

Swedish interventions in the tragedy of the Jews of Slovakia

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ABSTRACT • This article describes a largely unknown Swedish effort to intervene in deportations of Jews of Slovakia between 1942 and 1944. Swedish officials and religious leaders used their diplomatic correspondence with the Slovak government to extract some Jewish individuals and later on the whole Jewish community of Slovakia from deportations by their government and eventually by German officials. Despite the efforts of the Swedish Royal Consulate in Bratislava, the Swedish archbishop, Erling Eidem, and the Slovak consul, Bohumil Pissko, in Stockholm, and despite the acts taken by some Slovak ministries, the Slovak officials, including the president of the Slovak Republic, Jozef Tiso, revoked further negotiations in the autumn of 1944. However, the negotiations between Slovakia and Sweden created a scope for actions to protect some Jewish individuals which were doomed to failure because of the political situation. Nevertheless, this plan and the previous diplomatic interventions are significant for a description of the almost unknown Swedish and Slovak efforts to save the Jews of Slovakia. Repeated Swedish offers to take in Jewish individuals and later the whole community could well have prepared the way for larger rescues. These never occurred, given the Slovak interest in deporting their own Jewish citizens and later the German occupation of Slovakia.

Research on Sweden's attempts to assist Jews

In view of the abundance of studies of the Holocaust, the absence of major scholarly works offering comprehensive investigations of the Swedish attempts at rescuing Slovak Jews is somewhat surprising. However, following Hilberg's narrative (1961), which details the step-wise escalation from persecution to mass murder in National Socialist policy and practice, the rescue actions have been pushed to the periphery. Nevertheless, some of the Swedish attempts to assist European Jewry have been well researched. Swedish rescue efforts related to the Jewish communities in Norway, Denmark and Hungary during the Holocaust are well known. The first scholarly works on Sweden's attempts to assist European Jews were published in the early 1980s. Since then, the establishment of the Raoul Wallenberg Committee in 1981,

the 'opening' of the archives in some post-communist countries and new scholars taking up this particular topic have significantly improved research opportunities.

The rescue of Danish Jews, and Raoul Wallenberg's rescue of Jews from Budapest during the Holocaust have justifiably received much attention from scholars, students and laymen alike. Scholars such as Richard Breitman also investigated American rescue activities in Sweden and their impact on further Swedish involvement in providing refuge to European Jews (Breitman 1993). The substantial works of Steven Koblik (1989) provide us with a detailed view of different phases of Swedish attempts to help European Jews. The most recent research of Simo Muir (2016) exemplifies the cooperation within the Finnish and Swedish Jewish leadership after Germany's takeover of Hungary and the appearance of potential danger for Finnish

Jewry. Yet the Swedish rescue efforts were not limited to aid in Denmark or Finland or to Raoul Wallenberg and Hungarian Jewry.

Scholars of the Holocaust in Slovakia have also regarded the Swedish intervention in the case of the Jews of Slovakia as minor in the historiography of the Holocaust. Despite the publication of the correspondence between the Swedish archbishop Eidem and the Catholic priest Tiso as early as 1992 (Kamenec 1992: 221–2), there has been no further research elaborating on the documents more thoroughly. The same texts reappeared in 2005, in a collection of documents titled *The Holocaust in Slovakia IV* (Nižňanský 2003: 287–9), including also comments and documents of the German authorities and their attitude towards the correspondence between Eidem and Tiso. In the seminal work of Ján Hlavinka and Eduard Nižňanský readers must look to the footnotes of the work to learn about the ‘personal intervention of a protestant archbishop from Uppsala’ (Hlavinka and Nižňanský 2009: 131). These works introduced the Swedish involvement in the fate of Jews of Slovakia to scholarly research. Yet Bohumil Pisko – a key actor in the rescue attempts – or cases of rescuing individuals do not appear. Furthermore, none of these crucial works recognises Swedish attempts to assist the Jews of Slovakia in depth. As a result, it leaves little room for discussion of Swedish interventions in the tragedy of the Jews of Slovakia.

It is important to note that the lack of attention to Swedish interventions does not seem to stem from a paucity of source materials. Investigated sources, which consist of diplomatic and official correspondence between Slovakia and Sweden, are available in the Slovak National Archives, the State Archives of Nitra and Yad Vashem. Not only have scholars had access to official documents, which we have investigated, but

various materials have been held not only in Slovakia, but also in Israel and Sweden.

Although some of the Swedish efforts can be described as attempts by individuals, a deeper investigation of available sources reveals that these attempts cannot be characterised so simply. This study incorporates the voices of the representatives of the Slovak–Swedish communication via official documents and diplomatic or private correspondence.

Swedish attempts to assist the Jews of Slovakia

It is not generally known that before and after the rescue of Danish Jews and the Jews of Budapest, Sweden tried to offer a safe haven to Jewish individuals and later to the remaining Jewish community in Slovakia through diplomatic interventions. The story of Swedish efforts to shelter a selected group of Jews from the Holocaust nonetheless helps to supply part of the context for the historiography of the Holocaust. Thanks to the latest research on the Holocaust in Slovakia, previously unknown and unpublished documents has brought to light evidence of Swedish intervention in the tragedy of the Jews of Slovakia. By examining Swedish interventions in Slovakia, we seek not only to enrich our perception of Swedish rescue efforts in general but also to understand more thoroughly the significance of those efforts and complex conditions and situation in which these efforts were made.

This article undertakes a critical analysis of accounts found in official documents and diplomatic correspondence to arrive at a more comprehensive and nuanced depiction of Swedish attempts to intervene in the tragedy of the Jews of Slovakia. In doing so, it sheds light on the Slovak consul in Sweden, who is relatively absent from Holocaust

historiography, and whose activities invite an investigation of Swedish intervention acts against the antisemitic policy in Slovakia and the deportations of Jews from Slovakia in particular. Drawing upon previously unknown primary sources, we develop this argument in three parts. First, we demonstrate how the 'final solution' was implemented in Slovakia. Next, we examine the stages of Swedish intervention, notably how the Swedish Royal Consulate in Bratislava tried to intervene and how different Slovak ministries reacted, and especially how the Slovak consul in Sweden, Bohumil Pissko, and the Swedish archbishop, Erling Eidem, cooperated on the plan to rescue Slovak Jewry. We include in our analysis the Slovak governmental representatives' communication exchange with the Swedish authorities as well as the interactions between the president of the Slovak Republic and the Swedish archbishop, Eidem. Finally, we discuss the post-war silence over the Swedish rescue attempts in Slovakia. Following three different phases of Swedish intervention we discuss the intervention accordingly. The first

chapter describes the rescue-related activities of Soviet citizens of Jewish origin in Slovakia in 1942. In the following phase we discuss the rescue-related activities related to individual cases of Slovak Jews between 1942 and 1944. In the last phase Swedish rescue-related activities relating to the remaining Jewish community as a whole took place in 1944 and 1945.

The 'final solution' in Slovakia

The Munich Accords of 1938 represented an important change in the geopolitical situation in Europe and recognition of the dominance of Nazi Germany over Central Europe. The Hlinka Slovak People's Party (HSPP) – a conservative right-wing political party with strong Christian and nationalist orientation with antisemitic, anti-Czech, anti-Hungarian elements led by the Catholic priest Jozef Tiso – exploited the weakening of the Republic of Czechoslovakia and declared the autonomy of Slovakia in Žilina on 6 October 1938. In the Manifesto of the Slovak Nation,



Jozef Tiso meeting Adolf Hitler in Salzburg in July 1940. Archive of ČTK.

the new HSPP's elite declared their anti-semitic orientation: 'We shall persist on the side of nations fighting against the Marxist-Jewish ideology of dominance and violence' (*Slovenská Pravda*, 8.10.1938). The constitution of the later Slovak Republic created a one-party political system with the HSPP as the governing party. Thus, the HSPP ruled the country during the first Slovak Republic (1939–45) when the deportations of Slovak Jews took place. Therefore, the HSPP can be regarded as a major agent in the deportations.

The tragedy of the Jews of Slovakia is connected not only with the Nazi German 'final solution' plan but also with local Slovak anti-semitic politics. The Slovak Republic, founded on 14 March 1939, 'was established in the atmosphere of a deep European political and moral crisis as a side product of Nazi aggression towards Czechoslovakia' (Kamenec 2011: 96). Hannah Arendt's description of 'an invention of the German Foreign Office' (Arendt 1963: 184) aptly summed up the creation of the republic. Nazi Germany had several different plans for Czechoslovakia. Initially, Adolf Hitler had planned a total war of destruction in Czechoslovakia with help of Poland and Hungary but later he preferred to destroy the country from the inside (Nižňanský and Tulkisová 2014: 37–55). The Protection Treaty between Germany and Slovakia of 18 March 1939 included German coordination of the military and international policy of the Slovak Republic as well as economic subordination to Nazi Germany (e.g. Mičev 2009: 125–37; Dieckmann *et al.* 2003: 25–31). Germany took over the protection of the political sovereignty of the Slovak state and the integrity of its territory. Thus the independence of Slovakia was radically limited.

By spring 1939 the country with its approximately 89,000 Jews had introduced a political system built on authoritarian prin-

ciples, implementing elements of fascism. The regime was replaced to better match the Nazi ideology and politics. Conditions for implementing the 'final solution' for the 'Jewish question' in Slovakia were a result of the international politics of Germany in combination with autochthonous anti-Jewish tendencies within Slovak society and their implementation in antisemitic laws introduced by Slovak political institutions – government, parliament, the state council and Jozef Tiso, a Catholic priest, and a leading politician of the HSPP, who was the country's president from 1939 to 1945, and who was convicted and hanged for treason in 1947. Thus, according to documents from the Wannsee conference, 'the Nazi leaders ... expected no obstacles from the Slovak regime to the murder of the Jews' (Bauer 2001: 176). Slovak Jews fell victim to an antisemitic motivation within the majority of the Slovak population, represented by HSPP and its militia, the Hlinka Guard. They eventually contributed to the Holocaust out of self-interest in solving the 'Jewish question' in Slovakia. Initially the Slovak government and the parliament used laws and governmental decrees signed by the president, Jozef Tiso, while the most extensive was the governmental decree 198/1941 from 9 September 1941 – the so-called Jewish Codex – containing 270 articles based on a racial definition of Jews, aimed at eliminating Jews from the political, social and economic life, and which relegated Jews to second-class citizens. These laws can be seen as a Slovak version of the Nuremberg laws from 1935. These laws also included the presidential exceptions, which protected approximately 1,000 people and their families from deportation. The previous Slovak antisemitic politics of Aryanisation (First Aryanisation Act, decree 113/1940; Second Aryanisation Act, 303/1940) legalised the liquidation of Jewish businesses and companies, and banned Jews

from carrying out professions, leading to massive impoverishment in the Jewish community. Thus, in the autumn of 1941, the 'Jewish question' became a social question. The manufactured mass impoverishment of the Jewish community reached a 'logical' conclusion: the aim was to deport the Jews from the territory of Slovakia.

Slovak–German relations included several agreements, among them one from 8 December 1939 obliging the Slovak government to send workers to Germany. After Germany's request for 20,000 young Slovak men capable of working in the Reich, the representatives of the Slovak government realised that in view of the lack of manpower in Slovakia this would create economic risks for the republic. Thus the Slovaks suggested sending 20,000 young Jews to Germany (Hradská 1999: 40). The head of the Reich Main Security Office (RSHA) sub-department IV-B4, overseeing Jewish affairs and evacuation, SS-Obersturmbannführer Adolf Eichmann, agreed to accept these Jews, who could be used to 'build, after proper selection, the death and concentration camps at Auschwitz and Birkenau' (Bauer 1994: 66). According to the advisor for Jewish affairs in Slovakia, and later one of the most important men in charge of deportations of Jews from Macedonia, Greece and Hungary, SS-Hauptsturmführer Dieter Wisliceny's testimony in the Nuremberg trial conducted on 3 January 1946, 'the Slovak government further asked whether the families of these workers could not be taken to Poland too' (Testimony of Dieter Wisliceny 1946). At first Eichmann declined the request, but it



Deportation of Jews from Žilina. In 1942 all deportation trains from Slovakia crossed the train station in Žilina. Archive of Museum of SNP.

was just temporary until the capacity of concentration camps allowed larger number of victims. Slovakia was required to pay Nazi Germany 500 Reichsmark per head for each Jew deported from Slovakia.

The deportations from Slovakia started from Poprad on 25 March 1942. The first transport consisted of 1,000 girls and young women aged sixteen and up. In 1942, 57 transports left Slovakia, 19 of them being sent to Auschwitz and 38 to the Lublin area (SNA, F. 209, C. 864–1). The rumours started spreading while the Jews from Slovakia were being transported. It was said that Jews were not going to work in Poland, but instead they were being sent off to be killed there. The most important information came from a Slovak Jew, Dionyz Lenard, who managed to escape from Majdanek concentration camp in Lublin in June 1942. He gave one of the first reports about the situation in Poland and the need for the Jewish Centre (Hlavinka 2015: 43; Hradská 2006: 32). The Jewish Centre was

a Slovak version of *Judenrat*, established to be responsible for the implementation of Nazi and Slovak policy against Jews in Slovakia. In October 1942 the Working Group, an underground group established within the Jewish Centre, whose members tried to negotiate with Slovak and German authorities to halt deportations not only from Slovakia but from the whole of Europe through bribery (Büchler 2007: 103–90; Fatranová 2007: 46–85; Bauer 1994: 167–85), also received reports with ‘information about the horrible conditions of Jews who lived’ (Büchler 2002: 125–52) in ghettos in the Lublin district.

Together with the first pieces of information about the Jewish deportees from Slovakia to Poland the first attempts to act against deportations were initiated. There were some attempts to interfere in the pitiful situations of Slovak Jewry, for example by the Slovak Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Churches and even the Vatican (Kamenec 1992). According to Gila Fatranová (2007: 229) several Slovak high officers (the governor of the National Bank, Imrich Karvaš; the secretary of the Central Association of Slovak Industry, Peter Zaťko) demonstrated their lack of support for further deportations. When the international climate changed after Germany’s defeat in Stalingrad, several other international powers tried to intervene. Among them were Switzerland and also world Jewry, who were cooperating with the Jewish community in Slovakia. Among the international voices against the deportations from Slovakia was also Sweden, with its attempt to save Jews from deportation.

Swedish intervention in Slovakia

Slovak-Swedish diplomatic relations

Sweden had formally recognised the Slovak Republic on 26 July 1939, which made Sweden the first northern European state

to establish official relations with Slovakia (*Slovák*, 2.8.1939: 1). On 10 August 1941, Emil Stodola Jr became the official representative of Sweden in Slovakia (Petruš 2014: 107–21). The interests of the Slovak Republic in Sweden were represented by the consul general Bohumil Pissko,¹ who took office in October 1943 and aimed to ‘secure and establish closer relations with the Swedish Kingdom and build the base to their development, mainly when it comes to the mutual exchange of goods’ (*Slovák*, 7.10.1943: 8). On 10 November 1943, he reported to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: ‘I visited the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Christian Günther, who welcomed me very kindly and with a great understanding. ... It is undoubtedly a difficult disadvantage that the office was – according to local opinion – established five minutes before twelve’ (SNA, F. MZV, C.965). According to Pissko’s report, Swedish journalists did not forget to ask some mocking questions relating to the length of the planned stay of the Slovak Consulate. Pissko, as a consul general, was constantly reporting the latest news about Slovakia in the Swedish press and forwarded the attitudes expressed by the Swedish public

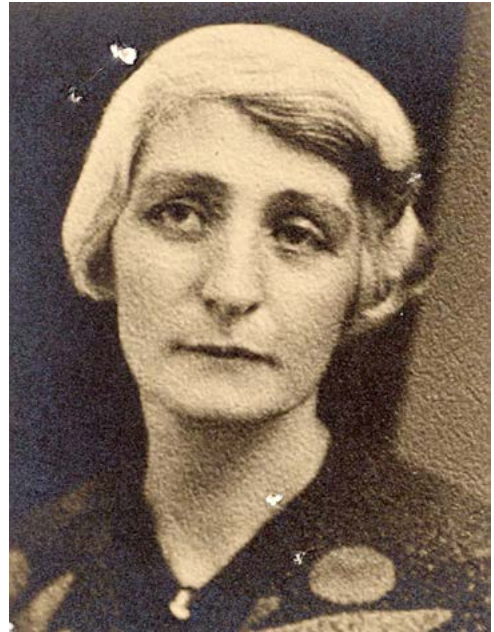
1 Bohumil Pissko (1908–1979) studied German Studies, Latin and Greek at University in Bratislava. He was awarded to study in Copenhagen and later in Uppsala. Since 1933 he had worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Prague – the Intelligence Department. After the establishment of the Slovak Republic he started to work for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs headed by Ferdinand Durčanský, who gave him the freedom to start to organize the administration of the Ministry in Bratislava. Later he became an official consul in Warsaw and Berlin. Since 1940 he was a consul in Sofia, Bulgaria, where he remained until 10 September 1943. In autumn 1943 he became a General Consul in Stockholm and remained there till 20 April 1945.

to Slovakia. On 9 October 1944 Pissko sent a telegram to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the programmes in foreign languages broadcast by the Slovak radio: 'If you want to get sympathy from the Swedish press, it should – if possible – avoid insulting Jews on broadcast programmes' (SNA, F. MZV, C. 967). Pissko and his diplomatic relations with Swedish elites later became very important in the Swedish interventions in the Slovak Republic.

Rescue-related activities: Soviet citizens

The first Swedish attempt to intervene in the fate of Slovak Jewry did not occur under favourable circumstances. It took place in May 1942, at a time when the deportations from Slovakia had already been going on for three months, and was connected with the international position of Sweden and the fact that the Slovak Republic was involved in the war against the Soviet Union. On 27 June 1941, Sweden, via an official note, made an offer to the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs which announced Swedish protection of Slovak state citizens and Slovak properties in the USSR in view of the Slovak participation on the war against the USSR. The Slovak Republic agreed on the Swedish proposal of undertaking the responsibility for Slovak citizens and Slovak properties in the USSR. The same note announced that the Swedish Royal Government complied with the request of the government of the USSR to protect state citizens of the USSR and properties of the USSR in Slovakia (SNA, F. MZV, C. 181). As a result of this note, two attempts by Sweden to protect Jews from the USSR who lived in Slovakia from deportation were made by the Swedish Royal Consulate in Bratislava.

On 19 May 1942 the Swedish Consulate contacted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs



Berta Kotscherchinski was one of the Soviet citizens in Slovakia who were under the protection of Sweden. Yad Vashem, The Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names.

on behalf of two Soviet Jewish citizens, Isaj and Berta Korscherschinski, who lived in the Slovak town of Bardejov and who were going to be deported from Slovakia. The Swedish Consulate protested, arguing that 'this process is not only against international law, but also against local regulations, because denominations were removed in the USSR, therefore they could not be considered Jewish' (SNA, F. MZV, C. 142). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs contacted the responsible offices and developed active exchanges in order to find and protect these Jewish individuals. However, the last information documented from 16 February 1943 says 'Mr and Mrs Kotscherchinski were not transported ... they left the state from Bardejov to the village Korská Vola in the General Government on May 17, 1942' (*ibid.*). In the Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names it is stated concerning the Kotscherchinski (here spelled Kocerzinki) couple: 'Isai Kocerzinki was from

Kiev, Ukraine – murdered in the Shoah, his wife Berta from Dvinsk, Latvia – transported to Naleczow, Pulawy in Lublin, Poland on 18 May 1942, murdered’.

Swedish attempts to protect Soviet citizens of Jewish origin living in Slovakia did not end with a single case but affected a larger number of Jewish individuals. Another intervention of the Swedish Royal Consulate dates from 10 June 1942, when Sweden undertook protection of USSR interests in the Slovak Republic once again. The note tells us about two other Soviet citizens named Rubin and Rachel Gutnik, living in Bratislava, aged 86 and 76, who were transported to the transit camp in Žilina, Slovakia, on 5 June 1942. Sweden protested against this process and demanded rectification. The institutions in Žilina were asked to wait, without proceeding further in this case until the potential final decision had been made. The Swedish Royal Consulate also added a demand to let the Gutniks come back to Bratislava and remain there until the whole case was solved. (SNA, F. MZV, C. 142)

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs immediately contacted the responsible Slovak offices. It also informed the Slovak Ministry of the Interior that ‘the prime minister said that Soviet citizens of Jewish race are not to be transported, as is done with Slovak state citizens. However, in accordance with valid international laws, as dangerous foreigners, whose homeland is our war enemy, they are to be detained’ (SNA, F. MZV, C. 142). The Slovak ministries followed the Swedish requests, and the available documents demonstrate repeated correspondence between the two countries’ officials, and they also document sincere investigations by Slovakia and willingness to meet Swedish requirements. The investigations and search for the Gutniks was stopped on 16 February 1943 when the Ministry of the Interior gave the latest

information, ‘I am sure that the Gutniks, if we are speaking about those who are mentioned by the Swedish Consulate, did not register themselves as Soviet state citizens and therefore they were transported’ (*ibid.*). Rachel Gutnik (spelled Gutnig, The Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names) was transported from Bratislava to Sobibor on 7 June 1942. Documents about her husband Rubin have not been discovered. His fate, however, was presumably similar to that of his wife.

Why these two aforementioned couples, who were citizens of the Soviet Union living in Slovakia, were the only ones that became objects of Swedish interest is not clear. Most probably there had been ongoing communications between Swedish institutions and some institutions or individuals in Sweden or the USSR that brought about the recognition of these individuals. At this stage of the research, sources from the USSR, which could help to clarify further research questions, are not known to us. Surprisingly, the internal communication between the Slovak ministries documents the importance of the Swedish requests, that were treated as a matter of urgency. In consequence of Sweden’s interest in protecting Soviet citizens and properties, the Slovak authorities had to satisfy Swedish requirements instead of risking damaging diplomatic relations with Sweden by ignoring their requests altogether.

Rescue-related activities: individual cases of Slovak Jews

Sweden’s attempt to intervene in Slovakia did not stop with the two cases of Soviet citizens. Almost at the same time as the attempts to protect the Soviet citizens of Jewish origin occurred, the first of Sweden’s requests regarding individual cases of Slovak Jews was forwarded to the Slovak authorities. On

19 May 1942, the Swedish Royal Consulate asked permission for some Jewish individuals not in possession of travel documents to be able to emigrate to Sweden. These three Jewish persons were Samuel and Hermína Engel, citizens of Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, and Heimann, a citizen of Nitra, Slovakia (SNA, F. MV, C. 241). However, according to the order of 14 September 1940 Jews had lost the right to own passports (Kamenec 1991: 101). The Swedish note did not only ask to issue travel documents but also to protect and not deport these individuals until they could leave Slovakia for Sweden (SNA, F. MV, C. 241). The Swedish note also indicated that the families of Samuel and Hermína Engel and Heimann were resident in Sweden and asked the Swedish authorities for help. So far, it is neither clear who the relatives were, nor has their interaction with the Swedish authorities been fully uncovered.

Documents that could give some further insight into their interaction may exist in Sweden. The Slovak National Archives does not possess any letters written by the aforementioned families. They do not seem to be associated with the Jewish elites or leaders in Slovakia. Nevertheless, their case was discussed at the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Slovak Ministry of the Interior as well as within county offices. According to communications between the ministries it seems that this particular case was important for Sweden as the Swedish Royal Consulate in Bratislava was pressuring to solve it (SNA, F. MV, C. 241). Again, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs pushed the Ministry of the Interior to treat the issue with urgency. On 17 September 1942, the Ministry of the Interior reported to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'in general the Ministry of the Interior has no objection against the legal resettlement/emigration of Jews, Slovak citizens, who live in the Slovak Republic' (*ibid.*). The

Ministry also announced that these individuals would not be deported until 31 October 1942, which was the deadline for obtaining credible documents to legally emigrate to Sweden. The main issue for the Ministry of the Interior was to find the Jewish individuals, so they had to ask the county councils for help. On 9 October 1942 the county council in Nitra stated 'the Jew Heimann from Nitra ... was deported with his wife from Nitra on 18 June 1942. This makes the issue of Heimann pointless' (*ibid.*). Even though there is another document with a different date of transportation, namely 15 April 1942, it does not change the fact that Heimann was deported, so the immigration became impossible.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs urged the case of Engels and Heimann several times. Moreover, the application deadline for the passports was postponed several times owing to multiple requests from the Swedish Royal Consulate. The deadline was extended from 31 October 1942 to 30 November 1942, and finally to 28 February 1943. Heimann had been transported most probably before the Swedish Consulate started the communication with the Slovak authorities. He was killed on 20 September 1942 (SNA, F. MV, C. 227; SA Nitra, District Office Nitra, C. 468; Yad Vashem, Majdanek Death Book). The postponing of the passport deadline, and hence the ban on further deportation, applied to Samuel and Hermína Engel, whose fate, it seems, unfolded differently from the tragic case of Heimann. Samuel Engel with his wife Hermína were living in 1942 in Banská Bystrica, and apparently survived. According to the census from 1943, at least Samuel Engel was baptised soon enough to be spared deportation (SNA, F. MV, C. 182, C. 396). Yet their ultimate fate is not known.

It made a considerable difference that the interventions were related to Jewish individuals originally from Slovakia and not from the

USSR. Even though these Swedish requests were related to Slovakia's own Jewish citizens, the Slovak official institutions followed these requests. These documents also prove that the Slovak authorities were willing to bypass the 'legal' directions which ordered them to transport these Jewish individuals. The readiness to satisfy these Swedish requests proves not only the importance of Swedish interventions but also that the Slovak authorities were willing to protect a few specific Jews from Slovakia until they could emigrate. This may be seen as an act of subordination of Slovakia to the stronger partner, Sweden, and as an act of permission to save some Jews from deportation as long as they left Slovakia. As the action of deporting Slovak Jews was already in full swing, it seemed impossible to intervene through diplomatic correspondence. Nevertheless, the Swedish intervention helped to protect Samuel and Hermína Engel.

These attempts to intervene in the fate of the aforementioned Jews who lived in the Slovak Republic occurred during the period between May 1942 and February 1943, a time which encompasses the first phase of the deportation of Jews from Slovakia. Between March and October 1942 approximately 58,000 Jews from Slovakia were deported. Between October 1942 and September 1944 there were no deportations from Slovakia. Therefore, the remaining Jews in Slovakia lived in relative safety but always with the danger of deportations being resumed. The following case of the Slovak rabbi Samuel David Ungar occurred between October 1944 and January 1945, during the last phase of the 'solution of the Jewish question' in Slovakia. Germany occupied Slovakia after the Slovak national uprising, which started on 29 August 1944. This initiated a new phase of deportation. The renewed deportations, known also as the second phase of deportations, took place under the German administration between



Rabbi Samuel David Ungar who was a subject of Slovak-Swedish diplomatic correspondence in 1944. Yeshiva of Nitra.

30 September 1944 and 31 March 1945. Approximately 11,500 Jews were deported (e.g. Hlavinka 2009: 119–25; Hlavinka and Nižňanský 2010: 50–80; Hradská 2006: 463) and about 10,000 of them were killed or died owing to the conditions in the Nazi camps. Jews and non-Jews were also killed in Slovakia by the Einsatzgruppe H together with the emergency division of the Hlinka Guard and the military group, the German Party in Slovakia, *Freiwillige Schutzstaffeln*.

In this violent atmosphere Sweden's attempt to save Ungar had started. Unlike the individuals of the previous cases of Swedish attempts, Rabbi Samuel David Ungar was related to two of the most influential people of the Jewish leadership in Slovakia. He was a first cousin of Gisi Fleischmann, a member of the Jewish Center in Slovakia and a leader of resistance within the Working Group together with rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel, who was married to Ungar's daughter. Ungar was also one of the few Jews who had received the

presidential exceptions. Moreover, the majority of Slovak Jews identified with Jewish Orthodoxy, and according to Yehuda Bauer 'the social authority was the Rabbi of Nitra, Shmuel David Halevi Ungar' (Bauer 1994: 64). Based on his higher position in the hierarchy of the Jewish community in Slovakia more information on his fate can be provided. Two days after the suppression of the Slovak National Uprising the only operating yeshiva within the regions of Slovakia as well as in Central and Eastern Europe – Yeshiva of Nitra – led by Ungar and officially abolished on 5 September 1944 (Polakovič 2012: 21). Soon after the closing down of the Yeshiva of Nitra the deportations of Jews from Nitra and vicinity to Auschwitz started, and Ungar's fellow believers from Nitra were amongst the deportees. Ungar was saved together with his sons by Slovak residents who led them to hiding at a guerilla encampment in the mountains. Later, they went a trip to Banská Bystrica accompanying the troops, but had to remain in mountain refuge.

On 25 October 1944, a confidential note arrived at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the name of the Slovak consul in Sweden, Pissko: 'Via Rabbi of Stockholm A. I. Jacobson the British Chief Rabbi Council addressed me to step in in the case of Rabbi of Nitra Samuel David Ungar. ... With respect to the intervention of the Swedish king on the matter of the Jewish question in Hungary, it will be in our interest if the case has a positive result' (SNA, F. MZV, C. 142). In addition Pissko wrote that Ungar and his family were to be given the highest protection from persecution or potential deportation. Moreover, Pissko mentioned that Ungar and his family were advised to contact the Swedish Royal Consulate in Bratislava. At this point the case of Rabbi Ungar seems to be confusing. Firstly, A. I. Jacobson came to Stockholm from Trondheim in order to

escape the German occupation of Norway in April 1940. Rabbi Jacobson was the spiritual leader of the restored Heinrich-Barth-Strasse synagogue until his death in 1955 (Berlinger 2016). Hence, Rabbi Jacobson may have been a rabbi from Stockholm but he had never been a rabbi *of* Stockholm, as Pissko's letter intimates. Moreover, there was no such organization as the British Chief Rabbi Council. Since we have no relevant information or documents about Rabbi Jacobson nor about his correspondence with the so-called British Chief Rabbi Council, we can only guess why these mistakes were present in Pissko's letter. Did Pissko lack correct information about Rabbi Jacobson and about the existence of the British Chief Rabbi Council? Or did he rather prettify his letter with 'big' names in order to emphasise the importance of the case and the significance of Rabbi Ungar? Did Pissko lie to his superordinate in order to try to save Rabbi Ungar? If this is true, why would he do so? In the absence of documents and evidence from Sweden and England, further research is required to solve these questions.

On 26 October 1944 Štefan Tiso, the cousin of President Tiso, who became Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and Minister of Justice of the Slovak Republic after the suppression of the Slovak national uprising on 3 September 1944, commanded the Minister of National Defence, Štefan Haššík, to 'immediately find out and announce to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs where the Rabbi of Nitra, Samuel David Ungar, with his family currently are' (SNA, F. MZV, C. 142). The Minister of National Defence announced that the family of David Samuel Ungar of Nitra should have been interned in the labour camp for Jews in Sered' in September 1944. The minister assumed that the rabbi and his family were arrested during the deportations from Nitra. Alongside many changes that

had happened since the suppression of the Slovak national uprising, the labour camp in Sereď, which had previously been under the Slovak administration, was taken over by the German Security Police (Sicherheitsdienst). Therefore, the minister suggested he ‘contact directly the Chief of the Security Police in Bratislava, who will be able to give you an explanation of where the Jewish rabbi in question and his family are’ (SNA, F. MZV, C. 142). Subsequently, on 17 January 1945 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs contacted the Deutsche Gesandtschaft in Bratislava to ask ‘if David Samuel Ungar and his family is in the labour camp of Sereď or anywhere else, hoping to enable him and his family to emigrate to Sweden’ (*ibid.*). Any response from the Deutsche Gesandtschaft cannot be provided in the current state of research. During the diplomatic negotiations and investigation of the Slovak authorities, Rabbi Ungar was hiding in the mountains, where he refused to eat non-kosher food, whereby, according to Daniel Polakovič (2012: 27), his ‘medical state eventually rapidly deteriorated, leading to a death caused by malnutrition on 21 February 1945’.

The Swedish intervention in the case of Rabbi Ungar of Nitra was not successful owing to a combination of several factors. It made a considerable difference that the intervention started during the German occupation of Slovakia when the Slovak authorities had no power over the Jewish question. Once the solution of the ‘Jewish question’ in Slovakia was held by the German directive any Swedish intervention became ineffective. Even though it proves that the Slovak authorities were willing to cooperate with the Swedish state, it must be said that preventing the arrest or deportation of the rabbi was a ‘good deed’ in a situation that was to a large extent caused by the same authorities. The same authorities were responsible,

primarily or secondarily, for Ungar’s death. Furthermore the political and military situation of Germany in 1944 caused an immense reconsideration of politics and regimes among the Germany allies. Most importantly Sweden pressured the Slovak government to take a more active role in finding not only Ungar but also all Jewish individuals who had previously been the subjects of Slovak–Swedish diplomatic communication. Sweden’s energetic role in the efforts to save these particular Jewish persons activated the Slovak authorities as well. Unfortunately in almost all cases the rescue attempts failed. Nonetheless, the Swedish efforts did not lose any of their significance. Interestingly, the Slovak authorities themselves, who had offered their own Jewish citizens for deportation to Germany, did not mind removing some Jewish individuals from deportation on the grounds that they had Sweden’s promise that the Jews would leave the country.

Rescue-related activities: the remaining Jewish community

The greatest of Swedish attempts to assist the Jewish community, which amounted now to approximately 11,500 individuals, started during the second phase of deportation of Jews from Slovakia on the impetus of the Swedish archbishop of Uppsala, Erling Eidem. The archbishop turned to President Tiso via the Slovak consul in Sweden, Bohumil Pišsko, on 11 November 1944, which marks the beginning of the effort to save the remaining Jews in Slovakia. However, important correspondence between Eidem and Pišsko preceded the letter addressed to President Tiso. Eidem, in the name of ‘Hjälp Krigets Offer! Kristnasamfund och organisationers insamling’ (‘Help the Victims of War! A Union of Christian Communities and Organizations’) addressed the Slovak consul general, Pišsko,

on 27 November 1944. He requested Pissko to 'please note all the efforts that were taken to rescue the remnants of Jewish ethnicity in Slovakia, and we hope that you, Sir, will do everything in your power for this cause' (SNA, F. MZV, C. 967).

This announcement from Eidem to Pissko included the letter from Eidem addressed to Tiso and started the main intervention, which began on 28 November 1944, when Pissko forwarded the letter from Eidem and added his own letter to Tiso. Pissko provided his analysis of the – in his words – hostile, or non-objective, attitude of the majority of the Swedish press towards Slovakia, which he described as the result of official Slovak actions over the 'Jewish question'. Furthermore, Pissko mentioned the intervention of the Swedish king, Gustav V, in the case of Hungarian Jews and further activities of governmental, religious and social organisations. He stressed that these actions were supported by all the political parties in Sweden, except for the pro-German group, which received only 3,500 votes in the election. Explaining the position of Sweden in the matter of the Jewish question, he tried to engineer a suitable moment to accommodate the Swedish attempt to save the remaining Jewish community in Slovakia. Pissko reported the conversation between him and Archbishop Eidem, describing the latter as the head of the State Protestant Church in Sweden, respected in Protestant countries, especially overseas countries, and successor of famous theologian Dr Nathan Söderblom, who had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his international work for peace and philanthropy. Furthermore, Eidem was described as somebody who enjoyed immense respect and favour from the royal family, and also from the religiously indifferent governmental social-democratic elites. According to this conversation Eidem asked Pissko about

the legal status of Slovak Jews and expressed a wish to address the president of Slovakia with a personal letter, which Pissko eventually sent as an attachment to President Tiso. Pissko explained further Eidem's close overseas relations, which he described as 'very beneficial for our interest'. The technical aspect of the transportation of the Jews from Slovakia should have been carried out with the help of financial support from American institutions that had confirmed their own desire to take care of the financial issue in cooperation with a neutral partner, such as the Red Cross. Moreover, Pissko expressed how his American colleague considered the issue as highly important and was willing to make any financial sacrifice needed. Pissko also noted that they would 'highly appreciate every positive result, even a hardly noticeable one' (SNA, F. MZV, C. 967). This letter from Pissko to President Tiso was accompanied by the aforementioned letter of Eidem, dated 11 November 1944. President Tiso did receive a letter from Eidem, where the archbishop intervened 'for the poor Jewish brothers' and asked the Slovak president to permit the relocation of Jews to a neutral area:

Our poor Jewish brothers, here in Europe, have suffered tremendously in the last decade. In some countries of the continent they have become almost exterminated. Since there is still a remarkable number of Jews in Slovakia, located in disparate localities, I would like to address you with an ardent demand – to kindly take charge of these endangered people. I do not dare to suggest to you ... steps that should be taken. However, with regards to the actual political situation of your fatherland, I must ask you to think if it is eligible to transfer Jews of your country to other areas in order to make their rescue possible. (SNA, F. KPR 405, C. 8)

The lack of independence granted to the Slovak Republic and subordination to Germany led the new prime minister, Štefan Tiso, to show Eidem's letter to the German ambassador in Slovakia, Hans Ludin, who passed the letter on further. Apparently this letter was important enough to be forwarded directly to the Reich's Main Security Office (RSHA), in the person of Adolf Eichmann on 6 January 1945. German Office Inland II, represented by Eberhard von Thadden, briefly described Eidem's letter and announced that Prime Minister Tiso had shown the letter, and he added the remark, 'What are these individuals thinking?' (Yad Vashem, Auswärtiges Amt, Inland II, JM 2218/AA). The arrogant remark of Prime Minister Tiso only confirmed the wide scale of collaboration of the Slovak regime with Nazi Germany. Prime Minister Tiso obviously did not have to show the letter but he decided to forward it to the German authorities. Even though the prime minister informed the German authorities, President Tiso responded to Archbishop Eidem in a letter from 8 January 1945. The Presidential Office addressed the Consulate General in Stockholm with a demand to deliver the attached letter to the archbishop from Uppsala. The letter for Eidem carries the date of 4 January 1945. The German attitude towards Eidem's letter was most probably discussed within official circles. President Tiso may have been informed about the desired response he had to give to Eidem. Nevertheless, the only document available is Tiso's answer, which demonstrates his helplessness in this situation: 'It is a pity that the interest expressed was not shown before 28 August 1944. Until that date, Jews had been placed, in accordance with Slovak laws, in well-organised labour camps or had been left in their previous occupations according to the certificate awarded' (SNA, F. KPR 405, C. 8).

Therefore, Tiso's statement must be

considered as a euphemism. It is true that some Jews could keep their previous occupations according to the certificate awarded. However, these certificates protected only about 5,000 Jews. Other Jews were placed in labour camps for Jews in Slovakia – in Nováky, Sered' and Vyhne (Nižňanský 2002: 325–35), which had been established for forced labourers, and which later served as transit camps for the concentration camps. Slovak guards were often tremendously cruel in these labour camps. Most importantly Tiso did not mention the deportations of 1942, when approximately 58,000 Jews were removed from Slovakia to Nazi camps (mostly to Auschwitz and Majdanek). According to Tiso, on 28 August 1944, a partisan revolt against the Slovak state began, involving a high number of nationalities. Slovak Jews joined the revolt: 'they left their camps and went to the mountains with weapons in their hands and with even bigger financial resources and they supported the revolt against the state' (SNA, F. KPR 405, C. 8). The information Tiso gave to Eidem is also very doubtful. Jews barely had any financial resources, especially those in the camps, after the process of Aryanisation. The only true information provided in Tiso's letter is the fact that when the 'German army force stepped in, they ... imprisoned Jews in concentration camps, as well as Slovaks and members of other nationalities who took part in the uprising. These camps were under German authority' (*ibid.*). Hence any further attempts to secure or protect the Jews of Slovakia were impossible. Pissko's reaction to the interaction between President Tiso and Eidem was sent to Eidem in the letter from 19 February 1945. It was marked as confidential, and says:

You have – with your appeal – made it easier for me to interfere in the situation of terribly persecuted Jewry ... I feel very dis-

appointed at the reaction of my president ... To see that my country has been swallowed up by the Nazis so that the president could not even give a promise to try to act according to your demand is a terrible tragedy. (SNA, F. MZV, C. 967)

The letter does not show any evidence that it was sent in the name of the Slovak Consulate in Stockholm. It rather seems that Pissko sent it to Eidem as a private person. Eidem responded within two days, expressing sympathy and grief but not regret that he had delivered the letter to Tiso (SNA, F. MZV, C. 967). Judging from Pissko's words 'you have – with your appeal – made it easier for me to interfere in the situation', it seems that it was actually Pissko that had been the trigger for this intervention in the fate of the remaining Jews in Slovakia; according to the correspondence between Pissko and Eidem it appears that Pissko was the one to ask help from Eidem to intervene in the tragedy of the Slovak Jews. Thus we may witness the cooperation between the Slovak consul, Pissko, in Sweden, who acted from personal motivation, using his diplomatic position, and the Swedish archbishop, Eidem, whose motivation might be religious or simply human. In comparison with the more politically sensitive proposals of Eidem involving massive Jewish emigration from Slovakia with the help of the United States, the earlier requests of the Swedish Royal Consulate to contact Slovak officials in the case of several Jewish individuals were relatively simple. The involvement of the American side emphasised the importance of Swedish efforts even more strongly. The connection with American institutions in this particular case of Swedish intervention in Slovakia could be a topic for further research. The story of Swedish efforts to shelter a select group of Jews from the Holocaust has merely been opened but has

not been concluded. Nonetheless, it helps to supply part of the context for the historiography of the Holocaust.

Post-war silence

The common perception in academic circles has been that the Jewish community in Slovakia was never part of the diplomatic negotiation between Slovakia and Sweden. However, the new evidence of Swedish attempts to help the Jews of Slovakia is remarkable. Nonetheless, there has been no research on Sweden's involvement in helping the Slovak Jews in spite of the great number of sources available and of new researchers dealing with Jewish communities in Europe during the Holocaust. Thus questions still remain. As a result of the authors' focus on the new documents available in the Slovak archives, this article cannot offer any hypotheses regarding lack of research in Sweden, the United States and the former USSR. Several hypotheses could explain the lack of research on Swedish attempts to assist Slovak Jewry:

1. The research of the Holocaust in Slovakia was limited or almost non-existent during the period 1948–89. Once the archives in Czechoslovakia (later Slovakia) were 'opened', researchers focused on material research and on more dominant and important topics which, led many scholars to leave 'subordinated' topics aside.
2. One of the main actors in the Slovak–Swedish negotiations – the Slovak Consul in Stockholm, Bohumil Pissko – remained silent. He emigrated from Czechoslovakia shortly after the Second World War, most probably because he could be persecuted by his own state as an eminent diplomat in the Slovak Republic during the war.

3. Possibly there are no survivors who were saved thanks to these acts, or if there were any survivors, they have never found a public voice and have never been heard or simply remained silent.
4. While the success of Swedish aid during the Holocaust has been well documented, the unfortunate story of Swedish attempts to help the Slovak Jewish community was not successful, which may explain why this story has remained untold for so long.

As Leni Yahil has noted, the case of Denmark is usually seen as 'evidence of humanity' (Yahil 1990: 574). Obviously, the rescue of Denmark's Jews and of the Jews of Budapest needs to be a successful story to be able to stand as evidence of human goodness. What about those rescue plans which did not succeed? Are they not 'good' enough to show humanitarian effort? These questions could be answered only by scholarly discussion and further research on the topic. The evidence in this article speaks against the customary assumption of Sweden's non-involvement in the situation of Jews in Slovakia. Moreover, the difficulties of complicated conditions of post-war memory in Slovakia removed the relevant Slovak diplomat from the narratives. Furthermore, Pissko was unable to take part in the national post-war narrative. The story of Pissko and Sweden was not attractive or required by the official Czechoslovak socialist historiography. The forty-year-long ideology of socialism silenced many historians, and witnesses such as Pissko. The exceptional-ity of the Swedish attempts, assisted by the acts of the Slovak diplomat to save the Jewish community in Slovakia during a time of war, was less predetermined than Slovak national memory expected after the war. We believe we have at least helped to open up the topic of Swedish intervention in the tragedy of the

Jews of Slovakia. Thus we invite scholars to fill the gap in research on this topic within a Swedish or European context.

Conclusion

The evidence adduced in this article does not speak against existing research but rather contributes to a challenging discussion and acts as an appeal for further research. The archival material based on diplomatic correspondence and communication within the Slovak ministries offers information that in part confirms our knowledge of Sweden's attempts to assist European Jewry. More importantly, this material expands the knowledge of the Holocaust in general. The common perception in Slovakia is that Sweden had no specific connection with Slovakia on the matter of the Jewish community. Moreover, the general knowledge about the Slovak diplomat, Bohumil Pissko, is deficient in every sense. A general assumption has been that Sweden never approached the Slovak government to exclude some Jews living in Slovakia from the deportations or to request a halt to the deportation of Jews in Slovakia in general, most probably because there has been no testimony from any survivors of these negotiations.

The Swedish rescue attempts represented by Swedish diplomacy, particularly in the person of Archbishop Eidem thanks to his contact to the Slovak diplomat Pissko, challenge a Swedish Holocaust historiography in which Sweden is regarded as at best minimally active in rescue attempts aimed at Slovak Jewry. At the same time Slovak Holocaust historiography is challenged by the untold story of Pissko who played an enormous role in the plan of saving the remaining Jewish community in Slovakia. Finally, the documents of the Slovak ministries suggest that Slovakia, after obtaining requests from Sweden, started

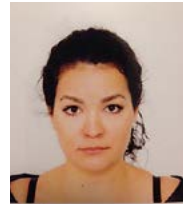
a major investigation to find and protect those Jews who were to be transferred to Sweden. Another finding from the official documents exchanged between Sweden and Slovakia is the large-scale Swedish plan to transfer the remaining Jewish community from Slovakia in 1944.

Had the military and political situation developed in a different direction, a full rescue operation would have become possible. It can remain only an assumption that the changing fortunes of war and the situation in Slovakia dissipated the chance to save the remaining Jewish community and caused the planned actions to be abandoned. The exceptionality of the Slovak–Swedish intervention in the deportations of the Jewish community is startling for both Swedish and Slovak national memory but also for Holocaust historiography. ■

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