



EUROPEAN
HOLOCAUST
STUDIES

VOL. 1

Right-Wing Politics and the Rise of Antisemitism in Europe 1935–1941

Edited by Frank Bajohr and Dieter Pohl



 Institut für
Zeitgeschichte
Zentrum für Holocaust-Studien

WALLSTEIN

Right-Wing Politics and the Rise of Antisemitism
in Europe 1935–1941

European Holocaust Studies

Edited by Frank Bajohr, Andrea Löw, and Andreas Wirsching

Volume 1

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A publication of the Center for Holocaust Studies
at the Institute for Contemporary History

Right-Wing Politics and the Rise of Antisemitism in Europe 1935 – 1941

Frank Bajohr and Dieter Pohl (Editors)

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Research Articles

German Antisemitism and its Influence in Europe: The Case of Alfred Rosenberg and the Nazi Foreign Policy Office after 1933

The British historian Mark Mazower once described Europe in the twentieth century as a “dark continent.”¹ Although one may question whether this characterization is applicable to the entire century, it undoubtedly holds true for the period we are dealing with in this volume. Within this short period of time and under the influence of the world economic crisis, the political landscape of Europe changed dramatically for the worse. Fascist, authoritarian, and right-wing regimes came into power and antisemitism often became state policy. This resulted in a range of anti-Jewish laws and regulations which were accompanied by a general rise of antisemitic movements and a wave of antisemitic incidents.

Having undertaken a journey through different European countries in August 1934, Neville Laski, the President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, later took stock of his disastrous experiences. In particular, he pointed out the growth of antisemitism in Europe. In his view, Austria was as “a nest of anti-Semites,” and visiting German-ruled Danzig had given him the impression that the aim of *Gauleiter* Forster and the Nazi Party was “to liquidate the Jews.”² In Poland Laski met with the famous journalist Bernard Singer, who described the situation in Poland as follows: “There are many anti-Semites in Poland who feel that events in Germany are a legalization of their activities and they are no longer ashamed to be anti-Semites.” While Singer called the situation in Nazi

1 Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent. Europe's Twentieth Century* (London: The Penguin Press, 1998).

2 William W. Hagen, “Before the ‘Final Solution’: Toward a Comparative Analysis of Political Antisemitism in Interwar Germany and Poland,” *The Journal of Modern History* 68, no. 2 (1996): 351–81; for the following quotes see: 353–57.

Germany “an abnormality,” he classified Poland as “the normal nerve center of anti-Semitism.”

What were the reasons for the rise of antisemitism in Europe in the second half of the 1930s? Should the political success of right-wing political movements and the spread of antisemitic policies and anti-Jewish laws be regarded as indigenous, national phenomena? Despite the obvious influence of some general factors like the world economic crisis and social ideals like a homogenous national community, were they rooted, for the most part, in conditions specific to individual European countries? Or can these developments be regarded as a transfer of ideas and practices—as a Nazi German export—more or less aggressively promoted by the Third Reich?

While much of what happened later would not have been conceivable without the German example, during the first years of their rule, as they still sought to consolidate their power in Germany, the Nazis were not in a position to exert significant pressure on other European governments. Nevertheless, two factors closely connected with Nazi Germany contributed to the rise of antisemitism beyond German borders.

Firstly, by pursuing an increasingly radical antisemitic course, by enacting anti-Jewish legislation like the Nuremberg Laws, and by defending this policy in the face of international criticism, Nazi Germany created a kind of antisemitic model in Europe and encouraged other right-wing movements to follow suit. In fact, German antisemitism did not even alarm the non-fascist European public as much as one may have expected. On the contrary, as analyses of the press in countries such as Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Yugoslavia have shown, with minor exceptions like the widespread condemnation of the November 1938 pogrom, many European circles were ready to accept at least some of the Nazi arguments vis-à-vis Jews and expressed little sympathy for the persecuted minority.³

Compared with the press, foreign consuls stationed in Nazi Germany reported rather critically on German antisemitism and the persecution of the Jews after the Nazi seizure of power.⁴ However, these critical reports only rarely resulted in practical action for the benefit of the persecuted. We can search in vain for impassioned calls to the governments of the

3 Gerhard Vilsmeier, *Deutscher Antisemitismus im Spiegel der österreichischen Presse und ausgewählter Zeitungen in der Tschechoslowakei, Ungarn, Rumänien und Jugoslawien. Die Jahre 1933 bis 1938* (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1987).

4 For the following see: Frank Bajohr and Christoph Strupp, eds., *Fremde Blicke auf das “Dritte Reich.” Berichte ausländischer Diplomaten über Herrschaft und Gesellschaft in Deutschland 1933–1945* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2011).

respective countries to open their borders liberally to Jewish refugees. Even the American Consul General in Berlin, George Messersmith, who had repeatedly voiced his opposition to National Socialism and its policies, was reluctant to issue visas and provide concrete assistance to Jewish refugees. For several years, the quotas for immigrants from Germany were not even filled. In many cases, the persecution of the Jews generated pity, but more often still, it spurred fears of a future flood of immigrants. A symptomatic reaction in this respect was that of the French Embassy official Arnal, who, in April 1933, immediately after Hitler's victory in the elections in March 1933, ordered all French consulates to count visas. His main fear was that Jews from a "poor economic background" may travel to France in massive numbers, and he tried to prevent this by introducing effective control measures.⁵

Secondly, in the years after 1933, Nazi Germany successfully gained international political influence by getting rid of the obstacles and obligations of the Versailles Treaty, by overcoming the economic crisis, and by establishing a huge program of rearmament. In 1933, Benito Mussolini's Italian Fascists still were the most influential movement among the right-wing extremist regimes in Europe, and Hitler and the Nazis initially seemed to be playing second fiddle. By 1938–39, however, the situation had been reversed. The Munich Agreement in 1938 and the destruction of Czechoslovakia visibly demonstrated that Nazi Germany had developed into a dominant power on the European continent. It had effectively limited British and French influence and found new allies, especially in southeastern Europe.

Without a doubt, these two factors contributed indirectly to the rise of antisemitism in many European countries. But were there also other forms of influence exerted by Nazi Germany—more immediate forms of pressure or even direct intervention?

In what follows, I will discuss this question by drawing on the case of Alfred Rosenberg and the Foreign Policy Office of the Nazi Party.⁶ The remarks are based on the edition of Rosenberg's political diaries that were published in cooperation with Jürgen Matthäus and the Mandel Center

5 Jean-Marc Dreyfus, "... und dann wählen sie Männer wie Hitler zum Werkzeug ihrer Katastrophe aus." Die Berichterstattung Botschafter André François-Poncets und der französischen Konsuln aus dem deutschen Reich bis 1939," in *Fremde Blicke*, ed. Bajohr and Strupp, 138–162, here 156.

6 Seppo Kuusisto, *Alfred Rosenberg in der nationalsozialistischen Außenpolitik 1933–1939* (Helsinki: Societas Historica Finlandiae, 1984).

for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the USHMM in Washington in 2015.⁷ Looking at both Rosenberg and his office sheds light on two additional factors, namely Rosenberg's and Nazi Germany's role within an international sphere of antisemitic communication and within an international network of antisemites, who were able to gain political influence in various European countries in the 1930s and 1940s.

Alfred Rosenberg, born 1893, was one of the most influential Nazi intellectuals and the chief ideologue of the Nazi Party, to the extent that Hitler used to call him the "Church Father of National Socialism."⁸ Born in Reval to Baltic German parents, he had studied architecture before leaving Russia for Germany in late 1918. Rosenberg quickly found a home in the radical right-wing movement developing in the city of Munich after the First World War. He joined the precursor organization of the Nazi Party and became acquainted with Dietrich Eckart and Adolf Hitler. In the eyes of Hitler and other Party leaders, Rosenberg possessed what few others could offer: firsthand experience of the Russian Revolution in 1917 and a relentless commitment to fighting Bolshevism as an allegedly Jewish attempt to rule the world. In his first book, *Traces of the Jew through the Ages*, published in 1920, Rosenberg had already defined Bolshevism as a specifically Jewish phenomenon.⁹ This fusion of anti-Bolshevism and antisemitism proved to be of enormous importance for both the anti-Jewish ideas expressed in Hitler's infamous book *Mein Kampf* and, in the long run, as an ideological justification for Nazi Germany's war of annihilation against the Soviet Union and the mass killings of Jews starting in June 1941.

According to Rosenberg the so-called "Jewish spirit" had not only created Bolshevism, but was also largely responsible for all political movements, ideologies, and manifestations with a universalistic approach. In this sense, liberalism and capitalism were Jewish too and even Christianity was defined as a "Jewish-Syrian" invention.¹⁰

Antisemitic diatribes featured prominently in Rosenberg's journalistic articles and works, including the journal Rosenberg began editing in 1924

7 Jürgen Matthäus and Frank Bajohr, eds., *The Political Diary of Alfred Rosenberg and the Onset of the Holocaust* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015); German edition: Jürgen Matthäus and Frank Bajohr, eds., *Alfred Rosenberg. Die Tagebücher von 1934 bis 1944* (Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer Verlag, 2015).

8 Matthäus and Bajohr, *Political Diary*, 81, Diary entry from August 11, 1936.

9 Alfred Rosenberg, *Die Spur des Juden im Wandel der Zeiten* (Munich: Franz Eher Nachf., 1920).

10 Alfred Rosenberg, *Houston Stewart Chamberlain als Begründer und Verkünder einer deutschen Zukunft* (Munich: Hugo Bruckmann Verlag, 1927), 83.

under the programmatic title *Der Weltkampf*.¹¹ Rosenberg therefore regularly attended international antisemitic congresses where he not only met with other, often highly obscure, antisemitic ideologues but also with some politicians who became influential actors on the European political landscape of the 1930s and 1940s, such as Alexandru Cuza, Minister of State in Romania in 1937–1938.

Towards the end of the 1920s, Rosenberg acquired additional expertise in foreign policy, an area in which few leading Nazis were interested or active, yet one hugely relevant to the international implications of the “Jewish question.” In a book with the title *The Future Path of a German Foreign Policy*, published in 1927, Rosenberg stressed the dangers emanating from Soviet Russia and made the case for a German-British agreement, thus anticipating what Hitler wrote in his so-called “second book” a year later.¹² Shortly after Hitler’s appointment as Reich Chancellor in January 1933, Rosenberg was put in charge of the Nazi Party’s Foreign Policy Office, which aspired to serve as a corrective to the traditional German Foreign Office whenever core Nazi goals were at stake.

Although Rosenberg received several new Party functions, including the Plenipotentiary for Supervising the Nazi Party’s Ideological Training, his ambitions for an executive state position were not satisfied during the first years of the Third Reich. In contrast to other members of the Nazi elite, until 1941, when he was appointed Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories, Rosenberg lacked the executive power and resources that came with a cabinet portfolio.

Nonetheless, Rosenberg always played a significant role when topics like Bolshevism or German expansion in the East were discussed among the Nazi elite and he always had the privilege to formulate the basic ideological goals of the regime at the annual Party rally in Nuremberg.¹³

Ultimately, although, in the period under consideration, Rosenberg lacked executive powers, looking at what he and the Foreign Policy Office were doing still provides privileged insight into Nazi Germany’s use of soft power and efforts to propagate some of its basic ideological principles, like antisemitism, on an international level. In his relations with foreign politicians and diplomats, Rosenberg did not portray himself

11 Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage, ed., *Weltkampf: Die Judenfrage in Geschichte und Gegenwart, wissenschaftliche Vierteljahresschrift des Instituts zur Erforschung der Judenfrage* (Munich: Hoheneichen-Verlag, 1924–1944).

12 Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Zukunftsweg einer deutschen Außenpolitik* (Munich: Franz Eher Nachf., 1927).

13 See: Matthäus and Bajohr, *Political Diary*, 125–27, entry “After the Parteitag 1937.”

as a particularly aggressive and interventionist Nazi. In this respect, the speech he gave at a reception held by the Foreign Policy Office for foreign diplomats in Berlin in February 1939 was typical. Giving it the title “Must ideological struggles result in hostility between states?” Rosenberg proceeded in publicly rejecting the idea that National Socialism should be transferred or exported to other nations.¹⁴ He defined National Socialism as a distinctively German phenomenon which was not based on universalistic ideas. Instead, each nation should find and develop its own national course. Accordingly, other right-wing movements in Europe should not be allowed to call themselves National Socialists.

However, Rosenberg’s apparent opposition to an unconditional transfer of National Socialism to other countries did not lessen his conviction in the importance of spreading its basic ideological tenets such as anti-Bolshevism and antisemitism. According to his ideological worldview, this did not even constitute a contradiction because Bolsheviks and Jews both stood for the evil powers of universalism preventing European nations from finding their specific path to national salvation. Therefore, the active promotion of antisemitism and anti-Bolshevism in other countries was not conceived of as an interventionist effort to dominate their political life but rather as a means of helping these achieve national freedom and independence.

Despite Rosenberg’s hermetic ideological convictions, his political contacts on the international stage were not limited to different states’ most extreme right-wingers. In fact, the Foreign Policy Office’s relationships with fascist parties were often characterized by rivalry and tensions rather than cooperation. Italy was a typical case, at least during the first years of Nazi rule. Mussolini and Rosenberg disliked each other and the latter harshly criticized the Fascists’ policies in relation to the church and on the issue of race.¹⁵

In Southeastern Europe in particular, the Foreign Policy Office supported right-wing politicians with experience in government or those with a chance of becoming politically influential. In Hungary, it therefore favored the Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös over more radical groups and rejected offers made by Zoltan Mesko of the Hungarian Nazis.¹⁶

In Romania, Rosenberg’s office had better contacts with Octavian Goga and Alexandru Cuza from the Christian National Party than with the so-

14 Excerpts of the speech printed in Matthäus and Bajohr, *Political Diary*, 364–66.

15 Matthäus and Bajohr, *Political Diary*, 46–47, 87–90, entries from August 2, 1934 and August 23, 1936.

16 Kuusisto, *Rosenberg*, 183–182.

called Iron Guard. Goga and Rosenberg met several times,¹⁷ and Rosenberg's men had actively supported the creation of the Christian National Party. They even helped formulate various sections of the Party Program, including those dealing with the distinction between three different categories of national minorities in Romania. Jews constituted the lowest category, No. 3, and as so-called "illegal immigrants," the great majority of them were supposed to be expelled from the country.¹⁸ There was no need to put pressure on the Christian Nationals with respect to antisemitism: Cuza had long been a radical antisemite. But still, the activities of the Foreign Policy Office undoubtedly heightened the importance of antisemitism on the political agenda of the Christian Nationals. The close cooperation between the Foreign Policy Office and the Goga-Cuza government had an extremely negative impact on Romanian Jews. The major antisemitic regulation passed during its short time in power in 1937–1938 was later not repealed.¹⁹ The personal friendship between Goga and Rosenberg and the close ideological cooperation with the Foreign Policy Office was symbolized, remarkably, by the fact that Goga always sent his letters to the German Foreign Office via Rosenberg's institution. In late 1937, Rosenberg commented in his diary with a triumphant undertone: "Now a second anti-Jewish state has emerged in Europe, thereby quickening the pace of dissolution of the Little Entente decisively."²⁰

Aside from its activities in Southeastern Europe, the Foreign Policy Office paid a great deal of attention to the situation in Scandinavia. In conjunction with antisemitism and the idea of a Nordic race, the office propagated the project of a Nordic community and close alliance between Germany and Scandinavian countries. The idea of a Germanic or Nordic community was popularized by cultural propaganda, in particular by the so-called "Nordic Society," located in Lübeck, which was strongly influenced by Rosenberg's office.²¹ In its internal reports, the office made no secret of the limits of its successes when it came to the transfer of antisemitic and racist ideology from Germany to Scandinavia. At that time, a different model of community-building was gaining ground in Scandinavian societies—particularly in Sweden. There, Social Democrats

17 Matthäus and Bajohr, *Political Diary*, 77, entry from August 10, 1936.

18 Kuusisto, *Rosenberg*, 204–243.

19 On these antisemitic laws see: Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania. The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies under the Antonescu Regime, 1940–1944* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 17–19.

20 Matthäus and Bajohr, *Political Diary*, 132, entry from December 31, 1937.

21 Kuusisto, *Rosenberg*, 332–351.

developed the idea of the “people’s home” (*folkhemmet*), an inclusionary people’s community based on social solidarity. Antisemitism and racism were not central to this notion despite the influence of eugenics on Scandinavian conceptions of community.²²

Yet Rosenberg’s office and the idea of a Nordic community found some support among Scandinavian right-wingers—especially younger supporters, who later joined the ranks of the Scandinavian SS. The most prominent was Vidkun Quisling, the former Norwegian Minister of Defense. Quisling, a staunch antisemite and an infamous Norwegian collaborator during the German occupation of Norway after 1940, maintained close contacts with Rosenberg and gave an antisemitic address at the opening ceremony of the “Institute for the Study of the Jewish Question” in Frankfurt in March 1941.²³

Scandinavia played a significant role in Rosenberg’s thinking as it was supposed to close the ranks in Northern Europe in the struggle against Bolshevism and the Soviet Union, which were central to Rosenberg’s political activities and those of the Foreign Policy Office. Its main representative for Eastern Europe was Georg Leibbrandt, a later participant of the Wannsee Conference on the Final Solution of the Jewish question. The activities of Leibbrandt and the Foreign Policy Office rested upon a network of anti-communist Russian, German-Russian, and Ukrainian emigrants.²⁴

Anti-Bolshevism was closely intertwined with antisemitism and ideological propaganda was drastically intensified in this direction. The staunchly antisemitic periodical *Nowoje Slowo*, published in Berlin by Russian emigrants, soon became a mouthpiece of the Foreign Policy Office and was distributed among the Russian-speaking population in Eastern Europe. Leibbrandt launched a new series of books on “Bolshevism” and authored its second volume, *Moscow’s Attack against Europe*, in which he blamed the Jews for the fusion of Marxist and imperialist ideas in Russia.²⁵

In practice, some of the Foreign Policy Office’s plans for Eastern Europe did not succeed. Rosenberg and Leibbrandt called for sensitivity vis-à-vis the ethnic and national orientations in the East hoping to use them against Bolshevik Russia. This type of “ethnic psychological foreign policy” (*völkerpsychologische Außenpolitik*) did not prevail after

22 Thomas Etzemüller, “Sozialstaat, Eugenik und Normalisierung in skandinavischen Demokratien,” *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 43 (2003): 492–510.

23 Kuusisto, *Rosenberg*, 338–343.

24 Matthäus and Bajohr, *Political Diary*, 143–144, entry from December 18, 1938.

25 Kuusisto, *Rosenberg*, 108–168.

Germany occupied the East in 1941. However, the antisemitic agenda of Rosenberg's men, who held decisive positions within the Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, did materialize as a bloody reality.

Rosenberg and his office's most important function with regard to the spread of antisemitism on the international level was probably their manifold contributions to the international sphere of communication on antisemitism.²⁶ The antisemitic periodical *Welt-Dienst* was published in more than twenty languages.²⁷ Rosenberg gave European right-wing journalists dozens of interviews. There was even a kind of exchange-service for antisemitic books, brochures, and articles between the various European right-wing movements. Although he did not mention them explicitly, Rosenberg frequently referred to them in his speeches. In his speech to foreign diplomats in February 1939, which culminated in the claim that the "Jewish question" would only be solved once the last Jew had left the territory of the German Reich as well as the European continent, Rosenberg indirectly made reference to a plan developed by the leader of the Dutch National Socialist Movement, Anton Adriaan Mussert. Mussert's plan, published in a brochure with the title *The United States of Guyana—the Jewish National Home* had appeared in Dutch, English, and German.²⁸ Rosenberg himself favored the island of Madagascar but his statement to the diplomats—which included the cynical remark that Alaska with its Nordic climate would be too good for the Jews—was a word for word rendition of what the British antisemite Henry Hamilton Beamish had written in an article for the Nazi Party organ *Völkischer Beobachter* in 1926.²⁹ It was mere plagiarism, lacking any kind of originality but it indicated that antisemites from different countries often mutually referred to each other and took part in an international antisemitic discussion.

This internationalization of communication was all the more remarkable as the great majority of antisemites were also radical nationalists and often disliked each other. However, especially since they defined the

26 Louis W. Bondy, *Racketeers of Hatred. Julius Streicher and The Jew Baiter's International* (London: N. Wolsey limited, 1948); Magnus Brechtken, "Madagaskar für die Juden." *Antisemitische Idee und politische Praxis 1885–1945* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1987), 31–80.

27 *Welt-Dienst. Internationale Korrespondenz zur Aufklärung über die Judenfrage* (Frankfurt a. M.: Bodung, 1933–1945).

28 Anton Adriaan Mussert, *Die Vereinigten Staaten von Guyana. Das jüdische Nationalheim* (n.p., 1939).

29 "Madagaskar. Von einem Engländer (Henry Hamilton Beamish)," *Völkischer Beobachter*, June 29, 1926, 1–2.

“Jewish question” as a global question, their antisemitic propaganda also depended on mutual acknowledgement and validation. In this sense, the “Antisemitic International” constituted a kind of self-sustaining system, with antisemites like Alfred Rosenberg serving as guarantors of the truth of antisemitic propaganda and with Nazi Germany serving as a model for the resolution of the so-called “Jewish question.”

*

Although this volume is dealing with historical developments in the 1930s and early 1940s, the parallels to Europe’s contemporary political landscape can hardly be ignored. Of course, one should avoid equating past developments and events with the present situation but we should not overlook that, in the past few years, in almost all European countries as well as in the United States of America right-wing and populist movements have gained momentum. There has been a notable upsurge of nationalism and anti-Liberalism in conjunction with populist sentiments against foreigners and refugees, against Jews, and against Muslims. One might even speak of a kind of rebirth of so-called “*völkisch*” ideas. This fatal attractiveness of old beliefs is all the more dangerous as liberal and democratic norms and values are being undermined by authoritarian efforts to transform democracy in some member states of the European Union. May Europe in the 1930s continue to serve as a warning of the potential dangers of the erosion of a liberal political order.

Right-Wing Politics and Antisemitism in Europe, 1935–1940: A Survey

It is now common knowledge that the mass murder of European Jewry, though originating in German politics and German-Austrian society, was a European-wide phenomenon, with more than 95 % of the victims coming from outside the German Reich, especially from Poland, the Soviet Union (according to its 1938 frontiers), Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and the Baltic states. Holocaust research of the last two decades has turned away from the more traditional approach of reconstructing perpetrator history (“*Tätergeschichte*”), as it has been pursued especially in Germany and the United States, and integrated a victim perspective, which dominated Israeli research for a long time, to create an overall approach including all societal groups involved. So-called “bystander research” has demonstrated the broad involvement of non-Germans in the persecution and sometimes even in the murder of Jews all over Europe during the Second World War, beginning with the involvement of Western Europeans, for example local police structures or administrations. If one analyzes a Polish or a Soviet county under German occupation, it is obvious that not only dozens of German administrators, policemen and other personnel, but also hundreds of local auxiliary policemen and other persons were involved in persecution and murder. The Romanian, Hungarian, Croatian, and even Bulgarian involvement in anti-Jewish politics and violence was by and large enacted autonomously, with little or no German pressure or interference. Probably around 5–10 % of all Holocaust victims never faced a perpetrator from the Reich, especially in Croatia, in Romania proper or in Romanian-occupied territories.

Only in recent years has the broad societal picture received more attention, such as the reaction of structures like the Churches or underground

movements, which had a certain degree of autonomy under German occupation. This led to the question of general Jewish-Gentile relations under German hegemony or German occupation, including not only assistance and rescue, but also anti-Jewish discourses, robbery, denunciations, and even murders. The debate on the Jedwabne pogrom, provoked by Jan Tomasz Gross' book which stirred up Polish public opinion from 2000 onwards, was just the beginning of micro research, which is pursued now inside and outside Poland and has led to impressive results, demonstrating widespread antisemitism during the occupation.¹

In the literature published prior to the 1990s, this has been considered exclusively an effect of German rule, of propaganda, or the demoralizing of social groups at the margins of society. The discourse within European societies before the war, unlike the ones in Germany and Austria, almost did not play a role in the Holocaust narrative. There were a few exceptions to this generalization, like the famous U.S. historian Arno Mayer, who is—as far as I can see—the only one to integrate Eastern European antisemitism before 1939 in his synthesis on Holocaust history *Why Did the Heavens not Darken?*, published in 1988. When Martin Gilbert included a map on prewar pogroms in Poland in his *Atlas of the Holocaust*, he met fierce criticism by the leading Polish historian on the occupation period, Czesław Madajczyk.²

The discourse and behavior of non-German Gentiles towards Jews during the war require an analysis of a long-term development. Furthermore, the historiography of European Jewry and research on antisemitism during the interwar period has produced impressive results, mainly on a national level, but also in a micro perspective.³ Especially in East-Central and Southeastern Europe, this research is often somewhat isolated and sometimes even under political attack, not least when continuities from the interwar period to post-communism come in mind.

1 Jan Tomasz Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Shimon Redlich, *Together and Apart in Brzezany: Poles, Jews, and Ukrainians, 1919–1945* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press 2002); Melanie Hembera, *Die Shoah im Distrikt Krakau. Jüdisches Leben und deutsche Besatzung in Tarnów 1939–1945* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2016); most recently: Omer Bartov, *Anatomy of a Genocide: The Life and Death of a Town Called Buczacz* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2018).

2 Arno J. Mayer, *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken? The "Final Solution" in History* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1988), 64 ff.; Czesław Madajczyk, "Sprawy polskie w 'Atlas of Holocaust'," *Dzieje Najnowsze*, vol. 18, no. 3/4 (1986): 279–292.

3 Dittmar Dahlmann and Anke Hilbrenner, eds., *Zwischen großen Erwartungen und bösem Erwachen. Juden, Politik und Antisemitismus in Ost- und Südosteuropa 1918–1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2007).

And though some impressive syntheses, like the ones by Bernard Wasserstein or David Vital on Jewish history, have been published,⁴ syncretical approaches to European antisemitism between 1918 and 1939 are rare or somewhat unsatisfactory, like the comparative analysis by the U.S. political scientist William Brustein *Roots of Hate*, who applied quantitative methods to “measure” antisemitism in several countries, focusing on events of anti-Jewish violence and anti-Jewish press articles.⁵ Recently the German historian Götz Aly published an impressive synthesis on the subject, which is somewhat more impressionist than analytical.⁶ Nowadays, research on nearly all European societies, on Jewish minorities and on anti-Jewish patterns, is so rich that it might be possible to proceed to a broader European approach, both comparative and transnational, in the near future.

Anti-Jewish policies, discourses, and social practices changed over the comparatively short period of the two decades between the wars. The early postwar years after 1918 not only brought additional emancipation and participation in public life for European Jewry, but also the birth of an organized right-wing extremism and anti-Jewish violence on an unprecedented scale. The years after the postwar crisis thus were quite ambivalent for European Jewry. The global economic crisis then further meant the breakdown of democratic systems in Central, Southern, and Eastern Europe, and the rise of fascist movements everywhere.⁷ But it was not just the fascist movements which were responsible for the turn to the right during the 1930s; rather, there was a broad shift in most political systems and—as I would argue—a transnational trend towards a new anti-Jewish discourse.

There are several problems which arise from an analysis of European antisemitism during the 1930s. First, the question of continuity: most of the so-called *modern* anti-Jewish discourses and forms of organization can be dated back to the late nineteenth century, while the major use of violence against Jews occurred right after the First World War, so

4 Bernard Wasserstein, *On the Eve: The Jews of Europe before the Second World War* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2012); David Vital, *A People Apart* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

5 William I. Brustein, *Roots of Hate: Anti-Semitism in Europe before the Holocaust* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

6 Götz Aly, *Europa gegen die Juden. 1880–1945* (Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer, 2017). Approximately half of the book is devoted to the interwar period.

7 The best overview on fascist antisemitism is: Hermann Graml, Angelika Königseder, and Juliane Wetzel, eds., *Vorurteil und Rassenhaß. Antisemitismus in den faschistischen Bewegungen Europas* (Berlin: Metropol, 2002).

what was new about the 1930s? But there is also the second problem, the problem of continuity into World War II: did German hegemony and German occupational rule set a completely new framework for European antisemitism, or are prewar and wartime antisemitism directly connected? Third, the question of significance: how important is the discourse on the so-called “Jewish question,” and can we measure its outreach? Fourth, are there distinctive national or regional patterns of antisemitism, or rather differences according to political preferences and milieus? Fifth, how was antisemitism directly related to the position of the Jewish minority, its demography, its political, economic, and social resources? Sixth, and probably most importantly: what is the relation between German Nazi antisemitic discourse and practices and the rest of Europe before World War II? What was the difference? These questions require broad international research and cannot be answered here. That is why the following passages rather try to offer a survey of the features of European antisemitism in the second half of the 1930s than a conclusive analysis.

It is astounding that historians have paid so little attention to the transnational meaning of German and Nazi antisemitism in Europe before the war. The Nazi seizure of power in 1933 was a major political break in European political history and was perceived as such by lots of contemporaries. The anti-Jewish wave in the Reich was met by international protests and calls for boycott, especially in the U.S., in Great Britain, and to a limited extent in continental Europe, for example by the Jewish Bund in Poland.⁸ Furthermore, Nazi politicians and experts built contacts and networks with antisemites all over Europe. There had been a rather small movement for an “Anti-Jewish International,” founded in 1882 in Hungary, and predominately based on small groups from Hungary, Germany, and Austria. During the revolutionary period of 1918/19, some right-wing circles in Germany, Austria, and Hungary even were planning to set up a “White International,” a partially antisemitic transnational movement which was to counter the revolutionary eruptions, to organize a military campaign towards Berlin.⁹ This never came into being, but the antisemitic movement was still existent in 1933, and taken over by the infamous Jew-baiter Julius Streicher, the publisher

8 Gertrud Pickhan, “Gegen den Strom:” *Der Allgemeine Jüdische Arbeiterbund ‘Bund’ in Polen 1918–1939* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2001).

9 Bruno Thoß, *Der Ludendorff-Kreis 1919–1923: München als Zentrum der mitteleuropäischen Gegenrevolution zwischen Revolution und Hitler-Putsch* (Munich: Wölfle, 1978), 396–399.

of *Der Stürmer*. The Anti-Jewish World Congresses remained an event for outsiders and ceased to take place after 1938.¹⁰

Political contacts were much more effective. Hermann Göring, for example, had close contacts to Hungarian Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös, an outspoken antisemite. The Nazis also secretly funded the Romanian National Christian Party, a major antisemitic force in the country.¹¹

German press and German “*Judenforschung*” (research into the “Jewish question”) monitored antisemitism all over the world. Especially since the late 1930s, this was a constant subject in the media, showing that Germany acted in an international antisemitic environment. The antisemitic press service *Welt-Dienst* was founded on a more private basis in 1933 and closely attached to the international Antisemitic Congresses, but only gained wider coverage after it was taken over by Nazi chief ideologue Alfred Rosenberg in 1937. Klaus Schickert, a leading antisemitic journalist, was sent by the *Deutsche Nachrichten-Büro* in 1937 to Budapest, to report on the “Jewish question” in Hungary.¹²

In general, German experts were pleased to see the rise of antisemitic policies, organizations, and debates abroad, on the new awareness of the “Jewish question” all over Europe and around the world, though they consciously overestimated what they observed. Nevertheless, most of the anti-Jewish policies abroad were criticized as being insufficient, not properly based on racial theories, and of course not as radical as German policies.¹³

Seen from outside, the German anti-Jewish drive was met with broad criticism in Europe in 1933/34. Though some observers were not unsympathetic to the new anticommunist power in the center of Europe, most were repelled by the wave of violence after the Nazi takeover. The

10 Magnus Brechtken, *Madagaskar für die Juden. Antisemitische Idee und politische Praxis 1885–1945* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1997).

11 Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, *Nationalsozialistische Außenpolitik, 1933–1938* (Frankfurt a. M.: Alfred Metzner Verlag, 1968). See also: Frank Bajohr, “German Antisemitism and its Influence in Europe: The Case of Alfred Rosenberg and the Nazi Foreign Policy Office after 1933,” in this issue.

12 Dirk Rupnow, “The Anti-Semite Internationale: The Exporting of Anti-Jewish Scholarship and Propaganda by the Third Reich,” in *A New Nationalist Europe Under Hitler: Concepts of Europe and Transnational Networks within the National Socialist Sphere of Influence (1933–1945)*, ed. Johannes Dalfinger and Dieter Pohl (London: Routledge, 2018), 259–270.

13 Gerhard F. Volkmer, “Die deutsche Forschung zu Osteuropa und zum osteuropäischen Judentum in den Jahren 1933–1945,” *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte*, vol. 42 (1989): 109–214; Kilian Bartikowski, *Der italienische Antisemitismus im Urteil des Nationalsozialismus 1933–1943* (Berlin: Metropol, 2013).

diplomatic missions of most European countries in Germany had to protect their own citizens who were living or had business relations in Germany, especially the Jews. Even fascist Italy was far from being a German ally at that early stage. The Italian effort to create a Fascist International, the so-called *Comitati d'Azione per l'Universalita di Roma*, failed at two conferences in 1934/35 because the delegates of the fascist movements could not find a consensus on the race question. Unfortunately, there are no systematic analyses on the European perception of the 1935 Nuremberg Laws, as far as I can see.¹⁴ For example, the National Democratic Party in Poland, the major anti-Jewish political force in the country, welcomed the laws as an important step to “solve the Jewish question,” but simultaneously was ardently anti-German, and criticized the biological approach of the Nazis.¹⁵ This was apparently a general pattern among the right-wing politicians in Europe at that time.

But there is good reason to believe that this changed during the second half of the 1930s. On the one hand, as within German society, the Nazi state also gained recognition in the international arena. Germany was considered more and more a success model for overcoming both the economic crisis (unemployment almost disappeared by 1937) and the alleged “national crisis.” The violations of the Versailles Treaty, beginning with the rearmament of 1935, were more or less accepted, or even considered a model, at least in states with similar revisionist intentions, like Hungary or Bulgaria.

On the other hand, open physical persecution within the Reich was almost not internationally visible after 1934. Most of the concentration camps were dissolved, persecution obviously was focusing on socialists and communists, less by executive measures, and more in the courtroom. During the 1936 Olympic Games, the German leadership avoided anything that could offend international public opinion. The assassination of the Nazi Party leader in Switzerland, Wilhelm Gustloff, by a Jew in February 1936, did not lead to a major pogrom like a similar event in Paris two years later.

14 Consider some articles in: Magnus Brechtken, Hans-Christian Jasch, Christoph Kreuztmüller, and Niels Weise, eds., *Die Nürnberger Gesetze—80 Jahre danach: Vorgeschichte, Entstehung, Auswirkungen* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2017), 104–164.

15 Ingo Loose, “Die Wahrnehmung der Nürnberger Gesetze in Polen und Ostmitteleuropa,” in *Die Nürnberger Gesetze—80 Jahre danach*, 105–122; Albert S. Kotowski, *Hitlers Bewegung im Urteil der polnischen Nationaldemokratie* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000), 77; Gerhard Vilsmeier, *Deutscher Antisemitismus im Spiegel der österreichischen Presse und ausgewählter Zeitungen in der Tschechoslowakei, Ungarn, Rumänien und Jugoslawien: Die Jahre 1933 bis 1938* (Frankfurt a. M.: Lang, 1987).

Meanwhile, the political scenery in nearly all of continental Europe either made a shift to the right or was being polarized. In Poland, the center of European Jewry, the authoritarian Pilsudski regime had ruled since the coup d'état of 1926. From then onwards, it constantly moved toward the right and radicalized its policies towards minorities, from 1930 onwards with open persecution of the political and cultural networks of the Ukrainian minority. The government political camp, the *Sanacja*, manipulated the elections in order to reduce the influence of the major opposition force, the antisemitic *Endecja*, but also established a semi-fascist mass organisation, the Camp of National Unity, which took over antisemitic proposals of the *Endecja*. Already at the time of Pilsudski's death in 1935, *Sanacja* politicians openly spoke out in favor of antisemitic policies. The new Prime Minister Sławoj-Składkowski in 1936 supported a boycott of Jewish shops and prepared programs for mass emigration.¹⁶

This shift toward right-wing antisemitism occurred almost in parallel in several countries. Hungary was the first country with an outspoken antisemite as prime minister, Gyula Gömbös (elected in 1932), but he was not able to enforce anti-Jewish measures due to the resistance of parliament and Head of State Miklos Horthy. However, in 1935, Gömbös's party won the election. Probably only his unexpected death in 1936 prevented him from going ahead with the anti-Jewish policies.¹⁷

Romania's government was held by the National Liberal Party with an ambiguous position towards the "Jewish question." On the one hand, Romanian political culture was—with the exception of Germany—the most antisemitic in Europe, which several leading politicians underlined. On the other hand, the government actively combatted the rise of the strong fascist movement, the Legion of the Archangel Michael or Iron Guard, which as the Everything for the Fatherland Party gained a vote of 17% at the 1937 election, in addition to the 9% gained by the violently antisemitic National Christian Party.¹⁸

Thus a common pattern of politics in East-Central and Southeastern Europe evolved: authoritarian governments with antisemitic tendencies

16 Alina Cała, *Żyd—wróg odwieczny? Antysemityzm w Polsce i jego źródła* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny/Wydawnictwo Nisza, 2012), 325–418.

17 Nathaniel Katzburg, *Hungary and the Jews: Policy and Legislation 1920–1943* (Jerusalem: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1981); Krisztián Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer és antiszemitizmusának mérlege—Diszkrimináció és társadalompolitika Magyarországon, 1919–1944* (Budapest: Jelenkor Kiadó, 2016).

18 Bela Vago, *The Shadow of the Swastika: The Rise of Fascism and Anti-Semitism in the Danube Basin, 1936–39* (London: Saxon House, 1975); Carol Iancu, *Les juifs en Roumanie, 1919–1938. De l'émancipation à la marginalisation* (Paris: Peeters, 1996).

fought against highly antisemitic fascist movements. There were exceptions to the rule: Czechoslovakia remained the only democracy in the east until 1938, in its founding years with an exceptional minority policy. From 1936 onwards, however, Czechoslovakia also came under German pressure, and, what is more important: the situation in Slovakia and in Transcarpathia was quite different from the one in the Czech lands. The Slovak and Ukrainian national movements were directed not only against Prague, but also against the Jewish population.¹⁹ Yugoslavia showed similar features as Czechoslovakia: here the “Jewish question” was much less debated than other nationalities issues. Tensions are visible primarily in Croatia, but even the radical Croatian Ustasha considered the Jews to be a group of minor importance.²⁰

Antisemitism apparently did not play a major role in other authoritarian systems, like the Metaxas regime in Greece. Though apparently antisemitic in internal discussions, Metaxas was appreciated by the Jewish communities as their protector.²¹ And in the Baltics as in Finland, open antisemitism was restricted to the realm of fascist groups like the Iron Wolf in Lithuania or the Perkonkrusts in Latvia.²²

But also the Western European democracies underwent a serious crisis during the Great Depression. Unlike in East-Central Europe, there was a

19 Miloslav Szabó, “Auf dem Weg zum Holocaust? Der slowakische Antisemitismus in der Ersten Tschechoslowakischen Republik,” *S:I.M.O.N.—Shoah: Intervention. Methods. Documentation* 2, no. 1 (2015): 11–24; Myroslav Shkandrij, *Ukrainian Nationalism: Politics, Ideology and Literature, 1929–1956* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 118–121; Raz Segal, *Genocide in the Carpathians: War, Social Breakdown, and Mass Violence, 1914–1945* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016).

20 Milan Koljanin, *Jevreji i antisemitizam u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji 1918–1941* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2008); Marija Vulesica, “Antisemitismus in Jugoslawien 1918–1941,” *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 17 (2008): 131–152; Nevenko Bartulin, *The Racial Idea in the Independent State of Croatia: Origins and Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

21 Consider: Susanne Spiliotis, *Transterritorialität und Nationale Abgrenzung. Konstitutionsprozesse der griechischen Gesellschaft und Ansätze ihrer faschistoiden Transformation 1922/24–1941* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1998).

22 Michael Garleff, “Die baltischen Staaten und die Juden 1918–1940,” *Jahrbuch des baltischen Deutschtums* 52 (2004): 93–114; Christoph Dieckmann, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik in Litauen 1941–1944* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2011), 125–141; rather critical: Liudas Truska and Vyantas Vareikis, *Holokausto priedaidos. Antisemitizmas Lietuvoje, XIX a. antroji pusė–1941 m. birželis [The preconditions for the Holocaust: Anti-Semitism in Lithuania, second half of the 19th century–June 1941]* (Vilnius: Margi raštai, 2004); Kathrin Reichelt, *Lettland unter deutscher Besatzung 1941–1944: Der lettische Anteil am Holocaust* (Berlin: Metropol 2011), 37–52; Anton Weiss-Wendt, *Murder without Hatred. Estonians and the Holocaust* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2009).