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The Jobbik Party in Hungary: History and Background

Hungary is situated in a key location in Eastern Europe, serving as a buffer between Russia and the rest of Europe. The country has served as an important ally to the United States due to this strategic location; however, the growth of Jobbik, a virulently antisemitic, anti-Roma extremist party with a growing representation in Hungarian Parliament, should alarm U.S. members of Congress and the Obama Administration. Though the party does not control the Hungarian government, they have enjoyed an uptick in popularity in recent years and their public discourse has exacerbated an already precarious situation for Hungary's minorities.

The ideals of the Jobbik party stand in stark contrast to American values. As a leader in human rights and democracy, the United States can encourage Hungary to push back against the authoritarianism and intolerance toward minority groups that is growing in the country and promoted by Jobbik.

Origins of Jobbik

Jobbik was founded in 2003 by Gabor Vona, the son of a staunchly anti-Communist farming family. Jobbik began as a conservative Christian group at the ELTE University in Budapest. The group became known as the “Movement for a Better Hungary.” The party was considered politically insignificant, winning 2.2 percent in the 2006 elections. Yet Jobbik, and the extremist movements to the right of Jobbik, are the heirs to many earlier right-wing Hungarian movements, including those that had allied themselves with Hitler’s Nazi Party prior to World War II. Jobbik revitalized latent hostility toward Jews, Roma, and LGBT persons, all of whom had been targeted by the Nazis, and added new targets of hatred—including Israel and Western-leaning socialists. And it began to organize grass-roots activists willing to act on those hatreds. Vona himself is seen as a charismatic figure who casts himself as a defender of Hungary’s traditions and territory against predatory foreigners. Unlike many other right-wing European leaders, who are virulently anti-Islam, Vona has

written favorably about Islam and made common cause with Palestinians because of his hatred for Israel.

Jobbik and Antisemitism

Jobbik’s overt antisemitism is shocking both in its pure racist Nazi rhetoric and the antisemitic myths spread by its leaders. They skillfully coningle ancient canards about Jews and hatred of Israel with post-financial crisis anxieties. They whip up fears of “international” (i.e. Jewish) bankers destroying the Hungarian economy, foreigners buying up land, and Israel “colonizing” Hungary. They have also made virulently antisemitic statements on the floor of Parliament. Jobbik officials have made antisemitic and racist statements repeatedly, which were all widely reported in the Hungarian media. However, despite—or because of—their remarks, these officials were reelected in 2014:

- “Now is the time to finally say: Israeli occupation is ongoing in our homeland. This is a fact, for evidence we need only to think about the overwhelming dominance of Israeli capital investments, property developments in Hungary. And the Gypsy people are a biological weapon of this [Israeli occupation]. They use them as tools against the Hungarian people.” —Eniko Hegedus, Jobbik Member of Parliament, May 2011
- “The Israeli conquerors, these investors, should look for another country in the world for themselves, because Hungary is not for sale.” —Gabor Vona, Jobbik President, May 2013
- “I think now is the time to assess...how many people of Jewish origin there are here, and especially in the Hungarian parliament and the Hungarian government, who pose a national security risk to Hungary.” —Marton Gyongyosi, M.P. and Leader of Jobbik’s Foreign Policy Cabinet, Nov. 2012

- "Hungary is preparing for two huge commemoration events in 2014: one is about the Hungarian victims, the heroes, who fell in the [Second World] war, the other is the Holoscam... excuse me, Holo—caust... still not working, Holocaust. It was intended, excuse me." —Tibor Agoston, Jobbik Member, Debrecen City Council, Feb. 2014

Antisemitic Attitudes in Hungary

A number of recent surveys indicate that antisemitic attitudes remain widespread—and are by no means limited to Jobbik supporters. In 2012, as Jobbik's popularity was rising along with its antisemitic rhetoric, the European Union surveyed Jews to learn whether antisemitism was a problem for them. The survey found that:

- 90 percent of respondents who consider themselves Jewish and who were living in Hungary at the time of the survey consider antisemitism to be "a very big" or a "fairly big" problem.
- 90 percent said antisemitism has increased in the past five years.
- 72 percent consider expressions of hostility towards Jews in the street or other public spaces to be "a very big" or "a fairly big" problem in Hungary.
- 75 percent said that they frequently hear that Jews have too much power in Hungary.
- 59 percent had heard Jews being blamed for the current economic crises.
- 57 percent had heard someone say that Jews have exploited Holocaust victimhood for their own purposes.

A more recent survey documented a rise in antisemitic attitudes among the Hungarian public after Jobbik's entrance into the Hungarian mainstream and the Parliament. This poll, conducted in November 2013 by the Action and Protection Foundation (TEV), a Jewish group in Hungary, found that up to 40 percent of respondents had antisemitic attitudes. Moreover the pollster, Andras

Kovacs of the Central European University in Budapest, reported that among those who accepted some antisemitic stereotypes, the proportion of people who displayed open antipathy toward Jewish individuals increased dramatically in 2010, when the xenophobic far-right Jobbik party entered parliament for the first time.

"There is a clear correlation between Jobbik's entrance and the prevalence of antisemitism in polled populations," Kovacs said. Kovac concluded that 35-40 percent of the 1,200 people surveyed accepted some antisemitic stereotypes: 7 percent were deemed extremely antisemitic, one-quarter of the sample appeared "devoid of any form of antisemitic prejudice," and the remaining third could not be categorized.

A 2015 global study by the Anti-Defamation League also found that 40 percent of Hungarians expressed antisemitic attitudes, as determined by an 11-question standardized survey on attitudes toward Jews. Sixty percent of Hungarian survey respondents agreed that "Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust" and 59 percent believed that "Jews have too much power in the business world."

The Global 100 Survey findings confirmed the work of many previous pollsters, scholars, and human rights activists. Polling confirms that antisemitism is most prevalent among Jobbik supporters but not all Jobbik voters are antisemitic. Kovac's study found that about half of Jobbik supporters were antisemitic.

Jobbik and Anti-Roma Sentiment

The Roma are Hungary's largest minority, making up about 7 percent of the country's 11 million residents. As is the case elsewhere in Europe, Roma have not been well integrated into Hungarian society, where they face official and private hostility and discrimination in employment, housing, and education. The vast majority of Roma live in poverty—at least half a million people. The Commissioner for Fundamental Rights for Hungary, Laszlo Szekely, noted in his 2012 report that about 10 percent of Hungarian villages either "have irreversibly become ghettos of poor Roma people or are becoming so." In 2011, three-quarters of Romani males between the ages 15–64 were unemployed. The unemployment rate of Romani women has always been even higher, estimated at 84 to 87 percent in 2011. Negative attitudes about the Roma cut across a wide swath of Hungary's population

and its political leaders. Nevertheless, Jobbik's leaders have tried to use their political gains to make it more acceptable to express anti-Roma hatred in public discourse.

Beginning with its 2007 pre-election campaign, Jobbik repeatedly used the racist noun "Gypscrime" to suggest that Roma citizens are genetically prone to becoming criminals. It also ran a campaign ad that said "You want to get rid of parasitism? Then vote for Jobbik!" The ad showed a mosquito under a red "No" circle. Many Jobbik leaders combine anti-Roma and antisemitic rhetoric, or imply that both are non-Hungarians.

Some evidence suggests that Jobbik is having an impact on perceptions by and about Roma. In a study carried out by the official Equal Treatment Authority, 95 percent of Roma in Hungary believed that ethnic discrimination is widespread and has been growing in recent years. In 2011, a survey of attitudes towards Roma in Hungary found that 60 percent of those surveyed shared the view that "the inclination to criminality is in the blood of Gypsies."

Previous surveys that asked the same question, however, showed that public attitudes have barely improved over the last decades. For example, the percentage of people agreeing that Roma have a genetic predisposition to crime was 64 percent in 1994, dropped as low as 53 percent in 2002, but rebounded to 60 percent in 2008. Moreover, the number of Hungarians who accept school segregation, though low, is rising. The percentage of Hungarians who said that "all gypsy children have the right to attend the same class as non-gypsies" fell from 89 percent in 2002 to 86 percent in 2008 to 82 percent in 2011.

According to a 2012 study by the TARKI Social Research Institute, 60% of the population in Hungary believed that criminality was in the "gypsy" blood, and 82% declared that the Roma population's problems would end "when they started working." An additional 42% of Hungarians thought it would be right for clubs or pubs to forbid Roma access, and two-thirds of Hungarians said they would not allow their children to become friends with a Roma child.

As these figures show, no government of any political party in Hungary has done much to eradicate these old prejudices, but Jobbik has certainly been effective in exploiting them (though seemingly not as effective as it has been in increasing antisemitic sentiment).

Hate Attacks Against Roma

The Hungarian government has failed to investigate, prosecute, and punish those responsible for hate attacks. Although Hungary has not kept reliable hate-crime statistics, it is clearly the Roma who are most often targeted for racist violence. In a rare study of hate-crime motivations by the Athena Institute, 48 percent of verified hate-crime cases were found to be motivated by racism, 44 percent by antisemitism, four percent by homophobia, and 4 percent by both racism and antisemitism.

In a spree of attacks in 2008 and 2009, extremists killed six Roma Hungarians, including a 4-year-old boy, and wounded 55 people, almost all of them Roma. In a number of the "Roma Murders" cases, assailants threw Molotov cocktails at Roma homes, and sometimes then shot from close range at the people fleeing the burning house. In 2009, four suspects were arrested. Their trial took two and a half years. NGOs and families of the victims complained that police had botched the investigation and had failed to bring a case against other known conspirators. In August 2013, four-and-a-half years after the first shooting, four neo-Nazis were convicted. Three were sentenced to life in prison, and the fourth, who drove a getaway car, was sentenced to 13 years in prison. One of the murderers confessed that his intention was to intimidate the entire Roma community. Hungarian Human Resource Minister Zoltan Balog hailed the verdicts, and acknowledged that the case had been mishandled. "While accepting the fact that we must recognize that the complete truth has not been uncovered, this sentence strengthens my belief that no perpetrators of racist crimes can escape the law in Hungary, and especially savage murderers pay a worthy penalty for their deed," he said. None of the Roma citizens interviewed for this report expressed any hope that conditions in Hungary would improve.

Jobbik and Homophobia

In 1995, Hungary amended its laws on unmarried couples living together to include same-sex couples. These "registered partnerships" do not have the same legal status as marriage; same-sex couples do not have the right to take each other's names or adopt children. Jobbik, like the ruling Fidesz Party and other socially conservative parties, opposes expanding LGBT rights, particularly same-sex marriage.

Hungary's new Constitution, which came into force on Jan. 1, 2012, includes provisions that:

1. Hungary shall protect the institution of marriage as the union of a man and a woman established by voluntary decision, and the family as the basis of the nation's survival.
2. Hungary shall encourage the commitment to have children.
3. Moreover, the constitution explicitly protects citizens against discrimination on the basis of race, gender, disability, language, religion and other categories, but does not mention sexual orientation.

Prior to the 2014 election campaign, a leading liberal website noted that "it is unclear whether at present Jobbik as a party stands by these policies, especially given its recent attempts at a more youth-oriented election campaign."

Budapest Pride

Budapest's Pride march had been held for a decade with sporadic protests but no violence, but in 2007, that changed: "Anti-gay, nationalist protestors—some giving the Nazi salute and screaming homophobic slurs—attacked Pride marchers with eggs, bottles, rocks, and smoke bombs. Eleven Pride participants were beaten, two so badly that they required hospitalization." Jobbik has consistently opposed Budapest Pride, on the grounds that it was "anti-Hungarian and anti-Christian." In 2011 and again in 2013, participants leaving the Pride with clothing or flags that identified them as LGBT supporters were also attacked.

In 2014, however, Hungarian police were deployed in far greater numbers than the anti-LGBT protestors, and succeeded in keeping them apart. Right-wing protestors affiliated with Jobbik and the 64 Counties movement shouted homophobic remarks and suggested that LGBT persons should be taken to the gas chambers. At one point the protestors broke through the lines, but police managed to hold them back, and the marchers proceeded unhindered. However, organizers also asked Pride demonstrators to hide visible gay pride symbols as they left the event to lessen the chances of attack.

Jobbik and anti-LGBT Legislation

Since it gained seats in Parliament in 2010, Jobbik has attempted to pass much stronger anti-LGBT laws similar to those in Russia. In 2012, Jobbik M.P. Adam Mirkoczki submitted a bill that would ban "promotion of sexual deviations," as defined in the broad amalgamation of "homosexuality, trans-sexuality, transvestitism, bisexuality, and pedophile behaviors." The bill called for banning advertising or programs that would present LGBT behaviors as acceptable, and made promotion of such "disorders of sexual behavior" punishable by up to eight years in prison. LGBT Hungarians and their supporters rallied against the law, which ultimately did not pass.

Jobbik and the Refugee Crisis

Jobbik's xenophobic position on the 2015 refugee crisis has deeply influenced Hungary's security-first response and its stance opposing E.U. efforts to facilitate a regional solution. As Hungary faced off with new arrivals by building a border wall, declaring a state of emergency, and deploying soldiers, Jobbik's leaders issued inflammatory remarks:

- "Hungary has to be able to turn back everyone who arrives at the Hungarian borders as an illegal migrant — everyone without distinction. There is a real humanitarian catastrophe taking place here, but the humanitarian catastrophe is not about what will happen to the poor immigrants. The humanitarian catastrophe is what will happen to poor Hungary." —Gabor Vona, Jobbik President, Sept. 2015
- "Even a child there knows how to assemble and disassemble an AK-47, and I would not feel comfortable standing close to a person with such skill." —Marton Gyongyosi, M.P. and Leader of Jobbik's Foreign Policy Cabinet, Oct. 2015

With the refugee crisis, as with other policy areas, the ruling Fidesz party has borrowed from Jobbik's playbook in crafting harsh and insular legal and administrative responses. Its posture of non-cooperation with the E.U. in crafting a multilateral response to the crisis deepens the country's slide into intolerance and isolation.