

[Hungarian Jews vote to stay away from events marking Holocaust Memorial Year](#)

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Hungary's main Jewish umbrella organization voted on Sunday to boycott official Holocaust commemorations this year unless the role of locals in the Nazi deportation and killing of Hungarian Jews is made clear. The Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities (Mazsihisz) decided to stay away from events marking the 70th anniversary of the deportation of 437,000 Jews from Hungary to the Nazi death camps.



András Heisler (standing) and other Mazsihisz leaders vote in Sunday's assembly

President András Heisler said Mazsihisz objected to plans for a Holocaust monument and memorial center in Budapest as well as the appointment of a new history institute director who seemed to excuse the Holocaust deportations. "If we do not get a real answer from the government on these issues, our decision will become final," he told journalists, adding he expected a reply within a few days.

A lack of consultation about the projects had upset Jewish communities, Heisler said, adding: "The unity that Hungarian Jews showed in that respect is unprecedented since the war."

Peter Feldmajer, Mazsihisz vice-president, said, "We will not attend the commemorations organized by the government in the future until the position of the government changes. The memorial year should be an open and real memorial, not whitewash the Hungarian fascist regime."

In a letter read out at the Mazsihisz General Assembly meeting on Sunday, World Jewish Congress President Ronald S. Lauder said the WJC would "support whatever decision

Mazsihisz sees fit to take in this respect." Lauder also expressed hope that the "controversial issues can be resolved by dialogue between Mazsihisz and the Hungarian government."

Almost seven decades since the end of World War II, anti-Semitism remains a sore point in Hungary, whose 120,000-strong Jewish community is one of the largest in Europe. Jewish leaders feel the country has not fully faced up to its wartime past.

The government of Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who [at the World Jewish Congress Plenary Assembly in May 2013 pledged zero tolerance for anti-Semitism](#), is proposing the installation of a monument that depicts all of Hungary as a victim of the German occupation, which took place on 19 March 1944. However, Hungary was a close ally of Nazi Germany prior to this event, and deportations of Jews took place even before German troops entered the country. Germany only occupied the country after discovering that Budapest was secretly negotiating with the Allies to surrender.

Mazsihisz has also criticized an official memorial center under construction at a Budapest train station that was once a hub for the deportations to the death camps. It argues that the center plays down Hungarian collaboration in the Holocaust. The Jewish community also wants the government to remove the director of a new history institute because he called a 1941 deportation of tens of thousands of Jews "a policy procedure for foreign nationals."

Hungarian Jews say Budapest had stripped Jews of nearly all their rights even before the Nazi occupation. "It wasn't the Germans who locked me up in the ghetto, but Hungarian soldiers and fascists," Mazsihisz Executive Director Gusztav Zoltai, a Holocaust survivor, was quoted by 'Reuters' as saying.

Jobbik plans to hold rally at former synagogue

Meanwhile, the Hungarian government defended the right of the extreme-right Jobbik party to hold a political rally in a former synagogue in the city of Esztergom, despite protests from Mazsihisz and other Jewish groups.

The International Communications Office told the 'Jerusalem Post' that the government "does not comment on party rallies" and that Jobbik had a legitimate right to hold its rally wherever it wanted. "Official parties have the right to hold events at venues where the owners of the venue allow them to. In this case, the community center [which was a synagogue until 1945] in Esztergom is owned by the municipality," the government spokesman said.

Mazsihisz said last week that it intended to block Jobbik from holding the rally by physical force, if necessary.