Report

SEPTEMBER 16, 2005

BUCHAREST, ROMANIA

POLITICAL USES OF ANTI-SEMITISM

PROJECT ON ETHNIC RELATIONS

Project on Ethnic Relations

The Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) was founded in 1991 in anticipation of the serious interethnic conflicts that were to erupt following the collapse of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. PER conducts programs of high-level intervention and dialogue and serves as a neutral mediator in several major disputes in the region. PER also conducts programs of training, education, and research at international, national, and community levels.

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PREFACE

The endurance of anti-Semitism as a cultural theme in Central and Eastern Europe is particularly striking considering the near-destruction of Jewish populations during the Second World War. While there is a vast literature on anti-Semitism past and present, less has been said concerning anti-Semitism as a deliberately deployed political weapon, and less still about its use in the post-Communist states.

A number of questions can be posed on the political uses of anti-Semitism in the region: Why do anti-Semitic political practices continue to resonate with the public? How did they survive the transitions to post-communist, democratic politics? What enables political actors to employ anti-Semitism as a weapon, and what are their methods? Is there any defense?

To explore these issues and seek practical responses to political anti-Semitism in the region and in Romania, on September 16, 2005, the Project on Ethnic Relations Regional Center for Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe organized a roundtable discussion in Bucharest for senior political leaders, intellectuals, and journalists. These participants took on topics ranging from the historical roots of anti-Semitism, to the role of civil society and of the state in combating anti-Semitism, to the controversial issue of Romania's Emergency Decree 31, which outlaws forms of anti-Semitic discourse, including Holocaust denial.

Building on the discussions that were launched in Bucharest, PER plans to organize similar roundtables in other countries of the region. These roundtables will take up the problems of political anti-Semitism in each local context, and will look for ways moderate politicians can effectively counter anti-Semitism and other anti-minority attitudes and practices.

This report documents the discussions at the Bucharest roundtable. Following PER's usual practice, participants are not identified by name in the text. Konstanty Gebert, a journalist at *Gazeta Wyborcza* in Poland, is the author of this report, which has not been reviewed by other participants, and for which PER takes full responsibility. The text was edited by PER staff.

We would like to express our thanks to our colleagues at the PER Regional Center for Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe for their work to make this roundtable possible, as well as to all the participants for their willingness to speak openly and frankly on a sensitive and often highly charged issue.

Livia B. Plaks, *President*

Princeton, New Jersey
November 2005

Participants in the roundtable.

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

The author of this text uses the Hebrew "Shoah" rather than "Holocaust" following his belief that the etymological roots of the former make it more suitable as a term for the destruction of Jews and others during World War II. In direct quotations, proper names, and commonly accepted phrases, such as "Holocaust denial," however, he remains faithful to the original source. Thus, both "Shoah" and "Holocaust" appear in this text and should be understood as interchangeable.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, anti-Semitism in Europe has made a spectacular comeback. According to a report by the EU Monitoring Unit, the number of anti-Semitic attacks in France in 2003 increased six fold over previous years; in other West European countries attacks also increased, if not so sharply. In Britain, according to a Board of Deputies report, there were four times as many attacks in 2002 as in 2000. Lately, the level of violence has declined, but it still remains high. In East European countries, this kind of cumulative data is not available, but anecdotal evidence indicates that attacks are getting more frequent, if still not reaching West European levels, probably because of a relative dearth of targets. In Kiev, just one day before the PER roundtable, a rabbi and his son were brutally attacked on the street in broad daylight; the police attributed this attack to hooliganism.

This rise of violence is accompanied by the increasing respectability of anti-Semitic beliefs. In 2005, a major Anti-Defamation League survey of six thousand people in 12 European countries east and west found that 42% believe that Jews are more loyal to Israel than to their own country, 30% believe they have "too much power" in business, 42% that they talk "too much" about the Shoah, and 20% blame them for the death of Jesus. In an EU survey in 2005, 59% of Europeans declared Israel "a threat to world peace" far outranking any other state, and 24% considered that "it would be better" if Israel did not exist. Not surprisingly, the emergence of such opinions made anti-Semitism again attractive as a political stance. Though some traditional extreme right wing parties have replaced Jews with Muslims as their primary hate object (for example, the French Front National), others combine hatred of both groups (the Belgian Flemish Vlaams Blok, for example). On the other hand, some mainstream parties, probably out of sensitivity for the Muslim vote, have adopted positions previously considered unacceptable. The German Free Democratic Party and Christian Democratic Union distanced themselves from overtly anti-Semitic activists in their midst only reluctantly and after much debate, while in Britain advisers to Labor PM Tony Blair suggested to him canceling the observance of Holocaust Memorial Day.

But while in Western Europe political anti-Semitism most often takes the form of vituperative Israel-bashing, in many countries of the Eastern part of the continent there exist parties which do not refrain from making use of the more traditional forms of hatred toward the Jews. In Russia, a coalition of public personalities, including 20 members of the State Duma, or parliament, had called on the prosecutors' office to outlaw all Jewish organizations, on grounds that they are "racist" and "anti-Russian." In Hungary, the Hungarian Truth and Life Party (MIEP) and in Romania, the Greater Romania Party (PRM), running on overtly anti-Semitic platforms, have in recent years scored well in the elections. In Poland, the League of Polish Families, which checks the ethnic identity of candidate members' ancestors, and whose youth organization is overtly neo-Nazi, consistently gets 8% of the vote. In Ukraine, it took the hero of the "orange revolution" Victor Yushchenko several months to distance himself from the *Silske Vesti* daily which, apart from supporting the eventually victorious presidential candidate, claimed that in 1941 Ukraine "had been invaded by an army of one hundred thousand Jews." Even in countries which, like Serbia and Bulgaria, had legitimately taken pride in the absence of anti-Semitism there, one encounters such movements today.

Why is this so? The Project on Ethnic Relations decided to hold a special roundtable on this topic, becoming involved in a Jewish issue for the first time. The roundtable was held in Romania, a country which still has not completely come to terms with the role it played in the Shoah, and where anti-Semitism is quite commonly found in political speeches and the media. Statues of wartime leader Marshal Antonescu, directly responsible for the deportation and deaths of two hundred fifty thousand Romanian Jews, stand in several Romanian cities, and streets are named after him. Romania's former president Ion Iliescu created a scandal when he denied in an interview for the Israeli daily *Haaretz* that his country had anything to do with the Shoah, or, for that matter, that the Shoah specifically targeted the Jews. He also awarded Corneliu Vadim Tudor, the PRM leader, with the country's highest decoration. In the 2004 parliamentary elections, PRM still received a sizable amount of votes though its support decreased from a height of 22% to 13% of the vote.

This somber general assessment is shared by international observers, as documented in the U.S. State Department's "Global Report on Anti-Semitism 2003/2004" which found for Romania as follows:

The extremist elements of the press continued to publish anti-Semitic articles. The Legionnaires (Iron Guard)—an extreme nationalist, anti-Semitic, pro-Nazi group—continued to republish inflammatory books from the interwar period. A new Iron Guard monthly, "Obiectiv Legionar" (Legionnaire Focus), carrying mostly old legionnaire literature, began publication in July 2003 and was distributed in several of the largest cities, including Bucharest. The New Right organization (also with legionnaire orientation) continued to sponsor marches and religious services to commemorate Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the founder of the Legionnaire Movement. Extremists made repeated attempts to deny that Holocaust activities occurred in the country or in territory administered by the country. In March, a private television station broadcast a talk show on "Gypsies, Jews, and Legionnaires," which voiced xenophobic, anti-Semitic, and racist views. The station owners did not respond to a protest sent by the Jewish Communities Federation. On a number of occasions government officials denied or minimized the occurrence of the Holocaust in the country. [1]

However, physical aggression against Jewish individuals or sites remains rare in Romania, and most political figures denounce anti-Semitism. A national Holocaust Remembrance Day has been observed, a manual for teaching the history of Jews and of the Shoah has been introduced in schools, and a State Institute for the study and commemoration of the Shoah has been established.

In fact, though some East European countries (especially Poland) have made impressive progress in facing past events and confronting contemporary anti-Semitism, there would be enough reason to hold a roundtable in any of them, or, for that matter, in any European country in general.

It was PER's intention that the debate focus around a series of precise issues outlined in the agenda, and highlighted in the opening remarks of both the PER President and the keynote speaker. Not unsurprisingly, however, the ensuing debate followed the agenda only very loosely, and concentrated

[1] "Report on Global Anti-Semitism, July 1, 2003 - December 15, 2004," U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. Released January 5, 2005. Available at http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/40258.htm.

instead on different issues connected with anti-Semitism which the speakers considered most salient. This might be because, in the words of one participant, "there has not been a debate in Romania similar to the one in Poland" about the darker pages of the country's past, and the threat that contemporary anti-Semitism represents. If so, then there is indeed a need for discussing the presence and sources of anti-Semitism in Romanian society today, before the political use made of it can be reasonably assessed, and a counter-strategy devised.

Contrary to usual practice at PER roundtables, there were no identifiable "sides" to the debate. This was not only because most of the participants in the debate were Romanian, of whatever separate ethnic, religious or cultural identities, but also because they were in agreement about both the persistence of anti-Semitism in Romanian society, and the need for countering it. Where they differed was in assessments of the relative prevalence of anti-Semitism in Romania in different periods of the country's recent history, the effectiveness of measures taken to counter it, and the motivations which might lie behind these measures.

ANTI-SEMITISM IN ROMANIA TODAY

Participants seemed to agree that anti-Semitism remains a problem in Romania. In the words of a representative of one Jewish organization, "Romania is not an anti-Semitic country, but anti-Semitism here is vivid and very dangerous."Another Jewish participant even stated that he wonders "whether the society we live in has any elements in it that would prevent another Holocaust," were such a thing to come to pass. These assessments might sound extreme, if taken out of context, but they point not to a clear and present danger, but rather to an absence of forces to counter existing manifestations of anti-Semitism. As a representative of a government institution

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remarked, "anti-Semitic discrimination in Romania has almost been eliminated, or at least we do not have such a phenomenon on the level of the public administration and official institutions. But when we analyze public discourse and the media, we notice that anti-Semitism is very present in our society." An academic concurred, saying that "we tend to look at anti-Semitism and racism as marginal events, and yet they emerge every now and then." A politician was even more critical, stating that "anti-Semitism is very present in Romania, and it is more and more visible in more and more areas of the country."

Some participants mentioned the prevailing stereotypes of Jews in Romanian society. "There is something fishy about them; they do tricks that are unfamiliar to us Romanians," an academic remembered family members saying. A Jewish participant stated that "in the Romanian mentality, Jews represent power, money and control. This is something that is much feared and respected." Overall, however, participants did not debate whether anti-Semitism is in fact present in Romania, treating this as self-evident; nor was the prevalence of this attitude compared to its manifestations elsewhere. "In Romania," an academic sadly stated, "the issue is to avoid the degeneration of the situation; we should not hope for a substantial improvement."

HISTORICAL ROOTS

Current anti-Semitism in Romania, participants agreed, is a continuation of pre-war attitudes, an unwillingness to confront the country's role in the Shoah, and ambiguities of post-war Communist policy. Historically, the war-time regime of Marshal Antonescu made Romania an ally of the Axis powers, and was responsible for the destruction of both Romanian Jewry, and of Jews in Romanian-occupied Transdniestria. For many Romanians, however, Antonescu remains a national hero for his role in the war against Soviet Russia, and many Romanians either do not know, or choose to ignore, his war-time crimes. The Communist regime which replaced him soon after Romania's war-time defeat was and is understood as deleterious to national interests, but its turn toward an outright endorsement of nationalism in the 1980s was seen by some participants as having a lasting impact even today.

"We can speak of a classical Romanian anti-Semitic movement with roots that can be traced easily both from a geographic and a historic perspective," one of the politicians present remarked. An academic agreed with him, saying that "anti-Semitism was in the 19th and 20th centuries deeply rooted in the mentality of Romanian society." He then commented that his own generation "was very deeply influenced by what they were taught in the eighties, when the Communist regime rehabilitated nationalism. This generation is now in parliament and among decision makers in Romania." He cited the Greater Romania Party as an example of "the transmission of anti-Semitism from the post-Communist era to the present years." In his view, the party "draws its discourse from the period prior to 1990, including the anti-Semitism and xenophobia," and this leads to the conclusion that, in contrast to the break with Fascist regimes in Western Europe after World War II, in Romania after Communism "there is a certain continuity, not discontinuity."

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The issue of the putative Jewish responsibility for Communism, a major theme of anti-Semitic discourse in post-Communist Central Europe, was all but absent in the debate, with the exception of the statement of one academic, who recalled childhood memories of family members saying that "Jews were the most important supporters of Communism in Romania" and therefore could not be trusted; an attitude, he added, seemingly contradicted by the fact that many family friends were in fact Jewish. However, a statement by one of the historians present, that anti-Semitism was suppressed under Communism, was widely debated by other participating historians, who indicated that, while "anti-Semitism was taboo under Communism," the Communist rulers themselves were anti-Semitic, as was eventually shown by their conversion to nationalism in the eighties. A Jewish participant touched on the issue of the popular perception of Jewish involvement in

Communism by pointing to the destructive impact of "competitive martyrology" between Jews and non-Jews, and postulated that Jews living in Eastern Europe should accept "the legitimacy of the feelings on the other side."

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Participants were overwhelmingly critical of the keynote speaker's suggestion that resisting anti-Semitism is best left to civil society, not the state—at least in the case of contemporary Romania. "The state should be the first to take action," a politician stated, "and the duty of the state is to implement the law." One should not wait for civil society to act, he asserted, for "the mentality and life experience of the Romanians is to first see what is happening, and how the state is implementing the law." A representative of a state institution also strongly advocated state action on the issue, given the fact that "civil society is poorly developed." He even said, citing "geo-political considerations," that "this is a matter pertaining to the national security of Romania." In this context, several speakers pointed out the connection between anti-Semitism and radical anti-Western and anti-American attitudes, and the role of media such as the Internet and rock bands in propagating this "new anti-Semitism."

Another politician, however, observed that "the problem of Romania is not the lack of laws, but the existence of laws that are not being observed by anyone." One academic participant saw the solution in state and civil society working together. He considered recent positive developments in Romanian policy, such as the establishment of an International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, which led to the formation of a State Institute for the Study of the Holocaust, the preparation of a school textbook on the subject, and the unveiling of a Holocaust memorial, as having been done "at the initiative of the Romanian authorities and at the initiative of civil society. "Another academic, however, was of the opinion that "for the moment, anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia are not priorities for the Romanian system."

Only one participant, a representative of a state institution for upholding human rights, spoke in favor of civil society "playing first fiddle" in the struggle against anti-Semitism. In his opinion "we do not have governments qualified to do it, and governments alone do not have a chance, because they do not have either the interest or the capacity" to be successful.

Some participants were sharply critical of the inability of Romanian civil society to counteract anti-Semitism, and especially Shoah negationism. "If in the interwar period there was a Romanian intellectual elite which took a stand against racism, anti-Semitism and fascism," a respected historian said, "we cannot say that of the [contemporary] Romanian intellectual elite which, especially after 1990, took the path of negationism." "The real progress made by Romanian society up to today," said another academic, "is minimal." Others noted that stigmatizing someone, rightly or wrongly, as "Jewish" tends, in the public mind, to decrease the validity of that person's opinions. An intellectual and former dissident said that this is not a time "for passive debates on anti-Semitism, but a time when anti-Semitism is only one element of a campaign against democracy. "Within this context, a representative of a State institution made a very pertinent observation. He said that while in the West tolerance means action in favor of minority groups, in Romania it means inaction in the face of their problems. Himself a member of an ethnic minority, he observed that his own group resists intolerance when it is a minority, but tends to be intolerant if it achieves majority status. Another participant was even more critical of the possibility of relying on civil society, reminding those present of a previous case of civil society intervening in national politics: the miners' descent on Bucharest to crush anti-government demonstrators.

Several speakers decribed the absence of church leaders at the roundtable, and quoted anti-Semitic statements made by prominent ecclesiastical representatives. One participant recalled recently watching a Romanian Orthodox Good Friday mass on television, with the priest saying repeatedly that "the Jews had killed God"—a theme, the participant stated, that was then picked up uncritically by young people. Another participant, a human rights activist, recalled that, when his institution had published an official motion against

anti-Semitism, he was publicly attacked by "a high ranking representative of a Protestant church" as "a Jew who had crucified Jesus." Their observations were supported by a former dissident who said that "there is strong reason to be frightened by what happens in schools regarding anti-Semitism. The younger generation educated since the mid-nineties is profoundly affected by a religious education that is intolerant and promotes stereotypes."

EDUCATION

This view was seconded by a distinguished historian, who said: "In our days historical education doesn't support democratic attitudes among the younger generation. Many schools do not shape a democratic mentality. Even the Romanian history textbook published by the Romanian Academy does not contribute to the formation of democratic thinking."

There was, however, a wide divergence of opinion regarding the optional textbook on the history of the Jewish people in Romania and of the Shoah, which the Ministry of Education was preparing to introduce into schools. A Jewish activist said that "the majority of young people don't have a clue about the Holocaust and about the Jewish people in Romania, or about any of the topics we are discussing here." This was confirmed by the representative of a state institution: "Politicians, and even teachers, are not informed; people in key positions in our society are not aware of the issues of the Holocaust or anti-Semitism. "Given this dismal situation, an academic warmly praised the forthcoming textbook. "Education is the key issue here, and the fact that today at the Ministries of Education and of Culture they are debating the optional textbook, which is soon going to reach high school history teachers, is a very good thing."

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A politician, however, took the opposite view. "I cannot imagine a positive result if even a small number of history teachers feel that the study of the

history of the Holocaust has been imposed on them." He recalled his experience in the Communist period, when "teachers who taught Marxist ideology would crack jokes about it in the halls during the break. "The issue of why any teachers should consider teaching the history of the Jewish people in Romania and of the Shoah an imposition akin to teaching Marxism—especially given that the textbook will be optional—was not debated, but one can assume this is connected with the necessary revisions of the nationalistic version of Romanian history it would entail.

Poland, which introduced a similar optional textbook several years ago, had to face similar problems. The Polish ambassador, present at the roundtable, offered to share his country's experience in that regard with Romanian educators.

EMERGENCY DECREE 31

In 2002, the Romanian government passed Emergency Decree 31, which outlaws all forms of racism and anti-Semitism, as well as Holocaust denial. At the time of the roundtable, this decree had been finally passed by the Chamber of Deputies of the Romanian Parliament, and was to be discussed in the Senate, before becoming a law. Even more than the issue of the textbook, Emergency Decree 31 became the object of heated controversy at the roundtable, as indeed it had been in the Romanian media. An academic, who otherwise seemed to be in favor of the decree, which, in his words, puts Romania in the same category as Germany and France as one of the few countries in which Holocaust denial is penalized, nevertheless had some reservations. "Is this appropriate?" he queried, "Isn't this a law that replaces debate with prefabricated sentences? I personally would not like to see people arrested for what they think-even if sometimes this is inevitable. But I would prefer professors, not prosecutors,

When the reaction to what, rightly or wrongly, is called anti-Semitism, is tough, people will think this is not democracy, but authoritarianism.

to speak," (hence his praise of the optional textbook). Another academic concurred: "When the reaction to what, rightly or wrongly, is called anti-Semitism, is tough, people will think this is not democracy, but authoritarianism. If we want to ask a democratic regime to do something similar to what Communism did [i.e. suppress anti-Semitism], maybe this is too much."

A politician seconded him by stating, "In Romania, any discussion of Jews and anti-Semitism inevitably leads to Marshal Antonescu, and so has the debate around this decree. So let us raise this question: Is this law going to stop us from studying this historical figure?" "Of course," he added, "this is a distortion of the discussion, but such distortions often happen." A representative of a state institution found that the law "is not being applied as it should" anyway, but said that his institution is changing this. He pointed to a verdict of a provincial court which had in fact found that anti-Semitism constitutes a form of discrimination.

A Jewish participant attributed the adoption of the decree to "the readiness of the Romanian authorities to adopt policies that are politically correct," if they serve their political purposes. In his opinion, the decree was adopted in order to strengthen Romania's chances of joining NATO. However, he observed, "three years later this decree is still blocked in Parliament because [in the meantime] the objective has been achieved. The attitude of the state against anti-Semitism is [thus] not sincere," he concluded, "and this should alarm us, given the state's role in educating the public."

The most serious criticism of the decree—or rather of the way of thinking that led to its adoption—came from a former dissident who pointed out that "democracy is the healthiest space for combating anti-Semitism." In his view, the limitations of freedom of expression contained in the decree cast a shadow on "the kind of democracy that exists in Romania." "Is it the obligation of the state to forbid the naming of streets after Marshal Antonescu? Is the state responsible for opinions privately expressed by someone?" In his view, the provisions of the decree might be an impediment to freedom of expression. Furthermore, he expressed concern about what he called "anti-negationism integrism." In his view, a ban on Holocaust negationism might

impinge on the academic freedoms connected to discussing it as a historical event, such as its periodicization, or the qualifications of its different stages.

This participant had already engaged in public debates on the subject, and had been harshly criticized for some of his positions. "My experience," he concluded, "tells me the following: if people are [unfairly] accused of anti-Semitism, this has a negative impact on many others, who have access to the media and can influence public opinion. It is my feeling that this anti-negationist integrism has had a negative impact on certain intellectual circles in Romania, which traditionally represent the forces of democracy."

His statements generated a lively response from other participants who, while rejecting the unspoken allegation that the speaker himself was guilty of anti-Semitism, rejected also his criticism of the putative "anti-negationist integrism." One speaker actually adopted this label, while rejecting the claim that prosecuting negationism could lead to the stifling of scholarly debate on the Shoah. Another pointed out that having a street named after a certain historical figure "is not a human right, but a political decision," and the Romanian State should not endorse making the war-time leader a role model. As to whether some opinions are, or are not anti-Semitic, a Jewish participant had a succinct answer: "If you want to know what anti-Semitism is, ask a Jew. In the same way, if you want to know what anti-Romani discrimination is, ask a Rom." This exchange, in which the first speaker himself did not participate, having left earlier, was the most heated moment of the roundtable.

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POLITICAL USES OF ANTI-SEMITISM

The issue that was intended to be the main topic of the roundtable proved, in fact, to be only one of the topics debated, and not even the central one, mainly because participants seemed to be in complete agreement concerning it. "The reason anti-Semitism is so appealing to some politicians," said one

participant, "is because hatred can be so easily used as a tool for manipulating the masses." Another politician concurred: "One discourse is very well received among voters and public opinion: it is anti-Semitic discourse." In the words of a representative of a state institution, "With the slogans 'death to the Jews' or 'death to the Roma,' one can gain votes and an audience."

Another participant mentioned concrete examples. "Several years ago, a senator praised Marshal Antonescu in the senate, and no representative of the democratic parties had the courage to at least leave the chamber, or voice a different opinion. This year, during a debate on the decree [Emergency Decree 31], the Greater Romania Party introduced to it an amendment that would ban contesting 'national heroes,' but this, mercifully, did not pass." These examples, however, were ridiculed by a politician, who said that "so many stupid things are said in parliament, that these are least harmful ones." It would therefore seem, even as politicians identify and denounce the political uses made of anti-Semitism, that they do not consider it a dire threat. In the words of an academic: "We have to admit that the type of democracy we have here it is not capable of controlling a phenomenon as diverse as anti-Semitism. There is a culture of anti-Semitism that feeds the stupid."

CONCLUSIONS

In a way, these participants might be right. The fact that politicians still can get mileage from anti-Semitism is not the cause, but the effect of the problem—the persistence of anti-Semitism itself in Romania, which the roundtable debated at length. One of the participants commented on the roundtable itself as follows: "I have the feeling of [witnessing] a ritual that repeats itself over and over again. We are in a show where the same people get together, ask the same questions, and give the same answers." Another participant disagreed: "I think such meetings are very useful, for anti-Semitism cannot be eradicated by symbolic gestures. "Many could argue, to the contrary, that holding a roundtable is precisely that: a symbolic gesture without deeper impact. However, the presence at the roundtable of top-ranking representatives of Romanian political parties and state institutions indicates that this is not the case. It seems safe to conclude that the participants came not to participate in an empty ritual, but to identify the problem and look for solutions. It would appear that a continuation of the debate would be useful.

APPENDIX

Keynote Address by Konstanty Gebert (excerpts)

Let us think back for a moment: half a century ago such a seminar would not have been necessary. It seemed then that anti-Semitism had been compromised once and for all through the genocidal policies of the Nazi regime, defeated by the nations of the world. But just twenty years ago such a seminar, with the participation of leading national political figures, would not have been possible, as the political use of anti-Semitism was then common practice. So, although the post-war political discrediting of anti-Semitism was extraordinary in its impact, one should not forget that the phenomenon has long and deep European roots, and perhaps it should not come as a surprise that, sixty years after Auschwitz was liberated, we are again confronted with anti-Semitism being used for political aims. This is something that is very apparent in Central Europe but it is by far not only a post-Communist phenomenon. Anti-Semitism, Auschwitz, are part of the European legacy of civilization. We cannot pretend it did not happen here.

Since the war, anti-Semitism means Auschwitz. There is no other anti-Semitism. Somebody who is an anti-Semite today is taking responsibility for bloody murder.

Unfortunately, for many Europeans today this is some kind of petty problem between some crazy Jews and some crazy anti-Semites, "of no concern to us." Yet since the war, anti-Semitism means Auschwitz. There is no other anti-Semitism. Somebody who is an anti-Semite today is taking responsibility for bloody murder.

This alone should have prevented anti-Semitism from being used for political gain again, and yet we sadly know this is hardly the case. Some are puzzled that this is possible in countries where there are almost no Jews. I believe this puzzlement is mistaken, because it seems to imply that anti-Semitism is somehow connected with the Jews, that it is a reaction to what the Jews do or do not do. And if we are surprised that, in a country with few Jews, there is anti-Semitism, we seem to imply that there is a degree of Jewish presence

in the country that makes anti-Semitism somehow understandable. This of course is not the case. The reason anti-Semitism works is because it is an all-explaining ideology. Once you assume that the Jews are the source of all evil, then the world suddenly falls in place. The Jews may be Communists or capitalists, pious or libertine, they may introduce cosmopolitism or be nationalists, it doesn't matter anymore, they are there, they are the source of evil. What is more, by defining thus the source of evil, you yourself are suddenly and safely on the side of the angels. If so, what should we do about it, we democrats, and we Jews?

Usually, we Jews take it on ourselves to condemn and combat anti-Semitism. I believe this strategy is misguided. Anti-Semitism is not our problem, it is not our disease. It is the disease of the non-Jews, the way that Jewish racism (not that the two can be seriously compared), whenever it is present, is our problem and our responsibility. Unfortunately, it does not work that way. Usually, if you don't have Jewish liberals to condemn it, anti-Semitism tends to slip through the cracks of political discourse. Especially in our part of the world, people are extremely anxious not to reproduce the political patterns of the Communist system. We will not deny free speech to anybody, even if that someone is calling for bloody murder. We will not prosecute for public statements, even if similar public statements had, within living memory, produced genocide. We are extremely careful not to use against anti-Semites the instruments of political repression that had been used against us, democrats, within even fresher living memory. By and large, in our part of the world, the state refuses to act against anti-Semitism. So what should we citizens do? Under normal circumstances, I would prefer the state not to intervene against the providers of anti-Semitic propaganda. I come from the underground publishing movement, and the idea of somebody going to jail for something that he has published sits very uncomfortably with my beliefs. But by the same token I would prefer to live in a society in which citizens would picket bookstores selling such materials, until they finally would close down, unable to make money. In a normal society this would be the citizens' obligation, not the state's. Unfortunately, the citizens do not usually rise to the challenge, precisely because they seem to believe that this is a matter between anti-Semites and Jews, of no concern to them. Neither, however, does the state.

And yet, just as anti-Semitism has nothing to do with Jews, the reason democrats should oppose anti-Semitism also has nothing to do with them. The reason is enlightened egoism: in a society in which some citizens don't feel safe, nobody can feel safe. Defending the Jews in this case means defending your own interest. The anti-Semites have succeeded in two very important aspects: they have convinced a substantial part of European public opinion that anti-Semitism is a Jewish issue, not a European issue, and that anti-Semitism is not a threat to democracy, but the repression of anti-Semitism is. This is something that Jews certainly cannot undo on their own; it will take the solidarity of European democrats to do it.

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