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# Anti-Semitism in Slovakia after the Velvet Revolution of 1989

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# ANTI-SEMITISM IN SLOVAKIA AFTER THE VELVET REVOLUTION OF 1989[1]

**By Peter Salner**

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## Abstract

This study discusses anti-Semitism in Slovakia after the Velvet Revolution of 1989. The introductory section presents an overview of the most destructive manifestations of anti-Semitism during 1918-1920, the Holocaust, and the Communist era (1948-1989). Anti-Semitism in Slovakia is less aggressive than in many other countries of the European Union. Physical violence is especially rare, and even the defacement of Jewish sites (particularly cemeteries) is typically motivated by vandalism, rather than by anti-Semitism. The most frequent expression of prejudice against Jews takes the form of verbal insults. These are predominantly used by children, who hear them from their families. Children (and adults) generally view these words as a regular part of the language culture and do not attribute a pejorative context to them. Between 1990 and 2019, anti-Semitism became embedded in the ideological equipment of certain political parties. In the process, it has moved from the margins of society to its center. Although I have examined different aspects of anti-Semitism in Slovakia in the past,[2] it was only while writing this study that I could more thoroughly consider the various manifestations of this phenomenon in the current democratic milieu. Jews in Slovakia[3] welcomed the Velvet Revolution of 1989 with the hope that it would usher in a brighter future. At the same time, some members of the community—especially the older generation—voiced concerns that the newfound freedom of expression would once again allow people to fulfill the

[1] This study emerged as part of the VEGA 2/0022/17 project, *The Wartime Slovak State and the Holocaust in Contemporary Social Discourse (An Ethnological Perspective)* [Vojnový slovenský štát a holokaust v aktuálnom spoločenskom diškurze – Etnologický pohľad]. I wrote it during the coronavirus pandemic, which I spent away from home. Thus I did not have access to my library and could not verify certain data, not even on the internet.

[2] Peter Salner, "Podoby antisemitizmu na Slovensku v období normalizácie (1969 – 1989)," [Forms of Anti-Semitism in Normalisation-Era Slovakia (1969-1989)] in *Podoby antisemitismu v Čechách a na Slovensku ve 20. a 21. století,* [Forms of Anti-Semitism in the Czech Lands and in Slovakia in the 20th and 21st Centuries] eds. Monika Vrzgulová, Hana Kubátová (Prague: Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2016), pp. 139-156. Peter Salner, *Historische und gegenwärtige Erscheinungsformen von Antisemitismus in der Slowakei* [Current and Historical Manifestations of Anti-Semitism in Slovakia] (in press).

[3] Prior to the dissolution of the common state on 1 January 1993, Slovakia had been part of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic.

adage that every change is a change for the worse. The history of Slovakia in the 20th century provides at least three examples which affirm this unfortunate Jewish experience.

## The Situation Pre-1989

In late 1918, the First World War came to an end, and the Austro-Hungarian monarchy splintered into several small independent states. The Czechoslovak Republic was one of them. At the time, Slovakia was reeling in chaos, which manifested itself in a wave of violence targeted primarily at Jews.[4] Apart from the pillage and destruction of Jewish property, the attacks also resulted in "…around a hundred, perhaps even two hundred, though not more" casualties.[5] Anti-Semitism persisted even after the stabilization of the new republic, though it gradually became less severe.[6] Two decades later, on October 6, 1938, Slovakia declared autonomy. Hungarian authorities laid claim to part of the Slovak territory and, pursuant to the First Vienna Award (November 2, 1938), a plebiscite was called. In consequence, Slovakia would cede 10,390 km$^2$ of its territory to Hungary. That territory was home to 859,643 people,[7] some 48,000 of whom were Jews. The Slovak authorities blamed the Jews for having voted against the national interest, and in response, they began to adopt the first anti-Jewish policies. In March 1939, Czechoslovakia fell apart and an independent Slovak Republic was proclaimed. The new regime promptly made the Jewish question "…into one of the most important domestic political issues of the state."[8] This culminated in the adoption of the so-called Jewish Code[9] and, later, in the deportations of Jews into Nazi extermination camps.[10] According to available evidence, 57,628 Jews from Slovakia were deported during the first wave of deportations (March 25 – October 20, 1942). The second wave only commenced after the occupation of Slovakia by the German Wehrmacht in September 1944, affecting a further

[4] For more, see Karol Anton Medvecký, *Slovenský prevrat* [The Slovak Upheaval] (Bratislava: Komenský, 1930). See also Peter Salner, *Židia na Slovensku medzi tradíciou a asimiláciou* [Jews in Slovakia Between Tradition and Assimilation] (Bratislava: Zing Print, 2000).
[5] Yeshayahu Andrej Jelínek, *Dávidova hviezda pod Tatrami. Židia na Slovensku v 20. storočí* [The Star of David Under the Tatras. Jews in Slovakia in the 20th Century] (Prague: Vydavateľstvo Jána Mlynárika, 2009), 123.
[6] For more on anti-Semitism in the early years of the Czechoslovak Republic, see Miloslav Szabó, *Od slov k činom. Slovenské národné hnutie a antisemitizmus (1875 – 1922)* [From Words to Action: The Slovak National Movement and Anti-Semitism (1875-1922)] (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2014).
[7] *Lexikón slovenských dejín* [Lexicon of Slovak History] (Bratislava: Slovenské pedagogické nakladateľstvo, 2007), 327.
[8] Ivan Kamenec, *Po stopách tragédie* [On the Trail of Tragedy] (Bratislava: Archa, 1991), 191.
[9] Decree 198/1941 On the Legal Status of the Jews, which consisted of 270 articles, was adopted by the Slovak National Council on 9 September 1941. In consequence, starting from 20 September 1941, Jews were forced to wear a star of David in public. Yeshayahu Andrej Jelínek, *Dávidova hviezda*, 2009, 298.
[10] The ongoing deportations were retroactively sanctioned by the Slovak National Council on 15 May 1942, when it adopted Constitutional Act 68/1942 on the Resettlement of the Jews.

13,000 individuals (the total number of victims should include the approximately 40,000 Jews deported from the territories which Slovakia had ceded to Hungary as part of the Vienna Award). The result was fatal. In 1930, 137,676 people in Slovakia subscribed to the Jewish faith.[11] According to relevant estimates, by 1945, the number of surviving Jews had dropped to between 15,000 and 30,000 people.[12] Even the more optimistic of the two estimates suggests that over 100,000 Jews had perished, amounting to 78.2% of the pre-war population. The community shrank even further between the years 1945 and 1950, when some 10,000 people left Slovakia for Israel/Palestine.[13]

On February 25, 1948, three years after the Liberation, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia seized power in the country. Some in the Jewish community welcomed this change. "The Jewish public could remember that the Communists had fought against fascism and made proclamations that were consonant with Jewish interests."[14] The fact that the new regime supported the founding of the State of Israel only further reinforced expectations that under the new system, Jews would be protected against expressions of anti-Semitism. However, the situation shifted rather quickly. On November 20-27 1952, the country witnessed the "trial of the anti-state conspiracy centered around Rudolf Slánský."[15] Eleven of the 14 defendants were Jews. The prosecution emphasized their Jewish background, alleged support of Zionism, and espionage on behalf of Israel. Ultimately, 11 of the defendants (10 of them Jews) were sentenced to death and summarily executed.[16] Distrust towards the Jews seeped into the media,[17] as well as into everyday life. In Slovakia, many Jews were tried or sacked from their jobs on the charge that they were disloyal to the regime and its ideology.[18]

[11] *Sčítání lidu v republice československé ze dne 1. prosince 1930,* Díl I. [Census of the Czechoslovak Republic from 1 December 1930, Part I] (Prague, 1934), p. 23.
[12] Yeshayahu Andrej Jelínek, *Dávidova hviezda*, 2009, p. 382.
[13] For more, see Chana Jablonková, "Izrael a Židia zo Slovenska" [Israel and Jews from Slovakia], in *Acta Judaica Slovaca*, 4, 1998, pp. 163-186. See also Ivica Bumová, "Povojnové pomery židovskej komunity na Slovensku a emigrácia Židov do Palestíny/Izraela v rokoch 1945 – 1953" [Post-War Conditions of the Jewish Community in Slovakia and the Immigration of Jews to Israel/Palestine in 1945-1953] in *Reflexie holokaustu,* [Reflections on the Holocaust] eds. Monika Vrzgulová, Peter Salner (Bratislava: Zing Print, 2010), pp. 16-35.
[14] Ibid., 2010, p. 393.
[15] Slánský was General Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.
[16] Eugen Löbl, *Svedectvo o procese s vedením protištátneho sprisahaneckého centra na čele s Rudolfom Slánskym* [Testimony About the Trial of the Anti-State Conspiracy Centred Around Rudolf Slánský] (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo politickej literatúry, 1968). Löbl was one of the defendants in the trial. He was sentenced to life in 1952, then released and rehabilitated in 1960.
[17] Eyewitnesses compared the tone of the contemporary press to the infamous Nazi newspaper *Der Stürmer*. See Heda Kovályová, *Na vlastní kůži* [published in English as: Under a Cruel Star: A Life in Prague 1941-1968] (Prague: Academia, 1992), 161-162.
[18] Jo Langer wrote about specific examples from her own experience. *Vtedy v Bratislave. Môj život s Oskarom L* [published in English as: Convictions: My Life with a Good Communist] (Bratislava: Marenčin PT, 2007). Ivica Štelmachovič Bumová devoted her most recent work to just this subject. *Sionisti a buržoázni nacionalisti v ŠtB. Prípad Oskar Valášek a spol. (1951 – 1963)* [Zionists and Bourgeois Nationalists in the Czechoslovak Secret

The gradual liberalization of social and political life in 1963-1968 brought renewed hope. However, all emancipatory processes were violently disrupted on August 21, 1968, when Czechoslovakia was invaded by the Warsaw Pact armies. The invasion resulted in mass emigration. About 4,500 Jews elected to leave Slovakia, amounting to over 50% of all the members of the community.[19] Those who stayed were viewed by the regime as a disloyal, even antagonistic, element of Czechoslovak society. The situation of the Jews during the so-called normalization era (1970-1989) was best characterized in a study by historian Ján Hlavinka, which, using the example of the city of Košice, details the manifold methods of persecution and control of the community by the Communist secret service, the State Security (ŠtB).[20] Other manifestations of anti-Semitism in this era were described by ethnologist Ivica Bumová.[21]

**The Situation after the Velvet Revolution of 1989**

Given the above, it is hardly surprising that the Jewish community viewed the collapse of the Communist regime and the subsequent restructuring of the state with equal parts joy and apprehension. The ensuing developments indeed confirmed that, apart from bringing positive change, democratic conditions also created ample room for open expressions of anti-Semitism.

As far as the positives are concerned, we should mention that on December 21, 1990, the newly-elected members of parliament adopted the "Declaration of the Slovak National Council and the Government of the Slovak Republic Regarding the Deportations of Jews from Slovakia." Aside from containing professions of contrition, the declaration also laid out the (still widely controversial) fact that the "deportations of 1942 were guided by Slovak hands."[22]

The state also took other steps to improve the situation of the community. Thanks to restitution laws, religious communities could reclaim part of the property which they had lost during the previous regimes. On October 9, 2002, Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda and

Service. The case of Oskar Valášek et al. (1951-1963)] (Bratislava: Chronos, 2019).

[19] The only Slovak rabbi, Elias Katz, also immigrated to Israel and became chief rabbi in Beersheba. There would be no other rabbis in Slovakia until the year 1993.

[20] Ján Hlavinka, "Židovská komunita pod kontrolou. Štátna bezpečnosť a židovské náboženské obce na východnom Slovensku v prvej dekáde 'normalizácie'" [The Jewish Community Under Control. The Communist Secret Service and Jewish Religious Communities in Eastern Slovakia in the First Decade of "Normalisation"] in *Pamäť národa*, 2005, 2: 20-23.

[21] Ivica Bumová, "ŠtB a židovská mládež (na príklade Západoslovenského kraja v rokoch 1969 – 1980)," [Jewish Youth and the Communist Secret Service (The case of Western Slovakia in 1969-1980)] in *Židovská komunita po roku 1945,* [The Jewish Community After 1945] ed. Peter Salner (Bratislava: Ústav etnológie SAV, 2006), 67-100.

[22] "Vyhlásenie Slovenskej národnej rady a vlády SR k deportáciám židov zo Slovenska," [Declaration of the Slovak National Council and the Government of the Slovak Republic Regarding the Deportations of Jews from Slovakia] in *Kritika&Kontext*, 1999, 1: 22-23.

Chairman of the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities (CUJRC) František Alexander signed an agreement between the CUJRC and the Government of the Slovak Republic regarding partial reparations for victims of the Holocaust. The government opened a deposit account amounting to 850 million Slovak crowns (approximately US$ 17.5 million in 2002). The yields were used by the CUJRC to set up a grant system that would support the activities of religious communities, as well as finance social, cultural, and education initiatives.

Another important symbolic act took place in September 2005, when the local representatives of Topoľčany issued a public apology to the Jewish community for a pogrom that had swept through the town in 1945. Among other things, their declaration contained the following lines: "We, the elected representatives of the citizens of the town of Topoľčany, express our deepest regret for these actions, which, in terms of their evil and inhumanity, have simply no equivalent in our modern history."[23]

The renewal of religious life was aided by the fact that in 1993, after a quarter-century hiatus, the vacant rabbinical posts in Slovakia were finally reassigned. Rabbi Baruch Myers took up his post in Bratislava (he holds it to this day) and Rabbi Lazar Kleinman in Košice.

Despite the aforementioned positives, there was no shortage of expressions of anti-Semitism and attacks against the Jewish representatives of the new regime. The chairman of the Public Against Violence[24] political movement, Fedor Gál (who was born on March 19, 1945 in the Theresienstadt/Terzin concentration camp), became a particularly frequent victim of verbal and physical violence. The era also witnessed attempts to rehabilitate the wartime Slovak State and its protagonists. Today, we are seeing a consistent increase in the popularity of conspiracy theories.[25] The current situation was aptly summarized by Z. Panczová: "In Slovakia today, we are seeing strong, radical manifestations of nostalgia for authoritarian regimes, coupled with a rejection of the liberal-democratic system. Despite the risk of legislative sanctions, some people publicly deny or even condone the Jewish Holocaust. We

[23] https://domov.sme.sk/c/2436855/topolcany-sa-ospravedlnili-zidom-za-nasilnosti.html. Accessed 24/10/2005.
[24] Public Against Violence [Verejnosť proti násiliu] was a pro-democracy movement founded during the Velvet Revolution. It played an important part in early post-1989 political developments.
[25] This subject has been thoroughly analyzed by ethnologist Zuzana Panczová, *Konšpiračné teórie: témy, historické kontexty a argumentačné stratégie* [Conspiracy Theories: Themes, Historical Contexts and Argumentation Strategies] (Bratislava: Veda, 2017); Zuzana Panczová, "Konšpiračné teórie a holokaust: súčasné podoby popierania holokaustu v slovenských internetových zdrojoch," [Conspiracy Theories and the Holocaust: Current forms of Holocaust denial on the Slovak internet] in *Tábor smrti Sobibor. Dejiny a odkaz* [Sobibor Extermination Camp: History and Heritage], eds. Ján Hlavinka, Peter Salner (Bratislava: Marenčin PT, 2019), 167-200.

are also witnessing the 'soft' forms of its relativization, distortion, or ideological exploitation."[26]

In the early 1990s, bookshops began selling the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, and other similar titles. This gave rise to intense polemics, which often (inadvertently) helped to spread the books' "message." The *Smena* daily introduced a regular column called Konfrontácie [Confrontations], which featured a debate about the *Protocols*. The owner of the publishing house which had released the volume argued his case as follows: "We do not consider the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* to be the official agenda of the Jewry as such. Rather, we view the book as laying out a roadmap for a small part of the community, which is not even exclusively Jewish—it comprises freemasons of various confessions and also Jews who are not really sincere believers in Judaism. We contend that this is purely a matter of power. The *Protocols* are a manual for an elite that wants to rule the world."[27] His partner in this debate, Robert Helebrandt, said that he did not think it was important whether the *Protocols* were a forgery or not, because, in the modern times, it was clear that global developments were being orchestrated artificially: "That is the greatest discovery, to which humanity contributed by exposing the Jewish attempts to destroy its culture and future. That is why the Protocols should be read every day. They should become an alternative, informative, and cautionary second Bible."[28] The rational arguments of CUJRC Spokesman Jaroslav Franek and political scientist Grigori Mesezhnikov, who were on the opposite side of the debate, were apparently rather more "boring."[29]

Discussions of this sort began in the common Czech and Slovak state and continued even after the formal emancipation of the Slovak Republic on January 1, 1993. The name of the new state, along with the attitudes of part of the public (and some MPs), evoked parallels with the wartime Slovak State. Especially among the Holocaust survivors, this gave rise to fears that the past would repeat itself. Grigori Mesezhnikov has distinguished three forms of anti-Semitism in Slovakia: explicit anti-Semitism, based on the hatred of Jews; glorification of the wartime Slovak State (1939-1945); and anti-Zionism and antipathy towards the State of Israel.[30] As he writes, "explicit anti-Semitism is no longer an effective tool of political and electoral mobilization in Slovakia. It seems that in the early 1990s, the country witnessed the

[26] Zuzana Panczová, "Konšpiračné teórie a holokaust," 2019, 190.
[27] Martin A. Šavel, "Konfrontácie. Prečo Áno," [Confrontations: The Yay] *Smena*, 30. 9. (1991): 3.
[28] Robert Helebrandt, "Konfrontácie. Prečo Áno," [Confrontations: The Yay] *Smena*, 30. 9. (1991): 3.
[29] Jaroslav Franek, Grigori Mesezhnikov, "Konfrontácie. Prečo Nie," [Confrontations: The Nay] *Smena*, 30. 9. (1991): 3.
[30] Grigori Mesezhnikov, "Tri podoby antisemitizmu na Slovensku," [Three Forms of Anti-Semitism in Slovakia] in *Sme blog*, 4. 3. 2012 https://institutpre.blog.sme.sk/c/302705/Tri-podoby-antisemitizmu-na-Slovensku.html.

final, unsuccessful attempt by political anti-Semitism to transform itself into a relevant societal force." Mesezhnikov notes that attempts to rehabilitate and glorify the regime of the "first independent state of the Slovaks" have much greater resonance with the public. In regard to Israel, he concludes that "none of the relevant political parties in Slovakia today assume an anti-Israel stance in matters concerning the Middle East. All of them are either slightly pro-Israel or, at the least, neutral."[31]

In the first few years after the founding of the independent Slovak Republic, it felt as though the fears of (not only) the Jewish community were coming true. Various newspapers and magazines, including the pro-government daily *Slovenská republika* (Slovak Republic), published anti-Semitic articles. There was increasing demand for the rehabilitation of the wartime regime and its protagonists. Historian M. S. Ďurica released the second edition of his volume on the history of the Slovak nation, creating considerable public outrage.[32] In his work, Ďurica idealized the conditions in Slovak labor camps and venerated the wartime president, Jozef Tiso, who was politically and morally responsible for the deportations of Jews from the country. Controversially, the second edition of the book was published using EU funds. To add to that, the Ministry of Education distributed the book free of charge to all elementary and secondary schools in the country to be used in class. Ďurica's views had thus been sanctioned as official state policy. Eventually, resistance from the expert and lay public caused the book to be withdrawn from Slovak schools. The Minister of Education, Eva Slavkovská (who had been appointed by the chauvinist Slovak National Party), remained steadfast: "The prime minister [ed. Vladimír Mečiar] made a promise to EU representatives that the book would not be used in class. I kept face and did not sign the ensuing directive. It would have been contrary to my moral and professional beliefs. The directive concerning the withdrawal of Ďurica's book from the pedagogical process was signed by the state secretary of the Ministry of Education, who is an appointee of HZDS."[33] Despite all this, the fifth edition of the book still adorns the shelves of many bookshops.

Attempts to rehabilitate the Slovak State were also visible in the public spaces of towns and cities. Busts, statues, memorial plaques, even streets named for either President Tiso or

[31] Grigori Mesezhnikov, "Tri podoby antisemitizmu," 2012.
[32] Milan Ďurica, "Dejiny Slovenska a Slovákov, II. doplnené vydanie" [History of Slovakia and the Slovaks. 2nd Amended Edition] (Bratislava: Slovenské pedagogické vydavateľstvo, 1996).
[33] HZDS – Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko [Movement for a Democratic Slovakia] was a political party led by Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar. It was a dominant force in Slovak politics, especially throughout the 1990s. In Peter Ťažký, Vladimír Mohorita, "Zachovala som si vlastnú tvár! Ja som nariadenie o odstránení Ďuricovej knihy nepodpísala!" [I kept face! I never signed the directive concerning the withdrawal of Ďurica's book] Interview with Minister of Education Eva Slavkovská, in *Zmena*, 14 (1998): 7-8.

another representative of the wartime regime, sprang up all over the country. On various occasions, it was contended that Tiso had personally intervened to save the lives of thousands of Jews. This was supposedly evidenced by the fact that the City of Jerusalem had erected a statue in his honor. At the request of historian Yeshayahu A. Jelínek, Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert dispatched a letter on August 24, 2004, denying that such a statue had ever existed. Despite everything, the narrative about the "kindly President Tiso" persists in Slovakia to this day.

With the growing spread of the internet, anti-Semitic expressions have moved from the print media to the virtual world. We have seen the emergence of websites that deal with Holocaust denialism, the alleged plans for "global Jewish supremacy," the State of Israel, etc. According to Z. Panczová, in this discourse, the term "Jew" "…is representative not only of a particular ethnic identity. It is attributive of the members of an antagonistic group—a political and societal, but more importantly, moral and cultural 'they.'"[34]

The available evidence clearly indicates that anti-Semitism has been moving from the periphery of Slovak society towards its center. This is best illustrated by the case of Marian Kotleba. This former IT teacher founded the paramilitary organization *Slovenská pospolitosť* [Slovak Togetherness], which was openly anti-Semitic and sympathetic to the wartime state. After its court-mandated dissolution in March 2006, Kotleba founded the political party *Kotleba – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko* [Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia]. Although the party has mostly directed its attacks against the Roma, Kotleba and his fellow party members have regularly made anti-Semitic statements, which led to some of them (including Kotleba himself) appearing in court.[35] In spite of all this, in 2013, Kotleba was elected regional governor of the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region. His party also enjoyed a non-negligible degree of success in Slovak parliamentary elections. In 2016, it won 8.04% of the vote (14 MPs in parliament). Four years later, in 2020, ĽSNS walked away with 7.97% of the overall tally, winning a total of 17 seats.

Grigori Mesezhnikov bases his analysis of anti-Semitism in Slovakia on the developments in the nation's political landscape, but he does not devote much attention to "small history," which, according to historian Ivan Kamenec, follows "…the particular fates and motivations of individuals."[36] This sphere is especially interesting from the ethnological

[34] Zuzana Panczová, "Konšpiračné teórie", 2017: 72.
[35] Jaroslav Franek, "Naše Slovensko. Najvyšší súd odmietol návrh na rozpustenie Kotlebovej strany," [Our Slovakia. Supreme Court strikes down proposal for dissolution of Kotleba's party] in *Roš Chodeš*, 81, June 2019, 14-15.
[36] Ivan Kamenec, "Nepoznaná stránka holokaustu na Slovensku," [The Unknown Side of the Holocaust in

point of view. Based on the available knowledge, in the post-1989 era, we can distinguish various expressions of "folk anti-Semitism," ranging from (sporadic) instances of physical violence, vandalism, verbal attacks, all the way to "inadvertent" anti-Semitism. The latter does not result from malevolent intent, but rather from traditional stereotypes and distinct cultural perceptions.

Regarding instances of physical violence, the two attacks against Rabbi Myers (in 1993 and in 2014) have caused the greatest outrage. Both cases involved individual assailants. More common are instances of vandalism in cemeteries: the destruction, defacement, or theft of gravestones. In 2002, a group of youths damaged 135 graves at the Košice cemetery. Then Rabbi of Košice, Jossi Steiner, concluded that the attack had not been motivated by anti-Semitism, but rather by vandalism. Following his intercessions, the perpetrators were ordered to do community service at the cemetery and attend lectures on the Jewish faith, culture, and way of life. In 2008, Bratislava police apprehended and fined three youths who had damaged the glass steles at the Chatam Sofer Memorial. In 2019, 75 gravestones were toppled at the cemetery in Námestovo. The local police found this to have been another instance of vandalism. The only incident with an unambiguously anti-Semitic motive was the destruction of more than 20 graves in the town of Rajec (here, the perpetrators are yet to be caught). Both of these latter incidents were strongly condemned by President Zuzana Čaputová,[37] as well as by other political and cultural personalities.

Relatively frequent are attacks by graffiti vandals, who also target Jewish sites. Their works sometimes feature Nazi symbols or anti-Semitic slogans, but for the most part, these are "expressions of individual creativity" which adorn all the buildings in the area are without specific anti-Semitic connotation.

In terms of person-to-person relationships, verbal attacks constitute the most commonly encountered expression of anti-Semitism. They are particularly frequent among children, but also appear in communication between adults. That said, they cannot always be interpreted as being consciously anti-Semitic. Among children, they are mostly founded on cultural stereotypes that the children encountered in their families and therefore view them as "normal,"

Slovakia] in Madeline Vadkerty, *Slovutný pán prezident. Listy Jozefovi Tisovi* [Esteemed Mister President, Letters to Jozef Tiso] (Bratislava: Absynt, 2020), 16-17.

[37] TASR, "Vandalizmus na Slovensku nemá miesto, reaguje Čaputová na poškodenie cintorína v Rajci" [Vandalism has no place in Slovakia, Čaputová says in reaction to the defacement of the cemetery in Rajec] https://domov.sme.sk/c/22290004/vandalizmus-na-slovensku-nema-miesto-reaguje-caputova-na-poskodenie cintorina-v-rajci.html. 2019. Accessed 4/4/2020.

rather than insulting. We can say with a degree of confidence that, in Slovakia, "…verbal expressions of anti-Semitism are often overlooked even when they are quite evident."[38]

As an example of "inadvertent anti-Semitism," I will mention an incident which took place in the village of Zlaté Klasy just outside Bratislava. The Jewish community was outraged after the locals were found to have been "eating, drinking and making merry in a place of eternal rest." Traditional local festivities had been held at the site of a Jewish cemetery.[39] The attitude of the community was summed up by the-then Chairman of the CUJRC, Igor Rintel: "Not only is this a violation of the precepts of the Jewish faith. We consider it to be a failure to observe the basic principles of decency and respect for holy grounds. To add to that the site is owned by the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Slovakia. The CUJRC has therefore resolved to file a criminal complaint."[40] This came as a surprise to the villagers. The mayor, Otto Csicsai, admitted his mistake while adamantly maintaining that the locals' actions **"were not ill-intended."** "We have been holding the festivities at that location for over 30 years—never directly at the cemetery, but right behind it," he explained, acknowledging that this time, the stalls and barrels had been placed regrettably close to the burial ground.[41] Paradoxically, in this case, both parties were justified in their reaction. From the point of view of the Jewish faith, graves are inviolable. The community was therefore right to condemn the locals' actions. From the point of view of the majority, which holds that inhumed remains can be removed from the graves if the plots are not being paid for, the Jewish cemetery in Zlaté Klasy was not a cemetery, per se. That is why the villagers felt entitled to use the area as they saw fit. They did not perceive their actions as inappropriate or insulting. Thus, there emerged a clash between two cultural approaches to graves and cemeteries, where the attitude of the majority was (correctly, though perhaps not justly) viewed as an expression of anti-Semitism.

The state of anti-Semitism in Slovakia is further illuminated by sociological research. According to Michal Vašečka, Slovaks still harbor various forms of prejudice against the Jewish community. Most widespread is the belief that Jews control a disproportionate share of global economic and political power.[42] The number of people who do not want to have Jews as their neighbors is also rising. Whereas in 2008, that number amounted to less than 10% of the

[38] Jaroslav Franek, "Naše Slovensko…", 2015: 15

[39] www.topky.sk "Vrchol drzosti, hody sa konali na posvätnommieste: Párky s pivom na židovskom cintoríne." [The Height of Disrespect. Festivities held at a sacred place: Beer and bangers at a Jewish cemetery] (28. 9. 2018). Accessed 4/4/2020. The reason this is in red is just to adjust the left margin. Than change to black.

[40] "Vrchol drzosti," 2019. The bold is in the original.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Michal Vašečka, "Sociologický výskum antisemitizmu na Slovensku po roku 1989 v kritickej perspektíve," [Sociological Research of Anti-Semitism in Slovakia After 1989: A Critical Perspective] *Sociológia*, 38, 2006, 4: 283-312 (quoted from p. 286).

population, a more recent 2018 study by the Institute of Sociology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences places it at 22.7%.[43] This is further evidence of the persistence of (or, perhaps, increase in) latent forms of anti-Semitism.

Also interesting is the comparison of Slovakia with other EU countries, which was published by eurobarometer.sk in January 2019. It shows that 70% of Slovaks do not believe that anti-Semitism is a problem in their country[44] (in the EU as a whole, that number is 43%). Only 34% of Slovaks find anti-Semitism to be an issue in the media (51% in the EU); 44% are concerned about anti-Semitism on the internet and social networks (67% in the EU); 32% are worried about Holocaust denialism (47% EU).[45] These differences stem from the lower sensitivity of Slovak society towards verbal expressions of anti-Semitism, as well as from the relatively high degree of the community's tolerance of such expressions.

As far as Slovakia's future is concerned, it is important that on 27 November 2018, the nation's parliament, by a huge majority (excluding MPs for Kotleba's party), voted to adopt the working definition of anti-Semitism elaborated by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).

**Conclusion**

Based on the above, I will now attempt several generalizations:

a) In the long-term perspective, anti-Semitism in Slovakia has been a latent (and sometimes manifest) aspect of the contemporary reality.

b) Until the end of the 1990s, anti-Semitism mostly featured in the print media. In the new millennium, it has been moving to social networks, where it mostly affects the younger generation.

c) Anti-Semitism in Slovakia is less aggressive than in many other EU countries. Physical violence is particularly rare. More frequent are attacks on Jewish sites, especially cemeteries. In many cases, these are motivated not by anti-Semitism, but by vandalism. The majority of the perpetrators are 18 years old or younger.

[43] Islamonline 2018, "Výskum SAV: 54,4 % Slovákov nechcú bývať vedľa moslimov." [SAS study: 54,4% of Slovaks would not want Muslims as their neighbors]. Accessed 13/4/2020.
[44] This number appears to be stable. According to Vašečka, in 1997, the share of respondents who subscribed to this view was 66%. Michal Vašečka, "Sociologický výskum antisemitizmu," [Sociological Research of Anti Semitism] 2006, 293; 25 % of the respondents believe that Jews have too much influence in the world (Ibid., 2006, 296).
[45] Eurobarometer 2019.

d) In Slovak society today, anti-Semitism often appears in the verbal expressions of children. These expressions are rooted in cultural stereotypes passed down through the generations. Often children (and adults) view them as regular elements of their language culture and they do not always use them as an intentional offense to the Jews.

e) Sociological research shows that a relatively large number of people would not want to have Jews as their neighbors (22.7%). This indicates the persistence of latent anti-Semitism and also the potential for further exacerbation.

f) In 1990-2019, anti-Semitism became part of the ideological equipment of certain political parties. It thus moved from the periphery of society to its center. This, combined with the persisting forms of prejudice, favors the prediction that this phenomenon will continue to feature in the political and everyday life of Slovak society.

Translated from Slovak by Jakub Tlolka