Introduction

For many years Jewish life in Europe has been viewed with skepticism and concern. The aftermath of the Shoah, demographic decline, trends of assimilation, and secularization gave reason to suspect that "the old continent" could not offer bright perspectives for those who desired to lead a distinct Jewish existence and build community. The disbelief was declared inside and outside the Jewish world. It appeared – for Jews and non-Jews – it was more achievable to guard Jewish heritage and memory than to hold high expectations in developing meaningful communal life anew. Some remaining demographic and cultural "Jewish Islands" were treated with care and respect, though visions for a full-bodied Jewish future in Europe were seen as unrealistic.

The wave of Jewish hope and revival starting in the 1990s was therefore rather unforeseen. The well-known events triggered by the end of the Cold War, followed by European unification, were primarily accompanied by massive euphoria in the Eastern block due to liberation from Communist repression. This historical breaking point included a surge of ethnoreligious and ethnocultural renewals. In this general context, some emerging concepts of a "Jewish renaissance" in Europe – as suggested by scholars like Diana Pinto[1] – might have overreached the target. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that, since the 1990s, European Jewry has been in the process of dynamic transformation. These changes were inherently connected with external Jewish assistence on the one hand (for example, support programs by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee/JDC, the LA Pincus Fund, the Jewish Agency of Israel, and the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation) and new self-aware Jewish generations less affected by the shadows of the Shoah who search for their distinct individual and collective identities on the other.

Though comparatively limited by statistics, communities in Central and Eastern Europe in particular are seeking original directions of how to live their Jewishness. Despite rather bleak demographic forecasts, predominantly younger Jewish protagonists have shown a willingness to reconnect to the heritage of their ancestors and excavate the potentials of Jewish tradition.

This introduced collective monograph intended to explore the processes mentioned above from a transdisciplinary perspective. This intention was supported by European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) funds that material-

1 Diana Pinto, "The new Jewish Europe. Challenges and Responsibilities," *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 31, no. 2, European Jewry – Between Past and Future (Autumn 1998): 3–15.

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ized in the "United in Diversity. A Study of Contemporary European Jewry and its Reflection" project. Part of the work constituted of qualitative anthropological research carried out in Jewish communities in five different countries: Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Germany. The examination revolved around self-perception, sense of belonging, transnationalism, future expectations, and inevitably antisemitism. The interactions with the majority of societies in the respective countries represented one of the additional significant focus areas.

Parts of previous generations whose identity survived cumulative traumas of the twentieth century eventually regained their ethnic awareness that was attentively cultivated afterward. The subsequent trends identified prevalently among younger generations of Central and Eastern European Jews embody an urgent call for visible participation in civil societies, however, not necessarily always on behalf of Jewish communities. Building meaningful relations based on shared ethnicity may even be interpreted as outdated. Moreover, introducing Jewishness into non-Jewish settings and opening up to the majority of society might be perceived as an inherited responsibility that under certain circumstances, represents unbearable weight.

An ongoing rapprochement between Jews and Christians certainly belongs to the relevant factors of the Jewish quality of life. As an outcome of these attempts, accompanied by an atmosphere of togetherness, synagogues and other Jewish institutions in Europe seem to be experiencing higher respect and recognition than ever before. In parallel, remarkable political and societal efforts to commemorate the Shoah receive more attention every year. Considering the regional angle, Jews in all five scrutinized countries might feel there are growing opportunities for full integration into said countries. Taking into account the broader perspective, a discussion of whether European Jewry is disposed to become the third pillar of the global Jewish community, aside from Israel and the American Jewish community, could be cautiously reopened.

Simultaneously, post-War Jewry in Europe has remained, at least in some places, fragile and unsafe. There are frequent anti-Jewish incidents across the continent, with many of them allegedly justified as political action against the State of Israel. In particular, the studies of the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) have proven that a majority of European Jews feel antisemitism is on the rise, subsequently expecting a deteriorating situation in the near future.[2] Many Jewish communities, families, and individuals in Europe have close connections to Israel.

2 Experiences and perceptions of antisemitism – Second survey on discrimination and hate crime against Jews in the EU, published December 10, 2018, accessed May 18, 2023, https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2018/experiences-and-perceptions-antisemitism-second-survey-discrimination-and-hate.

Thus, any escalations of violence in the Middle East involving Israel cause deep concern among them, a sentiment that also increases as anti-Israeli rallies multiply also in the EU.

Gradually, while Jewish people or institutions are under attack by antisemitic extremists from different camps or at the margins of political demonstrations, growing public outrage is detected. Politicians, churches, and protagonists of civic society attempt to strengthen the affected Jewish institutions and persons and moderate the repercussions. This might be perceived as a new quality of solidarity arising in the midst of a non-Jewish environment. Further research will be necessary to reveal to what extent this positive reverse trend stabilizes and, in case, how balanced and long-lasting conditions enable the undisturbed development of Jewish life.

This observed antagonism constitutes one of the significant aspects of life for members of Jewish communities today. In other words, two seemingly opposing streams have surfaced in the European continent in the first decades of the twenty-first century. This collective monograph abundantly testifies that Jewish cultures and religious traditions are witnessing a unique and unforeseen rise in the living experience for many involved actors. On the other hand, however, the same study confirms that Europe's Jews – even those of Central and Eastern Europe – are experiencing new threat scenarios.

Suppose we pause momentarily during these highly turbulent times (in Europe as elsewhere). In this case, we can realize that Jewish life on the continent was almost always present, albeit in varying degrees and geographical distribution. Employing this point of view, securing the sources, traditions, and knowledge of European-Jewish history from late antiquity to the present day is essential. This large arc of events in general, and the developments since 1933, 1945, and 1989 in particular, sufficiently illustrate that historical scholarship can only rarely be apolitical. In this case, a major topic with critical implications lies at the interface of contemporary history and research involving scientific controversy but also the burden of raw emotions.

There is a pressing need for immediate attention and critical scholarship to the matters mentioned above. Otherwise, phenomena such as whitewashing will infiltrate the political culture and mainstream society, specifically in so-called Visegrad countries even further. The term competitive victimhood is still awaiting thorough exploration in this context. Attempts at Holocaust relativization and Holocaust denial, not yet entirely uncommon today, are apparent consequences of a lack of awareness of these issues.

How certain is the Jewish future in Europe? This is a question that is asked more often than almost any other. Undoubtedly, many cultural, religious, social, and intellectual resources are "manufactured anew" with often enthusiastic partic-

ipation and engagement of the non-Jewish environment. Consequently, our study also explored what "essential issues" and values Jews in Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Germany attribute to their lived experience, in which manner they consider themselves part of a wider European community, and how they define their relations to other ethnocultural and ethnoreligious groups.

The present publication is comprised of the main findings of the mentioned study. In the book's first part, the texts and contributions dealing with historical, literary, and intellectual works on the Shoah in European space can be found. In this frame of reference, the authors uncovered vigorous efforts to keep the memory of the Shoah alive, countering falsifications of history and sensitizing upcoming generations to the vulnerability of contemporary Jewish life. The second part of the collective monograph mainly lists socio-empirical and anthropological results from the abovementioned qualitative research in five European countries.

Eduard Nižňanský and Katarína Bohová describe the perceptions of the Holocaust in Slovak historiography and among the general public after the establishment of the independent Slovak Republic in 1993. The authors underline that not all details of this historiography have been explored and that – at the same time – a difficult fight against new trends of nationalism and historical revisionism has to be waged. The authors also strongly consider the impact of revisionism on the formation of national symbols as well as the historiography situated between science and the Catholic Church's interpretation of history (of the Slovak state and the beatification of bishop Ján Vojtaššák).

Jiří Holý examines changes in the representation of the Holocaust/Shoah in Czech literature and film over the past few decades and focuses in particular on elements of pop culture in Holocaust fiction and film. Pop culture elements have become a typical feature of literature in the last few decades. According to Holý, they extend the creative possibilities for speaking about the Holocaust while raising many problematic questions. However, the author argues that second and third-generation artists and writers consciously use a variety of pop culture methods to respond to the increasing forgetfulness of history.

Dina Porat describes the manifold attempts by European Jewry and Israel, on the one hand, and the Vatican in Rome, on the other, to improve their historical relationship and examine possibilities for mutual theological appreciation. According to the author, efforts beginning in 1965 to reverse problematic relations and start a genuine dialogue of mutual respect with both sides have continued for several decades and in recent years have gained momentum. Since the beginning of the 2000s, several open letters and statements have been formulated and published by the Jewish side, illustrating the willingness to accept the extended hand and reach the reconciliation phase.

Haim Fireberg reflects on new antisemitism, especially in Poland, Hungary, and Germany. The author states that certain forms of new antisemitism in Central Europe are underestimated or suppressed and argues that the level of violent antisemitism, as indicated by statistics, is not necessarily correlated with the perceptions of antisemitism in those countries. Furthermore, Fireberg identifies particular "paradoxes" in Hungary and Poland. Despite having relatively low levels of antisemitic violence, the two countries perceive antisemitism differently in light of their understanding of domestic, political, and social conditions.

Lilach Lev-Ari, in her paper "Feeling 'At Home' or Just Privileged Minorities?", describes how Jewish people search for their place in contemporary Budapest. Lev-Ari's findings, based on qualitative research, including a series of interviews, imply that Jews in Hungary today are well integrated into various societal fabrics; most feel a sense of belonging and perceive themselves as an integral part of Hungarian society, at least in the micro perspectives. However, some would be aware of undercurrents of old and contemporary antisemitism at the macro level – sentiments which, according to the author, affect Hungarian Jews' sense of integration and affiliation.

Olaf Glöckner introduces the current environment of reunified Germany's heavily transformed Jewish community. The research results' analysis offers diverse perspectives on Jewish developments, much enhanced by immigration from the Former Soviet Union during the 1990s. In parallel, non-Jewish society actors reflect on overall processes of still ongoing public reconsideration and memory politics, comprehending Jewish heritage and the present as an essential part of German culture and self-understanding.

Marcela Menachem Zoufalá presents anthropological research that attempts to deconstruct and interpret the meaning of Jewishness as a lived experience among the members of the Jewish minority in the Czech Republic today. The results show the situation of Czech Jews as simultaneously dynamic, hopeful, and fragile. The study confirms that the social climate in the Czech Republic is more open to Jews in particular, though uncertainties about how tolerant and reliable the majority of society's attitudes are towards minorities persist.

Barbora Jakobyová, Eduard Nižňanský, and Olaf Glöckner trace how veteran Jewish leaders and intellectuals are shaping Jewish communities in Slovakia while simultaneously working towards political awareness-raising. In parallel, they refer to new forms of cooperation and reconciliation between Jews and non-Jews, for example in arts, literature, and intercultural exchanges. Furthermore, the research results distinctly reconfirm that painful and complex debates about the past continue and that the striving for historical repression has not ceased.

Finally, the country-specific study in Poland (Glöckner, Menachem Zoufalá) reveals how especially committed Jews inside and outside local communities work on concepts of religious, cultural, and intellectual renewal, but also search for new forms of intercultural exchange, in particular at places with a rich Jewish history. These projects are also understood as efficient means against a strong trend of new Polish nationalism which does not make the life of ethnocultural minorities any easier. Remarkably, key figures of the Jewish communities see the future of Jewish life in Poland as firmly intertwined with the future of Europe.

As in other research projects, the voices of participating scientists and authors represent pluralistic assessments concerning the status quo and future perspectives of Jewish life in Europe. This involves inter alia the inner dynamics and cohesion of the Jewish communities, insecurities, and potential external threats. In particular, in the empirical part of the book, readers will encounter parallel, sometimes conflicting, views and interpretations, so they can form their own opinion of a Jewry that is seeking its authentic path while shaping the developments of Europe.