ALMA MATER EUROPAEA UNIVERSITY

International Scholarly Symposium

NUREMBERG TRIALS 80 YEARS LATER AND NAZI 'PERVERTED SCIENCE'

Book of Abstracts

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ALMA MATER
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SYMPOSIUM PROGRAMME

Friday, 27 February 2026 | 10:00–14:00
Grand Lecture Hall

The symposium is organised under the umbrella of the Programme Group *Research of Cultural Formations* (P6-0278, A), funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS).

10:00 – 10:15 | Memory on 1942, War and Nazi Occupation Policy

Prof. Dr Ludvik Toplak, *Rector of Alma Mater Europaea University, Former Slovenian Ambassador to the Holy See Vatican*

10:15 – 11:00 | Nuremberg Trials – 80 Years Later and Nazi's Perverted Science

Prof. Dr Gideon Greif, Keynote Speaker; *Professor of Jewish history at Ono Academic College and the ECPD University for Peace in Belgrade; Chief Historian at the "Shem Olam" Institute for Holocaust Research and at the Foundation for Holocaust Educational Projects in Miami*

11:00 – 11:25 | Adolf Eichmann's Representative, Dr Siegfried Seidl, in Maribor in 1941

Boris Hajdinjak, *Director of the Centre of Jewish Cultural Heritage Synagogue Maribor*

11:25 – 11:45 | On the Eve of Nuremberg: The Kelsen-Radbruch Dilemma, the Emergence of Ius Cogens, and Its Legacy in Contemporary International Criminal Law

Assoc. Prof. Dr Luka Martin Tomažič, *Vice-Rector for Research, Alma Mater Europaea University; Vice-President of the Slovenian Academy of Legal Science*

11:45 – 12:05 | The Witness Who Knew Slovene

Prof. Dr Dr Igor Grdina, *Researcher, ZRC SAZU; Alma Mater Europaea University*

12:05 – 12:20 | PAUSE

12:20 – 12:40 | The Roots of Nazism in Yugoslavia and Slovenia Before the Second World War: The Subversiveness of the Kulturbund and the Post-War Trials Against Its Members

Assist. Prof. Dr Daniel Siter, *Researcher, Editor-in-Chief, Alma Mater Europaea University; Head of Research, International Research Centre for Second World War Maribor*

12:40 – 13:00 | Selection and Survival: Erika Fürst's Testimony on Josef Mengele and Nazi Medical Experimentation in Auschwitz

Dr Alja Brglez, *Researcher, The Institute of Civilisation and Culture; Advisor and Head of the Cabinet of the President of the Republic of Slovenia Borut Pahor (2012–2022)*

13:00 – 13:20 | Jewish Heritage and Deportations From Kőszeg and Szombathely

Prof. Dr Ferenc Miszlivetz, *Director of the Institute of Advanced Studies Kőszeg*

Assoc. Prof. Dr Mónika Mátay, *Institute of Advanced Studies Kőszeg and Institute of History at Eötvös Loránd University*

13:20 – 13:40 | Viktor Frankl (Biographical Sketch) and his Stance Towards Guilt, Nazism and Germany

Prof. Dr Sebastjan Kristovič, *Researcher, Vice-Rector for Education, Alma Mater Europaea University*

13:40 – 14:00 | CLOSING REMARKS

Professor Dr Ludvik Toplak
Rector of the Alma Mater Europaea University

RECTOR'S ADDRESS
Memory on 1942, War and Nazi Occupation Policy

Distinguished guests, esteemed colleagues, respected researchers, professors, dear students, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great honor to welcome you on behalf of Alma Mater Europaea University to this International Scholarly Symposium, The Nuremberg Trials 80 Years Later and Nazi 'Perverted Science.'

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the organizers, participating scholars, and everyone who has contributed to the realization of this important event. I extend a particularly warm welcome to our guests from abroad and offer a special greeting to our keynote speaker, Professor Dr Gideon Greif, an internationally renowned historian and Holocaust scholar.

The topic that brings us together today is demanding, historically painful, legally fundamental, and civilizationally profoundly relevant. It is relevant not only for our present, but also for the future of our children and grandchildren. For this very reason, I am especially pleased that this discussion is taking place at Alma Mater Europaea University, which thereby fulfils its mission to develop science in the service of peace, coexistence, and human well-being.

Alma Mater Europaea University is an independent and internationally connected institution of higher education. It operates under the patronage of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts in Salzburg, which brings together more than two thousand distinguished scholars from around the world, including thirty-seven Nobel laureates.

A special place within our university is held by our Faculty of Humanities (Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis), dedicated to the humanities and social sciences. We firmly believe that without the humanities, there is no critical judgment. Without history, there is no understanding of the present. Without ethics, there is no responsible science. And without responsibility, there can be no stable future.

Our guiding principle is "It's About People." This is also the title of our annual international conference - the 14th Annual Conference of Europe's Sciences and Arts Leaders and Scholars, on the topic "Answering Current Challenges in Society, Health and Technology," will begin on March 13, 2026. The message is clear. Science, law, politics, and economics ultimately concern human beings, their dignity, their rights, and their future.

Within our research activities, a dedicated programme group systematically focuses on modern history, particularly the pre-war, wartime, and post-war periods of the Second World War. These

research fields form the foundation for understanding identity, responsibility, and historical memory in our region. Maribor is both a symbolic and a real place for such reflection. Nearby, in Kidričevo, there is, to my knowledge, the only location in Europe where all theoretically possible types of twentieth-century camps associated with the First and Second World Wars were located. In 1991, we erected a monument there bearing the inscription, "In memory to the dead ones, as a warning to the living."

The Nuremberg Trials marked a turning point in the history of law and civilization. They were judicial proceedings against the defeated leaders of the Nazi regime. However, they were much more than that. They established the principle that crimes against humanity transcend the boundaries of individual states. They affirmed the personal criminal responsibility of individuals, even when acting in the name of the state or under superior orders. In doing so, they laid the foundations of modern international criminal law.

The Nuremberg Trials have legal, ethical, and political significance. From a legal perspective, it established three essential principles. Crimes against humanity are punishable. Aggressive war is a crime. Invoking superior orders does not absolve one of responsibility. From the so-called Doctors' Trials emerged the Nuremberg Code, which laid the foundation of modern medical ethics. It established voluntary and informed consent, protection of the dignity of research subjects, and the personal responsibility of scientists. For the first time in history, it was clearly articulated that law stands above ideology, the human being above the state, and ethics above power.

Ethically, Nuremberg represented a moral reckoning with dehumanization. The Nazi regime instrumentalized science and subordinated it to racial ideology. Medical experiments without consent, forced sterilizations, euthanasia, and the Aktion T4 program were all presented as progress, rationality, and even humanity. In reality, they constituted a perversion of the scientific spirit. It was science without ethics, without empathy, without recognition of the equal value of every human life. Nuremberg taught us that scientific freedom without moral responsibility is not progress. It is danger.

Politically, the message of the trials was equally clear. State sovereignty is not absolute. The international community has both the right and the duty to act when systematic crimes occur. This message is being tested once again in our time. We live in an era marked by wars, mass violations of human rights, and serious debates about elements of genocide in various parts of the world.

This symposium also addresses another interconnected issue, the question of perverted science. The Nazi regime did not rely solely on political violence, but also on the systematic abuse of scientific authority. Racial theories, eugenics, medical experiments on human beings, euthanasia, and bureaucratically planned extermination were all supported by a veneer of scientific argumentation. When science loses its ethical foundation, it becomes an instrument of destruction. When the law loses its moral core, it becomes a mechanism for legitimizing crime.

Allow me, at the request of the organizers, to share a personal and family experience at this point. I was born in July 1942, during the harshest period of Nazi terror in Lower Styria. It was a time of hostage shootings, mass imprisonments, deportations to concentration camps, and violent denationalization. Children were taken from their parents and sent to Germany for re-education in order to lose their language and identity.

My family was persecuted because we were Slovenians. One relative fell on the first day of the war, April 6, near Dravograd. Another died a few days later while defending a railway line. My father's third brother was shot as a hostage in October 1941. In August 1942, the Gestapo arrested my parents and relatives, my father and four children between the ages of three and seven, and transported them from Maribor to prisons in Celje. The original documents were later discovered in the archives by our esteemed colleague Dr Daniel Siter.

My exhausted mother was separated from us. My grandmother, my twenty-month-old brother, and I, then only three weeks old, were detained in a collection camp in Maribor. Because my grandmother was considered too old for forced labor in Germany, she was released together with my brother Simon and me. Convinced that she was going to her death, my grandmother placed me along the way to the railway station on a pile of waste, hoping that kind people would find the child. They did. A few days later, my mother and a house assistant found me in the semi-basement apartment of an unknown compassionate woman. I was three weeks old.

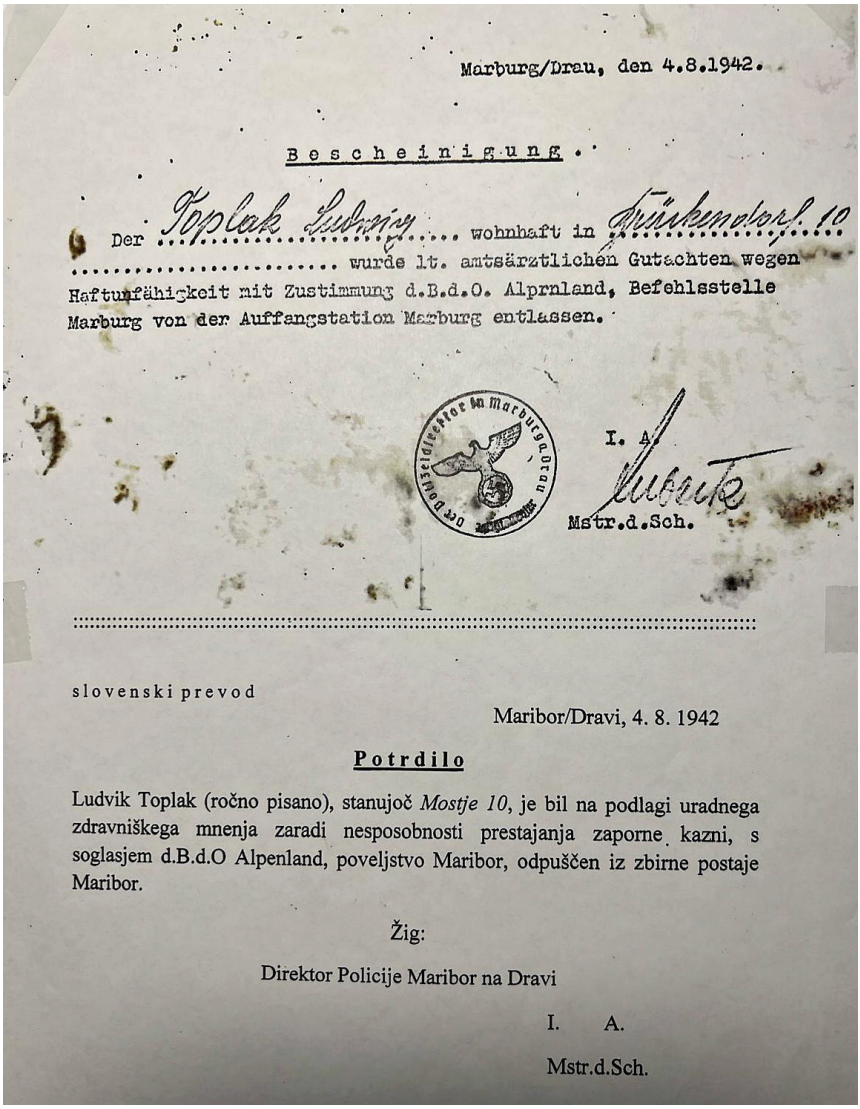
There exists an original release document (on the right) dated August 4, 1942, issued by the Director of the Police Office in Maribor, stating that Ludvik Toplak was unfit to serve a prison sentence due to health reasons. I mention this not only as a personal testimony but as evidence that even within a brutal regime, there were individuals capable of empathy. People were willing to help without expectation of reward, often at significant personal risk. Even within oppressive systems, individuals can choose humanity. On the other hand, the document symbolizes the absurdity and inhumanity of the totalitarian regime.

When we speak of Nuremberg today, we speak of concrete human destinies. We speak of children without identity, of families without graves, of a system that attempted to justify inhumanity through bureaucracy and false science. As a jurist, I see in Nuremberg a fundamental message. Some acts constitute crimes against humanity, regardless of time, place, or political system. In addition to Nazi ideology, we have witnessed other forms of dehumanizing ideologies, including the branding of individuals as class enemies in totalitarian systems and the stigmatization of groups under various contemporary ideological pressures.

We live in a time of new wars, renewed ideological tensions, manipulation of information, and technological breakthroughs that raise unprecedented ethical questions. Therefore, it is the duty of universities to preserve historical memory, defend truth, and educate younger generations in a spirit of responsibility, tolerance, and respect for human dignity. We might even speak of the need for a new Renaissance.

Allow me to conclude with one thought. Nuremberg is a moral compass for law, politics, economics, and science. It is a memory and a warning. It is a warning for our time. It is one of the foundations of a civilized society.

Thank you for your attention.



Marburg/Drau, den 4.8.1942.

Bescheinigung.

Der Toplak Ludwig wohnhaft in Trünkenbergl. 10 wurde lt. amtsärztlichen Gutachten wegen Haftunfähigkeit mit Zustimmung d.B.d.O. Alprnland, Befehlsstelle Marburg von der Auffangstation Marburg entlassen.

Der Polizeidirektor in Marburg a/Drau

I. A.

Mstr.d.Sch.

slovenski prevod

Maribor/Dravi, 4. 8. 1942

Potrdilo

Ludvik Toplak (ročno pisano), stanujoč *Mostje 10*, je bil na podlagi uradnega zdravniškega mnenja zaradi nesposobnosti prestajanja zaporne kazni, s soglasjem d.B.d.O Alpenland, poveljstvo Maribor, odpuščen iz zbirne postaje Maribor.

Žig:

Direktor Policije Maribor na Dravi

I. A.

Mstr.d.Sch.

Release certification document for Ludvik Toplak from 4 August 1942.
Source: Private collection of the Toplak family.

Dr Gideon Greif

Nuremberg Trials - 80 Years Later and Nazi's Perverted Science

SUMMARY

Major Nazi War Crime Trials (1944–present)

The judicial prosecution of Nazi crimes began even before the end of the Second World War and has continued—albeit in changing legal forms—into the present day. Central legal concepts such as crimes against humanity emerged precisely because existing international law proved insufficient to address the systematic mass murder perpetrated by the Nazi regime. Among the earliest proceedings were the Majdanek trials. The first trial took place in 1944 while the war was still ongoing; a second followed from 1946 to 1948. Both were conducted in Poland under Soviet influence. A third Majdanek trial was held much later, in 1975 in Düsseldorf, West Germany, illustrating the long temporal reach of accountability for Nazi crimes.

The most influential proceedings were the Nuremberg trials (1945–1949). For the first time in history, senior political, military, and administrative leaders were prosecuted for crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. Nuremberg established the principles of individual criminal responsibility under international law and rejected "following orders" as a defense. Closely connected to these proceedings was the Doctors' Trial (1946–1947), one of the subsequent Nuremberg trials. It focused on Nazi physicians who conducted lethal and non-consensual medical experiments on concentration camp prisoners. The trial exposed the systematic abuse of medicine for ideological and racial purposes and led to the formulation of the Nuremberg Code, a foundational document of modern medical ethics. While several physicians were convicted and executed, others evaded justice. The most infamous example is Josef Mengele, whose crimes at Auschwitz became emblematic of medical atrocities under National Socialism.

In 1947, the Auschwitz trial prosecuted leading Auschwitz personnel before a Polish court. This was followed by the Eichmann trial in 1961, which brought Adolf Eichmann to justice in Israel and had an immense global impact by centering survivor testimony and affirming the universal jurisdiction over genocide. A major turning point in West Germany's confrontation with its past were the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials, from 1963 to 1968. These proceedings revealed Auschwitz not merely as a site of individual cruelty but as an organized, bureaucratic system of mass murder embedded in state structures. Further camp-related prosecutions included the Treblinka trials, the Belzec trial, and the Sobibor trial. Although convictions were often limited, these trials documented extermination camps as instruments of genocide and preserved crucial historical evidence.

Individual and Personal Perpetrator Trials

Alongside large-scale trials, courts increasingly focused on individual perpetrators. Key figures such as Gustav Wagner and Franz Stangl, commandants of Sobibor and Treblinka, exemplify the long pursuit of justice across continents. The trial of Josef Blösche is particularly notable. Conducted in the German Democratic Republic, it ended with a death sentence in 1969—highlighting that the DDR still applied capital punishment and pursued Nazi perpetrators within its own ideological framework. A decisive legal shift occurred with the case of John Demjanjuk. His 2011 conviction established that "Beihilfe" (accessory to murder) was sufficient for criminal liability—meaning that Nazi perpetrators could be convicted without proof of a specific, individually committed killing. This precedent enabled later convictions of Oskar Gröning, Reinhold Hanning, Bruno Dey, Irmgard Furchner, as well as renewed proceedings against Siert Bruins and Gregor Formanek. Crucial to these efforts were individuals such as Simon Wiesenthal, Efraim Zuroff, and Gideon Greif, whose research and advocacy sustained judicial momentum. Institutionally, the Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen continues its work to this day, affirming that genocide and crimes against humanity are not subject to limitation.

BIOGRAPHY

Gideon Greif *is an Israeli historian and one of the most important contemporary scholars of the Holocaust, internationally recognized for his research on the Auschwitz extermination camp and, in particular, on the Jewish Sonderkommando. Born in Tel Aviv in 1951, Greif trained as a historian in Europe and earned his doctorate in modern history at the University of Vienna, where he specialized in Holocaust studies. Greif's scholarly significance lies above all in his pioneering work on the Sonderkommando—groups of Jewish prisoners forced by the SS to operate gas chambers and crematoria in extermination camps. For decades, this subject remained marginal within Holocaust historiography, often surrounded by silence, misunderstanding, or moral simplification. Beginning in the 1980s, Greif conducted extensive oral history research, interviewing all surviving members of the Auschwitz Sonderkommando worldwide. These testimonies constitute one of the most important firsthand source collections on the inner functioning of the Nazi extermination process. His research culminated in the influential book We Wept Without Tears, which brought the voices of Sonderkommando survivors into the center of academic and public discourse. The work fundamentally reshaped historical understanding of the extermination camps by documenting both the technical organization of mass murder and the extreme coercion, suffering, and moral dilemmas faced by prisoners forced into these roles. Today, the book is considered a foundational text in Holocaust scholarship. Beyond his research, Greif has been deeply engaged in Holocaust education and remembrance. He has lectured internationally, contributed to museums and memorial projects, and worked with institutions dedicated to documenting Nazi crimes. Through his scholarship, Greif helped ensure that the experiences of some of the most silenced victims of the Holocaust are preserved as an integral part of historical memory.*

Boris Hajdinjak

Adolf Eichmann's Representative, Dr Siegfried Seidl, in Maribor in 1941

SUMMARY

Siegfried Seidl (1911, Tulln–1947, Vienna) had been a member of the Nazi Party since 1930. He became a member of the SS in 1932. At the end of 1939, he joined the Sicherheitspolizei (SiPo) and Sicherheitsdienst (SD) in Vienna. Immediately afterwards, at the beginning of 1940, he became a member of the RSHA (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*) department, headed by Adolf Eichmann (1906, Solingen–1962, Ramla). Via Berlin he was sent to the resettlement office in Poznań (*Umwandererzentralstelle Posen*, UWZ), where he then participated in the resettlement of Poles and Jews from the Łódź area to the General Government. In 1940, he completed his studies in history at the University of Vienna with a doctorate. In April 1941, he was transferred to Maribor, where he became head of the Department III of the Resettlement Headquarters for Lower (i.e. Slovenian) Styria (*Umsiedlungsstab Marburg*). Eichmann visited this headquarters twice, on May 6 and August 25, 1941. Seidl's task in Maribor was the technical organisation of the transport of Slovenes to the Independent State of Croatia (i.e. Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Serbia. With the establishment of a resettlement camp in Rajhenburg Castle for Slovenians expelled from the Posavje region to Germany, his work in Slovenia came to an end in October 1941. Immediately after leaving Slovenia, he was appointed commander of the Theresienstadt ghetto, a position he held until 1943. He was then head of the Gestapo in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp from 1943 to 1944 and one of the leaders of the *Ungarnaktion* in 1944. During this "action," between the end of April and the beginning of July 1944, the Nazis arrested more than 455,000 Jews in what was then Hungary, including Jews from Prekmurje and Međimurje, and sent most of them to Auschwitz. Around 320,000 Jews of *Ungarnaktion* were murdered in Auschwitz immediately upon arrival. After the war, Seidl was sentenced to death by an Austrian court and is one of 30 Austrians executed in Austria for war crimes during World War II.

Keywords: World War II, Adolf Eichmann, Siegfried Seidl, Maribor, Holocaust

BIOGRAPHY

Boris Hajdinjak *has been an external collaborator of the Center for Jewish Cultural Heritage Synagogue Maribor since 2003, and is its director since 2017. He is the author of articles and books on the medieval and early modern history of Slovenia, the history of Maribor in the first half of the 20th century, and the history of the Holocaust in Slovenia and the countries of the former Yugoslavia. As an author or co-author, he has participated in museum exhibitions in Brežice, Čakovec, Lendava, Ljubljana, Maribor, Murska Sobota, Nagykanizsa, Nova Gorica, Ptuj, Rajhenburg, Ravne na Koroškem and Velenje. His most comprehensive exhibitions are on the Lords of Ptuj (co-authored with Polona Vidmar, 2008), Slovenian victims of Auschwitz (2020), the Knights of Rajhenburg (2022) and the Holocaust in Međimurje and Prekmurje (2023). He was a co-initiator of the installation of stolpersteine in Maribor in 2012, Ljubljana in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021, Lendava in 2019 and 2022, Murska Sobota in 2019 and Šalovci in 2022, and the nomination of five Slovenes from Prekmurje as Righteous Among the Nations in 2017.*

Dr Luka Martin Tomažič

On the Eve of Nürnberg: The Kelsen-Radbruch Dilemma, the Emergence of Ius Cogens, and Its Legacy in Contemporary International Criminal Law

SUMMARY

There has hardly been an event more important for the progressive development of international criminal law than the Nuremberg Trials of 1945–1946. The trials did not primarily follow the age-old motto of *vae victis*; rather, they represented a pioneering attempt to prosecute key figures in the structure of the Third Reich for acts that deeply shocked the conscience of the international community and people of goodwill. In this way, the pillars of modern international criminal law were established, with the hope that such horrors would never occur again. Nuremberg became a symbol of respect for natural law, according to which individuals cannot enjoy absolute immunity for their acts, even if they were "merely following the orders of superiors" or acting in accordance with wicked laws.

On the eve of the trials, an implicit but significant dilemma emerged: traditional international law did not recognise the direct criminal responsibility of individuals, who were shielded by the act of state doctrine. In response to the unthinkable horrors of the Holocaust, two main legal-philosophical approaches emerged. One was exemplified by the legal positivism of Hans Kelsen, who saw the core problem in the fact that, in the legal system of Nazi Germany, arguments of law and the evil Nazi "morality" mixed freely. Radbruch, on the other hand, proposed a solution whereby positive law would remain valid only as long as the tension between it and justice did not become so unbearable that the law had to yield to a higher, objective morality.

The doctrinal approach adopted at Nuremberg favoured the Radbruchian position. While existing law was taken into account and its breaches were considered, the crimes against humanity and peace were prosecuted on the basis of a universal morality, even when the perpetrators had not violated the letter of the law. This was consistent with the emerging concept of peremptory norms (ius cogens) of international law, for which the Nuremberg trials served as a powerful catalyst. Nuremberg demonstrated that moral norms prohibiting aggression, genocide, slavery, and other acts offensive to the conscience of humanity take precedence over positive law. These norms became the normative bedrock of the post-Second World War international community, as enshrined in the framework of the United Nations.

The Nuremberg Principles thus at least implicitly influenced the Genocide Convention (1948), the Geneva Conventions (1949), and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. After the end of the Cold War, the ad hoc tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda revived this legacy, culminating in the creation of the International Criminal Court (Rome Statute 1998). Universal jurisdiction expanded in national legal systems, as demonstrated by cases in Belgium, Germany, and elsewhere. Today, international criminal law faces significant challenges, especially political selectivity, the non-participation of major powers, and difficulties in enforcing judgments. The legacy of Nuremberg remains vital in the 21st century, although it requires continuous strengthening through reaffirmation by each successive generation and in every historical circumstance.

Keywords: Nürnberg Trials, Kelsen, Radbruch, Ius Cogens, International Criminal Law

BIOGRAPHY

Luka Martin Tomažič *is an Associate Professor and Vice-Rector for Research at Alma Mater Europaea University, a Full Member and Vice-President of the Slovenian Academy of Legal Sciences and a Lead Researcher at the Global Peace Offensive Center of the World Academy of Art and Science. He is a Researcher/Case-writer for Columbia University Global Freedom of Expression and has served as an Expert for the Constitutional Commission of the Slovenian Parliament. He was a Research Assistant to Ernest Petrič, former President of the UN International Law Commission, and a Visiting Researcher at the University of Zagreb. In 2023 and 2024, the IusInfo portal named him among Slovenia's top ten most influential lawyers.*

Dr Dr Igor Grdina

A Witness Who Spoke Slovene

SUMMARY

The Austrian State Secretary Michael Skubl (1877–1964) was probably the only witness at the main Nuremberg Trial who spoke Slovene. After studying at the University of Vienna, the jurist—born in Bleiburg (Pliberk) in Carinthia—devoted himself to a career in the security services. Before the First World War, he came to Ljubljana as one of the leading police officials; in their writings he is mentioned by the liberal politician Ivan Hribar and the social-democratically oriented writer Ivan Cankar. Hribar also notes that Skubl, who distinguished himself through broad education, wrote poetry in the Slovene language.

After the First World War, Skubl advanced rapidly within the hierarchy of the First Austrian Republic; his career reached its peak during the Austrofascist "corporate state," when he became police president and state secretary in the office of Federal Chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg. In this role he was—something he himself emphasized in Nuremberg—at the center of resistance to the "national opposition" in the years 1934–1938, though he was not particularly resolute in this regard. This is also evidenced by the fact that he persuaded the Austrian-Jewish writer Joseph Roth to leave Austrian territory before the Anschluss, which suggests that he did not believe resistance to Hitler's supporters was possible. After the Anschluss he was briefly imprisoned and then interned in Kassel; the National Socialists did not treat him as harshly as some other leading officials of the Austrian corporate state. In Nuremberg he was not a particularly incriminating witness, nor was he at the 1947 trial in Austria against the former foreign minister Guido Schmidt.

BIOGRAPHY

Igor Grdina *is a full professor of Slovene literature and cultural history. He is employed at ZRC SAZU and at Alma Mater Europaea University. His bibliography comprises around 1,700 items. He served as a visiting professor at the University of Vienna for two semesters and has also delivered invited lectures at Humboldt University in Berlin and at the universities of Tübingen, Regensburg, Graz, and Klagenfurt/Celovec.*


AUSCHWITZ
BEŁZEC
CHEŁMNO
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SOBIBÓR

Dr Daniel Siter

The Roots of Nazism in Yugoslavia and Slovenia Before the Second World War: The Subversiveness of the Kulturbund and the Post-War Trials Against Its Members

SUMMARY

In this paper and symposium lecture, the author analyses the initial establishment, development, and subversiveness of the Swabian-German Cultural Association (Kulturbund) in Slovenia, as well as the role, significance, and consequences of its members' activities between 1922 and 1941 and later within the occupation apparatus, including the post-war epilogue. The Kulturbund functioned as a cultural, social, and welfare umbrella organisation of the German minority in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. In its later stages, it evolved into a political and (para)military organisation, gradually assuming a strong Nazi orientation and ideological charge. Kulturbund was not merely a Yugoslav or Slovenian phenomenon. Documents from The National Archives (London) testify to the existence and wartime operations of a cell in Trieste.

Vojvodina Germans established the central headquarters of the Kulturbund in Novi Sad in mid-June 1920. In Slovenia, the organisation was founded in 1922 only in the Kočevje region. However, it did not experience substantial growth before 1929—or, more visibly, after 1931, when it was once again permitted to operate on Slovenian territory. By 1941, within the Drava Banovina, five districts and 52 local groups were active. The study highlights three key processes—Split, Radicalisation, and Nazification—through which the German Reich and the NSDAP assigned the Kulturbund a (para)military role as an auxiliary military instrument in preparations for the attack on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Graz, with its escalating radicalising influence in the late 1920s, ideologically replaced the Vojvodina centre of political life for Slovenian Germans. Through the scouting, youth training, and educational activities of Helmut Carstanjen and the rise of Nazism in Austria, Graz became a centre of National Socialist indoctrination for German Youth. These developments intensified the three key processes within the leadership structures of the Kulturbund, extending from Graz into Slovenian territory. Over time, Graz became a Nazi hub for anti-Slovenian subversive activity.

During the period when the Kulturbund was officially banned, its radicalisation was further intensified by the Evangelical Church. In a prolonged internal struggle, the younger generation of Germans prevailed, steering the rejuvenated organisation onto a Nazified path and transforming it into an obedient instrument of Nazi expansionism. The Kulturbund adopted the organisational patterns and objectives of the Nazi Party; through pre-war military training of young Slovenian Germans in handling, aiming, and shooting weapons, as well as ideological indoctrination in

the National Socialist worldview, its membership underwent systematic militarisation in camps in the Drava Banovina and neighbouring Austria. Even before 1941, this trained Youth formed the core of clandestinely organised Sturmabteilung (SA) and Schutzstaffel (SS) units, which assisted the German military during its invasion.

The lecture argues that the Kulturbund functioned as a key fifth-column formation (and, within its Nazified youth, a paramilitary force), systematically spreading Nazi propaganda, demagogy, and agitation in Slovenian territory prior to the war, while collecting secret and sensitive information about the Yugoslav state and individuals opposed to German or Nazi policies. Kulturbund cells compiled secret lists of Slovenians, thereby preparing the groundwork for invasion, occupation, and seizure of power. Thus, even before April 1941, the organisation had sealed the fate of many nationally conscious, educated, and socially active Slovenian families. The Kulturbund represents the origin of the criminal infrastructure that, during the occupation, underpinned the occupiers' ethnocidal, denationalisation, and Germanisation policies, as well as the terror inflicted upon the Slovenian population. At the end of the war, the new socialist authorities issued a final bill with interests for the wartime atrocities and crimes. After May 1945, an epilogue and victorious encounter unfolded (including against members of the Kulturbund and the German minority), which, within the complex context of the Second World War in Slovenia, concluded with tragic post-war actions.

Keywords: Kulturbund, Subversiveness, Nazism, Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Drava Banovina, Post-War Fate

BIOGRAPHY

Daniel Siter *is a Slovenian historian, researcher, and Editor-in-Chief at Alma Mater Europaea University, as well as Head of Research at the International Research Center for Second World War Maribor. His research focuses on the contemporary history of the first half of the 20th century. He specialises in the life of Adolf Hitler, the history of Nazism, prisoner-of-war camps, the Kulturbund, the German minority in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, occupation borders and German occupation policies in Slovenia, as well as dark cultural and military heritage. He is the author of the highly acclaimed scholarly book Rogaška Slatina Under the Swastika (published in two editions), for which he received recognition from the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Borut Pahor; as well as the first editor and author of an edited book published by LIT Verlag. He is a recipient of several awards and author of scholarly articles, reviews, invited lectures, discussions, interviews, and notable exhibitions—most recently in Moscow at the Victory Museum (2024) and the Manege (2025). He regularly participates in national and international conferences (Johannesburg, Canterbury, Moscow, Almaty, Vologda, Prague, Zagreb, Belgrade, among others) in the roles of author, organiser, and moderator.*

Dr Alja Brglez

Selection and Survival: Erika Fürst's Testimony on Josef Mengele and Nazi Medical Experimentation in Auschwitz

SUMMARY

The year 2025 marked the 80th anniversary of both the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp and the end of the Second World War in Europe. Commemoration at a temporal distance exceeding a single generation allows for a more measured reflection on events that not only reshaped the political and military landscape of Europe but also left profound and enduring scars on humanity's collective memory. This anniversary invites renewed consideration of the nature of evil, the role of ideology, and—central to this paper—the abuse of science in the service of racial ideology and state power. Few historical contexts illustrate the collapse of fundamental ethical principles in scientific practice as starkly as Nazi Germany, where science, particularly medicine, was systematically subordinated to ideological goals and transformed into an instrument of violence.

The paper examines the perversion of science under National Socialism, focusing on the ideological foundations and institutional structures that enabled medical professionals to participate in crimes against humanity. Racial theory, long present in European intellectual traditions, was elevated under the Nazi regime to a state-sanctioned "scientific" doctrine, legitimized through disciplines such as eugenics, genetics, and psychology. Official state institutions played a central role in institutionalizing these ideas within academic and medical practice, providing pseudo-scientific justification for forced sterilization policies, the so-called "euthanasia" programs, and ultimately for medical experimentation in concentration camps.

The most infamous embodiment of this "perverted science" was Dr. Josef Mengele, whose work at Auschwitz exemplified the fusion of medical authority, ideological fanaticism, and unchecked power. His experiments—frequently conducted on children and twins—were marked by extreme cruelty and a complete disregard for human life. Yet Mengele was not an isolated figure; rather, he was part of a broader network of physicians and researchers who treated camp prisoners as experimental material rather than as human beings.

The central focus of this paper is the testimony of Erika Fürst, a Jewish girl from Prekmurje, Slovenia, and a survivor of Auschwitz, who was personally examined and selected by Mengele upon her arrival at the camp. Her testimony offers a crucial human perspective on the mechanisms of medical selection and systematic dehumanization, revealing how scientific language, procedures, and professional authority were mobilized to legitimize violence.

The paper emphasizes the indispensable role of survivor testimonies in the study of Nazi crimes, arguing that archival documents alone cannot fully convey the lived reality of these atrocities.

The paper also addresses the postwar response of the international community, particularly the Nuremberg Doctors' Trial (1946–1947), which resulted in the formulation of the Nuremberg Code. This landmark document established voluntary and informed consent as a foundational principle of modern medical ethics. The legacy of Nazi medical crimes thus directly shaped contemporary bioethical standards, underscoring the inseparability of scientific practice and moral responsibility.

By integrating historical analysis with survivor testimony, this paper argues that science, when detached from ethical accountability, can become a tool of destruction. The testimony of Erika Fürst functions not only as a historical source but also as an ethical warning, reminding us that the responsibility of science toward humanity remains an urgent and enduring concern.

Keywords: Nazism, Medical Ethics, Josef Mengele, Holocaust, Erika Fürst

BIOGRAPHY

Alja Brglez *is a historian and researcher in historical anthropology, political culture, and collective memory, with a focus on processes of national reconciliation in Slovenia and the Western Balkan region, drawing on her extensive practical experience as a close collaborator of the former President of the Republic of Slovenia on issues of historical dialogue and post-conflict reconciliation.*

Brglez holds a PhD in historical anthropology, a Master's degree in history, and an MBA, and works as a research associate at the ICK Institute for Civilisation and Culture. Her research explores the ethical and societal responsibilities of institutions, the role of historical testimony, and the ways in which historical memory shapes contemporary political and social frameworks. She has published extensively on war, memory, reconciliation, and interregional relations, combining historical analysis with reflections on cultural, social, and political dynamics in Slovenia and its neighboring countries.

Dr Ferenc Miszlivetz
Dr Mónika Mátay

Jewish Heritage and the Deportations from Kőszeg and Szombathely

SUMMARY

The prewar vivid mental and cultural world of the Hungarian Jews seems to be irreatrivably lost. It is difficult if not impossible to locate and to reconstruct the everyday life of the common members of Jewish communities in the 19th and first decades of the 20th centuries. Our lecture investigates how Jewish people integrated themselves into the Christian environment and how they constructed their own world within it. Using personal stories, interviews, and ego-documents, we attempt to show how nearly two centuries of economic, social, and cultural development spanning generations came to an end brutally quickly, in the case of Hungary almost literally overnight, in the spring and summer of 1944.

Szombathely and Kőszeg are neighboring medium-sized and small towns in western Hungary. Geographically, they are much closer to Vienna than to the Hungarian capital, Budapest. This had a decisive influence on their history even in the early modern period, and it continues to be a determining factor in modern times, right up to the present day. The origins of Judaism in the region dates back to the Middle Ages, but our knowledge of this period is fragmentary because most of the historical sources have been destroyed. What we do know for certain is that Jewish families already had considerable experience in rapid relocation and adaptation in the 17th century, as their housing and activities were restricted by constant prohibitive decrees in line with the politics of the day. The Jews living in the region were actively involved in trade with Venice and Styria, and they also had close ties with the Nádasdy and Batthyány families, the prominent aristocratic clans in western Hungary.

Overcoming legal difficulties and despite repeated bans and expulsions, according to a 1835 census, Jews were already present in 100 of the 613 settlements in Vas County. The construction of synagogues in Szombathely (1832, 1880-81) and Kőszeg (1859) in the 19th century clearly indicates the integration of Jews into local urban societies. Based on our own research published in various volumes on Jewish history, materials of large-scale exhibitions organized over the past ten years, the Jewish research group supported by iASK, relevant chapters from our Talking Houses book series, and, last but not least, the experience gained during the renovation of the Kőszeg synagogue, which was initiated by iASK. In our presentation, we will showcase the complex Jewish cultural heritage that is inherently woven into the fabric of city life.

We focus on individual achievements who achieved extraordinary success, primarily on Philip Schey, who, as a successful first-generation small-town businessman, initiated – among others – the founding of the Kőszeg Savings Bank in 1844 and financed the construction of the local synagogue, Jewish school and ritual bath. The portrait of Fülöp Schey is incomplete and will remain so until his life, career, and investments outside Kőszeg, especially in Vienna, are thoroughly researched. Although the Scheys, who were agile and good at recognizing opportunities, considered Kőszeg to be extremely important for their future, the town was more of a temporary stop in the family's strategy. In the last third of the 19th century, the members of the Schey family moved their headquarters partly to Pozsony and mostly to Vienna.

BIOGRAPHIES

Ferenc Miszlivetz *is the founder and director of the Institute of Advanced Studies Kőszeg (iASK) and a Jean Monnet professor ad personam. He elaborated the innovative regional development concept, called KRAFT program (Creative Cities, Sustainable Region). He is the co-founder of the Institute for Social and European Studies Foundation (a Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence). He has served as the President of the Social Sciences unit of the Hungarian UNESCO Committee and holds a UNESCO Chair in Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainability in Kőszeg. His research interests include democracy, civil society, Central-European and European Studies, globalization and sustainability. Under his leadership iASK has won two prestigious FIABCI awards for the city dimensional real estate development of the historic town of Kőszeg.*

Mónika Mátay *(PhD 2003) teaches at the Institute of History at Eötvös Loránd University and is a member of the iASK Institute in Kőszeg. She has been a visiting lecturer at several foreign higher education institutions, including Rutgers University (New Jersey), Humboldt University in Berlin, Central European University, and the University of Trieste. He has taught foreign students in the Erasmus Program, the University of California's Transnational Education Program, and the ISES Institute in Kőszeg. She has participated in several research projects on modern social and cultural history, human heritage (talkinghouseseurope.com), crime history (arsenic mass poisonings in Hungary between the two world wars), marginalized social groups, social gender, and the media. Her publications include a monograph analyzing private debates between men and women, an edited volume on the history of crime in Budapest at the turn of the century, and book chapters and articles on a variety of topics, including a study reviewing modern European public life and a text on the role of Hungarian outlaws.*

Dr Sebastjan Kristovič

Viktor Frankl (Biographical Sketch) and his Stance Towards Guilt, Nazism and Germany

SUMMARY

(1905–1997), an Austrian psychiatrist, neurologist, and founder of existential analysis/logotherapy (the Third Viennese School), ranks among the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century in the fields of the humanities and social sciences. He earned doctoral degrees in medicine and philosophy and received twenty-nine honorary doctorates in recognition of his outstanding scientific and professional contributions. His book *Man's Search for Meaning* is regarded as one of the most widely read, translated, reprinted, and influential books of all time.

Frankl's personal life trajectory, profoundly shaped by his experience of Nazi concentration camps, constitutes a fundamental context for understanding his reflections on guilt, Nazism, and Germany. The present paper proceeds from the assumption that Frankl's engagement with these themes is not ideological or political in the narrow sense, but rather deeply anthropological, ethical, and existential.

Dialogue with Frankl is particularly valuable for gaining a deeper understanding of the anthropological and existential foundations of the human capacity to perpetrate extreme, cruel, and sadistic acts against others. Frankl does not interpret such phenomena merely as the result of pathological individual traits or socio-environmental determinants; instead, he situates them within the broader framework of human existential dynamics, especially in relation to the loss of meaning, inner emptiness, and moral disorientation. As Frankl himself states: "*What, then, is man?* We ask again. Man is the being that always decides what he is. He is the being who invented the gas chambers; but he is also the being who entered those gas chambers upright, with the Lord's Prayer or the Jewish prayer for the dead on his lips."

The biographical outline highlights key milestones in Frankl's life, including the development of his own theoretical orientation—logotherapy—and his personal ordeal of deportation and imprisonment in several concentration camps, during which he lost most of his family members. The central part of the paper examines Frankl's understanding of guilt. Frankl rejects the collectivization of guilt and consistently insists on personal, individual responsibility. According to him, guilt is always concrete and personal and cannot be ascribed to an entire nation or generation. At the same time, he emphasizes the existence of collective responsibility in the sense of a moral obligation for society to confront its past, acknowledge evil, and prevent its recurrence. This distinction enables an ethical stance that transcends revenge and fosters processes of inner purification and reconciliation.

In the context of Nazism, Frankl underscores the danger of ideologies that reduce the human being to a means, biological material, or a number. He understands Nazism as an extreme expression of dehumanization, which, paradoxically, also reveals the opposite dimension of the human person: the capacity for solidarity, compassion, and inner freedom even under the most inhuman conditions. His testimonies thus constitute not merely historical documentation, but an existential appeal to contemporary humanity.

The paper demonstrates that Frankl's thought represents a significant contribution to the understanding of historical trauma, the ethics of memory, and contemporary debates on guilt. His perspective is not oriented toward the past as such, but toward the future of humanity—toward the question of how suffering can be transformed into a responsible and meaningful response.

BIOGRAPHY

Sebastjan Kristovič *is a researcher, professor and Vice-Rector for Education and Study Process. He is an expert in existential analysis/logotherapy, quality of life, mental health, and education. In his scientific and professional work, he focuses on a holistic approach to the human being, the question of meaning in life, personality development, and protective factors of mental health, particularly among children and adolescents. He serves as Director of the International Institute for Psychotherapy and Applied Psychology. He is the founder and head of the innovative postgraduate specialist study programme Logopedagogy, which is based on a holistic and interdisciplinary approach to education. He actively participates in various projects, programmes, and research groups. He is the author of several scientific monographs and original research articles. For many years, he has also been active in applied practice, working with parents, teachers, and educators through individual consultations, professional lectures, seminars, and advisory work.*

Alma Mater Europaea University *is an independent, internationally recognised higher education institution operating under the auspices of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts in Salzburg. It unites more than 2,000 top scientists from around the world, including 37 Nobel laureates. Alma Mater provides programmes aligned with national and international standards and regularly updates them in line with developments in individual fields of study.*

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