

**Quest for Cultural Roots of Holocaust in Slovakia:
The Making-Of Hlinka's Slovak People's Party's
Anti-Semitic Ideology (1890s-1920s)
from Transnational Perspective and Its Foreign Inspirations**

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Motivation: Why exactly this topic?

The share of the Slovak government and Slovak society in the persecution and extermination of nearly 70,000 Slovak Jews indisputably remains an interpretational problem for a part of Slovak historians and public until today. Many people in Slovakia still consider the Slovak variety of the Holocaust to be a “misunderstanding” which is explained as follows: no one *wanted it*, but the German officials *deceived* Slovaks who, in a good faith, allowed to deport the Jews “to their new motherland” for “work” and, finally, corrupted historians and journalist dared to portray *the good-natured Slovak nation* as an outrageous anti-Jewish instigator...

Such a perception – whether we call it distorted, stereotyped or otherwise – is not specific for Slovakia only. Getting rid of responsibility for crimes against humanity has become an indispensable part of discourse on the tragedy of Jews and the collaboration in many European countries, in the spirit of German slogan *davon haben wir nichts gewusst*. Perhaps, therefore, some historians whose views are not distant from this viewpoint often talk about so-called “over-holocausting” (!) of historiography. I met with the similar perception of the Holocaust during oral history research, when I had been preparing a biography on Alexander Mach, Slovak wartime minister of interior, head commander of the Hlinka Guard and one of the most responsible figures for the Slovak Holocaust.

I personally believe that ignoring the role of Slovak government in the context of Slovak share on the Holocaust analysis is basically the same as writing about the Soviet Union and not talking about the Gulags. Historian Jozef Jablonický wrote

that the Holocaust did not start in the Auschwitz gas chambers, where a large part of the Slovak Jews died. The Holocaust, Jablonický stated, was only *finalized* in Auschwitz and started, in fact, as a successive stage process in Slovakia. The same applies to Slovak wartime anti-Semitism which, like anti-Semitism of other nations in Central Eastern Europe, has historically been very strong. I perceive it, in accordance with the conclusions of German sociologist Klaus Holz, as an autochthonous ideology framed by an opposition against Jews, who are defined, in the eyes of majority, as the representatives of anti-national attributes. This is how I methodologically focus on anti-Semitism as well - I do not divide it into an economic, religious or racial component but try to perceive it as a mutually interconnected compact unit that had shaped the perception of Jews by the majority and antipathy towards them.

State-of-art

The Slovak historiography has considered the growth of Anti-Semitism in Slovakia, which led to tragedy of the Jewish population, to be a product of interwar period. Authors of such a persuasion usually satisfy themselves with a laconic statement, that the raising anti-Semitism in Slovakia in the 1930s and 1940s was a direct response to the global European trends and to a rise of international fascism. When I analyzed the roots of Mach's anti-Jewish hatred during my previous researches, I came to a conclusion, that such a traditionalist interpretation is very vague. Hitler's *Machtergreifung* and the subsequent anti-Jewish legacy in Germany did not arouse the Anti-Semitism of Slovak politics and society as a brand new phenomenon. It was only a *catalyst*, an accelerator of a new wave, but as I learned on the background of Alexander Mach's story, a “birth certificate” of the Slovak Anti-Semitism is much, much older.

To this day, only few historians have in their research systematically focused on aspects regarding this issue before – Zeev Sternhell's close colleague Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, Petra Rybářová and Miloslav Szabó, who primarily researched the growth of Anti-Semitism mostly within the Slovak intellectual circles and political elites with emphasis on the period prior to the end of World War I.

Thanks to the possibilities to study a foreign literature during my recent fellowship stays in Prague, Munich and Vienna, I have acquired a decent overview of what methodological tools I should use in my ambitious effort to construct a new concept of modern Slovak Anti-Semitism which was later implemented into political ideology and political practice of the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party, the self-ruling and only allowed Slovak party in the wartime Hitler's satellite Slovak State (March 1939 – April 1945). Though my predecessors undisputedly brought a fresh air into the research, they have not attempted to interconnect the Anti-Semitism before 1918 with the Anti-Semitism of further perpetrators of the Holocaust – members and followers of the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party.

Outlining the new concept

Even though the Slovak and European historiography has already described the stages of the Holocaust in Slovakia during the WWII, questing for the *cultural roots* of the genocide in European context still belongs to rather untouched topics. Current state of historiography motivated me to become a pioneer on this field and to find out thanks to the FMS' support, *why and how the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party and their key figures actually became Anti-Semitic*. Therefore, I decided to sketch this process on the background of events and phenomenon prior to the late 1930s, when the first Anti-Semitic measures under the state's auspices were implemented into the legal system and the Anti-Semitic politics, which led to the Holocaust, turned into a mainstream.

For analytical purposes I divided my planned research of the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party's Anti-Semitism into two main mutually interrelated parts:

a) Austro-Hungarian Empire as an incubator for the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party's Anti-Semitism (1890s – 1918)?

Based on my so-far researches, I assume that the Hlinka's Party's Anti-Semitic ideology's core features had already been shaped up yet in the times of the Habsburg monarchy. The specific Austro-Hungarian “*fin de siècle*” was, like the cultural milieu in France or Italy, typical for a deep intellectual crisis and

reassessment of the values of modern industrial civilization. Originally rural nations (including Slovaks), who were shocked by the pace of the Second industrial revolution in the second half of the 19th Century, had started to fear the expanding liberalism and socialism as modernizing ideologies, and their supporters too.

Notable part of conservative Slovak society perceived liberalism and socialism as enemies of national and Christian principles, which were the main aspects of the national ideology already in the phase of forming of the modern Slovak nation since the turn of the 18th and 19th Century. The enlightenment and subsequent national revival process, which escalated during the 1848/49 revolution, created an ideal type of a modern Slovak: an ethnic Slovak speaking Christian fighting for his “holy rights” against the real and imaginary foes, who *threaten his existence*. This image was deeply rooted in the minds of all generations of Slovak intelligentsia and political leaders throughout the 19th Century, irrespective of religious denomination.

This Manichean worldview, reflecting the life to be a clash between *good* and *evil*, was boosted by the Catholic People's Party (*Néppárt*), founded in 1894 which, at its beginnings, integrated Catholic political streams of all nations living in the Hungarian Kingdom and which was also a cornerstone for the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party founded in 1905. The key ideological components of the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party, which renewed its political activity in newly established Czechoslovakia in December 1918, and within which structure the most notable Slovak Anti-Semites politically grew up, were founded, as I predict in my research, *as early as in the 1890s*.

The end of the 19th Century was a period of culmination of anti-Semitic tensions in Slovakia (at that time called *Felvidék*, the northern part of Hungarian Kingdom). I suppose that the economic and social emancipation of Jews, which the Catholic circles in the Hungarian part of Habsburg monarchy associated with the Jewish support to the detested liberalism, transformed religiously framed anti-Judaism into a *new dimension*. In the Slovak countryside and partly in towns as well, the Jews were often labeled as “deceitful racketeers”, capable of doing anything for economic profit, as a community without any national identity and moral integrity. These stigmas were radicalized in the discourse of Slovak national

movement from the 1880s as a result of a new anti-Semitic wave and of a strengthened oppression of the Hungarian government against ethnically non-Hungarian nations in the kingdom (Slovaks, Serbs, Romanians, Ruthenians, etc). In simplified discourse of Slovak nationalists, all the Jews, who did not provably support the Slovak national movement (financially or morally), became the synonym of *anti-Slovak feelings, assimilation tendencies* and *allies of the enemies* (=the Hungarian government).

This perception (despite lacking the ethnic aspect) was adopted by several Church dignitaries as well. Ottokár Prohászka, a Roman Catholic bishop in Székésfehérvár, remained a ruthless anti-Semite throughout his life and his views influenced many Slovak priests active in the Hlinka's Party. Prohászka stated that modernism, capitalism and Jewry are mutually interconnected elements. Prohászka's hoaxes, spreading the hate-speech (ritual bloody murders of Christian children committed by the Jews; his comparison of Jews to “invasion of bed bugs” or “invasion of rats”, etc.), co-shaped the cultural milieu in the Hungarian Kingdom.

Thanks to studying the literature in libraries abroad (Prague, Vienna, Berlin, Paris, Rome), I would like to identify the common and specific features of the Anti-Semitic ideologies among the “minor” nations in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and outside the Empire, mainly in France, Italy and German Reich. During my research I intend to find out, whether these modernizing measures were a *pretext* for radicalization of the Anti-Semitic narrative and ideology or played only a negligible role in shaping-of the modern Slovak Anti-Semitism.

Last but not least, I am curious how these tendencies were reflected by the Habsburg royal court and whether this Anti-Semitic atmosphere was a mainstream in the whole country or just a local issue of several regions. In this regard, I am longing to clarify the aspect that no one has paid major attention up to these days: was it only Hungarian clergy or also a cultural milieu of Karl Lueger's Vienna, which brushed up Jozef Tiso's and Vojtech Tuka's Anti-Semitism? Jozef Tiso (a wartime leader of the Hlinka's Party and President of the Slovak State) and Vojtech Tuka (a wartime Prime Minister of the Slovak State and “spiritus movens” of the Final Solution in Slovakia) both spent much time in Vienna at the beginning of the 20th Century and were later the foremost

ideological figures in the Hlinka's Party. Tiso attended the *Collegium Pazmanianum* as a student and Tuka, as a university teacher (professor of international law), maintained close contacts with academic colleagues from Vienna as well as from Paris. Alexander Mach, whom I have already mentioned before, could have also – according to my assumptions – been influenced by Anti-Semitic atmosphere yet in his hometown and, above all, in Esztergom – a heart of Roman Catholic Church in Hungary, where he studied to become a priest during WWI.

For conceptual purposes, I defined myself four research categories, through which I have been focusing on making-of the Anti-Semitism of these main three Hlinka's Party's figures:

1. *milieu of family,*
2. *milieu of school and hometown,*
3. *milieu of advanced studies (university),*
4. *global milieu (atmosphere in country/Europe).*

I believe – and the research has been proving so – that studying these cultural environments will be a key strategy to uncover domestic and foreign roots of Hlinka's Party's prominent Anti-Semites, who later became the foremost Anti-Semitic ideologists and perpetrators of the politics of Holocaust in Slovakia (Alexander Mach was a politician who systematically enforced a radical solution of the Jewish question since his beginnings in leading positions in autumn 1938. It was Mach who, following the infamous Salzburg negotiations with Hitler in July 1940, together with prime minister Vojtech Tuka initiated a series of cruel anti-Jewish laws leading from the restrictions of economic and civil rights to adoption of the racial principle in September 1941 and, finally, to loss of basic human rights and deportations of Jews from Slovakia since March 1942... Jozef Tiso, even generally considered to be a «softer Anti-Semite» than Mach and Tuka repeatedly verbally supported Anti-Jewish politics including deportations and was the most powerful man in the Slovak State.)

In other words, drawing on documents dislocated mainly in German and Slovak archives (*Bundesarchiv Berlin, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin, Slovak National Archives in Bratislava*), I want to find out, whether these figures were simply “thrown” into the genocide machinery and just uncritically copied the

methods of anti-Jewish campaign and persecutions used in the Nazi Germany or their activism and strategies in co-creating the politics of Holocaust rooted in their Anti-Semitic hatred and worldview made up decades before the establishment of the Slovak State. It is well known that in the sphere of anti-Jewish measures e.g. Mach cooperated with several prominent “architects” of the tragedy of European Jews, such as Dieter Wisliceny and Adolf Eichmann (who he got on very well with and during Eichmann's visit to Bratislava Mach invited him for a friendly bowling match). I wonder to what extent the program of extermination of Slovak Jewry came from the mind of Hlinka's Party's political elites and to what extent it was, as some historians claim, they were only the plagiarists of Nazi methods imported to Slovakia after Germany's total takeover of Slovak politics.

An important impulse for my writings on the Hlinka's Party's elites' Anti-Semitism is a book by American historian Richard Breitman, from whom I also got inspired in ways he portrays Heinrich Himmler's share on the Holocaust as I intend in the Hlinka's Party's case: Breitman tries to reveal Himmler's *psychological profile*, his “authentic anti-Semitism“ before joining the NSDAP structures and just after then to analyze its dynamics in the context of the escalating Nazi anti-Jewish policy.

After finding answers to set of questions and research problems above, I would like to define the model of a “*counter-civilization*”, which the Hlinka's Party formed in this period, inspired by Hungarian, Austrian and foreign milieu (German, French, Italian) in the era of “fin de siècle”, as well as to define what role the Anti-Semitism played within this alternative vision of world.

b/ Czechoslovakia as a fertile ground for shaping the Anti-Semitic ideology of the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (1918 – 1929)?

As I have found out in my research, the worldview, blaming liberals, socialists and Jews for destructing the “true values” of Slovak society was mostly adopted by Vojtech Tuka, a key ideologist of Hlinka's Party's Anti-Semitism in the 1920s. In this period, Tuka and his younger fellow, Alexander Mach, founded a semi-military branch of the Hlinka's Party called Rodobrana (“Home Defense”), a Slovak variety of Mussolini's *squadrismo* vastly inspired by the success of fascism

in Italy. In the context of a political situation in Slovakia in the first half of the 1920s, Mussolini embodied a hero to this radical wing of the Hlinka's Party and a "wall against communism". Rodobrana was dissolved in 1929, but, what is important in terms of my research, it emphasized fierce Anti-Semitism as one of its core features throughout its six-year existence, which the Rodobrana members spread into district and local organizations of the Hlinka's Party. In 1938, former Rodobrana's members created an organization which became a synonym for the Anti-Jewish politics of the Slovak State – the Hlinka Guard, a Slovak variation of the Nazi *Sturmabteilung*.

Despite deep religious roots, Rodobrana profiled itself as a revolutionary movement, an avant-garde of unfinished "Slovak national revolution". Traditionalist components of its ideology, like Christian faith or defense of the Slovak nation, served only as mobilizing elements on the way towards the idea of *new Slovakia*, of a *new world* purified from the "enemies of the Slovak nation", which included democrats, socialists, liberals and, most of all, the Jews.

Slovak libraries unfortunately do not offer relevant foreign literature dedicated to comparative studies of fascist Anti-Semitism. The libraries abroad, in which I intend to study, would provide me a great opportunity to compare, to what extent the Anti-Semitism was an integral part of similar "political armies" in interwar Europe and, particularly, how Rodobrana's radicalized perception of Anti-Semitism, implementing racial standpoints, influenced the perception of Jews and shaped the Anti-Semitism of more conservative Hlinka's Party's politicians and member base. Were the roots of Rodobrana's Anti-Semitism, implementing terms like "race", "blood", etc. really "home-grown" as Tuka stated? Or had Tuka and Mach been instructed in their Anti-Semitic propaganda by new, post-WWI foreign inspirations? It is well known, that Tuka, as a secret agent of Hungarian government, regularly travelled to Vienna in the 1920s, where he met many Anti-Semites (later Ustashists, Italian fascists, Horthy regime's deputies, etc.). During my latest researches in archives in Rome, I found materials indicating that Rodobrana's propaganda campaigns, including Anti-Jewish articles and statements, were, at least partly, inspired by Italian advisers. Was the Anti-Semitism of the Hlinka's Party in wartime period a *continuity* or a *discontinuity* of

the Anti-Semitic bubble made up in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy? I hope that additional research may uncover more...

I assume, that answering the bunch of questions above will help me to answer the key questions of my research and contribute to broader debates regarding the Holocaust in Slovakia and its international dimensions:

What image of Jews did these two phases (a + b) of creating the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party's Anti-Semitic ideology make up? What was an image of a Jew, Jewry, a “Jewish question” and its proposed “solution” *before* the Party came to power in Autumn 1938? How “innovative” was the Anti-Semitic ideology of the Hlinka's Party's regime after the start of implementation of the Politics of Holocaust? Which aspects and methods did the Party derive from the fascist regimes in the 1930s and 1940s?

I presume that responding to these questions thanks to a research supported by the FMS will finally give an answer to how unique (“Slovak-made”) were the ideological roots of the Hlinka's Party's Anti-Semitism during World War II and in which way they were only “copied & pasted” from Hitler's Germany.

Achievements (September 2019 – 15 April 2020)

For the time being, I can express my deepest satisfaction with the ongoing research. Until now I have not come across any notable difficulties and if everything goes well as planned, I expect that my findings and publications will heavily influence the discourse on making-of the Slovak Anti-Semitism and cultural roots of Holocaust in Slovakia, and promote the FMS’s mission as well.

During the first months of the support I have concentrated on searching for primary and secondary sources in Slovak and Czech archives and libraries. Since the research continually follows my previous researches in the Czech Republic, Germany, Austria, Hungary and Italy, even within this short term I was able to finalize several publications regarding the focus of project.

In the last months I have presented partial findings of my research at 4 conferences/seminars organized by institutions in Sweden, Serbia, France and Slovakia, including the prestigious ComFas conference at the Uppsala University.

From my point of view, the most valuable achievement regarding my ongoing project up to these days is a publication *Ludácka čítanka: Sila propagandy*,

propaganda sily [The Hlinka's Slovak People's Party's textbook: Power of propaganda, propaganda of power], published by a reputable Slovak publishing house *Premedia*. The book was introduced at the pre-Xmas market in December 2019 and already gained very positive feedbacks. This commented anthology portrays the narratives of the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party's key figures, including Anti-Semitic texts. My comments, preceding every single published text, explain the historical context and the political language the Hlinka's Party's used in its Anti-Semitic propaganda, drawing on foreign transnational inspirations.

Besides the anthology, I have submitted four research articles for publication. The first one, submitted to the most reputable Slovak historical journal *Historický časopis* (indexed by Current Contents & WoS), debates the contemporary discourses on Slovak variety of fascism and, based on a study of the newest foreign literature in the libraries in Bratislava and Prague, offers a new paradigm, how to percept fascism and the Holocaust as its inherent feature. Another paper I prepared for publication is an article called *Pioneers of Clerical Fascism? Mythic Language of Revolutionary Political Catholicism in Slovakia and Visions of a "New Nation"*, which was submitted to the *Constantine's Letters* journal (indexed by Scopus).

Thanks to the FMS support I was also able to finish two chapters for forthcoming collective monograph „*Our Slovak Fascism*“. *Mirroring of European Fascism in Slovakia (1922 – 1945)*. The first chapter *Prehistory of „movement of the 20th Century“: Birth and Rise of Cultural Fascism in Europe*, written in a co-authorship with Jana Pecníková and François Schmitt, can be considered as a general introduction of the book, sketching the foreign cultural milieus (French, Italian, German) as inspirations for making-of the modern Slovak Anti-Semitism. The second chapter *Slovak Fascism: An Attempt for a New Consensus* interconnects the global European context with local development and implements my findings on “Case Slovakia”.

In case of any questions or remarks, I will be happy to discuss them with anyone per e-mail: hruon@gmail.com or anton.hruon@umb.sk.