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SZÖVETSÉGE

ברית הקהלות היהודיות
בהונגריה

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Public comment on the report "Neediness Among Jewish Shoah Survivors: A Key to Global Resource Allocation" by Professor Sergio DellaPergola

The Federation of Jewish Communities in Hungary (MAZSIHISZ) is deeply concerned by the potential effects that may result from the Professor Sergio Della Pergola's report: *Neediness Among Jewish Shoah Survivors: A Key to Global Resource Allocation*.

The stated goal of the report is to develop a „set of detailed and verifiable criteria that will allow a just and efficient allocation of resources aimed at Shoah survivors worldwide, and to the needy in particular.” MAZSIHISZ fully agrees with this goal, since the requests for fund allocations typically exceed the available resources. However, it strongly contests some of the data presented in the report.

In Appendix 1. (Jewish population, Shoah survivors and demographic indexes, by countries, 2003, page 65), the study reports that in 2003 there were 17,902 Shoah survivors living in Hungary and that the size of the core Jewish population living in the country was 50,000. The estimate of the size of the survivor population coincides more or less accurately with the data of the Hungarian Jewish Heritage Public Foundation (MAZSÖK), which includes what is believed to be a full list of survivors who were born in Hungary before May 9, 1945 and still live in the country. On the other hand, according to our best knowledge, the number that Prof. Della Pergola gives to represent the size of the core Jewish population is far too small.

We understand that the definition of “core Jewish population” used by the study consists of those who “when asked in a census or survey, identify themselves as Jews.” This definition, reflecting the subjective self-identification of the subjects by allowing the inclusion of all converts by any procedure, works very well in some types of Jewish communities. But it does not hold true in Hungary, for a variety of reasons.

Between 1921 and 1990, the Hungarian Jewish community underwent “double slavery”, ranging from discriminatory measures to extreme persecution and annihilation. The first anti-Jewish law in Europe was enacted in Hungary, in 1921. From this year on, the community was stricken by more and more overwhelming waves of moral, financial and physical destruction. After 1945, in most parts of the world, surviving Jews were able to re-emerge and rebuild their identities and their communities. In Eastern Europe Jews had to wait for a restart until 1990 and the fall of the Communist regime, before they could begin to rebuild

Sociologically, the 70 years of humiliation, fear and hiding also resulted in a high proportion of so called “hidden Jews”; people who are descendants of at least one Jewish parent, who remember their Jewish roots but who typically live in mixed marriages and who do not openly declare or regard themselves as Jewish. In 2000, in the first Hungarian census since 1945 which had an optional question about ethnicity and religion, only 13,500 people declared themselves Jewish. This number is lower than the verified number of Jewish Shoah survivors in the country!

In 1999, the first post-Holocaust sociological survey of Hungarian Jewry was executed by the Minority Studies Group of the Sociological Institute of ELTE (Eotvos Lorand University of Sciences). An important part of this survey included demographic research work by Tamas Stark that was aimed at assessing the true size of Hungary’s Jewish population. On the basis of his work, an estimated 80,000 to 150,000 people in 1999 had at least one parent of Jewish origin. An English language summary of his report is attached. The whole work will be available in English soon.

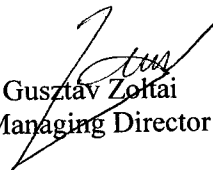
MAZSIHISZ believes that it is its moral duty not to surrender to this phenomenon, particularly when outreach and social welfare is concerned. In the course of its daily work, it thus focuses on the definition of the “extended” or even “enlarged” Jewish population (to use the terms employed by Professor Della Pergola) and actively seeks to reach out to the population of “hidden Jews.” MAZSIHISZ firmly and fervently believes that a good proportion of them can “come back” to the Jewish community, given the proper Jewish choices.

MAZSIHISZ believes that Professor Della Pergola’s definition of a “core Jewish population” in Hungary and the estimate of its numbers are misleading and far too low. Using of this term and this unacceptably low figure as a basis for considerations and decisions in different Jewish bodies in the future would ignore the true situation of Hungarian Jewry and could have potentially negative consequences for Hungarian Jewish growth and development.

Yours sincerely,



András Heisler
President



Gusztáv Zoltai
Managing Director

Assessing the size of the Hungarian Jewish population between 1945 and 2000

The last usable census data on Hungary's Jews were provided by censuses conducted in the four years immediately after the end of World War II.¹ Consequently, the current population of Hungarian Jewry can only be estimated within certain broad limits. This is partly because there have been no demographic data on religious denominations since 1949 and partly because the data collected between 1945 and 1949 show significant disparities, thus making it difficult to define the size of the starting point of from which to estimate, i.e., the number of Jews who survived World War II and remained in Hungary. The question of who should be considered a member of the Jewish population raises further difficulties. As a result, the estimates contain much uncertainty.

Calculations had to start by defining the number of the Hungarian Jews who survived the Holocaust. At the end of 1945, the Statistical Information Department of the Hungarian Delegation to the World Jewish Congress prepared a detailed statistical survey on the survivors with 143,624 persons registered in this survey. Other calculations - based on indirect means of recording data by German, Hungarian, and other diplomatic and internal affairs reports written ahead of the impending peace - estimated the size of post-war Hungarian Jewry between 220,000 and 260,000. *The former figure of 143,624 persons is considered to be the minimum number of Jewish survivors in 1945 and the latter number of 260,000 persons to be the maximum.* The minimum number basically reflects the number of *Israelites*, while the maximum number reflects the total number of survivors.² These are the two data sources from 1945 used in estimating the minimum and maximum size of today's Jewish population.

Based on the 1945 numbers, the size of the Jewish population was calculated in 5-year periods until 2000. The demographic patterns of the total population of Budapest were projected³ - the birth and death rates broken down by age-groups - on to the Jewish population of Hungary. Growth (in this case the decline) of the population was estimated according to the rules of standard demographic calculations based on the size of the female population. In other words, the fertility rates of the total female population of Budapest were projected onto the Jewish female population. Demographic data on the Budapest population were used because at the end of the war, two-thirds of surviving Jews already lived in Budapest and over the following decades, most of the Jews in rural areas gradually moved there.

In preparing these estimates, the decline in the population caused by emigration had to be taken into consideration. For these calculations, two large waves of emigration were considered. Based on available sources, it was estimated that 40,000 Jews left Hungary between 1945 and 1949.⁴ This number was subtracted from the estimated maximum number of surviving Jews, divided proportionally between the sexes and age groups. However, the minimum number of Jews was only decreased by 10,000, because this was the difference between the number of Jews registered in 1945 and the number of Jews counted in the 1949 census. For the emigration wave following the 1956 Revolution, two figures were calculated: 20,000 and 10,000: i.e., 10,000 were deducted from the

¹ For the first time after 1949 the last national census of 2000 contained optional questions on religious and ethnic affiliation, but for several reasons (such as a reluctance of Jews to be "registered") the data concerning the size of Jewish population is considered wholly inaccurate, c. 13,000 persons declared that they were Jewish either in a religious or in an ethnic sense.

² The term "Israelites" identifies those who declared themselves to be Jewish in the census carried out by the Hungarian Section of the Jewish World Congress in 1945-1946, i.e. they were members of the Jewish Religious Community.

³ On demographic data of the Budapest population, see the series of Statistical Yearbooks published by the Hungarian Central Statistical Bureau.

⁴ On Jewish migration the following sources were used: A.H. Richmond: *Postwar Immigrants in Canada*; M. Sironi: *Immigration to Israel*; L.K.R. Grossmann: *The Jewish DP Problem*; J. Lestchinsky: *Jewish Migrations*; the documents of the World Jewish Congress, and of the YIVO, and the statistics of the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics were also used.

number of the "Israelites" and 20,000 from the estimated number of the total Jewish population.

Two final datasets were derived. According to the extrapolation made on the basis of the minimum number of surviving Jews (143,624), the Jewish population of Hungary in 2000 totalled 64,000 persons; on the basis of the maximum number of survivors (260,000) this number amounted to 118,000 individuals.

*Changes in the estimated number of Hungarian Jews between 1945 and 2000,
(matrilineal descent)*

Year	Estimated Number	
	Minimum	Maximum
1945	143,624	260,000
1950	134,825	236,839
1955	134,195	234,434
1960	118,043	202,721
1965	110,041	187,550
1970	101,100	171,456
1975	94,480	164,120
1980	86,159	153,523
1985	80,353	145,015
1990	73,754	134,648
1995	67,843	124,353
2000	64,000	118,686

What do these numbers mean? The estimate of 64,000 persons for the year 2000 theoretically represents the bottom threshold of the Hungarian Jewish population. The final result of the second series of calculations - just under 119,000 - represents the maximum number of the Jewish population based on matrilineage. Given that the population estimates calculated were based on the size of the female population, this final result - like all the results of the series - relates to the number of those considered *Halakhic* Jews (i.e. Jews according to Orthodox Jewish law). However, this is only true if it is supposed that the female members of the 1945 population of 260,000 - considered to be the basis of our calculations - were all considered to be halakhically Jewish.

In the calculations the number of children born to a Jewish mother was estimated, regardless of the origin and religious denomination of her spouse. However, the rate of mixed marriage in the age cohorts under 70 is at least 50 per cent. Thus, when the group in which only the father is of Jewish origin is also considered, the estimated number of Jews needs to be increased by approximately 25 per cent. On the basis of this calculation, *there are an estimated 80,000 to 150,000 people today with at least one parent of Jewish origin.*

In theory, the results of this population estimate can be tested by comparing them with concrete facts and figures. However, information on the size of the population is incomplete. The data available on the number of Jewish burials are partial and scattered to such an extent that for all practical purposes they are inadequate to verify the calculations. Theoretically, the number of people who applied for Holocaust compensation prior to 1995 could be compared with the relevant data in the tables. However, when reviewing them, it became obvious that the number of applicants and the number of Holocaust survivors who were alive at the time of application - in other words of those theoretically entitled to compensation - do not correspond.

The information provided by the Hungarian Jewish Heritage Public Foundation (MAZSÖK) regarding persons entitled to a life-annuity (every person of Jewish origin born before May 8, 1945) was more useful in verifying the calculations. According to the

Foundation's files, 18,634 individuals had applied to the organization for compensation as of January 19 1999. Consequently, at this time, this was the minimum number of persons of Jewish origin aged over 54 in 1999. This number does not differ significantly from the results of the calculations for the year 2000 based on the maximum number of survivors (260,000 individuals), which indicated that there were 21,073 persons over the age of 54 in the year 2000. Although by the end of 2000 deaths had decreased the number of people registered by MAZSÖK to less than 18,000, the difference between the number of applicants for compensation and the demographic estimate is surprisingly small. Moreover, the difference between the estimated population and the registered population is probably even smaller than that shown by the numbers, as in earlier cases, not every survivor entitled to compensation contacted MAZSÖK.

Although the similarities between the concrete data on the number of Holocaust survivors and the results of the estimate of the population do not totally verify the calculations, it can be stated that the calculated data—especially the information concerning the overall population of survivors—reflect real demographic processes. Reinforced by two present sociological surveys, the calculations probably do not differ significantly from reality: In 1999 and in 2003, just over 2 per cent of a sample representing the entire adult Hungarian population (older than 18) claimed to have persons of Jewish origin among their parents or grandparents. Projected onto the entire adult population, this means approximately 170,000 individuals. At the same time it is important to emphasize repeatedly that the population data merely reflect trends, and the numbers published in the tables with five and six digits accuracy indicate orders of magnitude only.