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“A Convinced Anti-Communist and Rabid Zionist”

Simon Wiesenthal through the Lens of Hungarian State Security Service Reports during the Kádár Era

Abstract

This study focuses on Simon Wiesenthal, the former head of the Zentrum für jüdische historische Dokumentation (Jewish Historical Documentation Centre), and his relations with Hungary during the Kádár era. Based on original and previously unpublished sources from the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security (ÁBTL) and other repositories, this article examines the attitude of János Kádár’s regime toward Wiesenthal. Wiesenthal, who was under surveillance by the Hungarian State Security Services from the 1960s until the fall of communism, attracted the attention of political decision-makers not only in Hungary but also in other Eastern European countries as a leading figure in the Austrian Jewish community, though his activities aimed at exposing and bringing Nazis to justice soon came to the fore. Wiesenthal, who was also familiar with the activities of former Nazis in the countries of the Eastern Bloc, became a symbol of a new Austrian Jewish identity, but he also became more universally significant. Eastern European state-socialist countries would have preferred him to focus solely on “capitalist countries”, but Wiesenthal’s universal quest for justice made no distinction between Eastern and Western European citizens, and therefore between Eastern and Western crimes and criminals. These observations were generally expressed in the rhetoric of official anti-Zionist propaganda and the ideological language of the Eastern European regimes – in relation to Jews and Israel – which was significantly strengthened after the Six-Day War (1967) and the Polish anti-Zionist purges (1968).

One of the most famous “Nazi hunters” of all time, the legendary Austrian Simon Wiesenthal, himself a Holocaust survivor, was the target of several Eastern European secret service agencies over the years. He was the subject of both more general surveillance and of operations that specifically targeted him. The pages that follow examine how Hungarian State Security Services viewed Wiesenthal: was he a target of central surveillance, or was he merely monitored on an ad hoc basis by various lower-level departments? Furthermore, given Hungary’s official policy toward the Jewish community and Zionism, was there any guiding principle or even ideology behind these surveillance activities? These aspects have not been addressed in the existing scholarship on Wiesenthal; thus, the study is pioneering and lays the ground-

work for further research, drawing on and fully incorporating the records of the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security (Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára, ÁBTL), which houses the records of the Hungarian State Security Agency and Political Police.

Of the vast amount of documents the Hungarian State Security Service produced during the state-socialist period, there are three types of documents that mention Wiesenthal. The first is documents related to the state security agency's monitoring of foreign Zionist and Jewish organisations (there was a separate dossier entitled "Gemeinde", for example, which dealt with the Jewish community in Vienna). Related to this corpus are individual agent files in which agents (one of whom was in the leadership of the Vienna Jewish community) monitored and reported on movements related to Hungary in Vienna and Budapest, and in some cases, Wiesenthal was monitored in relation to the surveillance of someone else. Additionally, there are sources that monitored Israeli intelligence and reported on agent activities concerning Israel's activities in Europe. It is important to note that no separate file was maintained for Wiesenthal; the reports about him are embedded within existing files. The relevant records are filed under the categories of operational and work files.

The post-war Hungarian State Security Service's interest in Zionism and Simon Wiesenthal developed only somewhat slowly, and in fact, only a fraction of the many reports it produced on Austria and Jewish or Zionist movements dealt with him specifically. These reports can and should be interpreted within the context of the Cold War standoff between East and West, with the state security services of socialist countries (including the Hungarian Security Agency) motivated chiefly by their desire to gather information about what was happening in the West while also being interested in the aftermath of the Holocaust, which was otherwise concealed at home, i.e., in Hungary. The reasons for this suppression were manifold, but in general, the Jewish cause was seen as being particularistic, whereas the perpetrators and their descendants were viewed as fully integrated into Hungarian society. If the Hungarian communist government had addressed the Holocaust during this period, it would have been forced to deal with many unpleasant issues. At some point in the 1960s, however, a gradual change began to take place, and slowly, traces of Holocaust remembrance began to appear both in literature and in the state-controlled press in the country.

To explain the attitude of the Hungarian State Security Service to Wiesenthal, it is necessary to examine the relationship between the Hungarian state (and its security apparatus) and local Jewry after 1953. I consider 1953 to be a turning point because it marks the end of the harshest period of so-called communism in Hungary. Because there was little active exploratory work on Zionist affairs between 1953 and 1961, it seemed appropriate to organise this research from a new perspective. During the (early)

post-Stalinist period, new files, “group dossiers”, were opened to collect the results of systematic surveillance. On the one hand, there was a charge to gather information on Professor Sándor Scheiber, the prominent director of the Budapest-based Rabbinical Seminary and other Jewish leaders in Hungary who were considered unreliable; on the other hand, with equal vigor, agents were called to investigate youth groups in Jewish religious communities, which were considered operational “targets” of “Zionist propaganda”.

Within the Jewish community, where the Orthodox and Neolog factions had been forced merge, informers, often drawn from among the religious and secular leaders of the community, also sought to prevent the formation of groups sympathetic to Israel. Although the Jewish community had already been put under surveillance in the years immediately following the 1956 revolution, this activity intensified and became more systematic in 1960. In the early 1960s, the Soviet intelligence service asked its counterparts in “friendly countries” (all official relations with other Eastern European socialist countries were described as “friendly”) to “compile and submit to the State Security Council a summary report on the most characteristic trends in the Israeli intelligence service’s activities against the people’s democracies and the Soviet Union”. In its reply to this “friendly inquiry”, the Hungarian Secret Service already highlighted the nodes to which intelligence activities in connection with Hungarian Jewry should be directed: the Israeli embassy; an individual – Professor Sándor Scheiber, director of the Budapest Rabbinical Seminary; and the foreign relations activities and finances of the Jewish community.¹ The Soviet request accelerated events, as from 1961 onward, the staff of the Political Investigation Department of the Interior Ministry’s Political Investigation Division (Interior Ministry), subdivision II/5-c, in coordination with several subdivisions, began its intensive investigative work.

At this point it may be instructive to present a few examples of how the Hungarian state’s anti-Zionist campaign operated in the post-1956 period. The year 1956 was a turning point in Hungarian history in every respect. After the revolution, which finally put an end to Stalinism in Hungary, the new General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party János Kádár learned – even though the beginning of the era was marked by purges, imprisonments, and executions – that he had to make some kind of compromise.

Between 1957 and the end of 1961, the state security agency did not deal systematically with what it deemed Zionist cases, although the Israeli embassy was under surveillance. In 1962, a subdivision of the Interior Ministry created a dossier entitled “Zionist organisations” because “According to information from our own

1 Historical Archives of the State Security Services (ÁBTL), Budapest, “Zionists engaged in hostile activities”, O-17169.

and friendly acquaintances, Israeli and international Zionist organisations are actively gathering intelligence information about us and using their representations as a front for Israeli and Western intelligence organisations.”² Large Jewish organisations dealing with Israel, along with Jewish bodies that were only indirectly linked to Israel, such as the World Federation of Hungarian Jews or the Masonic B’nai B’rith, were characterised as Zionist in this document. The report also found that Zionism was also present in the “eastern countries”, particularly among people who had been harmed by the nationalisation of businesses. The Hungarian Residency in Tel Aviv was also involved in the “fight” against Zionism, and it viewed the monitoring of reciprocal travelers as a means of controlling Israeli interests.

After the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, however, János Kádár’s Hungary, on Soviet orders, severed its relations with the Jewish state and closed its diplomatic missions. The countries of the Soviet bloc, with the exception of the somewhat renegade Romania, waged a fiercely anti-Zionist and anti-Israel campaign. In Poland,³ the remaining Jews were forced to emigrate. In Hungary – the only country in the region where there was a large and integrated Jewish community, although Jewish religious life was under close state supervision – no anti-Zionist campaign was conducted; indeed, the top party and state leadership did not want one. In a speech to the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party’s (MSZMP) Political Committee delivered on 13 June 1967, Kádár made it clear that while he held Israel responsible for the war, he did not want to make a “racial issue” of the matter.

On the one hand, the severing of relations with Israel meant that Hungarian State Security Agency lost one of its domestic targets; and on the other hand, those who wished to maintain relations with Israel had been delegitimised (although no specific law was passed on this), and from this point of view, the state had even greater capacity to persecute Jewish communal activity – under the pretext of anti-Zionism. The task of monitoring the activities of the Zionists was also partly delegated to Hungarian embassies abroad. For example, in the early 1970s, the Ministry of the Interior (with the help of the Hungarian Embassy in the United States) prepared a report on the activities of the Zionist lobby in the United States. This type of surveillance also covered Hungarian diplomatic missions abroad and agents embedded in certain Jewish organisations. From then on, attention was focused on major international Jewish organisations, and (where they could, mainly with the help of agents working in Hungarian embassies) the Hungarian Security Service also monitored the activities of Israeli embassies and reported on their possible Jewish contacts in Hungary.

2 ABTL 3.2.5.O-8-301/1, “Tivadar Herzl” – Zionist organizations”, 9 May 1962, Ministry of the Interior, Subdivision II/3. Signed by Lieutenant Colonel János Vértes (Deputy Head of Division) and Lieutenant Colonel Endre Tóth (Deputy Head of Division).

3 Simon Wiesenthal, *Anti-Jewish Agitation in Poland: A Documentary Report* (Vogel, 1969).

Wiesenthal's post-war life took a turn shortly before 1964, as he moved with his family from Linz to Vienna in 1960 and, encouraged by Eichmann's capture, reopened the Jewish Historical Documentation Centre (now in the capital) in 1961. Austrian national political life dominated by the Austrian People's Party and the rapprochement between the great powers (the meeting between Soviet Party Secretary Nikita Khrushchev and US President John F. Kennedy was held in Vienna in June 1961) gave new impetus to the possibility of finding and justly punishing Nazi criminals.

The East Bloc's Israel Policy

Relations between Israel and the Soviet Bloc were cool and then were severed altogether in 1967, with the exception of Israel's relations with Romania, which later even attempted to mediate between the Palestinians and Israelis. The Cold War situation, the rivalry between the two superpowers, and the Arab-Israeli wars and conflicts determined the nature of this relationship. From the 1960s onward, Israel was considered a pro-American state, while the Soviets (including Hungary) supported Arab states, especially those inclined to accept a form of socialism.

After the Six-Day War in 1967, there were anti-Zionist campaigns in the Eastern Bloc countries, which resulted in, for example, the emigration of the remaining Polish Jews from Poland. The Soviet Union provided military assistance to Arab states (mainly Egypt, Syria, and Iran) and the Palestine Liberation Organization, and Hungary did too. The Arab countries' request for military aid was discussed at the Politburo (PB - Political Committee of the MSZMP) meeting on 18 July 1967, and despite the more cautious position of Kádár, military equipment was shipped from Hungary to these countries.⁴ During the Yom Kippur War five years later, direct requests for aid from the Arab states and the Soviet pressure reinforcing these intensified. The MSZMP PB meeting, followed by the smaller cabinet of the Council of Ministers, the Defense Committee, did not discuss the shipments of (military) aid until 30 November 1973, and only then did the deputy military president of the National Planning Office Ervin Jávör announce that the defense ministries of Iraq, Syria, and Egypt had requested military technology from Hungary. Based on a February 1974 meeting of the Defense Committee, we now know that Hungary exported approximately ninety T54 tanks, twelve MIG-21 F13 fighter jets, and three million rubles worth of

⁴ On 20 July 1967, the Hungarian government approved aid to the United Arab Republic (UAR) and the Syrian Arab Republic with its decision No. 3227/1967. Budapest undertook to supply military technology free of charge: 100 million forints to Egypt and 50 million forints to Syria. Pál Germuska, "Magyar katonai segítségnyújtás az arab országoknak az 1973-as Jom Kippuri háború idején", in *Hadi és más nevezetes történetek*, ed. Tanulmányok Veszprémy László tiszteletére (HM Hadtörténeti Intézet és Múzeum, 2018), 152-156.

new weapons and ammunition during the Yom Kippur War (due to the initiative of the Soviet Union). The financial basis for this aid was provided by a number of previous loan agreements. Throughout this period, Jewish emigration was generally prohibited, and Jewish organisations were monitored in relation to both the Arab-Israel conflict and emigration.

The Beginning

Simon Wiesenthal, who was nicknamed the “Nazi hunter”, became the subject of Hungarian State Security Service reports in 1964. While it is possible that similar reports had been produced earlier, it seems that Wiesenthal reached the threshold for attracting the interest of the security agencies at the same time his public activity was significantly intensifying. Wiesenthal, who barely existed in the public consciousness and media of the Hungarian Socialist Republic in the Kádár era (since his name appeared only very rarely in the general Hungarian and Jewish press during this period), was very much on the radar of the state security apparatus, although he was by no means the individual they were most interested in. Regarding the actual focus of their surveillance, Wiesenthal’s name was most frequently mentioned in Hungarian State Security Service documents in connection with its monitoring of Zionist and/or Jewish organisations in Austria.

This also means, of course, that what we think of as the relationship between Wiesenthal and the state security services of Hungary is partly a type of construct, since the Nazi hunter’s activities were not a specific target of observation but rather played a tangential role in the broader enquiries of the security agency. The Viennese engineer was under surveillance not only by Hungarian State Security but also by the security services of other socialist countries too (these certainly included – based on my research – Poland and Czechoslovakia), since he refused to shape his activities around Soviet considerations.⁵ To take the Polish example alone: the Polish state security service kept an eye on Wiesenthal for decades. Between 1963 and 1974, this operation was code-named “Duna” (Dunaj), and Wiesenthal himself was code-named “Izmir”. The Polish security service files contain long lists of people with whom Wiesenthal was in contact and the places he visited. The Polish intelligence agency surrounded Wiesenthal with a network of spies, many of whom were Holocaust survivors.⁶

Wiesenthal’s post-war life had changed quite significantly by the time the Hungarian Security Service began monitoring him in 1964, as he had moved with his family from Linz to Vienna in

5 Tom Segev, *Simon Wiesenthal: The Life and Legends* (Doubleday, 2010), 227–228.

6 Segev, *Simon Wiesenthal*, 184–186, 227–228, 293–294. Stankowski’s comprehensive biography of Wiesenthal (in Polish) does not deal with this issue. Witold Stankowski, *Szymon Wiesenthal: biografia* (Wydawnictwo “Książka i Wiedza”, 2009).

1960 and founded the Jewish Historical Documentation Centre there a year later.⁷ Austrian national political life was dominated by the Austrian People's Party, and the rapprochement between the great powers (the meeting between Soviet Party Secretary Nikita Khrushchev and US President Kennedy took place in Vienna in June 1961) seemed to expand the possibilities of finding and justly punishing Nazi criminals.

Wiesenthal had previously collaborated with the American and Israeli authorities in the search for war criminals and had been involved in the (unsuccessful) attempt to capture Eichmann by Israeli agents in 1948. In 1953, he informed the Israeli Consul General in Vienna, Aryeh Eshel, that Eichmann was hiding in Argentina, and the Israeli secret service eventually managed to apprehend the former high-ranking Nazi in 1960. Although Isser Harel, the chief of Mossad (1952–1963) who masterminded Eichmann's capture, would later vehemently deny Wiesenthal's role in it, the latter undoubtedly contributed to Eichmann's arrest, according to Tom Segev's research.⁸

A Brief Biography of Simon Wiesenthal

Although Wiesenthal's life has been well documented, what follows is a brief biographical sketch that highlights core elements relevant for this analysis. The founder of the Jewish Historical Documentation Centre in Vienna became famous primarily for his pursuit of former Nazis. He captured more than one hundred war criminals, assisting in the capture of Adolf Eichmann, and he also helped apprehend SS officer Franz Murer, the organiser of the Vilnius ghetto.⁹

Wiesenthal was born on 31 December 1908, in Buczacz, a town that is now in Ukraine.¹⁰ When Stalin's Soviet Union and Nazi Germany signed a non-aggression pact in 1939, agreeing to divide Poland, worse times came for Wiesenthal too. The struggle against all forms of totalitarian dictatorship was very important to Wiesenthal, and it was in the city of his birth that he became acquainted with the Soviet type. His stepfather was arrested by the NKVD and died in prison, and his stepbrother was killed. Wiesenthal closed his business and found work as a mechanic in a factory. Later, when the Germans occupied Lvov in 1941, he spent months in the Janowska labor camp near the city, after which he and his wife were sent to another forced labor camp. The plan and practice of exterminating the Jews affected Wiesenthal most directly: in August 1942, his mother was deported to the Bełżec death camp. By September, he and his wife had lost most of their family.

7 Segev, *Simon Wiesenthal*, 30.

8 *Ibid.*, 101–102.

9 *Ibid.*

10 See: <https://wiesenthal.org/about/about-simon-wiesenthal>.

Wiesenthal escaped from Janowska in October 1943 (immediately before the prisoners were murdered). However, in June 1944, he was recaptured and taken back to the camp, but he was fortunate in that the SS guards at the camp, anticipating the outcome of the war, had decided not to kill the remaining prisoners. Instead, inmates were herded westward, passing through Plaszow (a suburb south of Krakow), Gross-Rosen (now Rogoźnica, Poland), and Buchenwald, ending up in Mauthausen. Wiesenthal was weak and emaciated when he was liberated by the US Army on 11 May 1945.

Immediately after the war, Wiesenthal decided to help the Americans punish former Nazi criminals. He helped collect relevant documents for the US Army, which had a department responsible for dealing with war criminals. At the end of 1945, Simon and his wife were happily reunited (although they had both believed the other was dead), and in 1946, their daughter Pauline was born.

The materials found by Wiesenthal were used in the post-war trials of war criminals in the American zone. In 1947, Wiesenthal's relationship with the US Army ended, and he founded the Jewish Historical Documentation Centre in Linz with a dozen volunteers. The goal was to collect evidence for future trials. As the Soviet Union and the United States lost interest in war criminals and trials, Wiesenthal closed his office in Linz in 1954 and handed over the documents, with the exception of the Eichmann dossier, to the Yad Vashem Archives. Wiesenthal played a significant role in Eichmann's capture. There was cooperation between some Eastern European countries and Israel in the Eichmann case (Hungary, for example, handed over filtered documents), but in general, this type of collaboration did not call into question their strained relationship with Israel.

Wiesenthal as the Subject of State Surveillance

In 1938, there were approximately 192,000 Jews living in Austria, but many emigrated after the German annexation of Austria, and their numbers declined. After the Holocaust, the Allied powers concentrated the surviving Jews in Displaced Persons (DP) camps in Austria. Those Holocaust survivors who had nowhere to return to after the war stayed in the DP camps (one of which was in Linz), and they were assisted by groups of volunteers from Palestine, among others. By 1955, there were between 250,000 and 300,000 displaced Jews living in Austria. About 3,000 of them would remain in the country and helped form the new post-war Austrian Jewish community. During the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, about 200,000 Hungarians fled to the West, including approximately 15,000 to 20,000 Jews. Seventy thousand Hungarians remained in Austria, including numerous Jews, many of whom joined local communities (*kehilloth*) there. The

Hungarian State Security Agency was able to exploit some of their members for several reasons: they were offered various benefits and many had family living in Hungary through whom they could exert pressure.

Wiesenthal's earlier investigation of Eichmann was not, however, the motivation for the Hungarian security service's surveillance operations; their interest in the Viennese engineer was much more local and regional in nature. Wiesenthal was a person of interest to state security services as someone who had organised a "special party" in the Viennese religious community elections (the first report mentioning him is dated 19 May, 1964 and may be found in the file on the "Gemeinde", i.e., the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Wien - IKG - the official Viennese religious community in Vienna). The Hungarian State Security Service was interested in, among many other things, political relations in the IKG and the influence Austrian political parties and the Israeli embassy had on the community. They were also interested in gauging the strength of Zionist sentiment among the leadership. Austria was not seen as a friendly country (it was considered a neutral state), and Hungary, a country in which the Soviets had an interest, wanted information on everything it could get its hands on.

The attitude of the Hungarian State Security apparatus concerning the Wiesenthal case cannot be understood without considering the history of Hungarian-Israeli relations during this time. Hungarian-Israeli relations had been somewhat normalised in the 1960s (until the Soviet-initiated break in 1967) after some minor skirmishes (disputes concerning such issues as the "smuggling" of Israeli diplomats from Budapest, the expulsion of Israeli diplomats, the arrest of a Hungarian actor in Israel, and the money paid by Israel to Hungary in exchange for permitting emigration). The diplomats sent to Budapest by the Israeli side included a wide range of people, from left-wing kibbutzers to journalists. While the Arab affairs section of the Hungarian foreign affairs apparatus was not very keen to build closer relations with Israel, others (especially in the business community) would have welcomed them.

An interesting phase in the relations between the two countries occurred when the Hungarian and Central and Eastern European countries took positions on the Eichmann trial. Hungary refused to treat the case as a "Jewish issue" due to the specific instructions given by János Kádár, the long-serving General Secretary of the MSZMP.¹¹ Following Soviet guidelines, the Hungarian leadership initially claimed that Eichmann should be extradited to the country where he had committed his crimes. However, the plan, which was revised on the basis of Kádár's instructions and submitted to the MSZMP Political Committee, was later with-

¹¹ See András Kovács, ed., *Communism's Jewish Question: Jewish Issues in Communist Archives* (De Gruyter, 2017), 77–84.

drawn, reflecting the Soviet position. After consulting with other socialist countries (Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the Soviet Union), these countries also agreed that, despite Tel Aviv's diplomatic request, they would not allow representatives of the Israeli special investigation team into their countries to obtain evidence and witness statements. Instead, Hungary undertook to collect the material itself and forward it to the Israeli side. At the same time, this material was also suitable for supporting the Soviet bloc's policy against West Germany, and the documents were selected accordingly.

At the end of 1961, a previously non-existent publisher, Pannonia, published a source book entitled *Eichmann in Hungary* in both English and German. This collection of documents, which had never been published in Hungarian, was edited by Jenő Lévai (1892-1983), the best-known Holocaust expert in the country in first the three years after the Second World War and a journalist and historian who had been silenced after 1948. Suddenly invited to come out of the woodwork, Lévai was the only person the authorities considered "duly prepared" to be allowed to testify at the trial in Jerusalem, which began on 11 April 1961, lasted more than four months, and ended with Eichmann's execution.

The intensification of Hungarian-Israeli relations was tempered by the fact that (West) German Chancellor Ludwig Erhard and Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol agreed in May 1965 to establish full diplomatic relations. This agreement, which was adopted by the Knesset in March 1965, was the most significant event in relations between the Bundesrepublik and Israel since the 1952 Compensation Agreement. The establishment of diplomatic relations between the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and Israel was based on the German desire to assume full responsibility for Germany's past acts against the Jews and the desire of the FRG to participate in the new Europe.

The improvement in West German-Israeli relations was deeply troubling for the socialist countries of the Eastern Bloc. The Hungarian State Security Services, for example, constantly tried (often successfully) to persuade Hungarian Jews to make anti-(West)German statements. They also tried to lodge protests with the Israeli embassy in Hungary about the upturn in relations in order to put moral pressure on the Israelis, thus further reducing the embassy's already limited influence on Hungarian Jewry. The aim was to place a moral stigma on the Federal Republic, which was regarded as an ideological and political opponent of the Soviet Union, by using propaganda to portray it as the successor to Nazi Germany, where former Nazis were once again able to occupy high office.

Throughout the socialist era, the Hungarian State Security apparatus monitored Israeli diplomats, tapped their phones, read their letters and watched their movements. Wiesenthal was among those considered by them to be a "man" of the Israeli services (especially Mossad), an assumption which had some truth to

it, as according to Tom Segev's book, Wiesenthal was on the organisation's payroll for several years after the Second World War (under the pseudonym "Theocrat") and engaged in what it called "diversionary activities", targeting the socialist democracies of Eastern Europe. Wiesenthal was credited by the Hungarian Internal Security Service as one of Eichmann's "captors" and was regarded as a "big name" (in a report on the chief rabbi of Vienna, Dr Akiba/Béla Eisenberg from 3 November 1964).¹² These two developments were in fact connected. The security service reports established that key figures in the Viennese Jewish religious establishment such as Ernst Feldsberg (1894-1970) - who was the leader of Vienna's Jewish community from 1963 - and Wilhelm Krell (1902-1973), who was cultivating closer relations with the Viennese government and others were alarmed by Wiesenthal's breakthrough and regarded him as a hostile person.

The Hungarian State Security Service engaged two persons to collect information: a respected Hungarian rabbi (Chief Rabbi Dr László Salgó [1910-1985], alias "Agent Sárvári"), who was also familiar with Austrian affairs, as well as another leading functionary of the religious community ("Agent Xavér"), the codename for museum director Ilona Benoschofsky (1913-1997), who in 1962 had overthrown her predecessor Fülöp Grünwald (1887-1964). This turned out to be relatively easy, and they did not even have to go to Vienna because the chief rabbi of the city, the aforementioned Akiba (Béla) Eisenberg (1909-1983), had Hungarian origins, so he visited Budapest on several occasions and had good contacts with official Hungarian Jewry. However, Eisenberg was no longer as sympathetic to the Hungarian Interior Ministry because of his Zionist leanings.

So, between 1964 and 1965, Simon Wiesenthal gained considerable influence among the elite of the Jewish community in Vienna, and this prompted the Hungarian State Security Service to investigate him through its contacts there (many Hungarian Jews, including members and leaders of religious communities, lived in the Austrian capital). However, the Hungarian State Security Services - at least according to the reports I have seen - did not link him to the Eichmann case, nor, for example, to the Silberbauer case (a much less important matter), which began in 1964; moreover, his name did not come up in connection with similar cases. While during the Kádár era the Eichmann case was dealt with at the highest level and Hungarian journalists covered the trial, Wiesenthal's name was not mentioned in the coverage.

Another aspect of state security surveillance was more global in nature. In reports prepared for the Hungarian Interior Ministry, Wiesenthal's Zentrum für jüdische Historische Dokumentation and Wiesenthal himself were accused not only of being under the "direct control" of the Israeli embassy in Vienna and of work-

¹² ÁBTL, 3.2.5 O-8-301/1, "Herzl Tivadar - Cionista szervezetek", "Report on Zionist Diversionary Activity", 9 November 1971.

ing for Mossad but also of being involved, together with other Western secret services, in an “anti-communist campaign against the socialist countries”. This accusation continued to be leveled at Wiesenthal until the end of the period of surveillance (1980s), while his position – both in Austria and abroad – was strengthened by Israel’s resounding victory in the Six-Day War. Wiesenthal, who did not remain silent during the 1968 anti-Zionist campaign in Poland, also spoke out against former Nazis and criticised their socio-political reintegration into communist countries.¹³ This is a recurring motif in state security reports: Wiesenthal wanted to expose and prosecute former Nazis in capitalist countries and socialist countries.¹⁴ This did not fit the self-image that the socialist regimes had created for themselves and liked to promote to the world, and it also contradicted one of the themes of their propaganda that held that former Nazis were at large only in one of the German states, the Federal Republic of Germany. And that’s not all: in August 1978, for example, Wiesenthal demanded that Sweden not take part in the 1980 Moscow Olympics (which had, in any case, been boycotted by many countries because of the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan) until the fate of Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who saved many Jewish Hungarians but who later disappeared in the Soviet Union, had been clarified.

Returning to the 1960s, in February 1965, it was reported that Wiesenthal (via the work of the agent “Xaver”, who was conducting surveillance of the famous London-based Hungarian Jewish writer and journalist Pál Ignóty among others) wanted to enter into a coalition with the “Zionists” in the IKG.¹⁵ An undated report – but one which can be dated to 1965 – on “the activities of Zionist organisations in Europe” mentions Wiesenthal as a figure in the Joint Distribution Committee’s (JDC) efforts to expedite Jewish emigration from Linz to Israel.¹⁶ This source seems problematic because by 1961, the number of Jews in Linz was very low – less than two hundred persons.¹⁷ Indeed, the number was so low it was not published in the census.

The report distinguishes between the JDC and the work of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), which sometimes opposed emigration. Agent “Filder John”, in his summary for the BM (Interior Ministry) III/I Group Headquarters, reported that Wiesenthal, as owner of the newspaper *Der Freiheitskämpfer*, was “investigating public figures and functionaries in Hungary who had collaborated with the Nazis before and during World War II, and had participated in mass murders and anti-Jewish actions

13 Segev, *Simon Wiesenthal*, 225–227.

14 ÁBTL, 3.2.5 O-8-301/1, “Report on Zionist Diversionary Activity”, 9 November 1971.

15 ÁBTL, M-37478, “Xavér”, Working dossier, 1 February 1965.

16 ÁBTL, 3.2.5 O-8-301/1, “Herzl Tivadar – Zionist organisations, the activities of Zionist organisations in Europe”.

17 Michael John, “Gebrochene Kontinuität – Die Kultusgemeinde Linz nach 1945”, in *Jüdische Gemeinden: Kontinuitäten und Brüche. Studien zur Geschichte der Juden*, ed. Eleonore Lapin (Philo Verlagsleges, 2002), 139–178, 28.

and those who were members of the Arrow Cross party. With the information he has obtained, Wiesenthal intends to publish revelations.” (I found no trace of these claims reported in the Hungarian state media.) The agent was subsequently instructed to monitor Wiesenthal’s activities.¹⁸

The attention paid to Wiesenthal was reflected in a press review conducted by the Ministry of Interior in 1969 (a collection of articles). This can be found in a Hungarian State Security dossier called “Gemeinde” (“Organizations of the Zionist movement in Austria”). The collection of foreign press reports, as well as the management of the whole dossier, was carried out by the Hungarian Interior Ministry’s Department II/I-2, which dealt with so-called foreign interception. The collation of foreign press reports served the purposes of state security, and they were never made public.

The first item in the dossier was a German-language article about Wiesenthal in which the Nazi hunter, at a press conference in Vienna, accused the initiators and perpetrators of the (officially anti-Zionist) persecution of Jews in Poland in 1968 of having been fascists during the Nazi era.¹⁹ In the spring of 1969, Wiesenthal’s various disputes – published in the Austrian press – had already been translated and made known to the Hungarian State Security Service. Similarly, the Hungarian security apparatus was aware of his clashes with the Polish authorities, who stated that they would not be pursuing Nazi war criminals on the basis of Wiesenthal’s documentation.²⁰ In July 1969, the first Hungarian State Security Service summary of foreign media reportage and articles, as well as reports dealing specifically with Wiesenthal was published.²¹ The summary focused mainly on the debate about Poland and on articles critical of Wiesenthal published in the weekly German radical right-wing paper the *National-Zeitung*. According to a November 1969 report, Wiesenthal was in contact with Ableitinger, a high-ranking official in the Austrian State Police, who was at that point being discussed by the Austrian Parliament’s Committee on Counterintelligence.²² Wiesenthal, the report claimed, received regular information from him about various citizens. According to the document entitled “On the relationship between international Zionist leaders and Austrian police officers accused of espionage”, Ableitinger and his associates within the Austrian State Police were in contact with the Israeli embassy in Vienna, which was providing them with information.²³ In this source, Wiesenthal was named as a police official: a claim I found no evidence to support. In any case, the text is revealing

18 ÁBTL, 3.2.3.Mt-69 “Filder John”, Working file, Budapest, 25 March 1965.

19 ÁBTL, 3.2.5.O-8-317/1, “Gemeinde”, Organizations of the Zionist movement in Austria, 18 March 1969. Wiesenthal (allegedly) had incriminating data on 48 such persons.

20 ÁBTL, 3.2.5.O-8-317/1, “Gemeinde”, 22 March 1969.

21 ÁBTL, 3.2.5.O-8-317/1, “Gemeinde”, 30 July 1969.

22 ÁBTL, 3.2.5.O-8-317/1, “Gemeinde”, Budapest, 4 November 1969.

23 ÁBTL, 3.2.5.O-8-317/1, “Gemeinde”, Organizations of the Zionist movement in Austria, Report, 27 November 1969.

about the attitudes and competence of Hungarian security operatives:

The above circles acknowledge that the Israeli Embassy in Vienna maintained regular contact with Simon Wiesenthal, an official of the Austrian State Police. According to them, the contact was limited to requesting information about the possible Nazi past of Austrian citizens travelling to Israel. Wiesenthal was not always able to provide sufficient information and, in such cases, recommended Ableitinger as a private detective who always had accurate data.²⁴

The Focus and “Evolution” of the State Security Service’s Reports

By December 1969, Simon Wiesenthal was clearly no longer being described in Hungarian intelligence reports as *just* a Nazi hunter, and the authors of these reports believed that the Center Wiesenthal had established engaged in “espionage activities” against the socialist camp and had “regular” contacts with Zionists in the Eastern Bloc countries.²⁵ The report, originally written in German and circulated by the Vienna Resident Office in December 1969, makes it clear what the Eastern bloc state security community believed concerning the threat Wiesenthal and his staff posed to the communist bloc: they have “regular contacts with Zionists in socialist countries”.

Around this time, the Hungarian Security Services also became interested in Laetitia Dyckerhoff, (today, best known as a photographer), a West German citizen who worked as a permanent correspondent in Vienna for the journal publishing house Dr. Bilz und Dr. Fraund KG. (*Kommanditgesellschaft*).²⁶ A staff member of the Hungarian Embassy in Vienna contacted Dyckerhoff because she wanted to visit Budapest for the International Fair and she said that she had been in contact with Wiesenthal.²⁷ Dyckerhoff (it was alleged) offered to publish documents in the Hungarian press about the Nazi past of certain West German leaders, but – despite a recommendation by the Hungarian Embassy in Vienna – her approach was rebuffed by the Hungarian daily newspaper *Magyar Nemzet*. In any case, the state security agency did not learn much from Dyckerhoff about Wiesenthal except for a vague rumor that Wiesenthal wanted to publish material in *Der Spiegel* but the West German Embassy would not allow it.²⁸

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ ÁBTL, 3.2.5.O-8-317/1, “Gemeinde”, Report on Organizations of the Zionist movement in Austria, 23 December 1969.

²⁶ K.G. or limited commercial partnership. This is a type of business entity, and the same term is used in German, Belgian, Dutch, etc.

²⁷ ÁBTL, 0-8-193/2, “NSZK bécsi követsége és konzulátusa”, Report from Nyerges at the Embassy and Consulate of the FRG in Vienna, 27 May 1970.

²⁸ ÁBTL, 0-8-193/2, NSZK bécsi követsége és konzulátusa, Embassy and Consulate of the FRG in Vienna, Vienna, 27 May 1970.

We also know about the Dyckerhoff connection from other sources. One of the files of the “Gemeinde”, which focused on Wiesenthal in a separate section, summarises Dyckerhoff’s relationship with him, and mentions the journalist’s visit to the Hungarian Embassy in Vienna on 19 October 1970.²⁹ The Hungarian Embassy in Vienna’s referral itself contained an assessment of the events: the West German government of Willy Brandt wanted to prevent the exposure of minor Nazi functionaries. Dyckerhoff herself told the staff at the embassy that (allegedly) both the West Germans and the Israelis had given Wiesenthal “confidential instructions” to deal only with the exposure of major Nazis. “The instructions were that the Documentation Centre should not disclose any information or take any action against other Nazi party members or functionaries. This would provide protection for all those minor, but no less fanatical, Nazis who today live mainly in West Germany.”³⁰ Dyckerhoff also claimed that the so-called Verbelen trial (of Robert Jan Verbelen, a Belgian Nazi collaborator who fled to Austria and was eventually acquitted of all charges) had not been prosecuted because West Germans (according to Dyckerhoff) had paid “two billion marks in aid” to Israel. According to Dyckerhoff, the Brussels headquarters of the Resistance League was under heavy pressure from Bonn, but such pressure had not yet been applied to Wiesenthal. At the same time, Dyckerhoff claimed, Israel was also instructing Wiesenthal not to pursue his activities further.

The security agencies also monitored and distributed press reports about Wiesenthal. These included a pamphlet by the Vereinigung der Verfolgten des NS-Regimes (Association of the Persecuted of the Nazi Regime), which mainly analysed the conflicts between the Kreisky government, Bruno Kreisky himself, and Wiesenthal, but which also sympathised with the Nazi hunter in Vienna.³¹

A May 1970 report in the “Gemeinde” dossier (Dyckerhoff was the source for this report too) also attempted to map Wiesenthal’s political sympathies/antipathies.³² It noted that Wiesenthal sympathised with the ÖVP, the Austrian People’s Party, not the Social Democrats. The cynical assumption of the report is that Wiesenthal’s relationship with the West German Embassy was intended not only to keep himself informed but also to acquire certain sums of money “for half information or information withheld”. This is how the author of the report viewed the Schirmer case when it came to the (alleged) past of the new West German ambassador in Vienna. This involved the fact that an individual named Hans Schirmer had worked in the Nazi Foreign Ministry

29 ÁBTL, 3.2.5.O-8-317/1, “Gemeinde”, Information report, Organizations of the Zionist movement in Austria, Vienna, 26 October 1970.

30 Ibid.

31 ÁBTL, 3.2.5.O-8-317/1, “Gemeinde”; ÁBTL, 3.2.5.O-8-317/1, Subject: distribution of a Zionist pamphlet attacking the Kreisky government, October 1970 Report.

32 ÁBTL, 3.2.5.O-8-317/1, “Gemeinde”, Vienna, 27 May 1970.

under Ribbentrop, and a person with the same name served as the West German ambassador to Vienna between 1970 and 1974. Of course, the ambassador denied that he was the same person and would only admit to sharing a name with the other man.

Eastern European State Security Agencies at Work

The Czechoslovak State Security Agency joined in the surveillance of Wiesenthal and assisted in gathering information about him. According to a report from Prague dated 28 May 1970, Wiesenthal was planning to move his Documentation Centre to Norway, while the Swedish press reported that he was moving it to Sweden.³³ The Prague report claimed that Wiesenthal was cooperating with Czechoslovak and Polish authorities, but given that it was “only a game – his [Wiesenthal’s] aim was primarily to develop his activities in the interests of the Zionist movement”. In June, the Czechs gave the Hungarian authorities detailed information about the source of their intelligence.³⁴ A Russian-language source in August 1970 reported that Austrian Zionist organisations were claiming that Soviet condemnations of “aggressive” Israeli policy and the negative “stance” of the socialist countries toward Zionism constituted antisemitism.³⁵ It noted that these organisations collect information on “discrimination” against Jews in socialist states and identified Wiesenthal’s Vienna Documentation Centre as one such organisation. In “recent times”, it had cast aspersions on socialist countries, including the GDR, according to the report. Wiesenthal was indeed critical of the East German state: in February 1969, during a radio appearance, he estimated that the number of former Nazis in the GDR who occupied leading positions in parliament, the media, and higher education stood at around one thousand persons.

The state security apparatuses in the state-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe were, therefore, keeping their eyes on Wiesenthal. The Security Services Archive in Prague (Archiv bezpečnostních složek) holds records and summaries concerning the Nazi hunter. The Czechoslovak state security service, which had been monitoring “Zionists” for some time (from 1958 onward they also coordinated their activities to some extent with the Hungarian State Security Service), became as interested in the Viennese engineer as their Hungarian colleagues.

33 ÁBTL, Budapest, Report, “Gemeinde”, 3.2.5.O-8-317/1, 28 May 1970. (Translated from Czech into Hungarian.)

34 ÁBTL, 3.2.5.O-8-317/1, “Gemeinde”, Prague, 1 June 1970. The text has been translated from Czech into Hungarian. “In May of this year, we learned through an agent that WULF HINRICH /of Jewish origin/ Director of the Norwegian Shipping Company in Hamburg and AAGTE BJERKE of the Norwegian Shipping Company, would be moving to Norway, to the suburb of Oslo, with WIESENTHAL at the head of the Jewish Documentation Centre in Austria, later this year. The exact address is unknown. WIESENTHAL is currently still in Vienna.”

35 ÁBTL, 3.2.5.O-8-317/1, “Gemeinde”, 25 August 1970.

A Czechoslovak internal affairs briefing paper compiled in the summer of 1971 (“The Role of the Zionist Movement in Subversive Activities against the Socialist States”) deals at length with Wiesenthal.³⁶ The text dates back to 1968–1969 and states that during his last stay in Austria, a certain Jiri Hajek (the former Czech diplomat and foreign minister is probably the person referred to in the text) had a “conspiratorial” meeting in Vienna with Simon Wiesenthal:

As you know, the so-called European Documentation Centre is located in Vienna. This is the name of the large-scale spy agency set up by the international Zionist organisation and the CIA, which at the height of the events in Czechoslovakia set up a “subsidiary” under the name of the “Czechoslovak Refugee Committee.” The head of the documentation centre is the well-known Zionist specialist in “covert operations”, Simon Wiesenthal, who was personally involved in supporting the right-wing forces in 1968.

The text quotes a letter ostensibly written and sent by Wiesenthal to prominent Jews in Czechoslovakia in support of the 1968 Prague reformers, liberalisation, and democracy. Wiesenthal, in a statement to the Jewish Telegraphic Agency on 28 August 1968 (after the Warsaw Pact military invasion), called the letters a forgery.³⁷ He also pointed out that the anti-reformist forces in Czechoslovakia had described Dubcek’s regime as a “Zionist conspiracy” and that the Poles and East Germans had legitimised the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia by claiming that “Zionist forces” had taken over the leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party.

A Czechoslovak national security service textbook from 1977 entitled *Boj se sionismem a jehu agenturou* (Combating Zionism and Jewish Agency) states that it is necessary to deal with individuals (Czechoslovak citizens) who, during their “travels”, come into contact with “foreign Zionist centres”, such as Simon Wiesenthal’s Documentation Centre in Vienna.³⁸ Although the “Zionist centres” mentioned in the textbook include – in addition to Wiesenthal’s organisation – HIAS, Sochnut (the Jewish Agency for Palestine), and the World Federation of Jews in Czechoslovakia, the whole text is concerned with the “struggle” waged by the StB (the Czechoslovak “State Security” agency) against the “infiltration” of Zionism into Czechoslovakia.

Returning to the world of the Hungarian Internal Security Services, over time there was a spirit of ideological hardening,

36 Archive Ministerstva Vnitřní (Security Services Archive, Prague), Fond: A 30 Inv.jedn.: 407, 36–37. The archival research in Prague was supported by the International Visegrad Fund (Visegrad Fellowship – 62420030).

37 “Wiesenthal Says Zionist Plot Alleged by Opponents of Czech Reform in Spring”, *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 28 August 1968, accessed 28 April 2025, <https://www.jta.org/archive/wiesenthal-says-zionist-plot-alleged-by-opponents-of-czech-reform-in-spring>.

38 Archive Ministerstva Vnitřní (Security Services Archive), Prague, RV. 413, 95.

as, for example, in a March 1971 report entitled “On the Activities of the Israeli Secret Service in Austria”, which deals with Wiesenthal in the same spirit as before, but in a more focused way.³⁹ It describes the Documentation Centre as one of the European centers of the Israeli Secret Service, and identifies Wiesenthal himself as a key local figure in the Austrian, West German, and Israeli services. “It cannot be considered a coincidence that this centre is operating so close to the borders of neutral Austria and the socialist countries”, the authors write. This activity, according to the report, has nothing to do with his activities to apprehend war criminals but is exclusively linked to “Western” intelligence agencies, while Wiesenthal also “uses” Jewish aid organisations from socialist countries that provide supplies for Jewish refugees in and around Vienna. According to the report, at the Schönau Castle near Wiener Neustadt, an important reception center for Jewish immigrants to Austria, the Jewish Agency for Palestine’s (Sochnut) representatives were thoroughly “interrogating” the new arrivals. The author of the report assumes, as a matter of course, that Sochnut is also an agency associated with US intelligence services and that the organisation’s aim is to extract information from people arriving from the Eastern Bloc.

In November 1971, Wiesenthal’s name appeared in a State Security service document entitled “Zionist Dissident Activities against the Polish People’s Republic and the Socialist Camp”, which was probably a translation of a Polish text.⁴⁰ According to the report:

First and foremost, the Vienna Documentation Centre of the European Federation of Jews Persecuted by the Nazi Regime, headed by *S. Wiesenthal*. This centre operates under the direct auspices of the Israeli Embassy in Vienna and the Israeli intelligence service and works in close cooperation with special services in the Western countries and with ideological-political centres of divergence, especially Radio Free Europe and the Parisian (journal) *Kulturá*. This centre plays an important role in the anti-communist campaign against the socialist countries and Wiesenthal (sic!) himself is the inspiration for many slanderous propaganda campaigns in the press, radio and television, mainly in Sweden, Denmark and the FRG, in which he often takes part personally. Wiesenthal’s activities also include the production and dissemination of satirical pamphlets about the situation in Poland and other socialist countries, and about the political and state figures in our countries. Wiesenthal’s (sic!) fanaticism goes so far as to him saying, for example, in a speech in Sweden ... that “Nazi criminals must be persecuted everywhere, even

39 ÁBTL, 3.2.5.O-8-317/1, “Gemeinde”, Report, Budapest, 24 March 1971.

40 ÁBTL, 3.2.5 O-8-301/1, “Herzl Tivadar – Zionist organisations”.

in the communist parties, where new Nazi groups are being formed.”⁴¹

Wiesenthal as an Opinion Leader of the Viennese Community

The 1970s witnessed an interesting transformation of the Jewish religious community in Vienna, which had been traditionally social democratic in orientation, and traces of this development can be detected in Hungarian state security sources. On 12 February 1973, a report in the state security service’s “Gemeinde” dossier⁴² (“On Zionist organisations in Austria and their activities”) states that Wiesenthal was the leader of the Zionist organisation *Ausweg* (Exit). According to an internal source cited in the report, Wiesenthal had formed an alternative Zionist organisation. In the most recent congregational elections, the Bund, the strongest member of the Misrachi-Zionist (religious Zionist) organisation, had won fourteen seats, while Wiesenthal’s supporters had won five seats, the Zionists four seats and Aguda (Agudat Yisrael, a formally anti-Zionist organisation which abandoned its anti-Zionism) one seat. However, when the issue of aid to the state of Israel was raised, Wiesenthal voted with the Zionists, only “taking an opposition position on certain internal issues of the community”.⁴³

According to inside source of the Hungarian Security Service, about 60 per cent of the Jewish population participated in the elections, many of whom were members of the Communist Party. The report notes with dismay that many did not wish to participate in Austrian Jewish life at all.

Although seemingly not much had actually happened, the labels that the Hungarian State Security attached to Wiesenthal became increasingly harsh. In an undated document, probably dating from around 1973–1974, which discusses Zionist organisations in Austria, the Documentation Centre is mentioned prominently.⁴⁴ Although it is stated that Wiesenthal’s main aim was to track down former Hitlerites, it noted that “retaliatory” measures were to be taken against them (ex-Hitlerites), while at the same time the “members” of the Documentation Centre are described as anti-Marxists. Wiesenthal’s Documentation Centre was (according to the report) actively collaborating with “foreign centres of ideological diversion”, including Radio Free Europe. “The Centre is headed by Simon Wiesenthal, a Polish Jew, a convinced anti-communist and rabid Zionist. Before the war,

41 ÁBTL, 3.2.5 O-8-301/1, “Herzl Tivadar” – Zionist organisations”.

42 ÁBTL, 3.2.5.O-8-317/1, “Gemeinde”, Report on Organizations of the Zionist movement in Austria, Budapest, 12 February 1973.

43 Ibid.

44 ÁBTL, 3.2.5.O-8-317/1, “Gemeinde”, Report on Organizations of the Zionist movement in Austria.

Wiesenthal lived in Lwów. After the war, he actively cooperated with the American and Austrian special services, and when the Israeli state was established, he began working for the Israeli Intelligence Agency.”⁴⁵

The report lists the Documentation Centre’s staff and external contacts, claiming that two internal staff members had been found to be “Israeli intelligence officers”.⁴⁶ According to another information report, from January 1974 on, Jan Gajewski and Dr Knoll, the latter of whom was known to be an American intelligence agent, were in contact with the office.

In the mid-1970s, an informant named “Alexander”, who was active in the Viennese religious community, kept the Hungarian authorities informed about Wiesenthal’s activities. The Hungarian-born Viennese merchant Ernő Ackermann was one of the leaders of the community and was also an opponent of Wiesenthal. In January 1975, a report by “Alexander” stated that Wiesenthal had attacked the leadership of the Vienna *kehilla* through Alexander Friedman.⁴⁷ Other young Zionists also criticised the old leaders, reported “Alexander”, who also provided information on several other members of the Hungarian Israeli community in Vienna, including Bentzur Zeew, a leading figure among the Hungarian Jews in Vienna. Later, at a meeting of the Jewish Community Board on 24 June 1975, Wiesenthal personally criticised “Alexander”.⁴⁸ The agent himself described the Nazi hunter as an “extremist” member of the Misrachi faction who had apparently been encouraged by another individual (Braw Ehrenberg). Because Wiesenthal threatened “Alexander” with an investigation into his past after “Alexander” told Wiesenthal that he was responsible for radicalising the community, “Alexander” became very nervous about being exposed. Not only did “Alexander” meet with his Hungarian State Security contact; he also met with a man from the Israeli Embassy in Vienna who, like Brünnerberger, the leader of the Vienna Misrachi faction, called Wiesenthal’s accusation exaggerated. “Alexander” also asked to meet a member of the Budapest State Security Service, the contact person of the “Centre”, in Prague on 7 July 1975.

The meeting was set up in the Czechoslovak capital, and a very upset “Alexander” in Prague told his central contact that Wiesenthal was only a tool of the local Zionist right (e.g., of Herut and Misrachi) and that the threat had not been directed at him personally but at the religious community leadership under the influence of social democracy.⁴⁹ “Alexander” led the local branch of the social democratic Po’ale Zion movement. The contact agreed

45 Ibid.

46 ÁBTL, 3.2.5.O-8-317/1, “Gemeinde”, 3.2.5.O-8-317/1, Report, Budapest, 22 January 1974. For Lieutenant Colonel Ferenc, Head of BM III/I-4.

47 ÁBTL, Bt-1560/IV (10-69993), “Alexander”, 3 January 1975.

48 ÁBTL, Szegedi had a meeting and “material exchange” with Alexander on 26 June 1975, at the Elan café. Vienna, 30 June 1975.

49 ÁBTL, “Alexander”, Bt-1560/IV. (10-69993) case dossier, Report, Budapest, 15 July 1975.

with the agent that “Alexander” should reduce his activity in the congregation after his return to Austria on the pretext of being “offended”. After a short interval, “Alexander” would then accept the peace offering that would arrive from the right-wing group; this would be a moral victory for him, as it would appease the indignant Zionist Left. In August 1975, Agent “Alexander” reported that his situation had stabilised.⁵⁰ Zohar, the first secretary of the Israeli Embassy in Vienna, was (“Alexander” claimed) outraged by Wiesenthal’s behavior, saying that Wiesenthal was not only living on “Jewish money” (which had been allocated for persecuting fascists) but was using it to discredit “honest” Jews (i.e., “Alexander”). Zohar encouraged “Alexander” to communicate openly about these problems. In the end, Wiesenthal did not come to the 26 August 1975, congregational meeting. “Alexander” also reported that Yitzhak Korn (Yitzhak Coren, 1911–1994, Labour Zionist politician), Secretary of the World Organisation of Labour Zionists, had been in Vienna “recently” and had asked to attend the World Zionist Organisation’s main conference as a delegate (to be held in 1976).

In the autumn of 1975, the situation was further consolidated, and Wiesenthal criticised “Alexander” in his newspaper, but in a more moderate tone than before.⁵¹ The critical Die Blaue group was also disbanded, and Wiesenthal had a good chance of becoming a candidate on the joint Po’ale Zion-Misrachi list for the elections to the Zionist Congress in Jerusalem (as one of three people representing Austrian Jewry).

The Hungarian Security Service’s antipathy toward Wiesenthal was expressed in a report in the autumn of 1975, which asserted that he was a convinced anticommunist and Zionist and had links with the Israeli secret service.⁵² According to the authors:

They regard spying and data collection against socialist countries, especially the Soviet Union, as their main task. Through his travelling agents, he maintains contact with Jewish acquaintances in socialist countries, from whom he tries to gather incriminating information on party leaders, government members and other important figures.

Interestingly, the report also goes into great detail about the institutional structure, party affiliations and contacts of Viennese Jewry.

The figure of Wiesenthal was further brought to the fore in connection with his Nazi hunting activities – for example, when the informer codenamed “Unique” met Holger Bauer, the Freedom Party of Austria’s (FPÖ) national press officer on 3 February 1976, who told him that Wiesenthal, during the 1975 election campaign,

50 ÁBTL, Bt-1560/IV. (10-69993) “Alexander”, case dossier, Budapest, 8 September 1975.

51 ÁBTL, Bt-1560/IV. (10-69993) “Alexander”, case dossier, Budapest, 2 October 1975: “Compared to his previous extreme outburst, this article shows a complete retreat. Wiesenthal merely questions how a man as small as ALEXANDER can be the community’s most influential figure in Hungary.”

52 ÁBTL, 3.2.5.O-8-317/1, “Gemeinde”, 30 October 1975.

had accused Friedrich Peter, the FPÖ's national leader, of having been a member of an SS brigade linked to a mass murder during the Second World War.⁵³ According to the report filed by the agent codenamed "Unique", Friedrich Peter spoke to a senior diplomat in the Soviet Embassy, who told him that the Soviet press would not intervene in the case because they considered Wiesenthal to be a CIA agent. Peter sued Wiesenthal, but it did not degrade his (Peter's) position as in any case he would still travel to Czechoslovakia with Kreisky. Chancellor Kreisky, also persecuted as a Jew by the Nazi regime, however, defended Peter and accused Wiesenthal of "mafia methods", accusing him of collaborating with the Gestapo.

The particularly bad relationship between Wiesenthal and Kreisky is also reflected in the material of the Hungarian State Security Service, for example, when "Alexander" specifically refers to it in his report from 30 October 1976, which is specifically about Wiesenthal.⁵⁴ According to the head of the religious community, who personally hated Wiesenthal (and who was himself a CIA agent), it represented the stance of the left-wing Zionists who had saved Wiesenthal from getting into greater trouble earlier that year, when he had implicated a member of the government. "Now that his situation has been sorted out, he is attacking the leftists again, and he is not afraid of slander."⁵⁵

The End of the Wiesenthal Saga and the Religious Community Line

As the decades passed, the hostile tone toward Wiesenthal did not change much. The next time Wiesenthal appears in the reports, as far I know, was when, on Canadian television in October 1974, he accused – rightly – a former Hungarian gendarme captain named Imre Finta, the commander of the Szeged ghetto, of having participated in the murder of Hungarian Jews. The year 1974 marks the beginning of the Finta case, as it was in that year (as documented by Randolph L. Braham)⁵⁶ that Wiesenthal informed the Canadian government in a letter about Finta's past and forwarded a file to Sabina Citron, the head of the Canadian Holocaust Remembrance Association (CHRA). In connection with this, a Hungarian member of the staff of CBC Canadian Television, with the support of the Hungarian state authorities, wanted to learn more about the background of the case in Hungary.⁵⁷ Although Imre Finta ultimately escaped punishment,

53 ÁBTL, 3.2.5. 0-8-198/4, Tükör nyugatkövet", "Report on Meeting with Holger Bauer", 3 February 1976.

54 ÁBTL, Bt-1560/IV. (10-69993), "Alexander", case dossier, Budapest, 30 October 1976, BM III/1-4.

55 Ibid.

56 "Hungarian War Crimes Trial in North America", *Regio* 27, no. 1 (2019): 222–241.

57 ÁBTL, 3.2.5 O-8-301/1, "Herzl Tivadar: Cionista szervezetek", László Bastoványzky, Canadian citizen, CBC staff member, on his entry to Hungary, Budapest, 17 February 1975 (?).

Wiesenthal played a major role in raising awareness of what had happened.

At the end of 1976, Vienna's Jewish community was preparing for elections at a time when its governing body was dominated by the Left, with the twenty-four-member board dominated by the Labour faction, which held a majority of seats.⁵⁸ To try to break this dominance, various factions including the "far left" (Shomer), the Stern group (radical right), and Simon Wiesenthal's group ran against Labour in the elections. As it turned out, Wiesenthal won seven seats, including the position of Shomer, which amounted to half a seat. The Stern group won one seat, and the Misrachi group two seats. The Orthodox, led by Rabbi Grünfeld, won three seats, having previously supported the Labor Party. This left Labour with a minority share of eleven seats, although it was still the strongest single parliamentary group.⁵⁹ "Alexander" subsequently warned young people to avoid Wiesenthal, claiming that the "institution he maintained and organised against fascism [the Documentation Centre - AN] is increasingly being used against progressive Jews and socialist countries".⁶⁰ He published a list of young Austrian citizens who had visited socialist countries, highlighting in particular Sonia Veró, whose main "crime" was sending Zionist literature to the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.⁶¹

An informational report dated 1 February 1977, confirmed that the new leadership of the Jewish Community of Vienna had been re-established (or re-elected), and that its first meeting "was attended by our agent".⁶² At the meeting, which (most probably) took place on 1 February, the chairman (Anton Pick) remained in office. Of the twenty-four-member board, Po'ale Zion won twelve seats, the Wiesenthal List (United Jewish List) won nine seats, and Rabbi Grünfeld's group gained nine.⁶³

At the end of April 1977, a conference of Jews who had emigrated from Israel back to the Soviet Union was held in Vienna, at which Wiesenthal also spoke.⁶⁴ The event was attended by correspondents from the socialist bloc. Wiesenthal urged people who were dissatisfied with Israel and who had been unable to establish

58 ÁBTL, Bt-1560/IV (10-69993), "Alexander", 17 December 1976.

59 The dilemmas posed by the election are clearly stated by "Alexander": "If the Labour faction succeeds in winning the Grünfeld group for the coalition, the direction will remain the same as before. If the opposing parties can unite, it will be the strongest coalition, since the extreme left forces will be as much a part of it as the extreme right. This unity is likely to be short-lived precisely because of these major differences of opinion, as the opinions within these groups have not changed and are divided. For the time being, with the huge sums of money at Wiesenthal's disposal, the unity may be sustainable, but the separation and rupture would be almost total if this were to occur." Ibid.

60 ÁBTL, Bt-1560/IV. (10-69993), "Alexander", case file, Budapest, 17 December 1976.

61 The information report of 11 February 1977, confirms this line. The daughter of "Alexander" was in contact with Sonja Veró. BM III/I-4. ÁBTL, Bt-1560/IV. (10-69993), "Alexander", case file.

62 ÁBTL, Bt-1560/IV (10-69993), "Alexander", Budapest, 11 February 1977.

63 There are two deputies to the President, Edmund Reiss of Poale Zion and Dr Ivan Hacker of the Wiesenthal United Jewish List. Ibid.

64 ÁBTL, Bt-1560/IV. (10-69993), "Alexander", case file, 30 April 1977.

roots there to exercise restraint – as far as criticism of Zionism and Israel were concerned. Some of the disgruntled elements (allegedly) called Wiesenthal a CIA agent, and the conference organisers, citing Helsinki and human rights, “demanded that the Austrian government provide decent social support and accommodation for our temporary stay”.⁶⁵

An important point of contact between Wiesenthal and the Hungarian authorities was their common interest in the whereabouts of Hungarian perpetrators of the Holocaust and, if discovered, their punishment. In September 1977, the Amsterdam chief prosecutor, on the basis of information from Wiesenthal, ordered an investigation of Zoltán Papp, a Dutch citizen and resident of the city.⁶⁶ Papp, according to Wiesenthal, had been the commander of the ghetto in the town of Pápa and was currently an employee of the Dutch railways (albeit he was, at the time, suspended from his job).

In the 1970s, the public was shocked by the trial and conviction of Jewish Zionist activists (refuseniks) in the Soviet Union. A response to this was organised by Yaacov Doron, Israel’s ambassador in Vienna, and an individual referred to in the security service’s documents as “Rave”, the embassy’s press secretary (whose identity has not been confirmed). On 11 July 1978, the Israeli Embassy initiated a protest action in Vienna whereby they tried to persuade the Jewish community in Vienna to send telegrams of protest to the Soviet Embassy.⁶⁷ According to information the Hungarian Security Service gleaned from the Jewish community’s leadership in Vienna on 13 July, “Rave”, on behalf of the ambassador, asked the leaders of the community to visit the embassy and proposed that they begin organising a “day of protest”. The end point of the demonstration was to be the Soviet Embassy, where placards would be hung up and loud protests would take place. “Rave” explained that the demonstration would (formally) have nothing to do with the Israeli Embassy, and it would have to appear to be spontaneous.

The leaders of the congregation summarily stated that “Rave”’s proposal – on the date he had set – was unfeasible. They did not have police permission, and most of the Jewish youth in Vienna were on summer vacation, and they would only be able to mobilise a maximum of thirty to forty people. “Rave” was not happy about this, but the leadership of the community decided to hold a commemorative service in a synagogue at the same time as the demonstration to pray for the Soviet Jews. This took place on 13 July and Ambassador Yaacov Doron and “Rave” were among the one hundred or so attendees. First, a member of the leadership read a statement (allegedly) calling the Soviet Union antisemitic; then (as the Hungarian agent’s report puts it) in a series of speeches

65 Ibid.

66 ÁBTL, 3.2.5.O-8-317/1, “Gemeinde”, Report on Organizations of the Zionist movement in Austria, 3.2.5.O-8-317/1, Budapest, 21 September 1977.

67 ÁBTL, 3.2.1. Bt-455, “Filder John” B file, 28 July 1978.

“Simon Wiesenthal, head of the Vienna documentation office, attacked the Soviet Union in extreme terms and suggested that the demonstration should be held immediately. On this issue, too, a dispute escalated into a brawl, and the demonstration did not take place.”⁶⁸

The next Hungarian State Security report mentioning Wiesenthal appeared in November 1980, when III/I (11th Division) wrote a report on Zionist organisations operating in Austria. Wiesenthal, who headed the Jewish Historical Documentation Centre, is described in this document as a “convinced anti-communist and Zionist”, an Israeli agent whose organisation “initially concentrated on tracking down Nazi war criminals. More recently, mainly under Israeli pressure, the main emphasis has been on ‘persecutions of Jews’ in socialist countries. The centre has good contacts with ideological centres of sedition and subversion.”⁶⁹

The last state security source dealing with Wiesenthal that we know of was written in April 1981, and it contains similar content to earlier reports and the usual accusations about his “links” with American, Israeli, and West German intelligence agencies and his active intelligence “activities” against the socialist camp and the Arab countries of the Middle East.⁷⁰ According to the report, Wiesenthal kept records on and documentation related to human rights abuses in the socialist camp by the various governments and Communist Party representatives, and dissidents allegedly “assist[ed]” him in these activities. The report’s claim that “The information obtained will be sent to the US and Israeli intelligence services”, seems to draw on the usual rhetoric of the state-socialist regime.⁷¹

While logic would suggest that surveillance of Wiesenthal became increasingly frequent due to the developments in Hungary in the 1980s, I have found no evidence of this. (This may also be due to the fact that much of the secret service material was destroyed, at least as far as the 1980s are concerned.)

Conclusion

The research on Wiesenthal (including the biography by Tom Segev) has not systematically dealt with the relationship between the Zentrum für Jüdische Historische Dokumentation and the socialist countries of Eastern Europe. Wiesenthal, who came to Vienna after leaving Linz, forged a new post-Holocaust identity for Austrian Jewry (this statement is, by the way, consistent with Rachel Blumenthal’s assertion in her book *Holocaust Survivors*

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ ÁBTL, 3.2.5.O-8-532/1, “Chameleon – Israeli intelligence. An overview of Zionist organisations in Austria”.

⁷⁰ ÁBTL, 3.2.5.-O-8-504/6, “Israeli general agent situation Budapest”, 10 April 1981.

⁷¹ Ibid.

and Jewish Identity in Postwar Austria,⁷² which moves beyond the traditional understandings of Austrian Jewish (or even a former) identity. This kind of identity, unconstrained by the rigid ideological and political boundaries of the socialist countries of Eastern Europe was, of course, only “possible” for an exceptional individual such as Simon Wiesenthal. It is worth considering how this new and complex identity related to the official policy of the Zentrum, which Wiesenthal officially represented. Closely related to this development, I suspect, was the Documentation Centre’s refusal to acknowledge the East-West divide and the fact that the socialist countries of Eastern Europe were not excluded from its investigations into the post-war lives of former Nazis.

Another important question concerns the motives and objectives of state surveillance in this period. These questions are not only related to Wiesenthal but more broadly to the official policy of anti-Zionism in Hungary and other state-socialist countries, which was a kind of common language of official Soviet-inspired politics: the language of totalitarianism was used to formulate their views on an important buffer zone of East-West confrontation. After the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, this language became dominant in the Eastern bloc and was used against Jews and “Western phenomena” identified as Jewish. In Czechoslovakia, and especially in Poland, the “struggle” against the Zionists had serious consequences, with people not only being forced out of their jobs and positions but also compelled to emigrate.

It is also interesting to consider the extent to which the ideological language and content directed at Wiesenthal in the state security documents was an independent Hungarian product, and to what extent it was a translation (even a literal translation) of other, possibly Soviet sources. The 1968 anti-Zionist campaign in Poland produced a quantity of influential material, and by the 1970s, Soviet-led agreements between the interior ministries and state security services in the bloc’s member states had already been negotiated, with the fight against Zionists given special attention. The extent to which the party leadership controlled these processes and the extent to which Wiesenthal’s intransigence influenced the policies of the socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe concerning Nazi war crimes and criminals also requires research. For example, in the Eichmann case, there was cooperation between some Eastern European countries and Israel (e.g., Hungary handed over filtered documents), but the prevailing interpretation of Israel’s role in the case was not questioned.

It is also interesting to consider what Wiesenthal’s pure victim perspective meant and the “dangers” this perspective entailed for the Hungarian socialist politics of memory during the Kádár era. From Wiesenthal’s perspective, the victims and perpetrators of

72 Rachel Blumenthal, “Holocaust Survivors and Jewish Identity in Postwar Austria”, in *Constructing and Experiencing Jewish Identity* (Brill, 2022), 50–67.

the Holocaust had to be named, and he did not feel the need to hide them behind socialist humanist rhetoric. The taboo around the memory of the Holocaust, as Regina Fritz describes it in her 2012 book,⁷³ only began to fade in the 1980s. As Hungarian historian Gábor Gyáni observed,⁷⁴ in the first Marxist history book published in Hungary in 1964, the author of the chapter on the Nazi period devoted only twenty-one lines to the deportations of the summer of 1944, and only twelve of these referred to the deportation of half a million Hungarian Jews to the death camps. The date of the book's publication coincided with period the Hungarian State Security Services began to surveil Wiesenthal, and most of their reports – until the early 1980s – reflected this kind of attitude of Holocaust minimisation or erasure. Wiesenthal's activities were not presented to the Hungarian general public nor were they reported on in the Hungarian Jewish press.

To the specific question of what Simon Wiesenthal as an individual meant to Kádár's Hungarian socialist state, there is a complex answer. For the ruling elite, the activities of the Nazi hunter in Vienna meant little. Due to the restricted publishing environment of the era, there was a slow evolution as in the 1960s/1970s, the Hungarian media did not address Simon Wiesenthal at all; there are hardly any official newspaper articles about him, and his name and activities were barely mentioned in the restricted Jewish press in Hungary. However, in the 1980s, more was written about him and his organisation, and the gradual process of political détente put him on the radar of Hungarian newspapers. However, in the 1960s, Wiesenthal's activities left a mark on the state security organs that monitored various Western ideological and political movements. In this arena, he played a prominent role, and in this respect, the world of state security reports can also be viewed as a kind of subconscious mind of the regime: it administered, removed, and, at the same time, concealed beyond recognition that which it basically wanted to suppress (including itself), but it also found greatly interesting and exciting. The regime hoped to relegate Wiesenthal's activities – the main aspect of which was to “cultivate” Holocaust memory and break the silence surrounding it – to some kind of secret archive.

In summary, the Hungarian State Security apparatus did not approach Wiesenthal's activities from the point of view of the Holocaust, but it was interested in his perceived anti-Sovietism and hostility toward the countries of the Eastern Bloc. This was the main motive for its observations (which can be found spread across several dossiers, often isolated from each other). Wiesenthal was seen as an influential Viennese Jewish personality who was also concerned with the Eastern European states and who was therefore considered worthy of observation. The fact that Wie-

73 Regina Fritz, *Nach Krieg und Judenmord: Ungarns Geschichtspolitik seit 1944* (Wallstein Verlag, 2012).

74 Gábor Gyáni, “The Hungarian Memory of the Holocaust”, in *History as Memory* (Pesti Kalligram Kft, 2016), 187.

senthal's aversion to the Eastern Bloc countries was not due primarily to an anti-communist outlook but to their governments' half-hearted approach to the legacy of the Holocaust and their poor record on human rights (including, in the case of Soviet Jews, the right to emigrate) was of little concern to state security.

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