NCSEJ Moderates UN 75th Anniversary Commemoration of Babi Yar Massacres  
NCSEJ, October 14, 2016  
https://app.robly.com/archive?id=519c52e78d64eaaf6442c157d6458610

On Thursday evening, NCSEJ Executive Vice-Chairman and CEO Mark B. Levin moderated an evening of commemoration at the United Nations in New York City to remember the massacres at Babi Yar seventy-five years ago.

Hundreds of government and civic leaders attended the event, sponsored by the Permanent Missions to the United Nations of Ukraine, Israel, and the United States.

Mr. Levin moderated a program that included UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ivan Šimonović, and Permanent Representatives to the UN Ambassadors Danny Danon (Israel), Samantha Power (United States), and Volodymyr Yelchenko (Ukraine).

The event began with a video speech by President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko. The four speakers presented remarks, and Mr. Levin read the poem "Each One Of Us Has A Name."

The program also included video testimony by Raisa Dashekevich, a survivor of the Babi Yar massacre, a recitation of victim names by the ambassadors, and a musical performance by the New York Virtuoso Orchestra.

A full video of the program is available at http://webtv.un.org/meetings-events/.

In two days in September 1941, over 33,000 people, mainly Jews, were killed by Nazi forces at Babi Yar. From 1941 to 1943, between 50,000 and 100,000 people were killed at the site, including others.

Rabbi Brutally Beaten in Zhitomir, Ukraine  
Chabad.org, October 7, 2016  

A rabbi was found badly beaten in the western Ukrainian city of Zhitomir this morning. With the onset of Shabbat there, Jewish community leaders are asking for prayers.

Rabbi Mendel Deitsch, a longtime Chabad-Lubavitch emissary in France and more recently in Israel, was brutally attacked at Zhitomir’s central train station early Friday morning, where he was discovered and transported to a local hospital. The Jewish Community of Zhitomir, headed by Chabad Rabbi Shlomo Wilhelm, was alerted to the attack hours after Deitsch was admitted to the hospital.

Deitsch has been active in strengthening Jewish life in the former Soviet Union for many years, and is a central organizer of hospitality and programming at the burial site of Chabad’s founder—Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, in Haditch, Ukraine, where Deitsch is believed to have spent Rosh Hashanah.
The motive for the attack remains unknown. Violent anti-Semitic attacks in Ukraine are rare, and there is no indication at this time that it was anti-Semitic in nature.

As of the start of Shabbat in Ukraine, Deitsch was being operated on in Zhitomir. His situation is being described as extremely critical.

“The most important thing at this time,” stated Wilhelm, “is that people pray for the full recovery of Menachem Mendel Mordechai ben Miriam.”

Rabbi beaten in Ukraine airlifted to Israeli hospital
JTA, October 9, 2016

A Chabad rabbi who was severely beaten in a train station in the western Ukrainian city of Zhitomir was airlifted to Israel by emergency medical transport.

Rabbi Mendel Deitsch is in serious but stable condition at Tel Hashomer Medical Center near Tel Aviv. He had emergency surgery at a hospital in Zhitomir before being airlifted to Israel. His injuries remain life threatening, according to the Chabad website.

Deitsch, who was a longtime Chabad-Lubavitch emissary in France and more recently in Israel, reportedly was robbed and beaten by drunken local youths, Chabad said.

The motive has been described as criminal and not anti-Semitic, according to Rabbi Shlomo Wilhelm, director of Chabad-Lubavitch of Zhitomir.

“It should be noted that this is an unusual case that does not in any way reflect on the community in Ukraine,” Wilhelm told Chabad.

Georgian Dream Declares Victory In Parliamentary Elections
RFE/RL, October 8, 2016

The Georgian Dream party has declared victory in parliamentary elections shortly after polls closed on October 8 in the former Soviet republic.

Deputy Prime Minister Kakha Kaladze, a member of Georgian Dream, told Reuters after the October vote, that data gathered by the ruling coalition suggested Georgian Dream had won at least 58 percent of the vote.

Speaking to a cheering crowd of supporters gathered outside the Georgian dream headquarters late on October 8, Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili said a "huge victory" had been won.

But opposition leader Giga Bokeria said he still thought his United National Movement (ENM) could win the elections and that the Georgian Dream had "certainly failed to get enough votes to form the cabinet."

Because of Georgia’s complicated election rules, the final composition of the 150-seat parliament may not become clear until late November.
Ukraine Detains Alleged Russian Spy
RFE/RL, October 10, 2016
http://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-detains-alleged-russian-spy/28042419.html

Ukrainian authorities say a Ukrainian citizen with permanent residence in Russia has been detained in the northwestern city of Rivne.

Ukraine’s Security Service (SBU) said on October 9 that the man, whose identity was not disclosed, is suspected of attempting to obtain classified information by offering a large sum of money and Russian citizenship to a Ukrainian military officer.

The suspect was detained on October 8, one day after Russian authorities officially charged Ukrainian journalist Roman Sushchenko, who was detained in Russia on September 30, with espionage.

Ukraine-Russia ties have deteriorated since Moscow forcibly annexed Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula in 2014 and supported pro-Russia separatists fighting in eastern Ukraine.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin said on October 9 that Kyiv is considering leaving the Commonwealth of Independent States, of which Russia and eight other former Soviet republics are members.

Ukraine and Turkmenistan are only associate members of the bloc.

Romania to open first state-run Jewish Museum
AFP/The Times of Israel, October 10, 2016

Set to open in Bucharest in 2018, museum will focus on what before the Holocaust was Europe’s third-largest Jewish community

Romania, which denied its role in the Holocaust for years, is to open the first state-run museum dedicated to the country’s Jewish community, once one of the largest in Europe before World War II.

The museum, due to open in 2018 in the capital Bucharest, will focus on the persecution of Jews and the Roma, said Alexandru Florian, the director of the National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust.

“It will illustrate the role played by Jews in Romania’s modernisation, as well as fight prejudice and the denial of the Shoah,” Florian told AFP.

So far, the privately-run museum in Bucharest’s Holy Union Temple synagogue has been the main custodian of Jewish history in Romania.

Some 800,000 Jews lived in the country in the 1930s, making it the third-largest community in Europe after the Soviet Union and Poland.

Up to 380,000 Romanian and Ukrainian Jews were murdered on Romanian soil under dictator and Nazi ally Ion Antonescu.

The Romanian government rejected any responsibility in the Holocaust until 2003, when it set up a panel of experts led by late survivor and Nobel Peace laureate Elie Wiesel to look into the country’s dark past.

The findings revealed that many of Romania’s Jews and members of other minorities were murdered in death camps in the Transnistria region, now part of neighboring Moldova. Others died in pogroms or in death trains.
Today, some 3,200 Jews remain in Romania.

**Polish right-wing groups seek to deny that Kielce pogrom was motivated by anti-Semitism**

JTA, October 13, 2016

http://www.jta.org/2016/10/13/news-opinion/world/polish-right-wing-groups-seek-to-deny-that-kielce-pogrom-was-motivated-by-anti-semitism

Representatives of right-wing organizations have applied to the Institute of National Remembrance to resume investigation of the Kielce pogrom, saying its cause was not anti-Semitism.

In the application submitted this week, they claim the murders in the 1946 pogrom, which killed 42 Polish Jews, were committed by Communist officials and not city police and residents.

According to the groups, most of the victims died from shots fired by military weapons, which they say means that the responsibility for the massacre should not be borne by the residents of Kielce.

Six representatives of right-wing and nationalist organizations in Kielce signed the application. They are Małgorzata Soltysiak, Wojciech Zapala, Michal Sadko, Karolina Lebiedowicz, Karol Michalski and Filip Bator.

“Those who signed this application are well known for years as deniers of the pogrom,” Bogdan Bialek, president of the Jan Karski Association in Kielce, told JTA.

Bialek said there are no new documents about the massacre. His association recently organized an exhibition on the massacre, which contains documents from the forensic examination of the victims’ bodies showing that the Jews were murdered with crowbars, sticks, stones and flagstones.

“The way in which the applicant justifies their petition is an insult to the victims,” Bialek said.

The pogrom, a year after World War II ended, took place after some 200 Jews, many of them former residents of Kielce, returned from Nazi concentration camps, the Soviet Union and places where they took refuge. The city had been cleared of its Jews by the Nazis during the Holocaust.

It started following the abduction of a Polish boy who was returned two days later and said he had been kidnapped by a Jewish man. Some 42 years later, the kidnapped boy recanted his accusation.

**Russia completes delivery of S-300 air defense missiles to Iran: RIA**

Reuters, October 13, 2016

http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-iran-missiles-idUSKCN12D0Z2

Russia has completed the delivery of S-300 air defense missile systems to Iran, RIA news agency quoted Russia's state arms export agency as saying on Thursday.

Russia's agreement to provide Iran with S-300 has sparked concern in Israel. Moscow canceled the contract to deliver S-300s to Iran in 2010 under pressure from the West.

Russian President Vladimir Putin lifted that self-imposed ban in April 2016, following an interim agreement that paved the way for last year's full nuclear deal.

Russia delivered the first parts of S-300, the missile tubes and radar equipment, to Iran in April 2016.
Human Rights Commissioner Cancels Russia Visit
The Moscow Times, October 11, 2016

The Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights has canceled his planned visit to Russia. In a statement published on the Council of Europe's website, Commissioner Nils Muižnieks cited “unacceptable restrictions imposed on his program” as the reason for the cancelation.

The Commissioner also wrote that Russian authorities wanted to restrict his October visit to just 48 hours in Moscow alone, which he believed “would not have allowed sufficient time to carry out a substantive country visit.”

“A key element of my work is that I treat all countries by the same standards,” the Commissioner wrote. “Accepting the special conditions requested by the Russian authorities would have been unjust as a matter of principle and ineffective for the protection of human rights in the Russian Federation.”

In the conclusion to his statement, Commissioner Muižnieks expressed hope that Russian authorities would change their demands and restore “full cooperation.” He concluded that he would continue following the human rights situation in Russia “from afar.”

Right-Wing Azov Battalion Enters Ukraine’s Political Arena
RFE/RL, October 14, 2016
http://www.rferl.org/a/ukraiz-azov-battalion-forms-party/28053027.html

Ukraine’s far-right Azov Battalion has officially created a political party.

Greeted by chants of “Death to enemies!” at an inaugural party congress in Kyiv on October 14, Azov’s new political head, Nazar Kravchenko, told some 300 attendees, many in military fatigues, that the party would work to defend Ukraine against Russian aggression.

The gathering coincided with traditional nationalist events marking the creation of the controversial World War II-era Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and to celebrate Ukrainian Cossacks.

It also marks the second annual Day of Defenders, a holiday established following Russia’s seizure of Crimea and interference in eastern Ukraine, where a war has killed more than 9,600 people since April 2014.

Credited with recapturing the strategic port city of Mariupol from Russia-backed separatists in 2014, Azov is a former volunteer militia now included in the National Guard.

Due to members' far-right ideology and militancy, detractors believe the fighting force might also pose a threat to President Petro Poroshenko and the stability of the state.

Kravchenko told the Hromadske news site he hopes forming a party will give Azov greater political influence.

"There are several ways of coming to power, but we are trying something through elections, but we have all sorts of possibilities," he said.

Azov's symbol is similar to the Nazi Wolfsangel but the group claims it is comprised of the letters N and I, meaning "national idea."

Human rights organizations have accused the Azov Battalion of torture.
Twenty-four nations voted in favor of the motion, 26 abstained and only six voted against.

In a 24-6 vote, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on Thursday gave preliminary approval to a resolution that denies Jewish ties to its most holy religious sites: the Temple Mount and the Western Wall.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu slammed the vote stating: “The theater of the absurd continues at the UN.”

“Today UNESCO adopted its second decision this year denying the Jewish people’s connection to the Temple Mount, our holiest site for more than 3,000 years,” he said. “What’s next? A UNESCO decision denying the connection between peanut butter and jelly? Batman and Robin? Rock ‘n’ roll?”

Twenty-six nations abstained from the vote and two were absent.

The six countries that voted in support of Israel were the United States, Great Britain, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Germany and Estonia.

A senior US administration official chastised the vote taken by UNESCO’s 58-member Executive Board and told The Jerusalem Post that the US “will not hesitate to use our vote at the current board meeting to oppose these resolutions.”

The Palestinian Authority, however, welcomed the results.

The official spokesman of the Palestinian Presidency Nabil Abu Rudeinah said on Thursday evening that the continued international decisions against the occupation and its policy including that of UNESCO regarding Jerusalem and the al-Aksa Mosque form a clear message from the international community that it does not agree with the policies that protect the occupation and contribute to the creation of chaos and instability.

In 2015, the Palestinians, who have been recognized by UNESCO as a member state since 2011, began a drive to change the language with which that international body refers to the Temple Mount area, known to Muslims the Al-Haram Al Sharif (the Noble Sanctuary).

Initially they tried and failed to have it declared a solely Muslim site. Since then, they have submitted resolutions on Jerusalem at every possible UNESCO meeting, that uses only the Muslims terms for the Temple Mount area and its adjacent Western Wall.

UNESCO’s Executive Board passed such a resolution last April and its 21-member World Heritage Committee had been poised to do so again in July in Istanbul.

That vote was delayed until October 24-26, when the failed Turkish coup, cut the meeting short.

Since then a sentence has been inserted into the text that mentions that Jerusalem and its Old City walls are holy to all three religions; Judaism, Islam and Christianity.

The Western Wall is mentioned twice in quotes. Otherwise it was referenced in the text by its Muslim name of the Buraq Plaza.
Thursday’s vote was taken by UNESCO’s 58-member Program and External Relations Commission in advance of its ratification next Monday or Tuesday by the UNESCO Executive Board, which is made up of the same member states.

UNESCO outgoing director-general Irina Bokova has spoken against such resolutions, but ultimately the matter lies in the hands of the member states.

In the aftermath of Thursday’s UNESCO vote, both Israel’s Ambassador to UNESCO Carmel Shama-Hacohen and outgoing Foreign Ministry director-general Dore Gold focused on the changes in the voting roster since the executive board last approved such a resolution in Paris in April.

Shama-Hacohen and the Foreign Ministry had worked hard in advance of the vote to lobby member states to stand with Israel.

Gold, who resigned his position on Thursday effective immediately, said that the UNESCO vote was a “going away present.”

Ten countries which voted for the resolution the last time it came before UNESCO for a vote, abstained this time around, Gold said.

What that means, he said, is that more countries voted for Israel or abstained, than voted against Israel.

The 10 countries which switched their vote from last time were France, Sweden, Slovenia, Spain, Argentina, India, Sri Lanka, Togo, Guinea and Ghana.

Gold signed documents over the summer with Guinean officials formally reestablishing diplomatic ties.

He also noted the significance of India and Argentina switching their votes and not voting against Israel, as they have traditionally done.

“What this indicates is that things are shifting for Israel,” Gold said. “You are not going to get a total re-definition about how states are going to vote in the UN system in a matter of a few months, but a new trend is clear, which I hope Israel can build upon in the months and years ahead.”

Gold noted that none of the European countries voted for the resolution.

Asked how getting four European countries to abstain can be considered a victory, inasmuch as the resolution detaches any Jewish connection from Jerusalem, Gold said the drafters of the resolution included a sentence saying that the city is important to all three monotheistic faiths. Those countries that abstained – rather than vote against it – could point to that wording as not erasing completely Jewish ties to the capital.

“We appreciate the shift of 10 countries in the direction of abstaining,” he said. Gold added that this is not a binding UNESCO resolution, and that UNESCO director-general Irina Bokova said that since there was no consensus around the resolution, she will not implement it.

The PA’s Foreign Ministry said, “We regret that few countries succumbed to the PR bullying orchestrated by Israel, which shifted the focus from Israel's illegal and colonial actions in occupied East Jerusalem to issues irrelevant to the content and objectives of the resolutions, which aims to put an end to Israel's dangerous and illegal actions against holy sites in Jerusalem and Palestinian rights, including the right to worship.
“Palestine will continue to defend the rights of our people through all available legal and diplomatic avenues, including UN organizations. Our peaceful agenda will not be derailed by propaganda, nor will our tolerance and adherence to international law be altered by fallacies and cynical spin," the PA Foreign Ministry said.

Netanyahu suggested that the Bible aside, UNESCO members should visit the Arch of Titus in Rome.

“On it one can see what the Romans brought back to Rome after they destroyed and looted the Second Temple on the Temple Mount 2,000 years ago. There, engraved on the Arch of Titus, is the seven-branched menorah that is the symbol of the Jewish People, and I remind you, is also the symbol of the Jewish state today,” he said.

“Soon, UNESCO will say that the Emperor Titus engaged in Zionist propaganda,” Netanyahu said.

“To say that Israel has no connection to the Temple Mount and the Western Wall is like saying that China has no connection to the Great Wall of China or that Egypt has no connection to the pyramids. By this absurd decision, UNESCO has lost what little legitimacy it had left,” Netanyahu added.

The senior US official said the vote showed that the US, which withdrew its funding from UNESCO in 2011 in response to acceptance of Palestine as a state, must become more involved in the organization.

“The recurring highly politicized use of the UNESCO executive board meetings only further underscores the urgent need for the United States to restore its leadership at UNESCO, which has been considerably undercut since the United States ceased funding UNESCO in 2011.”

“We will continue to explore with Congress options for resuming payment of our dues, which will allow the United States to play a full role in this organization going forward and advance UNESCO’s work on issues like Holocaust education and countering terrorist narratives.”

The votes broke out in this way.

Those who supported the motion included Algeria, Bangladesh, Brazil, Chad, China, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mauritania, Mexico, Morocco, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Russia, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan and Vietnam.

Nations that abstained from the vote were: Albania, Argentina, Cameroon, Cote de’Ivoire, El Salvador, Spain, France, Ghana, Greece, Guinea, Haiti, India, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Nepal, Uganda, Paraguay, South Korea, St. Kits and Nevis, Slovenia, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Togo, Trinidad and Ukraine.

Absent countries included Serbia and Turkmenistan;

Those who opposed the resolution were: the US, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Lithuania, Germany and Estonia voted against the motion.

Rabbi Lazar criticizes Russia for supporting UNESCO resolution on Jerusalem
Interfax-Religion, October 14, 2016
http://interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=13333

Russia's Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar has criticized the UNESCO Executive Committee, which has recently voted for a resolution not mentioning the connection between Jews and the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.
"The recent UNESCO resolution on Jerusalem is an insult to the feelings of all believing Jews and it fully undermines in our eyes the authority of this organization," the rabbi was quoted as saying by his press service on Friday.

The document in question spoke about a special connection between Islam and Jerusalem without mentioning the rights of Jews to the holy places of the city. The resolution was supported by the delegations of Russia, China, Algeria, Bangladesh, Morocco, Oman, Lebanon, Qatar, and Iran.

"I am shocked by the voting by the Russian delegation in UNESCO. It is very strange that Russia, which attaches so much importance to the preservation of historical heritage and which until now has consistently fought any falsification of history, has supported an open fake this time," Lazar said.

He said the holy books that are common both to Jews and Christians prove that Jerusalem is holy to Jews.

"Even if UNESCO officials do not recognize the authority of the holy books, they should at least look at the results of the archeological excavations in this city. They indicate that Jerusalem was an unquestionable spiritual center for Jews and a center of our faith and tradition for centuries," Lazar said.

Lazar said he believes the fact that all religions can now support their holy places in Jerusalem and that all holy places of different religions in the city are reliably protected "is only thanks to the Jewish state, its laws, its law enforcement bodies and security services."

The situation with the Temple Mount periodically aggravates. The aggravation is accompanied by clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli police, Muslims, and Jews.

Hillel Makes History in Warsaw, Poland
By Rabbi Yossie Goldman
eJewishPhilanthropy, October 13, 2016

The 'Blue skyscraper' on Tlomackie Street is an imposing high rise office building that dominates the skyline of Warsaw, Poland. It was built in 1980 on the ruins of the Great Synagogue of Warsaw, one of the greatest buildings built in Poland in the 19th century and, at the time of its opening, the largest synagogue in the world.

The synagogue was opened on September 26, 1878 on Rosh Hashanah. It was personally blown up by SS-Gruppenführer Jürgen Stroop on May 16th, 1943, which was the last act of destruction of the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw by the Nazis.

One hundred thirty eight years after the Jews of Warsaw welcomed their first Rosh Hashanah in the Great Synagogue, and 73 years after the synagogue was destroyed, the prayer Avinu Malkenu was once again heard on Tiomackie Street. It is here, on the ground floor of the Blue skyscraper, that Hillel Warsaw opened its doors for Jewish students and young adults to bring in the New Year together.

Founded in 1923, Hillel has been enriching the lives of Jewish students and young adults for more than 90 years. Today, Hillel is present on more than 550 colleges and universities in North America, and in 34 cities in 15 countries throughout the world.

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah, for the first time in Poland’s history since the Shoah, Hillel enabled students and young adults to experience a service that was specifically created for them. The chanting and readings were led by students who were trained by Hillel International staff using a creative Machzor that included the traditional prayers, stories and songs. Following Rosh Hashanah, Hillel organized a boat ride down the Vistula
River for Jewish young adults to do *Tashlich* and learn with Jewish scholars about Torah teachings on environmentalism.

It was an uplifting experience for all, and especially for the many participants who were celebrating *Rosh Hashanah* for the first time ever.

Poland's Jewish history is a tortured one. In 1939 there were 3.5 million Jews in Poland. Five years later, ninety percent of them were murdered. Most of the survivors who returned to Poland were afraid to reveal to their children and grandchildren that they are Jewish. Only recently have many of these young people discovered their Jewish roots. Now they are eager to reconnect with their people and heritage. Rabbi Michael Schudrich, the chief Rabbi of Poland said “Hillel is central to the rebirth of Jewish life in Poland and to its future.”

Last April, the Hillel International delegation led by President and CEO Eric D. Fingerhut and Sidney Pertnoy, previous chair of the Hillel International board of directors, joined with local dignitaries and Jewish leaders to dedicate our new Hillel center in Warsaw. It is led by a dynamic local young person, Magda Doroz, and funded by an anonymous New York philanthropist and the Taube and Koret Foundations. Now, as Hillel Warsaw continues to flourish, we are making plans to support our work in a second city in Poland, Krakow.

Where the Great Synagogue of Warsaw once stood, young people once again prayed and celebrated the Jewish New Year. It was with pride and thanksgiving that they concluded the service with the words of *Hatikva* and *Am Yisrael Chai*!

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**Dwindling at home, Central Asia’s Bukharian Jews thrive in Diaspora**

*By Cnaan Liphshiz*  
*JTA, October 10, 2016*  

As a new immigrant with little savings and no guaranteed income, Mikhail Davidov had no hope of getting a mortgage to buy the $900,000 house in Queens, New York, he now calls home. Luckily for Davidov, a 42-year-old hairdresser who immigrated to New York six years ago from Uzbekistan, he never needed a mortgage.

Instead, he borrowed the money, interest free, from his extended family of Bukharian Jews – a tight-knit community whose members have excelled both in making money and preserving their traditions even after most of them left their ancestral homelands in Central Asia.

“Banks are for Ashkenazim,” Davidov said, referencing European Jews, during a visit to his native city of Samarkand last month. “When I’m established and done paying back my family members who are already established in Israel and the States, I’ll lend money to a relative. It’s how we succeed.”

Davidov’s story is typical of the tradition of mutual assistance that experts of Bukharian Jewry say is key to the community’s remarkable success in business and maintaining their unique customs and lineages long after most Bukharian Jews left their homelands in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan following the Soviet Union’s collapse.

By the 1990s, the vast majority of approximately 100,000 Bukharian Jews had left Central Asia, where they have lived at least since the 15th century, for Israel, the United States, Austria and Moscow. Today, only 3,000 of them remain in Central Asia.
Concentrated mostly in the three Uzbekistani cities of Tashkent, Samarkand and Bukhara, Central Asia’s Bukharian Jewry is a graying community with hope neither of replenishing their numbers nor the social status they enjoyed up until the previous century. At one time they dominated the region’s textile and dye industry, according to Giora Pozailov, a historian at Israel’s Bar-Illan University specializing in Bukharian Jewry.

Bukhara once was a major stop along the Silk Road, which in ancient times connected Europe with Asia. Now the southern desert city has so few Jews that its two synagogues almost never open simultaneously to ensure at least one has a minyan, the obligatory quorum of 10 men required for some Orthodox prayers.

Even so, Shabbat prayers stretch on for hours as a handful of congregants wait for suburbanites and late risers to arrive on foot. Draped in prayer shawls, the men practice their deep, guttural singing of scripture as they sit in pews in the main synagogue’s yard — a cooler alternative to the stuffy interior, which can reach 104 degrees Fahrenheit in summer.

The women used to sit apart from the men in the synagogues, on an elevated balcony, but have since moved downstairs with the men because climbing the stairs became too difficult for elderly congregants. The only growing Jewish institution in Bukhara is the community’s walled-off cemetery.

“This community has no future here,” says Shirin Yakubov, a 33-year-old mother of three.

Yakubov is one of the few young members of Bukhara’s Jewish community of 150. Her three siblings all live in Israel, where she and her husband, Arsen, plan to immigrate as soon as his elderly parents also agree to leave. Meanwhile, their children attend a Jewish school where only a few of some 200 students are Jews.

Both synagogues feature pictures from the 1997 visit to Bukhara of Hillary Clinton when she was first lady – part of an eclectic display of ornaments hanging on the their walls that include china vessels, portraits of community sages and, somewhat depressingly, an array of nonfunctioning clocks.

Whereas time seems to be running out for the Bukharian Jews of Central Asia, their communities have produced for themselves a new and extraordinary lease on life in Russia and the West.

Despite arriving with meager funds to competitive societies where Jewish communities are fast assimilating, Bukharian Jews have managed to rebuild congregations that stand out in their level of prosperity, robustness and cohesiveness, according to Pozailov.

Among the best-known and most successful Bukharian Jews is billionaire diamond magnate Lev Leviev, an Israeli philanthropist who has spent millions of dollars in donations to institutions that experts on Bukharian Jews say keep the community from falling apart outside its homeland.

Leviev is funding predominantly Bukharian schools, such as the Ohr Avner Jewish School in Elmhurst, New York, which opened in 2002 and “where young members of the community can meet spouses and study about their heritage,” Pozailov said. Thanks to donations from Leviev and others, the community in the United States has several newspapers, including the Russian-language Bukharian Times weekly. The Queens community even has a museum – an amenity that the remnant community in Uzbekistan lacks.

In Vienna, where hundreds of Bukharian Jews settled in the 1970s, members of the community now dominate the kosher food and catering business. And in Israel, their outsize stake in the country’s $6 billion diamond industry, among other sectors, has turned them into the quintessential Zionist success story.

Living on the Silk Road “has exposed Bukharian Jews to international skills, principles of trade, different cultures and perspectives that mean that, today, business runs in their blood,” Pozailov said.
Zeev Levin, the head of the Hebrew University’s Central Asian Research Unit, takes such assertions with a grain of salt, citing the lack of scientific research on Bukharian Jews’ levels of income and their alleged immunity to assimilation. Others cite the experience of similar ethnic “niche” groups whose economic success depends on mutual support, not cultural inheritance or genetic advantages.

Yet there is little doubt that compared to other Jewish communities, Bukharian Jews have done a good job in preserving their heritage.

In communities as far-flung as Australia, young Bukharian Jews are taught the community’s distinct customs and history, like the controversial 18th-century exchange of the Persian prayer style for the Sephardic one. Bukharian Jews are originally thought to have arrived in the region as exiles from Persia and perhaps, according to community lore, as Israelites expelled from the Holy Land.

This emphasis on preserving Bukharian culture and language (many community members speak Bukhori, a dialect of the Tajik-Persian language) has created an environment conducive to preserving intimate traditions, according to Pozailov.

One such custom involves the exchange of personal greetings between couples on Passover. They serve one another the first of four cups of wine drunk during the Passover seder and present their wishes for one another.

The Queens Bukharian museum, located at the Leivef-funded yeshiva in Queens, includes traditional garb such as the jumah – a gold-threaded, colorful plaid kimono-like robe worn by men on major Jewish holidays.

While significant, Leivef’s help is “but one of several factors that make Bukharian Jews a unique community, which has managed to re-create itself and prosper in conditions that broke most other Jewish communities,” Pozailov said.

Nestled among predominantly Muslim populations that even Joseph Stalin did not want to alienate unnecessarily, Bukharian Jews suffered less of the anti-religious and anti-Semitic persecution that befell their European coreligionists living in the former Soviet Union, he noted.

Before that, the social isolation of Jews under the region’s Muslim rulers — they imposed special taxes for Jews, forbade them to ride horses and made them wear a patch on their clothes — cemented Bukharian identity by the middle of the 19th century, when czarist Russia took over the area and freed its Jews. The takeover ushered in a golden age for Bukharian Jews, when capitalists like the Vadyaev brothers reached a near monopoly of the cotton industry before they were dispossessed of their fortunes following the Bolsheviks’ rise to power.

To Elyahu Ludayev, a Samarkand-born dentist and amateur historian from Tel Aviv, this unique history is responsible for making Bukharian Jews “one of the few non-haredi Jewish communities that is not at risk from assimilation,” he said.

But, Ludayev added, “it’s more complicated in Israel, where unfortunately you can’t really prevent your child from marrying a non-Bukharian Jew.”

Babyn Yar: A site of massacres, (dis)remembrance and instrumentalisation
By Yuri Radchenko
New Eastern Europe, October 11, 2016
A century ago, Babyn Yar (also often referred to as “Babi Yar”) was a vast ravine on the edge of the city of Kyiv. Today, this place is actually located in the centre of the Ukrainian capital and is now built up with roads, an underground, parks and apartment blocks. Initially the Babyn Yar hillslopes were rather steep and in some places its depth ranged from 10 to 50 metres. In the 19th and the first half of the 20th century there were several cemeteries here: Orthodox, Jewish, Karaim and Muslim. At that time, in a nearby settlement called Syrets, there were barracks with firing ranges which belonged to the Russian imperial army. After the Soviet regime came to power, a summer camp for the Red Army soldiers soon appeared.

Before the Second World War, Babyn Yar was not used as a burial site for the victims of the Holodomor famine or political repressions of the Soviet totalitarian regime, as some people in Ukraine and the Ukrainian diaspora tend to think. Bodies of the victims of the Stalinist regime were buried in secret mass graves at nearby cemeteries.

Victims

Some of the Jews who lived in Kyiv before the outbreak of the Soviet-German war left the capital of Soviet Ukraine for the east. Those who remained were for the most part elderly, ill or had such relatives. On September 19th 1941 the Wehrmacht occupied Kyiv and the next day there was a large explosion at the armoury near the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, a historic monastery. This explosion was used as a pretext for arresting the Jewish population of the city by the German military.

On September 24th, pursuant to the order of the occupation administration, the local population gathered at a building on the main street of Khreshchatyk, where the toy store used to be. The order was for the local population to turn in their hunting weapons, gas masks and radios. Suddenly around 2pm, there was an explosion. Mines, which were left behind by retreating engineers of the Red Army, began to explode, causing a huge fire in the centre of the city.

The occupants and collaborationists found a “scapegoat” in the Jews that remained in Kyiv. German SS units began making mass arrests in the city. Jews, communists, and Soviet NKVD agents were among those who were detained. Arrests were followed by executions. The slaughters were carried out in many places, possibly also near the ditches dug by the Soviet prisoners of war in Babyn Yar.

On Friday September 26th a landmark joint meeting of the military administration and the SS representatives was held where the decision was adopted that all Jews living in the city should be executed at Babyn Yar, instead of setting up a ghetto in Kyiv. This place was “convenient” as the SS-men had been using the place for mass killing of public officials for several days there. On September 28th the newly created Ukrainian Auxiliary Police circulated an announcement addressed to the Jews of the city Kyiv and its vicinity. According to the order the Jews had to assemble at a given intersection by 8am the next day, bringing along their “documents, money, valuables, warm clothing and linen”. It could be understood from the text that it was not written by a Kyiv resident, as the indicated intersection of “Melnikov and Dokterivska Streets (near the cemetery)” did not exist. The street that was crossing with Melnikov Street was called Dehtiarivska. It was notified that the Jews who would not comply with the order would be shot.

The following day, on September 29th, a large group of Jews made up of men, women, children and the elderly, together with their non-Jewish spouses, headed to the aforementioned intersection and then turned to the west, walking on Melnikov Street. There they all went through the gates to the Jewish cemetery which was being patrolled by the Ukrainian Auxiliary Police. According to the witnesses who managed to escape, the entrance to the cemetery was a “point of no return”; only truck drivers could exit from there. From the German side, Sonderkommando 4a and Feldgendarmerie soldiers were present at the site.

Executions
After walking through the gate, the massive group of people turned left and headed along Kahatna Street (today Sim’i Khokhlovykh Street). There, the Germans forced their victims to give up their documents, which were immediately burnt. The Jews then turned right, entering Laherna Street (today Dorohozhytska Street). The victims were forced to undress and leave their belongings. The men and women were then separated and marched to the ravine for execution.

Sometimes the SS-men beat the Jews before shooting them. In the evening after the execution, the Germans, together with their local assistants, scoured the area where the corpses lay and searched for any signs of life. The bodies were then covered with a thin layer of sand. The execution took place between the hours of 10am to 6pm. Those Jews who had not been killed during that time were herded in a local shed and had to wait until the next morning. The shootings then continued. According to a German report, 33,771 Jews were executed in two days – September 29 – 30th, 1941. Although there are no video records or photos of the execution, there are colour photos taken by a German officer at Babyn Yar several days after the shooting. These pictures show Germans going through the piles of clothing of the Nazi victims, while the Soviet prisoners of war were flattening out the graves of the murdered Jews.

One of the most interesting and yet most painful issues that remain in question is who exactly performed the killing of the Jews at Babyn Yar. It is reliably known that the German Sonderkommando 4A, which was a subdivision of the Einsatzgruppe C, bears direct responsibility. It was assisted by the 45th Hamburg Reserve Battalion and the 303 Bremen Police Battalion as well as local interpreters and the Auxiliary Ukrainian Police. However, the issue of the Ukrainian military formations created by the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists headed by Colonel Andriy Melnyk (OUN-M) remains unclear to date.

According to Dutch researcher Karel Berkhoff, who relies on a broad evidentiary basis, at least two military formations created by the OUN-M were in Kyiv during the shooting of Jews at Babyn Yar. The first formation was the squad of Ukrainian policemen mainly from Galicia and Transcarpathia under the command of Ivan Kediulych, which arrived in the capital of Ukraine on September 24, 1941. The second one was the Bukovinian Kurin, the first group of which arrived in Kyiv “shortly after it was liberated from the Bolsheviks” according to the memories of the participants. It remains unclear whether these units were present at Babyn Yar during the shooting. And if they were there, the question of the functions they performed also remains open. It is known that Stepan Fedak, a member of the OUN-M, was one of the interpreters of the Sondercommando 4A. Fedak is known in history for shooting the car in which Poland’s chief of state, Józef Piłsudski, and Lviv governor, Kazimierz Grabowski, were driving in Lviv on September 25th 1921. Grabowski was injured in the assassination attempt, but Piłsudski was not hurt. When Fedak joined the Einsatzgruppe C in the summer of 1941, his main duties included translating documents from Russian and Ukrainian into German and participating in arrests. According to testimonies made at post-war trials in West Germany, during the shooting at Babyn Yar, he was patrolling the road which led to the massacre site. Another point of view regarding participation of the Bukovinian Kurin in the killing of Jews at Babyn Yar is represented by Vitaliy Nakhmanovich, a historian and leading research fellow of the Museum of the History of Kyiv and executive secretary of the public committee for the commemoration of the victims of Babyn Yar. He also examined a large number of sources, mostly memories and diaries of the participants and reached the conclusion that the Bukovinian Kurin arrived in Kyiv in the first fortnight of November 1941, i.e. after the mass execution of Jews in Babyn Yar.

At the same time, there is no doubt that the auxiliary parts of the Ukrainian police were present, which was recruiting not only the OUN members, but also former Soviet prisoners of war and civilians. Members of the OUN-M, who sought to co-operate with the Germans for several months after shooting of Jews in Babyn Yar, published the newspaper Ukrainske Slovo (Ukrainian Word) in Kyiv. This newspaper contained many antisemitic articles, in which the Jews were equated with Bolshevism and accused of “oppression” of the Ukrainian people.

First monuments
There were further executions in Babyn Yar. It became the resting place for non-Jewish members of Jewish families, Soviet prisoners of war, Roma, and Red Army partisans. One theory is that the bodies of the OUN-M members, who came into conflict with the occupation authorities in late 1941/early 1942, and of head of Kyiv City Administration, Volodymyr Bahaziy was placed there after they were shot by the Germans. In 1943, when it was clear that the Wehrmacht would retreat from the occupied Eastern territories, the Third Reich initiated a new operation named “Sonderaktion 1005”, which aimed to hide evidence of the mass murders. Those who were forced to perform this horrible task provided various numbers of the exhumed and burnt corpses, ranging from 45,000 to 120,000, most of which were Jews.

Even prior to Nazi Germany’s surrender in March 1945 the Ukrainian Soviet government adopted a decree “On the construction of a memorial on the territory of Babyn Yar”. However, as an antisemitic campaign was gaining momentum in the Soviet Union in the late 1940s under the motto of the “battle against cosmopolitanism”, the construction never commenced. In 1950 – 1960s the Jewish, Karaim, Muslim and Orthodox cemeteries were destroyed at Babyn Yar. In March 1961 another tragedy occurred in this area, which took many lives and destroyed a large number of residential houses. Water and mud which had built up in the area as a result of hydraulic earthworks burst the protective embankment and flooded some blocks between Frunze and Novo-Konstantynivska Streets.

The first monument was opened only in 1976 in memory of the “Soviet citizens and prisoners of war and officers of the Soviet Army shot by the Nazis at Babyn Yar”. As can be noted from its very title, the monument did not indicate the ethnicity of the majority of people massacred at that site. Later a park of culture and leisure for the Shevchenkivskyi district, covering 118 hectares, was built on the territory of Babyn Yar. In fact nothing “authentic” from Babyn Yar was left by the 1980s. During the period of Ukraine’s independence, there were no largescale constructions on the territory of Babyn Yar. The only exception was the opening of Doroohozhychi metro station at the corner of Melnikov and Olena Teliha Streets in 2000.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, several different monuments were erected on the territory of Babyn Yar. On the 50th anniversary of the execution, on September 29th 1991, a monument to the Jews massacred by the Nazis in Babyn Yar was opened on the site of the former Kyrylivske Orthodox cemetery, with the leaders of the young state attending the ceremony. The monument was Menorah-shaped and was titled respectively, which indicated the Jewish ethnicity of the victims. At the same time, a tablet in Russian and Yiddish was attached to the monument which was erected in 1976. Around the same time, wooden cross were installed in Babyn Yar in memory of the OUN members murdered by the Nazis in Kyiv during the war. According to the official statement of the OUN successors from Ukrainian diaspora and Ukraine, Germans killed 621 members. In more than 20 years since Ukraine’s independence, around 29 plaques, monuments and memorial signs were installed on the territory of Babyn Yar, mostly by private initiatives.

History and memory

In April 2003, civic activists represented by the Ukrainian liberal intelligentsia of Ukrainian and Jewish origin consolidated to establish the Public Committee for the Commemoration the Victims of Babyn Yar (The “Babyn Yar” Committee). The co-chairs of the committee were: Semyon Gluzman, Ivan Dziuba, Myroslav Popovych, and Vitaliy Nakhmanovich as the executive secretary. The main objectives established by the “Babyn Yar” Committee included the “establishment of a state historical memorial sanctuary; a national memorial at Babyn Yar in memory of the Holocaust victims of fascism and totalitarianism; and an opening of a state museum at Babyn Yar”. As to the material effects of the committee’s work, the first book of a five-volume collection of archival documents and research papers titled Babyn Yar: Man, Authority, History was published, dedicated to the historical topography of Babyn Yar and the overall chronology of events which took place during the Nazi occupation.

The committee also initiated a number of academic conferences. Between 2005 and 2008 three nationwide conferences titled “Second World War and the Fate of the Peoples of Ukraine” took place. Funding was provided by the State Committee of Ukraine on Nationalities and Migration.
In November 2005 Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, commissioned by “Babyn Yar” Committee, conducted a nationwide survey to identify the level of awareness of the history of Babyn Yar among Ukrainian citizens. Further, a comprehensive programme for research of public opinion regarding the issue was developed which so far has not been implemented due to lack of funding. Nevertheless, on the 70th anniversary of the shooting at Babyn Yar, an international academic conference titled “Babyn Yar: history and memory of a massacre” was held in 2011.

Since 1991 Ukraine’s government has not pursued a concrete or clear policy regarding the legal status of the territory of Babyn Yar. At the time of Leonid Kuchma’s presidency, the cabinet of ministers of Ukraine adopted a decree in December 2001 which stated that “the complex of monuments at the site of the mass killing of civilians and prisoners of war at Babyn Yar during the Nazi occupation of 1976 – 2001” was to be placed on the state register of monuments of Ukraine. During Viktor Yushchenko’s presidency, the territory of Babyn Yar, where the monuments had been installed, was granted the status of state historical memorial sanctuary. One of Yushchenko’s last decrees issued in February 2010 was to grant national status to the sanctuary. However, all those actions were mere formalities.

Putting aside verbal rhetoric, however, little has changed even after the revolutionary events in Ukraine of the late 2013 and early 2014. Nakhmanovich noted in 2015 that only “a small portion of the territory which should be turned into the memorial complex has been transferred to the sanctuary … Site developing problems have not been resolved. The Jewish cemetery, which was actively developed already in post-war times, was not included in the sanctuary.” Nakhmanovich also argues that Ukraine, unlike Poland for example in relation to the Auschwitz memorial, does not have the “state’s position”.

Global commemoration site

The Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance (UINR) was established during Yushchenko’s presidential term. During this, the institute was primarily promoting the Holodomor events of 1932 – 1933 as genocide and glorifying the OUN and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). The institute hardly conducted any real research and was mostly engaged in propaganda activities. During that period there was not a single discussion held on the role of Ukrainians in the Holocaust, including participation (or non-participation) of the OUN-M members in the shooting of Jews at Babyn Yar. Under Viktor Yanukovych’s presidency, the “neo-Soviet” vision of the Second World War was adopted which seemed to be inspired by the late Leonid Brezhnev. The management of the institute was replaced, and it no longer had any significance.

In 2015, Volodymyr Viatrovych, a Ukrainian social activist and historian known for his non-academic sympathies for the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (Stepan Bandera wing) was appointed as director of the UINR. Upon his appointment, the UINR began posting on its website that “along with Auschwitz, Babyn Yar in Kyiv is a global commemoration site and symbol of the Holocaust. For Ukraine, it is a site of the massacre not only of Jews and Roma, but also Soviet prisoners of war, Ukrainian nationalists, hostages and prisoners of the Syrets concentration camp, patients of the Pavlov psychiatric hospital suffering from mental disabilities and Dynamo Kyiv football players. In addition, it is also the site of the Kurenivka tragedy of 1961”. In an interview Viatrovych compared the plans for the “Babyn Yar Museum” to the memorial complexes dedicated to the crimes of the Stalinist regime. “It is my belief that the institute should coordinate the work of the museums operating in the field of restoration of historical memory: the National Memorial to the Victims of Holodomor, the National Museum Prison at Lonckoho Street in Lviv, the Bykivnia Graves, Babyn Yar, the Dem`ianiv Laz historic memorials … These are the places that can tell us about the terrible crimes.”

On June 26th 2015 the UINR held a consultation on the prospects of developing a Babyn Yar sanctuary. During the meeting it was decided to hold a public roundtable in September 2015. Yet, to the best of my knowledge, this roundtable never took place.
As may be noted from publications and statements made by the UINR, it is not planning to hold a painful debate on the participation of non-Jewish population of Ukraine in the Holocaust. It is difficult to say why it is so. One reason might be that the UINR is “mechanically” following the post-Soviet tradition of avoiding “difficult” problems, the study of which could allegedly “undermine” political “stability” in the country. Another reason might lie in the political views of the director and some of the employees of the Institute. Viatrovych was known as a proponent of the OUN-B and belongs to the group that advocates for the so-called “nationalistic” model of remembrance of the Second World War. In their views, any such debate on participation in persecution and killing of the Jews by any Ukrainian political actors or military formations during the war could “undermine” the national identity and “harm” the statehood.

Most likely, it is not a political factor that matters, but bureaucratic and economic factors. Even if the management of the institute is willing to take an active part in arranging the sites of massacres, the UINR has rather limited resources and has no clear mechanisms to implement its declared solutions. At least formally, the UINR engages the following non-governmental research and educational institutions to resolve problems of commemoration sites in Babyn Yar.

“Last Witnesses”

Despite all of the above, the new Ukrainian government along with the UINR have taken part in the commemoration of the victims of Babyn Yar. On September 12th 2015 Petro Poroshenko, the president of Ukraine, issued a decree providing for a series of events dedicated to the anniversary of the tragedy. The decree states that the purpose of commemoration is “to honour the victims of the crimes committed by the Nazis during the occupation of Ukraine’s capital – the civilians of all nationalities, prisoners of war, members of the Ukrainian liberation movement – and to join society’s efforts to prevent a repetition of crimes against humanity in order to unite the people around the idea of creating a European state governed by the rule of law in Ukraine which is able to protect all its citizens and support Ukrainian and international civic initiatives.”

Therefore the decree does not accentuate that Babyn Yar is, first and foremost, a place of a Jewish suffering. Interestingly, there is a “reference” on Babyn Yar on the UINR website which provides much information about the killing of Jews, however, it is silent about Ukrainian participation in the execution of Jews. According to the UINR, only Germans were the murderers: “During the German occupation of Kyiv in 1941 – 1943 Babyn Yar was the site of mass executions of Jews and Roma, Soviet prisoners of war, prisoners of the Syrets concentration camp, as well as members of the Soviet underground, [and] members of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists”.

The history of Babyn Yar is also instrumentalised by pro-Russian propagandists. For example, in 2013 the Russian Historical Memory Foundation produced a documentary called “Babyn Yar. Last witnesses”. This foundation is headed by Alexander Dyukov under the guise of studying the Holocaust and other crimes committed by Nazism and different national movements in Central and Eastern Europe. Dyukov has been for many years engaged in assisting Vladimir Putin’s regime in propaganda attacks against the Baltic region states and Ukraine. Dyukov and people like him do not treat the history of the Holocaust as a part of national (in this case – Russian) narrative, but only as an instrument to highlight “neo-Nazis” in these states. It is also illustrative that the documentary film was produced during the presidential term of Yanukovych when, as opposed to Yushchenko’s term, the “nationalistic narrative” was suppressed and forced out from public discourse. The documentary is abundant with exaggerations, misrepresentations and open falsifications. It mentions relatively marginal publications of “revisionism” of Babyn Yar history which came out in several small newspapers in 1990s and one publication in the Internet.

The authors of the film hold the view that “everything was fine” with the commemoration of the Nazi victims during the Soviet period. Interestingly, they note that “Babyn Yar is covered with earth. There is a park there now”, however they fail to mention that this was done not during Ukraine’s independence, but during Soviet times. The film also mentions that, unlike in Germany, there is no punishment for the denial of the Holocaust in Ukraine. Interestingly, there is no such punishment in Russia, as well. Indeed, knowledge about the Holocaust
is unfortunately low, sometimes way too low in Ukraine. There was no discussion in the country about participation of non-Jewish, non-German population in the Holocaust, unlike in Poland. Yet, were there any such discussions in Russia? Is that not the reason why Jürgen Graf, one of the “leading” Holocaust deniers, has moved from Switzerland to Moscow?

While watching the film, I personally had the impression that the authors selectively “edited” testimonies of the witnesses in order to create a negative image of “Western Ukraine” and oppose different Ukrainian regions with each other. The film suggests that only the members of the OUN from Galicia were in the police which killed the Jews. The authors of the film failed to mention that many Russians were willing to kill Jews for a piece of bread and immunity from beating and disease in the camps for the Soviet prisoners of war. The film also contains factual errors. For example, the police superintendent in Kyiv whose surname was Orlyk is represented as an active OUN member named Dmytro Myron (nicknamed “Maksym Orlyk”).

Periodically various provocations take place on the territory of the massacre. For example, on the night of September 13th 2015 an unidentified person placed car tyres around the Menorah monument, poured petrol on them and set them ablaze. The fire was extinguished only due to the assistance of the guard of the Orthodox Church which was not far from the monument. According to some records, this is already the sixth act of vandalism on the sanctuary’s territory since the start of 2015. It is largely due to the fact that there is no security present at the memorial complex.

This attack was very similar to another desecration of the monument to the Holocaust victims in Kostiantynivka village of Melitopol Raion in Donetsk Oblast which occurred on the night of September 27th 2015. There, the monument was also vandalised with car tyres and fire. The similarities of such acts suggests that this was a deliberate action with the purpose to accuse the “people of the Maidan” for such acts, as car tyres were the symbol of resistance to the Yanukovych regime in the winter of 2013 – 2014.

Heritage

Certainly the history of commemoration of Babyn Yar from 1991 until today should not be described only as a relationship between the post-Soviet (Ukrainian) officials and the representatives of the Jewish and other communities, which put forward initiatives to install various monuments or even erect buildings. To that end, initiatives of the people who represented themselves as leaders of the Jewish communities in Ukraine are illustrative. After the collapse of the Soviet regime, dozens of organisations emerged in Ukraine declaring that they represented the Jewish population of the country. In 2002, Dr Amos Avgar, the Joint Distribution Committee country director for central, western and southern Ukraine came forward with an initiative to build the “Heritage” Jewish Community Centre on the territory of Babyn Yar. This initiative, put forward by Avgar who lacked knowledge of Russian or Ukrainian and did not know much about the situation in Ukraine at that time, was supported by many leaders of organisations naming themselves Jewish. For example, this project was endorsed by the Ukrainian businessman and president of the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress Vadim Rabinovich, the president of the Jewish Council of Ukraine, Ilya Levitas, and the head of the Ukrainian Anti-Fascist Committee, Alexander Shlayen. This initiative was opposed by the general Ukrainian public which was represented by both Jews and Ukrainians. Particularly, the erection of “Heritage” at Babyn Yar was criticised by the head of the Association of Jewish organisations and communities (Vaad) of Ukraine, Josef Zissels, the head of the Ukrainian Centre for Holocaust Studies, Dr Anatoly Podolsky, Vitaliy Nakhmanovich and many others.

The main argument against construction was that the “Heritage” had to be erected on the territory where the Nazis had killed the Jews. This is contrary to the laws of Judaism (the major argument against construction was that the “Heritage” was to be built on the site where the Nazis had been killing Jews, as in their view, this contravenes the laws of Judaism). Further, the suggested model of commemorating the deceased was designed to reflect only the Jewish martyrdom of Babyn Yar and, for example, did not include Gypsy or Ukrainian ones. This scandalous project gradually came to naught, however, from time to time there are appeals to construct various buildings “on the bones”. In 2013 the president of the World
Forum of Russian Speaking Jewry, Alexander Levin, proposed the then President Viktor Yanukovych with a project for construction of a “memorial and community centre” at Babyn Yar. It was planned that this “centre” would include an “interactive pavilion” with the scene of killing carried out in autumn of 1941 reconstructed with the help of “Hollywood special effects”. In his interview, Levin stated that “The Complex, which shall include the Community centre, will be a flamboyant symbol of revival. At the very place where attempts had been made to wipe the Jews off the maps, children will learn Torah”. As far as I am aware, implementation of this project was never commenced.

**Revealed: Nearly Half The Adults In Britain And Europe Hold Extremist Views**

*By Alberto Nardelli*

**BuzzFeed, October 7, 2016**


Almost half of the adults in 12 European countries now hold anti-immigrant, nationalist views, according to major new research that reveals the spread of fringe political views into the mainstream.

BuzzFeed News has been given exclusive access to new data from YouGov, which polled more than 12,000 people across the continent to measure the extent of what it termed “authoritarian populist” opinions – a combination of anti-immigration sentiments, strong foreign policy views, and opposition to human rights laws, EU institutions, and European integration policies.

The YouGov findings are the first to capture the political attitudes that are both fuelling, and being fuelled by, upheaval across Europe and beyond – from the continent’s refugee crisis and the Brexit vote in Britain, to the burkini ban in France, to the rise of Donald Trump and the radical “alternative right” in the US.

In Britain, the poll found authoritarian populist attitudes were shared by 48% of adults, despite less than 20% of the population identifying itself as right-wing. Three months on from the EU referendum, prime minister Theresa May has responded this week by appealing directly to disaffected working-class voters with a promise to crackdown on immigration and reassert British sovereignty.

In France, a clear majority of people surveyed – 63% – held authoritarian populist views, while in Italy the figure was 47%. In Germany, it was 18%, which appears low by comparison but, given the country’s history and the extreme nature of its far-right groups, is regarded by analysts as surprisingly high.

The highest levels of authoritarian populist views were recorded in Romania and Poland, where they were held by 82% and 78% of adults respectively. In Lithuania, by contrast, the poll did not did not detect any evidence of the authoritarian populist phenomenon at all.

Joe Twyman, YouGov’s head of political and social research for Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, said: “These results show that the old days of left-versus-right have been replaced by a much more complicated, nuanced mix of political groupings, with profound implications for politics across Europe. Any political party or movement that can successfully appeal to those of an authoritarian populist leaning could benefit hugely when it comes to elections.”

Both sides of this emerging political battle describe the challenge Europe is facing as “a clash between values”.

Former UKIP leader Nigel Farage told BuzzFeed News that despite his scepticism towards pollsters, the new research “supports what has been obvious to anyone with the eyes to see and the ears to hear”.
“What is happening across Europe is not some sudden revelation,” Farage said, “but a slow build-up of disillusion amongst the peoples of Europe let down by an anti-democratic political class who are attempting to build a United States of Europe without the consent of the citizens.

“This is not a matter of the old labels of left or right. In the past both left and right were rooted in place, but no longer. The governing political class across this continent doesn’t like the Europe in which it lives, holds its people in contempt, and would prefer to sit in executive lounges than engage with those whose work pays their wages. That is why you are seeing increasing disillusion with a failed EU project that is now doomed. Brexit was just the beginning.”

But British Conservative MP and former business minister Anna Soubry disagreed: “People in Britain and across Europe are turning their backs on openness. But the answer is not to pander to a cynical populism that seeks to divide people, but to stand up for what we believe in.”

Earlier this month, following a string of bad state election results for her party, German chancellor Angela Merkel warned: “In 1990, when the wall fell, the Cold War came to an end and freedom blossomed everywhere; it looked like we were on an irreversible road to victory, and that it was just up to the rest of the world to join our model. Freedom had won. It now turns out things aren’t that simple.”

The results do not automatically mean that there will be a surge in support for anti-establishment, populist parties. At general elections, voters make their choice for many different reasons – concerns about the economy may, for example, trump worries about multiculturalism. Many of the most disaffected do not vote at all.

However, as support for these views has increased, so have votes for more radical parties and candidates.

In Germany, for example, the anti-immigration Alternative for Germany (AfD) party now holds seats in 10 of Germany’s 16 states. Nationally, with a general election due next year, the party is polling above 15%. Three years ago, the AfD failed to win enough votes to enter parliament.

The YouGov data shows that most people in the country are centrists, internationalists, liberals and pro-EU. Authoritarian populism is still restricted to more extremist positions.

But certain subjects that have been off-limits since the end of the second world war – such as debates about German nationalism and identity and people’s ethnicity – are now making a comeback.

Hans Blomeier of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation told BuzzFeed News that “what is dangerous is not always the words themselves, but their history and what is behind them”.

“A nation that is outward-looking is suddenly inward-looking again – and the AfD is driving this,” he said.

Like Germany, Denmark has also seen a shift in the tone of political debates. According to the YouGov data, a quarter of Danes who identify themselves as centrists nevertheless hold authoritarian populist beliefs – a similar proportion to those on the right-wing of the country’s political spectrum.

“There is a move towards more authoritarianism, discrimination based on ethnicity,” said Karen Melchior, a diplomat and candidate with the liberal Radikale party. “It is not a left-versus-right issue. It is like a cold war with competing visions of Europe.”

In recent policy discussions about introducing a tougher citizenship test and the appropriateness of segregating classrooms on the basis of ethnicity, even parts of the Social Democratic party held “discriminatory” views, Melchior claims.
Voters in France will soon have the chance to vote on the ideas that drive authoritarian populism. Polls suggest Marine Le Pen, leader of the anti-immigrant Front National, will easily make it through to the final round of two candidates in the country’s presidential elections in 2017.

But the anti-immigrant, nationalist rhetoric has not been limited to Le Pen. Former president Nicolas Sarkozy is among the other contenders for the presidency, and some, including within his own party, have accused him of adopting the Front National’s tone on immigration, Islam, and identity.

In recent weeks, Sarkozy has denied climate change is caused by humans, has said he would drop sanctions against Russia, and has even questioned the right to citizenship of some of those born in France. The latter is a constitutional bedrock, and Sarkozy himself attacked the Front National a decade ago for suggesting the right to citizenship should be abolished.

The rise of nationalist, anti-immigrant views has been strongest in central Europe, with Polish adults scoring the highest in the YouGov survey, taking into account all the measures polled.

In nearby Hungary, the “cultural counter-revolution” that central European leaders pledged in the wake of Brexit is even more stark.

The refugee crisis is one of the most powerful drivers of authoritarian, anti-immigrant views. A senior government official close to Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orban told BuzzFeed News “it is not just about the numbers. There is an issue with provenance, cultural, demographic and religious issues. Some Muslims do not respect the European way of life.

“Many North African migrants have not integrated, they live isolated in polarised communities. There are now districts in cities such as Paris and Copenhagen that are dangerous.”

The official predicts that there will be eventually be walls all around the EU. “Countries colonise others by war, or by flooding them with their people,” they added.

To the right of the ruling Fidesz party is Jobbik. In the space of a decade, the party, grown out of a right-wing youth association, has gone from polling less than 2% to 20%.

Jobbik MP Marton Gyongyosi, who also serves as vice-chairman of the parliamentary committee on foreign affairs, told BuzzFeed News Orban had basically copied Jobbik’s immigration policies.

But Gyongyosi claims that Jobbik’s success is best explained by its stance against “corrupt elites” and its opposition to “neoliberalism”.

The MP says the party’s economic policies have more in common with the Greek far-left Syriza and Italy’s anti-establishment Five Star Movement than with other far-right parties in Europe. “Immigration is the only common denominator between right-wing parties,” he says.

One trend that links Donald Trump’s run through the Republican primaries, the Brexit vote in the UK and the AfD’s success in recent German state elections is an increase in previous non-voters casting a ballot.

The YouGov data shows that authoritarian populist groups tend to be more likely to be male, older, with fewer educational qualifications, but the degree for which that holds varies from group to group and from country to country. This makes defining and responding to the demographic mix of populist parties difficult.

“In the past, these voters thought that all the parties were the same, now they see the AfD and Trump as different – protesting makes sense,” said Hans Blomeier, of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. “They see them
as a way to give the establishment a slap in the face. They deliver their anger in an election, it hurts
everybody.”

He warned that governments and parties that respond to populism with more populism are “playing with fire”. But, he added, it is not enough to say “these are just lunatics”.

Commenting on the study on his Facebook page, the former Belgian prime minister, and the European Parliament’s chief Brexit negotiator, Guy Verhofstadt, said the results showed that politics in Europe are no longer a battle between the “left” and “right”, but increasingly between those who fight for “open societies” and
“closed societies”.

Adding, “we can put our heads in the sand and let Europe slowly die, or we use this crisis to renew and reform Europe”.

Russia has ‘playbook’ for covert influence in Eastern Europe: study
By John Walcott and Warren Strobel
Reuters, October 13, 2016

Russia has mounted a campaign of covert economic and political measures to manipulate five countries in central and eastern Europe, discredit the West's liberal democratic model, and undermine trans-Atlantic ties, a report by a private U.S. research group said.

The report released on Thursday said Moscow had co-opted sympathetic politicians, strived to dominate energy markets and other economic sectors, and undermined anti-corruption measures in an attempt to gain sway over governments in Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia, Serbia, and Slovakia.

"In certain countries, Russian influence has become so pervasive and endemic that it has challenged national stability as well as a country's Western orientation and Euro-Atlantic stability," said the report of a 16-month study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington and the Sofia, Bulgaria-based Center for the Study of Democracy.

The publication of "The Kremlin Playbook: Understanding Russian Influence in Eastern and Central Europe" coincides with an unprecedented debate in the United States over whether Russia is attempting to interfere in the Nov. 8 presidential election with cyber attacks and the release of emails from the campaign of Democratic Party candidate Hillary Clinton.

The former U.S. Secretary of State's campaign has said the Kremlin is trying to help Republican Donald Trump win the White House.

On Friday, the U.S. government for the first time formally accused Russia of hacking Democratic Party organizations. Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday rejected allegations of meddling in the election.

The Russian Embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment on the report. On Sunday, however, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told Russian state TV the United States was increasing its hostility toward Moscow.

Lavrov complained that NATO had been steadily moving military infrastructure closer to Russia's borders with Eastern European countries and criticized sanctions imposed over Moscow's role in the Ukraine crisis.

A former U.S. State Department official is the report's lead author and U.S. officials said they concur with the findings on Russia's involvement in Eastern Europe.
"The Russians have been engaged in a sustained campaign to recapture what Putin considers their rightful buffer in Eastern Europe, and to undermine not just NATO and the EU, but the entire democratic foundation of both institutions," said a U.S. official who has studied Russian behavior since before the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991.

The official requested anonymity because, he said, the White House has ordered officials not to publicly discuss hostile Russian activities.

Those activities, he said, include bribery, propaganda, disinformation, "the occasional" assassination of Kremlin critics at home or abroad, and now using the internet to undermine opponents and weaken Western institutions.

"The Kremlin Playbook" cites a series of Russian efforts to expand its writ in central and eastern Europe.

They range from "megadeal" projects such as the 12.2 billion euro contract to build two new nuclear reactors in Hungary, awarded to Russia under opaque terms, to the cultivation of pro-Russian businessmen who gain political office and then shield Moscow's interests, it said.

In Bulgaria, Russia's economic presence is so strong, averaging 22 percent of GDP between 2005 and 2014, "that the country is at high risk of Russian-influenced state capture," the report said.

Heather Conley, the former U.S. official and lead author of the report, said in an interview that the study was intended to highlight a challenge that has received insufficient attention from American and European policymakers.

"The first step is to acknowledge that which is happening," said Conley. "What is at stake here is how we view ourselves and the functioning of our democracy."

The report proposes measures to curb what it calls an "unvirtuous cycle" of covert Russian influence. They include more focus on illicit financial flows and revamping U.S. assistance programs to stress strengthening governance and combating Russian influence.

It is not the only study this year to highlight Russia's measures in the region.

"Russia has opened a new political front within Europe by supporting the far right against the liberal European Union," the Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research, a British Army research group, said in February.

Governments such as those in Hungary and Greece "openly sympathize" with Putin, it said. "The result is that there is a substantial 'fifth column' in western and central Europe which weakens our response to Russian aggression."

Will the West Ever Stand Up to Putin?
BY HANNA HOPKO
Atlantic Council, October 13, 2016
http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/will-the-west-ever-stand-up-to-putin

German Chancellor Angela Merkel suggested that the Normandy Four—leaders from France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine—gather on October 19 to discuss the war in Ukraine.
But this is premature. Nothing will come out of this meeting without a detailed roadmap for a real ceasefire and Russian President Vladimir Putin’s adherence to fully implement the Minsk agreements.

Russia is essentially demanding that Ukraine fully implement Minsk, including the holding of elections in Russian-occupied territory in the Donbas, while meeting a tiny part (at most one percent) of its Minsk obligations. After all, the most basic requirement of Minsk is an end to the shooting, but there has not been one day since the first ceasefire was agreed to over two years ago that there has not been shelling from the Russian-controlled side of the contact line. This is not a genuine offer to secure peace; it’s just a game. The Kremlin must be completely isolated until the shelling in the Donbas stops.

It is high time for the West to understand that Ukraine is not a buffer zone. We are a strategic partner and the restoration of global security is not possible without Ukraine.

Russia has cleverly used international institutions to prevent it from taking real steps to implement Minsk. It influences the decisions of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and its membership in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is laughable: Russia blatantly disrespects and disregards the organization’s mission. At the UN Security Council, Russia had no problem wielding its veto on the draft resolution on Syria, even when innocent lives are at stake.

We have been given bad advice by some of our European friends. As Ukraine considered amendments to the constitution that would give eastern Ukraine greater decentralization so as to fulfill the Minsk agreements, one European official urged their adoption. “If someone slaps you on the cheek, turn the other cheek. This is a Christian value,” he told me. But this isn’t a theological discussion. The Europeans understand that Russia invaded Ukraine, but still they require the victims to take the initiative to resolve the conflict, which was triggered by Russian aggression.

The situation that we are in—a hybrid peace—will bring more losses than the hybrid war that killed thousands in eastern Ukraine over the almost last three years. After 10,000 deaths, "turning the other cheek" means allowing more body bags and instability in the broader region. Putin will not give up his expansionism easily.

It is time for the world to wake up. The West has pressured Ukraine during the last two years while not making any attempt to force Putin to secure a real ceasefire.

Continental Europe talks a lot about values, but from Kyiv it looks like just that: a lot of talk. The dialogue between Europeans and the aggressor has nothing to do with Christian values. Negotiating with a tyrant using the language of appeasement is pointless. Russia annexed Ukrainian Crimea and then invaded the Donbas, bombed peaceful districts of Aleppo, has built up its military massively, engages in military provocations in the Baltics, and ignores its agreements on peacekeeping and military deterrence. How many times should we turn the other cheek?

We were hopeful that the West’s response might change this fall. Even after the interim report of the Joint Investigation Team on the MH17 tragedy demonstrated that Russia provided the Buk missile that killed 298 innocent people, and even after Russia and Syria’s inhumane attacks on hospitals and civilians in Aleppo, the West’s response was inadequate. France, Germany, and the United States could take actions that would get the Kremlin’s attention. They could suspend Russia from the SWIFT banking system or refuse to buy its oil and energy products. A recent picture at the United Nations was equally depressing: nothing could be done as Russian blocked the French resolution calling for a ceasefire in Syria and the banning of military flights over Aleppo.

The weak and conciliatory reactions of the West deeply concern us, and they concern others in Eastern Europe as well. The sad truth is that the West does not seem to know how to confidently stand up to Putin any more.