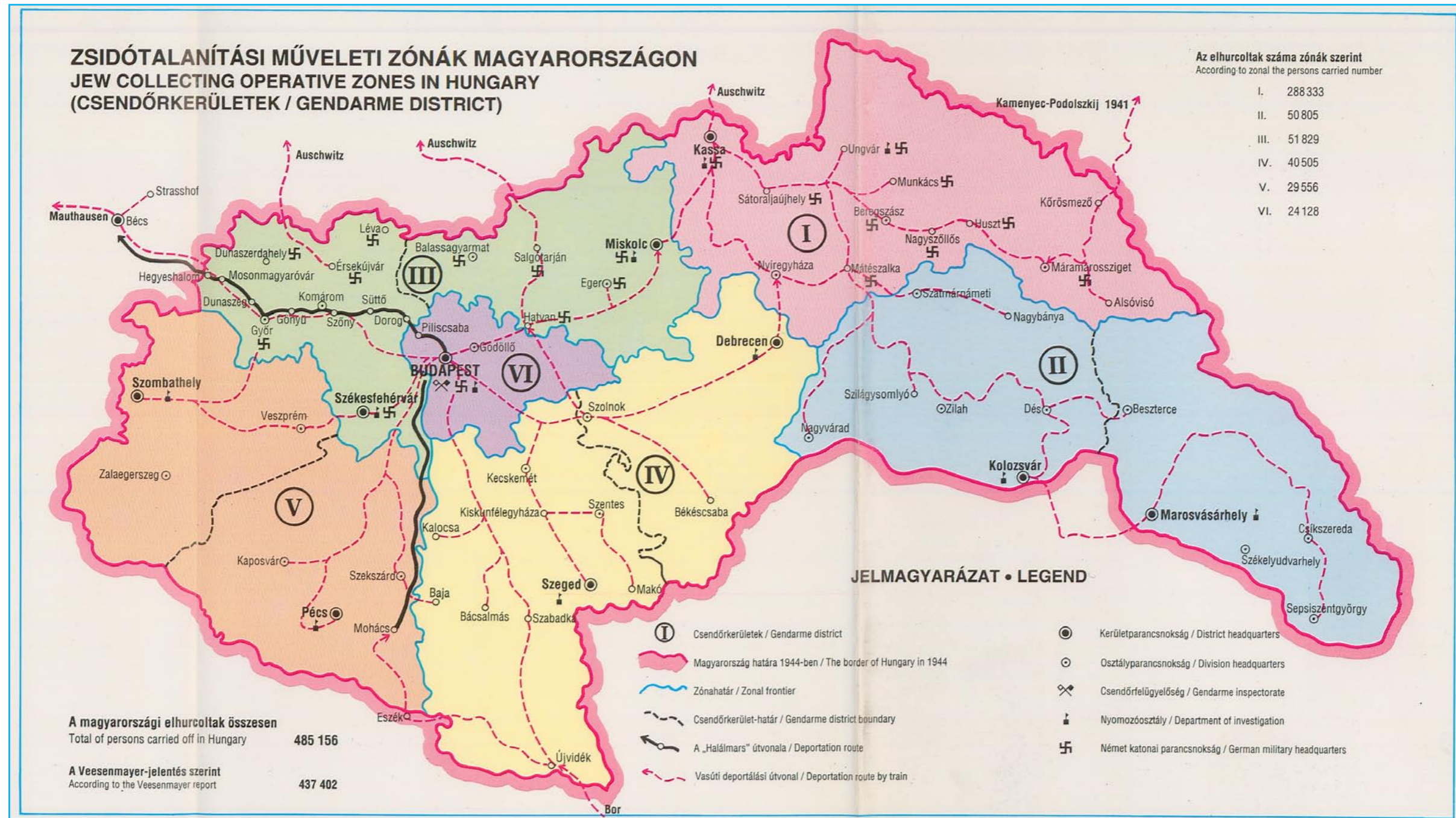


# Rapport from Hungary (2010–2013)

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It is probably well-known that Hungary is home to one of Europe’s largest Jewish communities. But nearly 70 years after the Second World War, Hungary has started down a path, which in the past has already led to fascism, the rise in power of the far right and a horrific defeat.



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But before I speak about this ominous path, I would like to make a brief side note:

*Between 1920 and 1930, one of Hungary's most significant papers was called OJSÁG. This publication focused on political humour. Known as well for its Jewish jokes, the paper viewed the world from the perspective shared by many middle-class Jews living in Budapest at the time and focused on Hungarian political events.*

*Within Budapest's Jewish community, the following joke remains popular:*

**Question: Can one believe in Viktor Orbán, Hungary's prime minister?**

*The wise rabbi responds thus: "Grün and Kohn are walking down a side street, when a dog starts coming towards them. Kohn becomes frightened, but Grün reassures him:*

*– Why are you scared of that dog? Can't you see how he's wagging his tail?*

*– "Yes, but look" —says Kohn—he is snarling and showing his teeth. One doesn't know which side of the dog to believe."*



**When asked if, as a Hungarian, a Jew and a resident of Budapest, we can believe in Viktor Orbán, the answer is a resounding "NO."**

*Elie Wiesel wrote an open letter to László Kövér, speaker of the Hungarian parliament. He noted: "It is with profound dismay and indignation that I learned of your participation, together with Hungarian Secretary of State Géza Szócs and far-right Jobbik party leader Gábor Vona, in a ceremony in Romania honoring József Nyírő, a member of the National Socialist Arrow Cross Parliament. I found it outrageous that the Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly could participate in a ceremony honoring a Hungarian fascist ideologue of the Horthy and Szálasi regimes. This distressing news came following the resurgent practice of naming public spaces after wartime leader Miklós Horthy and of rehabilitating Albert Wass and other figures that collaborated heavily with the Hungarian fascist regime. I was also informed that the writings of extreme right intellectuals are systematically introduced in the Hungarian curriculum."*



János Áder, President (at right), unveiling the statue of Albert Wass



It is well known that the spread of anti-Semitism and racism do not only pose problems in Hungary, but elsewhere throughout Europe. The difference, however, is that in most other European countries mainstream political parties and community organizations have managed to keep these extremist elements quarantined from the rest of society. Most other EU countries have also taken clear, decisive and successful steps in combating far right extremism, especially in places like Austria and France. German television, for instance, took a show off the air after it surfaced that the main character has a Nazi past. Demonstrations that glorify Hitler are banned in Germany, while in Hungary it is even possible to hold such an event right in front of the Palace of the President of the Republic. It should also be noted that Hungarian anti-Semitism differs markedly from the western European variant, where anti-Semitic attacks and aggression are often committed by Muslims, rather than by the majority population.

In an effort to maximize votes, the Hungarian government consciously incorporates the Nazi ideology of Jobbik into its regime. As such, Orbán – to use his own terminology – constantly partakes in peacock dance. In terms of human rights-related issues, the governing party fails to distance itself from the far right. In fact, one of the great tragedies of post-1989 Hungary is that the country has no moderate, classical conservative party.

Orbán's responsibility for the rise in anti-Semitism dates back to his electoral defeat in 2002, after which he often turned to coded anti-Semitic language, which any far right supporter could understand and with which he hoped to win over extremist voters. He often spoke about “foreigners”, “foreign cosmopolitans” and even referred to the left as being “genetically coded” to act in what he felt was an unpatriotic manner. Immediately following his election defeat, Orbán noted that the “homeland cannot be in opposition.” With these anti-Semitic speeches Orbán has gained the support of the far right and managed to keep it, up until the extremist realized that much of this is little more than smoke and mirrors, and that Orbán does not necessarily buy into his own rhetoric.

The World Jewish Congress decided that in order to shed light on growing anti-Semitism in Hungary, it would hold its 2013 conference in Hungary, instead of in Jerusalem. In his May 6<sup>th</sup> speech to the Congress, Orbán admitted that anti-Semitism posed a growing problem in Hungary and promised that he would address this crisis “using all means at my disposal.” Nevertheless, even after mentioning this, he failed to distance himself from the far right. Additionally, he insulted many Hungarian Jews as in his speech he implied that Jews are not Hungarian.

During the Horthy regime, Hungary Jewish population was diverse economically, culturally, politically and socially. The vast majority of Hungarians of Jewish faith or heritage considered themselves to be Hungarian patriots. But only a fraction of the Hungarian Jewish community survived the Holocaust and their numbers were reduced even further after 1945 and, especially, the 1956 Hungarian revolution, when 50,000 Hungarian Jews immigrated to the U.S., Israel and western



Europe. Over the past three years since the election of the Fidesz government, their numbers have declined even further. At the same time, since the regime change of 1989, a new generation has come of age which sees itself as Hungarian of Jewish faith or origin. Jews in Hungary generally identify as much with being Hungarian as they identify with their Jewish heritage. But Fidesz and the far right calls into question their Hungarian identity, and Orbán did much the same in his speech before the WJC.

Orbán's two-faced politics are astounding. According to his speech, "the government will take the most decisive action against all extremist, racist and anti-Semitic acts. The government will do all it can in order to diminish the hateful and unacceptable voices. At the same time, it will make it perfectly clear that it aims to protect all of the country's citizens from such attacks."

Unfortunately, all of this is empty propaganda and rhetoric, while anti-Semitism, racism and homophobia are on the rise, and while hateful speech and hate-filled physical attacks are increasingly common.

According to Péter Feldmájer, president of the Alliance of Hungarian Jewish Faith Communities, the participants of the Congress have "arrived in a country where an elderly head rabbi is attacked on the streets, where fascists are rampant, where the courts turn murderers into role models for the youth, where streets and squares are named after anti-Semites and where Hungarian Nazi authors form part of the national curriculum in schools." While Feldmájer's words were clear and succinct, he did not mention who bears responsibility for this situation.

Using his two-thirds supermajority, Orbán has built an autocratic – even dictatorial – structure and has re-crafted the country's constitutional framework in his own image and to his own liking.

With his government's unprecedented power, he should have no trouble dealing a decisive blow against the extremists and, considering that the Treaty of Paris is still in effect, which declares that parties such as Jobbik are illegal, he would be obliged to take swift action.

Yet the Orbán government has turned to Nazi authors, thinkers and ideas to take the attention away from lost jobs and economic hardship, while relying on the Horthy era, with all of its symbols, to give Hungarians hope for the future. Unresolved structural problems, high levels of unemployment and the decline in the social safety net, poverty and crime are often blamed on the Roma population and on the Jews. Both minorities are often the scapegoats for all of Hungary's social ills.

The moral and intellectual decline is clearly evident within Hungarian society. Discrimination and hatred forms part of the daily reality and discourse. Certainly, we cannot neglect the responsibility that previous liberal and left-leaning governments bear, especially since the rise of the far right and the radicalization of the Hungarian right happened under these governments.



Fidesz—for nearly the past two decades—has viewed interwar Hungary in a positive light, and has even seen the politics of this era as a model for the country. Horthy was a war criminal – albeit, he was never convicted – and he bears serious responsibility for the extermination of Hungarian Jews. In 1944, while under German occupation, Hungarian authorities took the initiative in deporting 437,402 Hungarian Jews to the death camps.

József Szájer, a Hungarian member of the European Parliament claimed in a congressional hearing in Washington that *“there is no rehabilitation of Horthy and that the government has no such plans or desire.”* Yet it is clearly no secret that:

- The new constitution, accepted and approved exclusively by the governing parties, has codified the historic and moral rehabilitation of the Horthy regime, which was in place from 1919 to 1944.
- Hungary’s most important public place, Kossuth Square in front of the Parliament, is being restored to reflect its pre-1945 state. Construction has already commenced.

It should also be noted that Orbán’s minister in charge of education and culture, Zoltán Balog, and Sándor Lezsák, the deputy speaker of Parliament, attended the unveiling of a statue in honour of Ottokár Prohászka, a rabidly anti-Semitic cleric who was the intellectual and spiritual force behind Europe’s first racial law, the 1920 Numerus Clausus. Prohászka legitimized the most virulent forms of anti-Semitism.



Kossuth Square: There are archive photos showing the square as it was before 1945 on the fence separating the area under reconstruction. It might give some idea about its future outward appearance

Zoltán Balogh has also offered awards to Kornél Bakay, and archaeologist who also happens to be a supporter of Szálasi, and to revisionist-ir-redentist rock musician János Petrás.

According to the government, the decision to incorporate into the school curriculum three anti-



Semitic writers of the Horthy regime represents “societal needs.” The authors include Albert Wass, József Nyirő and Dezső Szabó. According to the Association of Hungarian Teachers, from an aesthetic and literary perspective, these authors cannot be considered significant literary icons.

We can see the ideals of the Horthy regime reflected in Orbán’s constitution. The constitution’s “Confession of Faith” is, in itself, an attack on separation of church and state required in secular society, as is the fact that religion is now a compulsory part of the school curriculum.

Horthy lives on, thanks to support of the Church. In a church named after the Blessed Sára Salkaházi, who saved Jews during the War and was killed by the Arrow Cross, locals organized a Horthy commemoration. Fidesz members of parliament and a local mayor attended the event.

These examples are very telling of the intertwined nature of the right and far right in Hungary, but they are also indicative of the indifference shown by many liberals, as well as the lack of solidarity with those who suffer discrimination. This indifference strengthens the right’s campaign of hate.



FIDESZ’S PARTY HEADQUARTERS

*“Don’t take the side of the murderers, don’t listen to Ron Werber!”*



Old friends Zsolt Bayer and Viktor Orbán having fun!



Old friends Viktor Orbán and Gábor Vona having fun?

In Hungary – in stark contrast with other European country – the lack of a legal framework to curb hate means that it is impossible to truly penalize those who spread racism and anti-Semitism. Courts and judges can be labeled (pejoratively) as Jewish by anti-Semites in court rooms. Only Holocaust denial, but not anti-Semitism is addressed by legislation.

Even today, the anti-Semites and racists claim that Jews are

overrepresented in more prestigious professions. During the 1920's and 1930's the right made the same claims, at a time when 60 percent of the Jewish population formed part of the middle class, 3% were peasants and 13% were industrial workers. We all know the consequences of this campaign.

A significant section of Hungarian society does not understand that this tendency to discriminate and marginalize – which we have already experienced in our history – portends great danger. At the moment, there is no evidence of a positive change in direction.

**The new Parliamentary Guard: What will Fidesz use it for?**

