



KAVALA HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL

Kavala, Greece

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Executive Summary

The erection of a memorial to the 1,484 Jewish residents of Kavala killed during the Holocaust provoked a dispute between Jewish advocates and the City Council, grounded in anti-Semitic rhetoric. The memorial's unveiling was delayed amidst calls to remove the Star of David from its face, prompting criticism from the international community. Upon its belated unveiling on June 7, 2015, Deputy Minister Panagiotis Sgourdis drew comparisons between the atrocities of World War II and the current situation in Palestine. Since then, the memorial has been vandalised thrice. This case study explores how the attempts to commemorate Kavala's Jewish victims of Holocaust caused manifestations of long rooted anti-Semitism in Greece, triggering the reflexes of the local community.

Introduction

The erection of a memorial commemorating the 1,484 Jewish residents of Kavala killed in the Holocaust has been the site of disputes between Jewish groups, the local Municipality, and anti-Semites. The contestation predated the unveiling of the current memorial in 2015, as until 2004, the local authorities resisted efforts to erect such a memorial. The unveiling in June 2015 was initially postponed by Kavala's mayor, Dimitra Tsanaka, on the basis that members of her party opposed the Star of David engraved on its surface.¹ The unveiling on 7 June 2015 was used by Greek Deputy of Rural Development Minister Panagiotis Sgouridis to draw a comparison between the atrocities of the Second World War and the Israeli blockade of Gaza.² Since its unveiling, the memorial has been vandalised thrice, with both Greek and Jewish news organisations attributing this to local anti-Semitism and the broader prominence of anti-Semitism within Greece. On 21 June 2015, two weeks after it was unveiled, the memorial was defaced with blue paint, and on 29 March 2017, the marble surface of the memorial was smashed with hammers.³ Another vandalism occurred in 7 November 2023, one month after the break out of the Israel-Hamas conflict.

Background

Historical Background

Kavala is a city in Northern Greece, situated in the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace. Jewish communities had a century-long presence in the region, while in the 16th century, Ashkenazi Jews arrived from present-day Hungary, alongside Sephardim Jews from the Iberian Peninsula in lands that later became part of modern Greece. Religious anti-Semitism was deeply ingrained in Greek Christian communities and was institutionalised already since the Byzantine era. In the nineteenth century, as nationalistic sentiments gained prominence, they concurrently assimilated political anti-Semitism.⁴

Jewish communities in the region of Kavala, which were notably numerous, were not exempt from the wave of anti-Semitism that swept through Europe and the newly formed Balkan states at the turn of the nineteenth century. In addition to being accused of exerting excessive political influence within the state and prioritising Jewish interests over national ones, they were also blamed for their involvement in socialist movements and for their voluntary enlisting in the

¹ Yair Rosenberg, "Greek Mayor Flip-Flops Over Holocaust Memorial Unveiling," *Tablet*, May 18, 2015.

² *Ibid.*

³ Yair Rosenberg, "Greek Holocaust Memorial Vandalized.," "Greek Holocaust Memorial in Kavala damaged by anti-Semites," *Neos Kosmos*, April 7, 2017.

⁴ Katerina Lagos, *The Fourth of August Regime and Greek Jewry, 1936-1941*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 40-41, 50.

Ottoman military during the Greek-Turkish War of 1897, which ended with Greece's decisive defeat. The war's outcome significantly intensified the scrutiny of the pro-Turkish inclination of the Jews, particularly in the region of Thessaly. This had a profound impact on Greek-Jewish relations and compelled certain Jewish families to seek refuge in Kavala.⁵

In the early twentieth century, during the period when the city of Kavala remained under Ottoman rule, historical sources reveal divergent perspectives concerning the coexistence of Jewish and Christian communities in the city. While some accounts attest to the harmonious relations between Greeks and Jews, anti-Semitic incidents were also reported, notably on the occasion of Christian Easter celebrations.⁶ Economic competition between Greeks and Jews was a significant underlying cause behind Greek anti-Semitism; however, instances of collaboration also transpired, with individuals from diverse religious groups uniting to assert their labour rights within international trade unions.⁷ These alliances facilitated the forging of connections between the Jewish and Greek communities despite the emerging tensions stemming from the intensification of Balkan nationalisms.⁸

Nevertheless, the dissemination of nationalistic ideas quickly found fertile ground in Kavala, which, apart from being a port city, was also a thriving hub for the international tobacco trade. State ideology, as expressed through the consular authorities, capitalised on the aspirations of the emerging Greek urban class to gain economic dominance over the Jewish elites in Macedonia and Thrace. In this sense, 'the rivalry against the Jews in the region' was not rooted 'in anti-Semitism as it was known in Western Europe, but rather on Greek national objectives.'⁹In the framework of the Macedonian Struggle (1893-1912), a series of conflicts mainly fought between Greece and Bulgaria for control over Ottoman Macedonia, an economic war was also directed against the Jews. The underlying rationale behind this was that Jewish presence hindered the Hellenisation of the region and, thus, the Greek struggles against Bulgarian influence and penetration in Macedonia. During the ensuing Balkans Wars (1912-1913), Bulgarian forces committed anti-Semitic attacks against Jewish citizens of Kavala, including the apprehension and abduction of Jewish political actors. These attacks had repercussions extending beyond the Balkans, causing concerns among Jewish people and in the Jewish Press in Europe. At the time, according to Vasilis Ritzaleos, 'the suspicion of the Jewish against Bulgarian expansionism in Eastern Macedonia

⁵ Βασίλης Ριτζαλέος, *Οι Εβραϊκές κοινότητες στην Ανατολική Μακεδονία και την Θράκη από τα μέσα του 19ου αιώνα μέχρι τον Δεύτερο Παγκόσμιο Πόλεμο* [Jewish Communities in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace from the mid-19th century until the Second World War], *Διδακτορική Διατριβή, Αριστοτέλειο Πανεπιστήμιο Θεσσαλονίκης*, 2006), 200.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 194 referencing Arch. de l' AIU/Bulgarie/IE/3a Bassat 1905-1909, *Επιστολή Μπασάτ, Καβάλα 5 Μαρτίου 1908*.

⁷ From the mid-19th century until the 1950s, Kavala boasted a lucrative tobacco industry and was distinguished as an international node in the trade of eastern-type tobacco. Many residents of the city of different religious backgrounds were employed in tobacco factories. Institute of Social Movements & Tobacco History, "Historical Retrospection," November 2, 2023.

⁸ Ριτζαλέος, 197.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 200-201.

incited a wave of migration from the area, a move that proved to be a lifesaver for many Jewish families during the Second World War.¹⁰

After the end of the Bulgarian occupation in the region in 1918, and the takeover of East Macedonia by the Greek military, anti-Semitic incidents were reported against the Jewish population of Kavala led by political authorities, military forces and a segment of the public opinion. Those actors blamed the Jews for committing injustices against them and pursued their humiliation, an attitude that reflected their belief that Jews enjoyed a privileged position during the Bulgarian occupation.¹¹

In a similar vein, in the interwar period, Ioannis Metaxas's authoritarian regime (1936-1941) sought to weaken the Jewish tobacco trade operations in the city. While Metaxas's ideology did resonate with traditional anti-Semitic positions, he did not adopt anti-Semitic policies; Jewish people were primarily targeted by the regime when they had communist affiliations, as communism was projected as the main ideological threat to the State at the time.¹²

Conversely, in the early years of the Second World War, the Greek government proceeded with the implementation of anti-Semitic measures, with the involvement of the Bulgarian state.¹³ These were complemented by legislation enacted by the pro-Nazi government in August 1942, which entitled the authorities to take steps toward the solution of the 'Jewish problem' without the approval of the Parliament.¹⁴ Kavala had been part of the Bulgarian occupational zone since 1941. Jewish properties were gradually registered by the municipality, while their progressive social marginalisation was enhanced by the prohibition of their presence in public spaces. On March 3 1943, following the Dannecker-Belev agreement concerning the deportation of Jews in the occupied Greek and Yugoslavian territories, Bulgarian forces arrested the town's Jewish population, transferring them to the port of Lom in the Danube. From there, they were subsequently deported to Treblinka extermination camp.¹⁵ Of the 1,484 Jewish people taken from Kavala, only 42 survived the Holocaust.¹⁶ The Kavala Holocaust Memorial commemorates the arrest and deportation of the Jewish residents of Kavala and their subsequent deaths in the Treblinka extermination camp.

¹⁰ Ibid., 223, 244.

¹¹ Ibid., 264.

¹² However, it is worth noting that Metaxas did adopt harsh measures against the Slavic-speaking populations in Macedonia, including "the surveillance of entire populations [...] and deportations with the assistance of the police apparatus." Ibid., 376.

¹³ Those included confiscating the radios and telephones owned by Jewish citizens, who were also compelled to pay a tax of 20% of their property's net value. *Μαρία Καβάλα, Η καταστροφή των Εβραίων της Ελλάδας (1940-1941)* [The Destruction of Greek Jews (1940-1941)], (Κάλλιπος, Ανοικτές Ακαδημαϊκές Εκδόσεις, 2015), 110-111.

¹⁴ Ibid., 111.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Jewish Museum of Greece, "Kavala," Jewish Museum of Greece, May 15, 2020.

The Contemporary Contestation

The contestation surrounding the erection of a Holocaust memorial in Kavala pre-dates the unveiling of the current memorial in 2015. Until 2004, local authorities resisted efforts to erect a memorial. From 2004 until its eventual erection in 2015, multiple issues stalled its completion. Kavala's Deputy Mayor of Culture, Michalis Lychounas, wrote a piece in Kathimerini newspaper in 2015 outlining the delays 'in actually succeeding getting the memorial ready,' highlighting the 'foot-dragging and interminable delays' since its initial approval in 2004.¹⁷ As he wrote:

The preparations with all relevant organs continued with the goal of a celebration of memory, but also of the future, until the cries of horror were heard: "The symbols of Lucifer (Star of David), indifference over our dead (make a memorial for the Greeks killed of Asia Minor), a global Zionist conspiracy, freemasonry, the new order of things which seeks to destroy the nation and hysteria over supposed protests" were the arguments...The bitter truth is that there remains a segment of the Greek population which has powerful anti-Semitic feelings based on ignorance and prejudice and the education system does not do enough to eliminate the phenomenon.¹⁸

Lychounas' piece emphasises the plethora of anti-Semitic and nationalist arguments that lie at the heart of complaints against the memorial's construction, furthering the view that this is not an isolated occurrence but rather the result of broader anti-Semitism in Greece. The view that the ongoing contestation surrounding the monument stems from anti-Semitic sentiment is echoed in Greek and Jewish Press, as well as by international and Greek politicians and officials. In this sense, Lychounas' quote speaks to the issues at the heart of Kavala's Holocaust Memorials contestation.

History of the Contestation

Whilst broadly guided by anti-Semitic arguments and rhetoric, contestation surrounding the erection of the Holocaust Memorial in Kavala can be divided into four specific events. In chronological order, these include the delayed unveiling of the monument amidst controversy surrounding its depiction of the Star of David, the Deputy Minister of Rural Development, Panagiotis Sgouridis' speech at the unveiling of the monument, the vandalising of the monument with paint and the vandalising of the monument with hammers. This section will consider them in turn, outlining their development and contribution to the ongoing dispute surrounding the monument.

Delayed unveiling amidst the Star of David controversy

¹⁷ Pavlos Zafiroopoulos, "Kavala mayor Tsanaka slammed for disgraceful holocaust memorial decision," The Toc, May 17, 2020.

¹⁸ Ibid.

The contemporary controversy surrounding the Holocaust Monument in Kavala began with the decision of the City Council of Kavala to postpone the monument's unveiling ceremony, scheduled for May 17, 2015. Two days before the ceremony, Kavala's Mayor Dimitra Tsanaka postponed the event 'on the grounds that members of her party objected to the monument's Star of David engraving.'¹⁹ Whilst the Mayor claimed that she did not share this position, she has been quoted expressing concern for the 'size and placement' of the Jewish symbol on the monument, stating that the Star of David engraved on the monument needs to be removed for 'aesthetic reasons.'²⁰ Moreover, the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (KIS) reported that in a telephone conversation with KIS, the Mayor 'expressed her objection with regard to the religious symbol of the Star of David (Magen David) engraved on the Monument, and asked for the removal of the symbol in order not to cancel the inauguration event.'²¹ KIS also reported that in a letter to the organisation, Mayor Tsanaka described the pressure and threats she had received in order to proceed with the dedication of the monument.²² The response of the Municipal Council and Metropolitan Church validated the pressure Tsanaka was under from the broader community to halt the unveiling. The local Metropolitan Church 'issued an announcement condemning the Jewish character of the monument, stating a preference for a monument to all genocide victims.' In the same spirit, the Chairman of the Municipal Council, Gioros Grammenos, stated that the monument 'stands against his religious conscience.'²³

This decision to postpone the event on account of its depiction was met with outrage from a plethora of actors. The Jewish community in Kavala staged a protest in front of the City Hall on 17 May, the original date for the unveiling of the memorial, with protestors wearing yellow Stars of David in a denouncement of the postponement.²⁴ The KIS described the removal request as 'unacceptable, unethical and insulting,' whilst the American Jewish Committee's Executive Director lamented, '[h]ow can it be that the eternal symbol of the Jewish people – the very symbol that the Nazis required Jews to wear in the death camps and ghettos of Europe during the Second World War – is deemed unfit for public display in Kavala? What gall for the Jewish community to be asked to remove the Star of David as a condition for allowing the monument to be displayed.'²⁵ Giorgos Kalatzis, the Greek Education Ministry's General Secretary, stated that the Kavala 'risked being the first Greek city to turn down a monument raised for its own citizens,' emotively saying that 'as an Orthodox Christian, I feel deeply insulted by this issue, because it would be as if

¹⁹ Yair Rosenberg, "Greek Mayor Flip-Flops Over Holocaust Memorial Unveiling," *Tablet*, May 18, 2015.

²⁰ Associated Press and TOI Staff, "Greek mayor relents in controversy over Holocaust monument," *The Times of Israel*, May 18, 2015.

²¹ Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, "Cancellation of the unveiling ceremony of the Holocaust memorial at Kavala," Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, May 15, 2015.

²² Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, "The response of the Greek Jewry to the letter of the Mayor of Kavala," Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, May 15, 2015.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Pavlos Zafiropoulos, "Kavala mayor Tsanaka slammed for disgraceful holocaust memorial decision," *The Toc*, May 17, 2015.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

someone asked us to erase or modify for 'aesthetic reasons' the symbol of the cross on the tombs of our grandfathers executed by the Germans.²⁶ Local Greek political parties from across the ideological board joined in the condemnation of the postponement of the unveiling ceremony, with Syriza, New Democracy, Independent Greeks, To Potami and Pasok demanding an official apology from the Mayor, and a review of the situation.²⁷

The Mayor soon rescheduled the unveiling of the monument, with the depiction of the Star of David remaining engraved on its face. The intention to reschedule the unveiling was announced at the protest held on the original date of the memorial's unveiling, where Tsanaka told protestors that the dedication ceremony for the monument would take place 'very soon.'²⁸ It is unclear as to whether this reversal was made after discussions with the Municipal Council or unilaterally by the Mayor within the context of hundreds of protestors gathered in front of the City Hall and strong condemnation from the community more broadly. According to a local news outlet, Kavala-Portal, whilst promising the rescheduling of the event, Tsanaka also apologised for the incident, describing it as a 'huge misunderstanding.'²⁹ In what the KIS describes as a 'reconciliation gesture,' the Mayor addressed a letter to the body stating the city's willingness to proceed with the unveiling of the monument.³⁰

Yet whilst Tsanaka apologised, she also passed the blame onto the Deputy Mayor of Culture, Michalis Lychounas. She stated, 'Perhaps I was wrong to trust so much the deputy mayor of culture, Michalis Lychounas, who took on entirely planning the event and the memorial. That was my mistake.'³¹ However, as we previously noted, Lychounas' piece in Kathimerini following the event outlines the deep-rooted nature of the contestation beyond the sole issue of its depiction of the Star of David. In this sense, the contestation over the memorial's inclusion of the Star of David seems to only scratch the surface of broader opposition to the monument's erection. Panagiotis Sgouridis' speech at the unveiling of the monument speaks to this position and the broader issues at stake in the contestation over the Kavala Holocaust Memorial.

Whilst the other events detailed in this report speak to the contested nature of the Kavala Holocaust Memorial, the controversy surrounding its unveiling and the depiction of the Star of David is the most notable series of events in exhibiting the issues at the heart of this contestation.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, "The Greek Political Parties condemned the postponement of the unveiling ceremony of the Holocaust Memorial of Kavala," Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, May 15, 2015.

²⁸ Associated Press and TOI Staff, "Greek mayor relents in controversy over Holocaust monument," The Times of Israel, May 18, 2015.

²⁹ Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, "The response of the Greek Jewry to the letter of the Mayor of Kavala," Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, May 15, 2015.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Pavlos Zafiroopoulos, "Kavala mayor Tsanaka slammed for disgraceful holocaust memorial decision, The Toc, May 17, 2025.

Memorial Unveiling and Panagiotis Sgouridis' Speech

The Kavala Holocaust Memorial was unveiled on 7 June 2015, three weeks behind the original schedule. Whilst the Kavala City Council issued apologies concerning the Star of David controversy and subsequent postponement of the unveiling, the official unveiling of the monument was nonetheless steeped in controversy as a result of the Deputy Minister of Rural Development, Panagiotis Sgouridis' speech at the event.

Sgouridis has been accused of abusing 'the memory of the Holocaust by mentioning Gaza during [the] speech about the genocide and saying that 'victims become bullies.'³² The criticism of the speech stemmed in majority from the Simon Wiesenthal Center, a Jewish human rights organisation, who stated that Sgouridis' speech was 'not only an inversion of the Holocaust by listing it alongside the blockade on Gaza but also served to banalise it.'³³ During the speech, Sgouridis argued that atrocities continue today despite the lessons of the Holocaust, listing

'the continuation of the extermination of the Assyrians by the jihadists, the invasion and occupation in northern Cyprus, the Kurdish issue, the blockade of Gaza, the genocidal dismemberment of Yugoslavia, and the Ukraine crisis as examples.'³⁴

He concluded his speech by saying that monuments like the one unveiled at Kavala are important 'because unfortunately, many times the roles switch and the victims become bullies.'³⁵ Shimon Samuels, the Wiesenthal Center's director for international relations, commented that 'the speech, the place, the time and the backstory all combine to make Sgouridis' speech inappropriate.'³⁶

Whilst Sgouridis' speech has been critiqued and lambasted in Jewish media, it appears that it did not become a focal point of contestation as in the case of the unveiling and the possible removal of the Star of David from the memorial. No apology was requested or given, and it appears that the speech has generally been forgotten in the broader controversy surrounding the memorial.

Defacement with Paint

On June 21, 2015, the Kavala Holocaust Memorial was vandalised with blue paint.³⁷ Interpreted as an anti-semitic act by domestic and international sources, the vandalising of the memorial was strongly condemned by the Kavala City Council.³⁸ The Council, and specifically the Mayor herself,

³² JTA, "Greek Official panned for Gaza mention in Holocaust Speech," *The Times of Israel*, June 18, 2015.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Yair Rosenberg, "Greek Holocaust Memorial Vandalized Two Weeks After Unveiling," *Tablet*, June 22, 2015.

³⁸ Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, "Desecration of the newly erected Holocaust amemorial in Kavala,," Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, June 23, 2015.

was praised for the speed of its reaction, with the Mayor issuing a public statement condemning the event, in addition to the paint being cleaned within hours of its discovery.³⁹ The KIS expressed their condemnation of the event, simultaneously citing the Municipality's prompt actions in restoring the monument, announcing their 'satisfaction for the immediate intervention of the Municipality of Kavala.'⁴⁰ With that being said, the Mayor was also cited as stressing that the act of vandalism was not a sign of anti-Semitism, which many view to be a misguided conclusion.⁴¹ It is unclear as to whether anyone has been convicted for the crime.

Hammer Attack

On March 29, 2017, the Kavala Holocaust Memorial was partially destroyed by vandals in what appears to have been a hammer attack.⁴² The attack smashed the marble coating of the memorial, desecrating the inscription and engraving of the Star of David. The Mayor of Kavala visited the memorial on the day following the attack before speaking to the president of the KIS, expressing her condemnation of the desecration.⁴³ The Mayor promised that

'the Holocaust memorial will be immediately restored in order to be offered again to the town and to continue to symbolise unity among people, sending a strong message against racism and intolerance and reminding the black pages of the past that humanity must never again witness.'⁴⁴

Similarly to the case of the monument's defacement with paint in 2015, the Municipality of Kavala was praised for its timely handling of the situation. The KIS praised this statement and 'the prompt reaction of the Mayor of Kavala, Ms. Dimitra Tsanaka, who has immediately condemned this sad incident.'⁴⁵

In terms of broader responses in the Greek and International community, the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs addressed the incident, highlighting that 'similar incidents of vandalism of historic monuments, racism and intolerance are unequivocally condemned by the Greek society.'⁴⁶ The Secretary General for Religious Affairs of the Education Ministry Mr George Kalantzis stressed, 'as many times they demolish them [the Holocaust Memorials] so many times we will have them rebuilt.'⁴⁷ The main opposition party, New Democracy, stated: 'hatred, bigotry and racism are

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ekathimerini, "Vandals smash Holocaust memorial in northern Greece," Ekathimerini, March 30, 2017.

⁴³ Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, "Restoration of the vandalized Holocaust Monument of Kavala due to prompt reaction of the Municipality and the local society," Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, April 13, 2017.

⁴⁴ Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, "Holocaust Monument in Kavala vandalized," Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, March 31, 2017.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, "Holocaust Monument in Kavala vandalized," Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, March 31, 2017.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

unknown to the principles, the values and the culture of Greece,' whilst the SYRIZA Party, which was in office at that time, mentioned: 'The vandalism of the monument for the 1.484 Jews of Kavala who perished at the concentration camps is an "effrontery monument" and reminds to the citizens of the town that fascism lies in wait.'⁴⁸ On June 13, 2017, four Greek citizens were arrested for the attack.⁴⁹

On November 7, 2023, one month after the eruption of the Israel-Palestine conflict, the memorial was vandalised again with black paint. The municipality services swiftly restored the damage.⁵⁰

Decision-Making Processes

The decision-making processes surrounding the Holocaust Memorial Statue at Kavala have occurred at the elite level in the Municipality of Kavala, with decisions stemming from the City Council and the office of the Mayor, Dimitra Tsanaka. The Greek Jewish community, and specifically Kavala's Jewish Population and the KIS, are key stakeholders in this process, issuing statements condemning the actions of the Council and pressuring the local government. This localised pressure is supported by the publicity of the contestation in international Jewish media, helping to raise the profile of the issue to the level of the national government.

With the exception of Sgouridis' speech (which we established garnered limited attention), the decisions of the Kavala City Council and Mayoral office have been overwhelmingly prompted by a backlash in public opinion at the local, domestic, and international level. In all of the cases highlighted above, emotive reactions to perceived wrongs have been at the heart of reconciling contestation. The resolution of the initial controversy surrounding the removal of the Star of David was grounded in the apology offered by Tsanaka to the protestors, in addition to the written letter addressed to KIS. A complete reversal of the Council's original position appears to have been the only possible solution to the backlash received, with the Council following this line of response in subsequent instances. In both cases of vandalism, Mayor Tsanaka was praised for the speed at which the events were addressed and for her strong condemnation of the acts as racist and intolerant of common norms.

In both instances of vandalism, the Greek Jewish community placed a strong emphasis on the need for justice and the reconciliation of the events through the prosecution of those individuals responsible. It is unclear as to whether this has been pursued fully, especially in the case of the defacement of the monument with paint. Calls for legal justice from the Jewish community suggest that a stronger approach to prosecuting those responsible may have helped reconcile the

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Dikra, "Four Men Arrested For Vandalizing Holocaust Memorial in Kavala," *Against Antisemitism*, July 13, 2017.

⁵⁰ Kavala Post, "Καβάλα: Άγνωστοι Έριξαν Μάυρη Μπιογιά στο Μνημείο του Ολοκαυτώματος των Εβραίων της Πόλης," *Kavala Post*, November 8, 2023.

events. Moreover, this speaks to the broader dissatisfaction present in KIS statements surrounding local initiatives to combat anti-Semitism in Greece, which many articles highlight as amongst the most prevalent in Europe.

Summary and Conclusions

The contestation surrounding the Kavala Holocaust Memorial is overwhelmingly guided by disputes between the local Municipal government and the Greek Jewish community. The initial postponement of the unveiling by the Municipal Council and the overall stance of its members against the Jewish character of the monument were followed by multiple acts of vandalism of the Memorial after its inauguration. Each dispute has been primarily motivated by anti-Semitic rhetoric and actions, with this being reflected in the coverage of the events in local and international media. These actions vividly exposed the deep-rooted anti-Semitic sentiments within parts of the local society. Nevertheless, they also prompted a resolute response by the local Greek Jewish community, and condemnation by parties across the political spectrum, leading to the immediate restoration of the Memorial. The continuing attacks against the memorial, showing that the contestation is indicative of the underlying anti-Semitic tensions observed in Greek society and is expressed in similar incidents of desecration or vandalism in cities across the country.

Regarding the decision-making processes, the key factors that have guided reconciliation have been apologies and substantive gestures that reflect the condemnation of anti-Semitic disputes, such as those which guided demands to remove the Star of David and the three instances of vandalism. The last attack in 2023 must be also read against the backdrop of the rise in anti-Semitism incidents in Southeastern Europe in the aftermath of the Israel-Hamas conflict. Eversince, there have not been any substantive developments regarding the contested nature of the monument and its role in the remembrance of those 1,494 individuals to whose memory it stands.

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About Contested Histories

In recent years, there have been many contestations over memorials, street names, and other physical representations of historical legacies in public spaces. These contestations often reflect deeper societal tensions whether triggered by political transitions, demographic shifts, inter-ethnic strife, or a growing awareness of unaddressed historical injustices.

The Contested Histories project is a multi-year initiative designed to identify principles, processes, and best practices for addressing these contestations at the community or municipal level and in the classroom. Conflicts about history, heritage, and memory are a global phenomenon, and, although each case is different, comparative cases can indicate lessons learned and reflect best practices.

About IHJR at EuroClio

The Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation (IHJR) is a research centre at EuroClio - European Association for History Educators in The Hague, The Netherlands. The IHJR works with educational and public policy institutions to organise and sponsor historical discourse in pursuit of acknowledgement and the resolution of historical disputes in divided communities and societies.

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