

Orban fails to impress Jewish leaders on anti-Semitism

Contributed by Mikky Zsedely
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BRUSSELS - Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's speech against anti-Semitism at the World Jewish Congress (WJC) in Budapest on Sunday (5 May) failed to impress organisers, as the far-right Jobbik party staged a rally against Jews in the Hungarian capital.

Orbán condemned the rise in anti-Semitism in Hungary and in Europe more widely. He called it a danger that "threatens even us Christians" and voiced determination to stamp it out.

Viktor Orbán condemned anti-Semitism - but critics say his words were not enough (Photo: European Parliament)

Congress organisers said Orbán did not confront the true nature of the problem, however

"We regret that Mr Orbán did not address any recent anti-Semitic or racist incidents in the country, nor did he provide sufficient reassurance that a clear line has been drawn between his government and the far-right fringe," the WJC, which represents Jewish communities around the world, said in a statement.

WJC head Ronald S. Lauder told press that several recent events in Hungary have caused him alarm.

He said that anti-Semitism and incitement against the Roma minority are becoming commonplace and "even acceptable" in Hungary.

He noted that Zsolt Bayer, a journalist and one of the founding members of the ruling Fidesz party, called the Roma "cowardly, repulsive, noxious animals" who are "unfit to live among people."

"Let us never forget the Roma were also victims of the Nazi Holocaust. Today, Jews are again wondering whether they will have to leave the country, for similar reasons," Lauder said.

He added: "We were shocked to learn that an anti-Semitic TV presenter was awarded a prize," referring to TV broadcaster Ferenc Szaniszló, who won the Tanácsok Prize for journalism in March. The prize was later withdrawn amid heavy protest.

He questioned why Hungarian officials are erecting statues to honour anti-Semites like Miklós Horthy.

Horthy was a Hungarian naval officer in World War I who later led the country into an uneasy alliance with Nazi Germany up until Hitler's invasion.

Lauder also pointed out that several Hungarian MPs had wanted to draw up a menacing "list of Jews."

Marton Gyongyosi, the deputy leader of Hungary's far-right Jobbik party proposed the list last year saying that Jews who hold public office are "a national security risk."

Jobbik is Hungary's third largest political party with 47 seats in the 386-seat parliament.

It says it wants to protect Hungarian values and heritage.

It has been linked to vigilante attacks on minorities.

On Saturday, several hundred Jobbik supporters staged a demonstration in central Budapest "in memory of [the] victims of Bolshevism and Zionism," despite attempts by Orbán's government to block the event.

A number of individuals wore the black uniform of Jobbik's banned paramilitary group, the Hungarian Guard, which has previously staged torch-bearing demonstrations in Roma villages.

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