

## **Jewish Studies at the CEU, 1999--2001**

The initiative for establishing a Jewish Studies Program at the Central European University was launched by the Board of Trustees of the university six years ago. The central guiding idea has been to create a centre for teaching and research on Jewish history, culture and society that would reflect the long and rich contribution of the Jews to the region served by the Central European University. Since 1996, Jewish Studies has organised six lecture series, four summer universities, offered a number of courses taught by professors of the History Department and the Nationalism Program which relate to Jewish Studies and which made it possible for interested students to expand their knowledge in this field. Our first Jewish Studies Yearbook published in 2000, gave a detailed account of the activities in the field of Jewish Studies in the first three years of the project.

Since 1999 the Jewish Studies continued the successful **public lecture series**, which unites renowned scholars from both the region and Western Europe, the United States and Israel. In the academic years 1999/2000 and 2000/2001 in the series *Facets of Jewish Experience through the Ages* and *The Presence of the Past: Jewish Experience East and West* 18 lectures took place. The bi-weekly lectures were regularly attended by a large interested audience composed by the students and the faculty of the CEU and other universities in Budapest. The full list of lectures can be found at the back of the present volume.

Since in communist Eastern Europe Jewish questions and issues were often disregarded, even tabooed, little serious research was carried out in Jewish subjects. To fill in gaps in our knowledge of the history, sociology, culture, religion of Jews of the region, CEU Jewish Studies has launched two research programs. The first one, **Jews and Politics** under the direction of András Kovács, aimed at analysing the participation of Jewish politicians and political institutions which intended to represent the interest of the Jewish communities in the political life of the countries of the region. Our purpose has been to support pre-eminently researches on primary sources of Jewish politics in different archives of the region. The following themes have been examined in the framework of this research: Jewish politics in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Bohemia; Jewish politicians in the Hungarian parliament; early Hungarian Zionism; Zionism between the two world wars in Hungary; exploration of documents relating to Jews and the Jewish question in communist archives. The research was made possible by the CEU Research Grant. Some of the results are published in the present volume – see the articles by Michael Miller, Attila Novák and Árpád Welker.

Our second project, the **Jewish Studies Thesis and Research Support Program**, was initiated to encourage both M.A. and Ph.D. level students to complete dissertations on various Jewish subjects and to carry out individual research projects related to their topics. Participants of the program receive consultation and supervision from renowned scholars of the field both within CEU and in other higher educational institutions. The Support Program offered grants to help students do archival research, consult local experts, participate in conferences, as well as to publish the material produced. In the past 3 years, 17 students received this grant. They carried out research on a variety of themes, ranging from the middle ages to our days and from the interpretation of Jewish texts (e.g. Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Song of Songs in the early Middle Ages; the Guide of the Perplexed as an encoded text) to

antisemitism (e.g. Antisemitism in the Czech fascist movement in the interwar period), Jewish--Gentile relationship (e.g. Polish and Czech national movements and the attitude towards Jews in the 19<sup>th</sup> century), the history of Jews in the region (e.g. Opposition to Zionism within Hungarian Orthodox Jewry; The legal and socio-political status of the Jewish communities in Romania, 1866--1924) or Israeli identity (e.g. Conceptualising and Shaping Israeli Identity). A number of students in several departments participated in the program and wrote their M.A. thesis on Jewish subjects, including Jewish social history (e.g. *The Image of „the Jew” in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Hungarian Satirical Journals*), Jewish identity (e.g. *Jewish Identity in Bulgaria*), assimilation (e.g. *The Concept of Assimilation in Istvan Bibo`s Writing, The Jewish Question in Hungary after 1944*) or antisemitism (e.g. *The 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Russian Antisemitism and its Impact of Georgia: Jewish Show Trials*). The grant, which is distributed on the basis of an open competition among CEU students, is funded by the generous support of the American Jewish Committee, the Yad Hanadiv Foundation and a number of Eastern European Jewish communities, like the Czech, Hungarian, Polish and Slovak Jewish community. The present volume contains already three such articles (Eszter Andorka, Marie Crhova and Ksenia Polouektova).

In the last years the Jewish Studies Project has extended its activities to build up a *multi-disciplinary track* combining post-graduate teaching and advanced research. As a result of our efforts in the academic year of 2001/200 the CEU Jewish Studies Project has been able to announce a new *specialisation in Jewish Studies* for M.A. and Ph.D. students in the History Department and the Nationalism Studies Program. A formal recognition of a completed Jewish Studies specialisation is being offered to History and Nationalism M.A. students who earn 12 classroom credits in Jewish Studies classes and write their dissertation on a related topic. The courses of the Jewish Studies specialisation track provided students with an overview of the region`s Jewish history, social history and culture. The topics included modern Jewish historiography (Michael Brenner), the social history of Central European Jewry (Victor Karády), modern Jewish politics in Eastern Europe (John Klier), and modern antisemitism (András Kovács). Eight students enrolled in the program in the 2001/2002 academic year. They wrote their dissertation on such various topics, as for example the social mobility of Jewish and Estonian students of the Tartu University during interwar period, the different types of Jewish communities in Hungary since the fall of communism, the Jews` place in Polish interwar society in the light of the debate over ritual slaughter, or the sociological--literary view of the Holocaust. The courses offered in the project are listed in the appendix. The establishment of a systematic Jewish Studies teaching program made necessary a substantial development of the Jewish Studies library section at the CEU library. The library has already started to build up an assortment of books on the subject in the last couple of years but in the last academic year Jewish Studies launched a special library development project in order to make accessible for the students all indispensable publications from the last decades on Jewish subjects. The Jewish Studies specialisation and the library development were made possible by the generous financial support of the Yad Hanadiv Foundation.

Jewish Studies also contributed to two conferences. The *Academic Conference on Jewish Identities in the Post-Communist Era* (Budapest, 2001), was organised and sponsored together with the Institute for Jewish Policy Research/JPR, London, Frankel Center for Judaic Studies, and the University of Michigan. The aim of the conference was to compare and analyse research on Jewish identities in Europe, and understand how Jews in different places conceive

of themselves; how they relate to the states in which they reside; and how their evolving self-understandings influence their relationship with world Jewry and the societies in which they live. These issues are, of course, also very relevant beyond the academic circles -- to Jewish leaders and policy planners who must face the question of meanings and boundaries of Jewishness. The second conference entitled *Jews and Modernity in Europe* was organised in conjunction with Collegium Budapest. The participants explored the Jewish and non-Jewish responses to the various dilemmas raised by modernisation, which fundamentally changed European Jewry and its relationship with its surrounding. They also analysed how the processes and events of the last decade, namely European integration and globalisation, influence the relationship of Jews and non-Jews in society.