognized or forgotten crimes or other abuses of human rights.”²³ The gathering may be considered to have laid the foundation for what Dujisin calls a “dedicated coalition of memory-makers in international arenas,”²⁴ though at the EU institutional level, the pioneering innovation came under the Slovene presidency of the EU. In April 2008, that presidency organized in Brussels together with the European Commission a public hearing on “Crimes Committed by Totalitarian Regimes.”²⁵ Taking advantage of the EU presidency being held by four former communist countries led by “parties belonging to the anti-communist side of the political cleavage,” the coalition (both horizontal, i.e., internal; and vertical, i.e., within the EU) managed to push the agenda that would eventually lead to the establishment in October 2011 of the Platform of European Memory and Conscience (PEMC). The Platform coordinates the work of institutes and non-governmental organizations dealing with communist or, jointly, Nazi and communist crimes.²⁶

The argument of the Platform is perhaps best summarized in an article authored by Maria Mälksoo of the University of Tartu, Estonia. She speaks out against the “West-centric writing of European history” and even calls for an “ideological decolonization” of Central-East European memory, one that was, it is claimed, imposed on the new members of the EU ahead of accession.²⁷ “While the recollection of the Holocaust has become increasingly institutionalized and internationalized,” Mälksoo writes, the crimes of the communist regimes and their *traumatic repercussions*²⁸ for contemporary

European politics have hardly received comparable academic and political attention.”²⁹ Addressing the case of Poland and the Baltic States, Mälksoo notes that, in fact, one “could distinguish at least four major mnemonic communities in the European memory landscape in relation to World War II.” Hand in hand with the Atlantic–West European memory, one finds a separate German memory, a yet different Russian one and the East Central European mnemonic experience of the war. “The Baltic States and Poland have emerged in the vanguard of the so-called ‘new European’ commemorative politics, demanding the inclusion of their wartime experiences in the pan-European remembrance of this war.”³⁰ In the course of the negotiations for adhering to the conditions of NATO and the EU (which she dubs a “ritually liminal phase of becoming European”) some “elements of their past had to be consciously put on hold without an opportunity to reflect on them in any deep manner before the context had become more ‘enabling’ for such reflection and, consequently, for a more autonomous construction of their selves.”³¹

That “liminal phase” is now over, however, and unless Europe recognizes the East’s right to its own memory and includes it in the pan-European memory, there can be no joint European memory. The Prague Declaration of June 2008, as well as the setting up of the PMEC, it seems to me, are efforts to end what Mälksoo calls the “subaltern” status of East Europeans in memory reconstruction. One cannot fail to observe that the article is mainly directed at Western audiences. It is full of left-wing political science jargon, but the jargon is employed for defending nationalist and (usually Right and Extreme Right) actions. However, Western politicians such as German Joachim Gauck, who later became German president (2012–17), also fully support and signed the Prague Declaration.³²

Similar, if less jargon-loaded, demands have been ventured elsewhere in the region. In the preface of a book published in 2014 that strives

to unmask the “idea that twists the mind” (communism), three Romanian authors write that European reunification has been pursued “exclusively through the westernization” of the East. This, however, had imposed on the region a “new iron curtain.” Unlike the former curtain, the new one is “no longer dividing Europe in line with a geographic axe running—as the old one did—from Szczecin to Trieste, but runs through the soul of every European, dividing his memory and dissociating his sensibility.” Those who lived behind the former iron curtain, they write, “have other memories, *are marked by other traumas*,³³ remember differently and are otherwise wounded in their soul than [are] people in the former West.” Postcommunist Westernization has meant the “transformation of its memory” (the allusion to the Holocaust is clear) “into a common memory.” Yet, “[t]he other memory, the memory of communism and of the totalitarian trauma that did not last a decade but half a century, is still not common.”³⁴

Let us pause and submit what these four authors write to an analytical perspective that is seldom used in this connection. Competitive memories and the competitive martyrdoms, I believe, are both the outcome of the fact that although both competitors display similar characteristics, each is responding to different traumas against a background in which the Holocaust has become the paradigmatic genocide of the last century. Paradoxical as this may sound, one reason for the emergence of Eastern counter-memory should be sought in the success of the international community of Holocaust survivors and second- and third-generation survivors to make the Shoah be perceived as the “symbol of absolute victimhood.”³⁵

Somehow this created the feeling that, unless placed in the genocidal category, no community's suffering stands the chance of being similarly acknowledged at the international level. It is this subjective, rather than any objective, criteria that plunges the Holocaust-Gulag competitive martyrdom into the realm of cognitive mapping. International law distinguishes

between genocide and crimes against humanity, and both are exempt from the statute of limitations. Furthermore, on closer examination, the definition of genocide as reflected in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 9, 1948 is considerably narrower than that of crimes against humanity as defined by the International Criminal Court in its Roma statutes, adopted in July 1998.³⁶ Logically, then, partisans of communist crimes retribution should rely on the latter, rather than the former, legislation. Yet this is not so. Critics of the 1948 convention claim that owing to mainly political reasons and Soviet objections, the definition is too restrictive, including only “national, racial, ethnic and religious” groups but leaving out “political” groups. Yet, apart from the fact that the Soviet Union was by no means the single country to oppose the inclusion of such groups—the Americans, the British, and the French were just as opposed for their own reasons³⁷—on close examination and in combination with the 1998 international legislation,³⁸ experts such as William Shabas conclude that “questioning the ‘gaps’ in the Genocide Convention is like speculating on ‘improvements’ to Picasso’s *Guernica*, Marc Anthony’s eulogy, Siegfried’s funeral music, or asking whether new ingredients should be added to a classic dry martini or whether one can make oysters Rockefeller using chicken.”³⁹

Since genocide is perceived to be “the crimes of crimes,” competitive-martyrdom promoters refused to be absent at *the* judgment, when the bells are tolling. This would also smooth the way in for the success of the double-genocide theories in the region (see below). Here are a few reasons why:

While in the case of the Holocaust one currently deals mostly with “postmemory,”⁴⁰ the memory of communism is still first-hand experience combined with postmemory (family, friends) socialization. Both are traumatic, but in different ways.

American sociologist Robert Bellah and his associates have shown that side by side with the large national community “defined by its history and by the character of its representative leaders” there exist smaller, but just as important, “communities of memory.”⁴¹

Jeffrey Alexander’s concept of “cultural trauma” can help us further elucidate this situation. In what is basically a Freudian approach, the American sociologist writes that a cultural trauma “occurs when members of a collectivity feel that they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memory forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.” The construction of such cultural traumas, he adds, makes it possible for “social groups, national societies, and sometimes even entire civilizations not only cognitively [to] identify the existence and the source of human suffering, but [to] ‘take on board’ some significant responsibility for it.” That does *not* necessarily mean that these communities become inclined to accept responsibility for the suffering of those who are not members of the group. Rather, they perceive it as their duty to seek those responsible for those traumatic events outside the group itself. These groups “*can, and often do, refuse to recognize the existence of others’ trauma...By denying the reality of others’ suffering, people not only diffuse their own responsibility for the suffering but often project the responsibility for their own suffering on these others.*”⁴²

Many of the reactions of Poles to the work of Jan Gross, starting with *Neighbors*, continuing with *Fear* and *Golden Harvest*, and up to the recent Polish president’s (still pending) decision to withdraw from him the Order of Merit bestowed on Gross in 1996, reflect such attempts to deflect responsibility for collaboration with the Nazis and postwar acts of antisemitism.⁴³ True, the Poles are widely known to consider themselves to be the eternally victimized “Christ of Nations” and one cannot

help remarking that competitive martyrdom ultimately leads to the substitution of *imitatio Christi* by *imitatio Judae*. As Polish historian Witold Kukla put it, “In the past, the Jews were envied for their money, qualifications, positions and international contacts—today they are envied for the very crematoria in which they incinerated.”⁴⁴ The “Auschwitz Crosses” saga⁴⁵ is but one example among many,⁴⁶ and Poland itself is but one example among many East European competitors for victimhood.

Alexander underlines that “events do not, in and of themselves, create collective traumas. Trauma is a socially mediated attribution.” The attribution of trauma status, sociologist Alexander adds, is not necessarily due to the “actual harmfulness” of the events “but rather because these phenomena are believed to have abruptly, and harmfully, affected collective identity.” In other words, the traumatic event is one that affects “individual security [which] is anchored in structures of emotional and cultural expectations that provide a sense of security and capability.”⁴⁷

Cultural traumas thus become what Yael Zerubavel has termed as “master commemorative narratives,” by which she means a narrative that “focuses on the group’s distinct social identity and highlights its historical development,” thus structuring collective memory.⁴⁸ In dominant commemorative narratives, “[the] power of collective memory does not lie in its accurate, systematic or sophisticated mapping of the past, but in establishing basic images that articulate and reinforce a particular ideological stance.”⁴⁹ At this particular point, Zerubavel notes in what is a key remark for understanding postcommunist competitive martyrdom: “Thus, collective memory can transform historical events into *political myths* that function as a lens through which group members perceive the present and prepare for the future. Because turning points often assume symbolic significance as markers of change, they are more likely to transform into myths. As such, they not only reflect the social and

political needs of the group that contributed to their formation but also become active agents in molding the group's needs."⁵⁰

Political myths, understood in the significance attributed to them by George Sorel, that is to say, as mobilizing constructs that cannot be refuted by logical argument,⁵¹ are primarily the work of intellectuals acting as links between politicians and society at large. Dujisin⁵² calls them "memory makers," but it should be added that these intellectuals are no less influenced by what we called "cognitive mapping" than are politicians and the population at large. In that mapping, Stalin's Soviet Union and his successor leaders share the role of the primary traumatic collective experience. Concomitant, those believed to have helped bring the trauma about are necessarily viewed with hostility. These intellectuals do not necessarily belong to the *Lumpenintellektuellen* strata, as did their predecessors in Nazi Germany. Indeed, the three Romanian protagonists introduced earlier are viewed by many as belonging to the *crème de la crème* of elitist society.

To understand why double genocide is so attractive, one should turn to Maurice Halbwachs's *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* and his insistence on memory being particularly powerful when constructed around family and peer group values. While it would be untrue to claim that all those persecuted under communism shared the values of interwar radical right (indeed, some were opponents of those values), it is nonetheless true that the politically hounded shared the same persecutions while imprisoned or subjected to other maltreatments. Under that situation, members of families depicted as class enemies and subjected to social isolation (the *lisbenty* of Eastern Europe)⁵³ were hardly inclined to make distinctions between themselves and families of genuine extreme right wingers whose fathers or grandfathers had aimed at placing in power one set of totalitarianism against the now persecuting set. Among the persecuted, there was solidarity both in the camps and outside them. Obviously, there was

also cognitive dissonance between what was being taught by official history and what was whispered at home and among peer groups. In postcommunism, such cognitive dissonance either disappears or becomes the object of *the* struggle for memory.

There is no reason to desist from applying what Zerubavel does in analyzing the context of the emergence of Zionist collective memory to postcommunist East Central Europe. Just as in the former case, in the latter case one encounters communities of memory that underwent a cultural trauma. In search for positive heroes and against the background of communist Holocaust neglect and/or distortion, the double-genocide approach (described in the next section) is fast becoming in these countries the master commemorative narrative, one in which the myth of anticommunist resistance finds both hero models and exculpation for the past. Within the framework of a century dominated by a paradigmatic genocide, competitive martyrdom is the synthesis of all these elements. *It strives to provide an alternative dominant narrative, not an alternative paradigm.* In the substituted narrative, the collective trauma of denationalization and Sovietization prevails over any attempt to drive attention to the suffering of Jews and Roma during the Holocaust, the more so as Jews continue to be perceived as instruments of communization.

DOUBLE GENOCIDE

Let us return to the Prague Declaration. On the face of it, there is nothing antisemitic in it. Yet, by calling for establishing August 23 as the "day of remembrance of the victims of both Nazi and Communist totalitarian regimes, in the same way Europe remembers the victims of the Holocaust on January 27," it obviously equated the victims' levels of oppression and suffering.⁵⁴ Furthermore, it invited the question as to why the Holocaust should continue to be observed separately and whether discontinuation of the separate observance was not merely a question

of time. Finally, the Declaration seemed to subscribe to the oft-ventured postcommunist antisemitic view that Jews indulge into a “monopoly over suffering.”

Some of the follow-up declarations adopted by international organizations sought to alleviate this sentiment. For example, the resolution adopted by the European Parliament on April 2, 2009 stated that “millions of victims were deported, imprisoned, tortured and murdered by totalitarian and authoritarian regimes during the 20th century in Europe,” but added, “the uniqueness of the Holocaust must nevertheless be acknowledged.”⁵⁵ Another Prague Declaration follow-up gathering of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), held in Vilnius in July 2009, made reference to the European Parliament’s resolution of a few months earlier “to proclaim August 23... as a Europe-wide Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Stalinism and Nazism,” but it also acknowledged the “uniqueness of the Holocaust” and, furthermore, reminded participants “of its impact and the continued acts of antisemitism” occurring through the OSCE region. The same resolution expressed “deep concern at the glorification of totalitarian regimes, including the holding of public demonstrations glorifying the Nazi or Stalinist past, as well as the possible spread and strengthening of various extremist movements and groups.”⁵⁶ Notably, there were differences of nuance between the three documents. Whereas the Prague Declaration had called for a “day of remembrance of the victims of both Nazi and Communist totalitarian regimes” and the European Parliament called for “a Europe-wide Remembrance Day for the victims of all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes,” the OSCE resolution differentiated between communism in general and its “Stalinist past.” Implicitly, then, the OSCE resolution subscribes to the distinction made earlier by French historian Henri Rousso.⁵⁷

One can only speculate to what extent such differences reflect a compromise among the drafters. For if the OSCE resolution seems the most moderate among them, it is nonetheless remarkable that it is the only one that refers to both Nazism and Stalinism as genocidal regimes.⁵⁸

The Prague Declaration correctly used the term “crimes against humanity” in reference to its call to emulate the Nuremberg Tribunal (in which “genocide” was not used in the indictment), but those familiar with developments in the region could hardly overlook that its spirit had long been manifest in the “double-genocide” formula that preceded the Declaration by many years and prepared the ground for it.

In a nutshell, the “double-genocide” theory places the Gulag and its local derivative on par with the Holocaust. In its more benign form, it calls for “symmetry” in condemning the two, equally repulsive in its eyes, atrocities of the last century, and calls for a similar “symmetry” in applying punishment for those guilty for them.⁵⁹ In its (rather common) aggressive form, it insists on the role played by Jews in communization, which should exculpate, in the eyes of the theory’s partisans, local collaboration with the Nazis. This latter form has elements common with deflecting the guilt for the Holocaust onto the Jews themselves.

The double-genocide theory was first posited in Lithuania, soon after the fall of communism. Hungary was the first state to grant double-genocide institutional recognition in 2010 by passing legislation that prohibits the denial of both Nazi and communist “genocides.”⁶⁰ It was followed in the same year by Lithuania. The denial of communist crimes was also introduced in the penal code (albeit in different forms) in Latvia, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Moldova.⁶¹

As Bartov⁶² points out, a prominent role in the endeavor was played by *The Black Book of Communism*, first published in 1997 in France. Stéphane Courtois, the editor of the book,

wondered in the introduction why should there be a difference between a Ukrainian child of a “kulak” who starved to death during the Great Famine and a Jewish child who died of hunger in the Holocaust, and what interests could be served by concealing the similarity.⁶³ In his work, Courtois strives to demonstrate that communist rule was just as, and perhaps even more, genocidal than Nazi rule.⁶⁴ He became the dean of the Romanian Sighet Summer School, where a memorial museum for the victims of communist regimes organizes lectures on communist crimes every year. Eric Weitz, who is by no means an opponent of comparing the Soviet and Nazi regimes, attributes to Courtois the same (in)famous role as that played in the West by Ernst Nolte, the chief trivializer of Nazi-regime crimes by deflection of guilt to Lenin and Stalin's Russia. Both historians, he writes, “engaged in polemics that masked as scholarship.”⁶⁵

Let us examine a few examples among many. On March 7, 1998, Floricel Marinescu, a Romanian historian with links to the previous regime, wrote the following in *Aldine* (a supplement of *România liberă*): “From the strict quantitative perspective, the number of crimes perpetrated in the name of communist ideology is much larger than that of those perpetrated in the name of Nazi or similar ideologically-minded regimes.” Unlike President Emil Constantinescu, who had apologized for his country's role during the Holocaust during a recent visit to Washington, DC, Marinescu wrote:

No prominent Jewish personality [from Romania] has apologized for the role that some Jews have played in undermining Romanian statehood, in the country's Bolshevization, in the crimes and the atrocities committed [by them]. Proportionally speaking, the Romanians and Romania suffered more at the hands of the communist regime, whose coming the Jews had made an important

contribution to, than the Jews themselves had suffered from the Romanian state during the Antonescu regime.... The Red Holocaust was incomparably more grave than Nazism.

Historian Gheorghe Buzatu (1939–2013) published in 1995 a brochure titled *How the Holocaust Against the Romanian People Began*⁶⁶ and other historians soon followed suit.⁶⁷ In the early 2000s, the former anticommunist dissident Paul Goma authored in his Paris exile a book titled *The Red Week*, published in numerous editions in Romania and Moldova.⁶⁸ In strident antisemitic tones (which he denied), Goma depicted the crimes committed against the Jews by the Antonescu regime as a response to the humiliations allegedly suffered at their hands by Romanian troops forced to retire from Bessarabia in the wake of the 1940 Soviet ultimatum.⁶⁹

Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, who was among the first Western authors to analyze this postcommunist trend in Romania, noted the following back in 1999: “The pathos, indeed the intentionally provocative tone of the militant parallelism [between Nazism and communism]” makes use of the term “Red Holocaust” primarily in order to employ a notion (Holocaust) that “allows the reality it describes, to immediately attain, in the Western mind, a status equal to that of the extermination of the Jews by the Nazi regime.”⁷⁰ Furthermore, “the spirit of the wording is one of a claim of victimization careful to legitimize itself in a sort of mimetic rivalry with Jewish memory.”⁷¹ That is the competitive martyrdom component of double genocide. But Laignel-Lavastine's intuitive article also alludes to an ideological basis at the foundations of such efforts. In her opinion, postcommunist Romanian historiography had been captured by (both interwar and national-communist) ideology.⁷²

Romania's historiography, however, is by no means a singular case. The late Polish historian Tomasz Stremboz, reacting to Gross's *Neighbors*,

portrayed the Jews of Jedwabne burned alive by their neighbors “as communists who had previously betrayed Poland and the Poles during the Soviet occupation of eastern Polish territories from 17 September 1939 to 22 June 1941.” In his concluding remarks to a volume in which double genocide seems to be the common denominator unifying nearly all postcommunist countries, Omer Bartov notes: “Self-perception as victim often immunizes the individuals and nations from seeing themselves as perpetrators. This is an especially effective mechanism when perpetrators were indeed also victims of mass violence.”⁷³ He illustrates this with the case of Hungary, where radical rightists argue that the Jews’ role in the repressive communist security apparatus “balances out the murder of hundreds of thousands of Jews with the collaboration and active participation of Miklós Horthy’s regime and the fascist Arrow Cross Party.”⁷⁴ The House of Terror museum in Budapest, “which restricts the Holocaust to a couple of rooms while devoting the rest of its ample space to communist crimes,”⁷⁵ meticulously lists Jews among the communist perpetrators but not among the victims of the Stalinist system.⁷⁶ For Randolph Braham,⁷⁷ the House of Terror attempts to turn Germany’s last ally into its last victim, an attempt furthered in 2014 with the inauguration of Budapest’s Memorial to the Victims of the German Invasion depicting Hungary as Germany’s victim but ignoring Hungary’s responsibility and collaboration with the Nazis in exterminating Jews. This memorial is an amalgam between deflective negationism, double genocide, and Holocaust obfuscation.⁷⁸

In a collection of articles published in 1998, titled *In the Devil’s Cauldron of Dictatorships*,⁷⁹ historian Mária Schmidt, who is believed to be a close advisor to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, presents the history of Hungarian-Jewish relations up to 1919 in an unrecognizable idyllic light. The article titled “The Place of the Holocaust in the Modern History of the Hungarian Jewry (1945–1956)” fully embraces the double-genocide approach. The Hungarian liberal nobility

and the leadership of the Hungarian Jewry, she writes, 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 Admiral Horthy’s anti-Jewish legislation and discrimination, if one were to believe Schmidt. According to her, the regime “was not friendly to the Jews but until 1938 its representatives were not antagonistic either.” 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 as those who had directed the fate of “sovereign Hungary” seems immaterial.

It is when Schmidt addresses the postwar period that her views are fully revealed. After the war, she claims, practically all political parties, 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 (Orbán’s political foes) are supported by Jews or controlled by them. She goes on to cite the Italian political scientist Roberto Michels’s 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. Hungary had nothing to do with either and consequently has nothing to atone for.

To “demonstrate” this, Schmidt is not merely emulating other extreme right wingers from

Hungary (but the same applies to Romania, Poland, and other places) by mentioning the names of communist leaders with Jewish origins, such as Mátyás Rákosi, Mihály Farkas, Ernő Gerő or József Révai while remaining silent about non-Jewish leaders.⁸⁰ 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. Schmidt became one of the first postcommunist historians to advocate the rehabilitation of Premier László Bárdossy, executed on January 10, 1946 for war crimes, thus identifying herself with the demand first raised by the ultranationalist and antisemitic Justice and Life Party (MIÉP).⁸¹ 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 quotation 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. Furthermore, 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.”⁸²

HOLOCAUST OBFUSCATION

Combining both competitive martyrdom and double-enocide theories, Holocaust obfuscation is a synthetic construct of both. Its main novelty rests in making possible for promoters of the “dark past” to transform it into a luminous episode in their country’s recent history and to promote the perpetrators of the Holocaust and/or their supporters as national heroes. The door is thus widely opened for rehabilitating not only such “heroes” but their ideology as well.

First used by Dovid Katz, an American-born Yiddish Studies and Holocaust scholar of Lithuanian descent,⁸³ Holocaust obfuscation

involves several consecutively interconnected objectives:

Deflate Nazi crimes; inflate Soviet crimes; make their “equality” into a new sacrosanct principle for naive Westerners who like the sound of “equality”; redefine “genocide” by law to include just about any Soviet crime; find ways to turn local killers into heroes (usually as supposed “anti-Soviet” patriots); fault victims and survivors, especially those who lived to join the anti-Nazi resistance.⁸⁴

The “Seventy Year Declaration”—signed, among others, by eight Lithuanian politicians (Social Democrats)—emphasizes the uniqueness of the Holocaust and rejects any attempts to whitewash Nazi collaboration as in the Baltics, as Dovid Katz summarizes it:

On 27 January, the seventieth anniversary of Wannsee, seventy European parliamentarians from nineteen EU states signed the Seventy Years Declaration, in an unabashed retort to “Prague 2008.” It is a bold new reaffirmation that the legacy of the Holocaust shall not be undermined and it mentions by name the specific groups of Nazi allies currently honored in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.⁸⁵

It was, however, Efraim Zuroff, the well-known Nazi hunter, who summarized quite clearly the purpose of Holocaust obfuscation by calling it “an attempt to turn everything topsy-turvy”: “If Communism equals Nazism, it means Communism equals genocide, which means Jews committed genocide because there were many Jewish Communists. It also helps to deflect the guilt of European countries in terms of their complicity in the Holocaust. Suddenly they are the victims rather than the perpetrators.”⁸⁶

As Omer Bartov⁸⁷ remarks, the Baltic States “have a particular penchant for employing the totalitarian model as a mean of contextualizing the Nazi genocide of the Jews with the larger framework of Soviet crimes against indigenous Baltic populations.” He notes that “Latvian

history textbooks tend to juxtapose the ‘Latvian genocide’ by the Soviets with the Holocaust,” while “specific details of the latter are often omitted and local hostility to the Jews is ascribed to alleged Jewish treachery.” The situation is no different in Estonia, where “segments of Estonian public opinion seem to concur with the implication that Jews try to exaggerate the extent of their victimization by Germans and Estonians in order to divert attention from Soviet-Jewish crimes against Estonians.”⁸⁸ This is indeed so, but the three Baltic States are also pioneers in transmogrifying perpetrators of the Holocaust into national symbols. More precisely, the governments turn a blind eye to the metamorphosis, tacitly condoning it and occasionally joining in the practice.

LITHUANIA

Admirers of the Lithuanian Activist Front march twice a year⁸⁹ in Kaunas and Vilnius to commemorate their wartime defense against the USSR. The Front was a short-lived resistance organization created in 1940 to liberate Lithuania after the Soviet occupation. It planned and executed the June 1941 uprising and established the short-lived Provisional Government of Lithuania, but Germany disbanded the government and banned the Front in September. The Front’s antisemitic (and anti-Polish) policies are well documented. Its members subsequently formed various military units; some participated in the liquidation of local Jews and joined the murderous Nazi *Bataillone* and *Schutzmannschaften* that operated in Poland, Ukraine, and Russia. They also participated in the July to September 1942 Warsaw ghetto deportation to Treblinka. They served at Majdanek and fought partisans in Russia as well.⁹⁰

Participants displayed modified Nazi symbols at many of these marches—defying the 2008 law that forbade public display of Soviet and Nazi symbols⁹¹—some of them shouting “Jews out” and “Lithuania for the Lithuanians.”⁹²

The Lithuanian government does not officially endorse these marches, but government funding helped reinter wartime Provisional Government Premier Juozas Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis (who died in US exile in 1974) in Kaunas on May 20, 2012. In 2014, marchers in Kaunas and Vilnius carried his portrait. In 2016, his portrait was carried again, side by side with those of Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas, Povilas Plechavičius, Kazys Škirpa, Antanas Baltūsis-Žvejys, and Jonas Noreika. The carriers were members of The Union of Nationalist Youth of Lithuania, and their banner read: “We know our nation’s heroes.” All these “heroes” are Nazi collaborators, and Jonas Noreika (a.k.a. Generolas Vetra) is known to have signed the order to send the Jews of the Siauliai region into ghettos on August 22, 1941; several hundred were then murdered on the spot, others were liquidated later.⁹³ One should add, that in Lithuania, not a single suspected war criminal has been put on trial—despite the fact that the United States denaturalized fourteen of them and deported them back to Lithuania to be tried.⁹⁴

Two former presidents, Vytautas Landsbergis and Valdas Adamkus, attended the ceremony of Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis’s interment. Adamkus had honored him posthumously in 2009 with Lithuania’s highest award. Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis had signed the order for the expulsion of Jews from Kaunas to the Seventh Fort, where they were murdered, and signed a subsequent order to transfer the surviving Jews to the Kovno ghetto within four weeks.⁹⁵

Not only did Lithuania fail to prosecute suspected war criminals, but in line with equating Nazi and communist crimes, it launched an investigation against Yitzhak Arad, a prominent Shoah historian, former head of Yad Vashem, and a member of the International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania, set up in 1998. Lithuanian-born Arad was a Soviet partisan and subsequently became an Israel Defense Forces brigadier-general.

Arad had nothing to hide,⁹⁶ but in their effort to equate the Holocaust and Soviet crimes, Lithuanian prosecutors opened against him an investigation on war crimes and crimes against humanity. The investigators claimed he had served in the NKVD and participated in the liquidation of anti-Soviet resistance in 1943 to 1944. Yad Vashem protested and suspended its participation on the joint commission and other bodies.

The prosecutors also investigated two elderly Lithuanian women who had fought with the Soviet partisans, Fania Yocheles Brantsovsky, 86, and Rachel Margolis, 87, both living in Israel. Arad's case was "reluctantly" closed in September 2008.

LATVIA

Marches in commemoration of the Waffen-SS locals who fought against the Soviets also take place in Latvia and Estonia. Every year, on March 16, members of the former Latvian Legion march in Riga. Once more, the event benefits from tacit or overt support of parties that are considered mainstream rather than extremist. The distinction, however, is blown away by the winds of reality. For example, the For Fatherland and Freedom Party, formed in 1993, considered moderately conservative, and a government coalition leader in 1997 to 1998, merged with the far-right All for Latvia Party in 2011, forming the National Alliance. Several scandals have surrounded this formation for its support of the march. As Efraim Zuroff stressed in 2009, this party's public homage to the Latvian SS Legion does not reflect "harmless nostalgia," but is rather part of an "insidious plan to gain recognition for a perversely distorted version of European history which will officially equate communism with Nazism." This would transform nations with a high percentage of Nazi collaborators in genocide into victims of a supposed genocide and cover up these countries' failure "to prosecute their own Nazi war criminals."⁹⁷

Zuroff shows that whereas march supporters claim that the Legion's men were patriotic soldiers who "fought against the Soviets and had no connection to SS crimes," this is barely a partial truth. In fact, whereas the Legion itself did not participate in Holocaust crimes, many of its men had actively participated in murdering Jews before the Legion's establishment in early 1943, by which time nearly all of Latvia's 90,000 Jews, as well as many tens of thousands of Jews in Belarus, had been murdered by Latvian security police units. Many of these murderers, including from the infamous Arajs Kommando, subsequently volunteered to join the Legion.

Yet, mainstream Latvian politicians, including former President Andris Bērziņš, defend the march because the Legionnaires allegedly deserve respect, not condemnation. While still in office, Bērziņš said in 2012 that these men were conscripted into the Waffen-SS, went to war to defend Latvia, and "were not war criminals," omitting that about one-third volunteered and participated in sending 90,000 Warsaw ghetto Jews to Treblinka.⁹⁸

A monument commemorating local Latvian Waffen-SS was unveiled in Bauska in September 2012.⁹⁹ In June 2013, the Saeima unanimously passed a law forbidding public display of Nazi symbols. However, it was not enforced when Latvian Legionnaires proudly displayed their symbols on March 16, 2014. Moreover, in July 2014, President Andris Bērziņš promulgated a constitutional preamble, passed by the Saeima, honoring Latvia's "freedom fighters" and—in line with the Prague Declaration—condemning both "the communist and Nazi totalitarian regimes and their crimes."¹⁰⁰

ESTONIA

The parallel Estonian event is held on July 6. Since the early 1990s, an organization carrying the name of a post-World War I veterans' association had been pressing governments to attribute the status of "Freedom Fighters" to

those who have fought in World War II against the Soviet Union.¹⁰¹ The status was finally granted by the parliament on February 14, 2012 to World War II veterans, regardless of what side (Soviet or Nazi) they had fought on. But Waffen-SS veterans dominate the Estonian Freedom Fighters Union. The Waffen-SS Estonian division was established in January 1944 and was formed by volunteers. While it did not participate in Holocaust crimes, its members included men who had previously been involved in killing Jews and Gypsies.¹⁰² Furthermore, “Estonian auxiliary police units were a very important part of the German murder machine against Jews in Belarus, and even in Poland and Ukraine.”¹⁰³ In July 2013, Defense Minister Urmas Reinsalu posted a laudatory message to the Union on his ministry’s website for keeping “the ideals of liberty alive.”¹⁰⁴

In January 2014, Estonia buried Waffen-SS veteran Harald Nugiseks with full military honors; he was one of four Estonians to receive the Knight’s Cross, the Third Reich’s highest award for bravery in battle. He had volunteered for the division after escaping to Germany. In 1945, his division surrendered and he was sent to a labor camp in Siberia, returning home in 1958. Following independence in 1991, Nugiseks received an honorary captain’s rank from the military. Reinsalu called him “a legendary Estonian soldier whose tragedy was that he could not fight for Estonian freedom in an Estonian uniform.”¹⁰⁵ One cannot but agree with Anton Weiss-Wendt, who writes that “the Holocaust runs counter to the Estonian national narrative.”¹⁰⁶

HUNGARY

The Holocaust runs counter to national narratives elsewhere in the region as well. To a large extent, these are all countries whose “regimes of historicity” are routed in the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁷ Under its first postcommunist government, Hungary reburied

Admiral Horthy in the presence of several members of the government, albeit in a private event. A creeping but unabated campaign for the rehabilitation of Horthy’s memory has been ongoing under all cabinets headed by Viktor Orbán.¹⁰⁸ Although claiming to pursue a conservative agenda, Orbán’s Fidesz–Hungarian Civic Alliance embraced (first) the political discourse of MIÉP and later that of the far-right Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik).

Both FIDESZ and MIÉP-Jobbik denounced the Trianon Treaty, perceiving it as an expression of the international conspiracy that dismembered Greater Hungary at the end of World War I. Three statues commemorating Trianon in this light were erected in Hungary between 1998 and 2002.¹⁰⁹ The first Horthy statue in postcommunist Hungary, life-size, was unveiled in May 2012 in the southwestern village of Kereki, near Lake Balaton. Just a few days later, Reformed Bishop Gusztáv Bölscei unveiled a restored marble Horthy plaque at the Debrecen University of Reformed Theology. Then, on June 1, a square in the town of Gyömrő, some 30 kilometers southeast of Budapest, was renamed after the admiral. In fact, this was a restoration of sorts, since between 1937 and 1945 the square had been called Horthy Square. During the same month, another monument (a bust) honoring Horthy was erected in the village of Csókakő, Fejér County. The initiative belonged to several ultranationalist organizations, such as the local branch of Jobbik, its paramilitary group Hungarian Guard (discussed later) and the revisionist Sixty-Four County Youth Movement. The latter’s local leader, László Toroczka, told audiences that it was not enough to erect Horthy statues. “We have to continue pursuing his policy as well and demand the revision of the Trianon Dictate; we have to put the slogan ‘no, no, never’ and ‘everything back’ on our banners.” Indeed, hand in hand with the bust’s inauguration, it was announced that the former Bánya Square would henceforth be called *Nagy-Magyarország* (Greater Hungary).¹¹⁰

Jobbik has called for unveiling a Horthy statue in Budapest's historic Gellért Square on the hundredth anniversary of the admiral's entry into Budapest in November 1919.¹¹¹ On the occasion of the ninety-fifth anniversary of that event, as every year, Jobbik organized a march in the capital. Calvinist Pastor Lóránt Hegedűs Jr., Deputy Chairman of Jobbik, told a crowd of supporters: "As long as they can publicly defame the memory of Admiral Horthy with impunity, they can do this with the entire Hungarian nation."¹¹² No one asked who "they" might be, since it was clear: Jews and the Leftists who march to their tune. Hegedűs, who is an admirer of British negationist David Irving, has a long record of antisemitic pronouncements.¹¹³ On November 3, 2013, a bust of Horthy was unveiled on the grounds of the church in central Budapest where Hegedűs serves as pastor.

More recently, the Hungarian statues saga added a page to the story. On February 24, 2014, a bust of Hungarian politician György Donáth was placed on the building where he used to live, just around the corner of Budapest's Holocaust Memorial Center. The communists executed Donáth on trumped up charges in 1947. At that time, he was a member of the Smallholders Party, but as a member of parliament between 1939 and 1944 (representing the ruling Movement of Hungarian Life led by Béla Imrédy), he had given vent to his strong antisemitism and supported anti-Jewish legislation.¹¹⁴ The initiative for the memorial belonged to *Politikai Elítéltek Közössége* (Community of Political Prisoners), an association representing former political detainees. Scheduled to speak on the occasion were former Premier Péter Boross, whose views are now close to those of Jobbik, and Fidesz Deputy Chairman Gergely Gulyás. The ceremony was attended by some one hundred supporters of Donáth's memory. It had to be cancelled, however, as the speakers were hissed and booed by some three hundred protesters—Jews and members of opposition parties. The Federation of the Jewish Communities of

Hungary had earlier issued a statement saying, "The disgraceful political role of György Donáth cannot be ignored even if he became a victim of communism in a show trial in which he was sentenced to death." The protesters carried banners with inscriptions such as "Those who celebrate racists are racists themselves" and members of opposition parties called Donáth "a man of hatred, who hated Jews, ethnic Germans and Romanians." Leaving the site, Gulyás said that while he did not agree with views that excluded minorities, Donáth was a martyr and deserved to have a statue in Budapest.¹¹⁵

A Holocaust-Gulag clash of memories? That, too. But, above all, the occasion provided an illustration of competitive martyrdom and, beyond doubt, of Holocaust obfuscation. The incident is also reminiscent of a similar occurrence registered just a few months earlier. On March 6, 2015, a court of justice heeded the efforts of the son of historian Bálint Hóman to rehabilitate his father. The decision meant that the confiscated properties of Hóman would be returned to his family. Hóman had served as minister of culture in several interwar governments, was a strong supporter of anti-Jewish legislation, and remained a member of the Hungarian parliament even under the Arrow Cross government of Szálasi installed by the Germans after invading Hungary in 1944. Based on the Nuremberg precedent, he was put on trial in 1946 for having participated in the meeting of the László Bárdossy cabinet that decided on Hungary's entry in the war against the Soviet Union on June 26, 1941.¹¹⁶ One can argue about why Hóman was put on trial alongside Bárdossy and one other minister while other members of the same cabinet were not. But one cannot argue about the charge of "crime against peace" without delegitimizing the Nuremberg process itself. Hóman was sentenced to life in prison and died in jail in 1951. Soon after the judicial rehabilitation, plans emerged for erecting a statue immortalizing Hóman in the town of Székesfehérvár, some 60 kilometers south of Budapest. He never had anything to do with

that town, but the mayor of Székesfehérvár is a Fidesz member and the city hall approved the plan, said to have been initiated by a private foundation linked to Jobbik, and the erection of the statue was partly funded by the state (Dunai, 2015). In fact, it later emerged that Premier Orbán was personally involved in the planning. Only a strong reaction against the statue from the United States (acknowledged by President Barak Obama but angrily refuted by the Hungarian government) eventually resulted in the scrapping of the plan.¹¹⁷

SERBIA AND CROATIA

Rehabilitations and the ideological significance of revised memory¹¹⁸ are the order of the day in recently renewed tensions between Serbia and Croatia as well. They have been accusing each other of attempts to cleanse the past, and for once they are both right. In May 2015, Serbia rehabilitated Chetnik leader Dragoljub (“Draža”) Mihailović, executed in May 1946 for high treason and collaboration with the Nazis. A court of justice in Belgrade ruled that his trial at the hands of Tito’s communist regime had been “political and ideological” and serious legal errors had been committed in the course of the trial.¹¹⁹ Mihailović’s rehabilitation did not ring an alarm bell for the Jews, but it certainly did for the Croats.¹²⁰ The Jews had their own “Serbian worries.” Since the late 1980s, the dominant Serbian Orthodox Church had transformed the virulently antisemitic Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović (1880–1956) from “traitor” into a “saint.”¹²¹

More recently, however, another Serbian rehabilitation seems to be likely, and this one cannot leave Jews indifferent: the family of Milan Nedić and the Association of Political Prisoners and Victims of the Communist Regime started judicial procedure for the rehabilitation of Nedić, the wartime Nazi puppet regime head of the so-called Government of National Salvation, which functioned from August 1941 until October 1944. Under his

regime, Belgrade became the first capital city in the world to be declared *Judenrein*. By the end of the war, some 90 percent of Serbia’s Jewish population had been murdered by the Nazis.¹²² Nedić’s legal successors argue that his trial (he committed suicide in prison in 1946) had been politically motivated. His apologists go even further, claiming that his suicide was actually murder and that while head of the government, Nedić had given refuge to some 600,000 Serbs from all over the Balkans and thus helped Serbs survive Nazi occupation.¹²³ Nazi hunter Zuroff, on the other hand, denounced the attempt to turn Nedić into a “victim.” In an op-ed published in the Serbian newspaper *Danas*, Zuroff said the move was part and parcel of similar attempts in the former communist countries, particularly in the Baltic states and Hungary. “If Nedić had any illusions that he could influence German policy regarding Serbia and Serbian Jewry, he should have realized long before his Quisling government was disbanded that he was virtually powerless and was merely a puppet of the Nazis and completely at their mercy,” Zuroff was quoted to say, noting that during the period of his rule some 300,000 Serbs were murdered, in addition to nearly sixteen hundred Jews, a significant number of whom were killed on the outskirts of Belgrade.¹²⁴

On the other side of River Drina, Croat President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović said in reaction to Mihailović’s rehabilitation that the verdict could not erase “the atrocities of the Chetnik movement, committed in collaboration with the Nazis and fascists during World War II, which brought great pain and suffering to all nations in this region.” She then added: “As president of Croatia, I most resolutely condemn any attempt at historical revisionism.”¹²⁵ Yet, on the very same day of Mihailović’s rehabilitation, Grabar-Kitarović paid a private visit to Bleiburg, southern Austria, and to Macelj and Tezno across the border in Slovenia, where she lit candles and laid wreaths. In the words of the presidential office, Grabar-Kitarović was thus paying “respect to victims killed in the

tragic events in May 1945.” In these events, civil servants and members of the Ustaša fascist movement of Ante Pavelić’s regime trying to flee Zagreb were caught and executed without a trial by Tito’s Partisans. Grabar-Kitarović explained the visit as follows: “A crime is a crime and it cannot be justified by any ideology.”¹²⁶ On the other hand, the new Croatian president (who had taken office in February the same year) stayed away in April from the official ceremonies at the Jasenovac concentration camp, where at least 83,000 Serbs, Roma, Jews, and political prisoners had perished at the hand of the Ustaše. Instead, she sent as representative Hollywood producer and Auschwitz survivor Branko Lustig.¹²⁷

Although this was by far better than what went on around Jasenovac under Croatia’s first president, Franjo Tuđman,¹²⁸ it still reflected the strong presence among the Croat leadership of more than one shade of “dark past.” Among other authors, Ljiljana Radonić¹²⁹ and Sven Milekić¹³⁰ have discussed this aspect with unmatched competence. It must be pointed out, however, that long before Grabar-Kitarović had placed Jasenovac and Bleiburg on the same footing, two Zagreb university professors, Radko Goldstein and his son Ivo, had published a book titled *Jasenovac and Bleiburg Are Not the Same* (2011). The book, of course was a reflection of ongoing arguments embracing the double-genocide theory in its worst version, namely Holocaust obfuscation. An exiled Croat academic from Sidney, Australia, on her blog called the two authors “pundits of totalitarian regimes’ victims discrimination.”¹³¹

Just as worrisome was the inclusion in the new Croat government of historian Zlatko Hasanbegović, who held the position of culture minister between January and October 2016. Apparently a protégé of President Grabar-Kitarović, Hasanbegović is known to have belonged in his youth to the Croatian Liberation Movement (*Hrvatski oslobodilački pokret* or HOP), a party founded in exile by Ante Pavelić in the 1950s and officially

registered in postcommunist Croatia in 1992. At that time, as revealed after his appointment, he wrote extensively for the HOP publication *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* (Independent State of Croatia, *NDH*) an Ustaše-cleansing journal. Photos showing Hasanbegović wearing the Ustaša beret also emerged. Currently a member of the Tuđman-founded Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), which returned to power in 2016 in a coalition government, Hasanbegović had made the transition via another far-right formation, The Croatian Pure Party of Rights (*Hrvatska Čista Stranka Prava* or HČSP), founded in 1992, where he headed the youth wing of that formation. Hasanbegović is also a member of the Bleiburg Honorary Platoon, an NGO that honors the Ustaše executed by Tito’s partisans in 1945. It is not accidental that soon after being sworn in, the presidency of the parliament elected in November 2015 decided to reinstate sponsorship of the Bleiburg commemoration. The sponsorship had been withdrawn in 2012—a move Hasanbegović had harshly denounced. In articles published in *NDH*, he had called the Ustaše “heroes” and “martyrs” in the best spirit of what would later emerge as Holocaust obfuscation. In the same spirit, after his appointment as minister, he rejected criticism and calls for his resignation, saying that anti-fascism was just “an empty phrase” and arguing that “Stalin, Tito and Pol Pot were all anti-fascists” who after victory went on to establish dictatorships in their countries.¹³²

ROMANIA

A final word about Romania. Holocaust obfuscation is more than apparent in a sustained campaign calling for the canonization by the Romanian Orthodox Church of the so-called “Saints of Prison.” These were all, or nearly all, former Iron Guardists, some of which had been imprisoned already by Marshal Antonescu for having participated in the Legionary Rebellion against him in January 1941. The “Saints of the Prison” are considered to be “martyrs” in the

Romanian resistance against the communist regime. Their past as members of the Iron Guard is seldom mentioned and, if it is, no mention is made of the Guard's antisemitism. On the contrary, self-sacrificial deeds are attributed to some of them, though these were never mentioned in the prison memoirs of Jews who spent time in jail with them—for example, Pastor Richard Wurmbrand. A converted Jew and a former communist, Wurmbrand is claimed to have had his life saved by Valeriu Gafencu but he never mentions that in his autobiographical works.¹³³ There must be dozens of books on the Romanian market by now, and pilgrimages are made to the tomb of Arsenie Boca at the Prislop Monastery, where “wonders” are said to take place. These pilgrimages are apparently very lucrative for those involved in organizing them.¹³⁴

It is not an accident that authors known for their previous attempts to rehabilitate the Iron Guard and its members, including founder Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, edit many of these books. Titles are also worth pondering. For example, in a volume edited by Răzvan Codrescu (one of the first to attempt Codreanu's rehabilitation), one finds articles by Codrescu, by Sorin Lavric, the author of a eulogy volume¹³⁵ on philosopher Constantin Noica and the Iron Guard, but also by Radu Preda, who was appointed in May 2014 director of the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Regime Crimes and the Memory of Romanian Exile (IICMER). His predecessor, the young historian Andrei Muraru, carefully avoided any IICMER implication into competitive martyrdom and links to Iron Guard promoters. Muraru became a presidential counselor to newly elected President Iohannis Klaus, but his departure radically changed IICMER's face. Immediately on his appointment, Preda, a theologian by training, stated that it was his “obligation” to put “the Case of the ‘Saints of Prison’ on the agenda of the institute.”¹³⁶ In the aforementioned volume, he authored two articles: one titled “Memory's Mercenaries”

and the other “Memory as an Obligation.” Lavric's contribution was titled “The Need of Martyrs,” while Codrescu himself wrote on “The Martyrology of Communist Jails” and reported on the recently held “First Symposium of Martyrdom.”¹³⁷

Apologists of the Guard were also on the vanguard of attacks against the National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania “Elie Wiesel” (INSHREW) and its director, Alexandru Florian. Under the auspices of the Professor George Manu Foundation—one of several specializing in Iron Guard cleansing—Cezarina Condurache published a volume in 2015 titled *Faces of Romanian Dignity: Heroes of the Nation and Saints of Prison*¹³⁸ and edited another tome titled *The Anticomunist Heroes and Saints of Prison Re-Incriminated by Law 217/2015*.¹³⁹ Law 217 had been approved by the parliament and was (or rather should have been) enforced starting July 30, 2015.¹⁴⁰ The law aimed at covering lacunae in Governmental Ordinance 31/2002, approved by the parliament as Law no. 107 in 2006. To be more precise, prosecutors had time and again interpreted the law as not applying to the Legionary Movement, claiming that its fascist character was debatable; they also claimed that the text of the 2002 governmental ordinance prohibiting Holocaust denial does not apply to Romanian territory, since allegedly no Holocaust had taken place on Romanian territory proper. The INSHREW and Florian personally had long pressed lawmakers for the change, and that is what brought on them the wrath of critics and opponents.

Publications with an overt neo-Legionary character aside, mainstream intellectuals also criticized Law 217. Preda was among the first to claim that the new law was discriminatory, calling the law “pro-communist,” since it ignored crimes committed by the communist regime.¹⁴¹ Other prominent intellectuals concurred, among them Andrei Pleșu, who in the best spirit of double genocide and of Holocaust obfuscation called for “symmetry” in addressing

legally the two totalitarian legacies and claimed that the tribunals that had sentenced wartime Romanian intellectuals had been under communist influence.¹⁴² The wrath intensified as Florian successfully demanded the nullification of the decision to make writer Vintilă Horia (an interwar admirer of Adolf Hitler sentenced in absentia to life in prison) an honorary citizen of his birthplace. Thus far, however, that was his only success, for prosecutors continue to refuse to indict in line with the new legislation, claiming that the acts had been committed before Law 217 went in force. There is one exception, however, but that exception refers to acts committed by members of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania in promoting their own wartime “heroes.” So much for nondiscrimination.

CONCLUSION

The Prague Declaration follow-up is a successful story, but not as one-sidedly successful as one may believe. In December 2010, the European Commission (the forum that makes binding decisions when all is said and done) refused to heed a Lithuanian initiative (supported by the foreign ministers of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Hungary, and Romania) that would have made double genocide into binding legislation for all EU members. The proponents wanted to criminalize the denial of communist crimes the same way that denying the Holocaust is banned in EU countries. The Commission said in its decision that “opinions on the matter

are too divided” and “there is no consensus on it.” EU justice spokesman Matthew Newman was quoted as saying the following: “The bottom line is, obviously, what they did was horrendous, but communist regimes did not target ethnic minorities.”¹⁴³ That should have been the end of the story—only it wasn’t, as this article has shown.

Yet, European commissions come and go; in a not too distant future, the horizontal and vertical network of influence and lobbying might succeed where it failed in 2010. Furthermore, the winds of change have blown over the Atlantic Ocean. On May 23, 2014, heeding again a Lithuanian initiative sponsored by Congressman John Shimkus of Illinois and strongly backed by the Joint Baltic American National Committee (JBANC), the U.S. House of Representatives approved legislation recognizing August 23 as the Day of Victims of Soviet Communist and Nazi Regimes, or Black Ribbon Day, as it came to be known as well.¹⁴⁴ Marked by the trauma of Soviet occupation and sharing this cognitive mapping with all other former communist countries where Stalin imposed his system, there is little chance and no justification to deny these people their own right to memory. What *must* nonetheless be hindered is the attempt to amalgamate perpetrators and victims. One must also call the ideology that leads from competitive martyrdom to the double-genocide fallacy and to Holocaust obfuscation by its own name: neo-antisemitism. Or is the “neo” superfluous?

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- 7 Shafir, "The 'Second Nürnberg' (I)," 121–44; Michael Shafir, "The 'Second Nürnberg': Legend vs. Myth in Postcommunism (II)," *Holocaust: Studii și cercetări*, [Holocaust: Studies and Research] VIII, no. 7 (2015): 243–52.
- 8 I am employing Maurice Halbwachs's concept of "social frameworks." See Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*. 2 édition (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008).
- 9 On cognitive mapping, see Les Roberts, ed., *Mapping Cultures: Place, Practices, Performance* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). On mental mapping, see Alan K. Henrikson, "The Geographical 'Mental Maps' of American Foreign Policy Makers," *International Political Science Association* 1, vol. 4 (1980): 495–530. These concepts have been used in general for analyzing decision-making processes at the international leadership level, but all individuals constantly make their own decisions and are influenced by their earlier "cognitive mapping" of the order of things. A cognitive map, one is told by Sandra Breux and Min Reuchamps, might ultimately be reduced to the following formula: "Cognitive map = perception + imagination." Sandra Breux and Min Reuchamps, "Introduction," in *Carte mentale et science politique: Regards et perspectives critiques sur l'emploi d'un outil promoteur*, eds. Sandra Breux, Min Reuchamps (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2011), 9–24.
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- 63 Stéphane Courtois, "Introduction: The Crimes of Communism," in *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, trans. Johnathan Murphy and Mark Kramer, ed. Stéphane Courtois et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 9, 17, 19, 23.
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