



NCSEJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF
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Four Suspects Arrested in Ukraine For Attack on Chabad Rabbi
Chabad.org, October 19, 2016

http://www.chabad.org/news/article_cdo/aid/3468742/jewish/Four-Suspects-Arrested-in-Ukraine-For-Attack-on-Chabad-Rabbi.htm

Police in Ukraine have arrested four suspects for the brutal beating and robbery two weeks ago of Chabad-Lubavitch emissary Rabbi Mendel Deitsch, who remains in serious but stable condition at a hospital in Israel.

According to local press reports, two men and two women from the Carpathian mountain region attacked Deitsch, 63, near the central train station in Zhitomir on the night of Oct. 6, or in the early hours of Oct. 7. They then fled the city with the rabbi's cell phone and cash, leaving him bleeding and unconscious under a bridge near the station.

The suspects returned to the city a week after the attack and were identified and arrested by police two days ago.

The rabbi was discovered the morning after the attack and was admitted to the intensive care unit at a regional hospital, where he was diagnosed with multiple head injuries and brain trauma.

Deitsch underwent emergency surgery in Zhitomir while the victim's family in Israel urgently worked with the Israeli government and emergency-services organizations in Jerusalem to arrange an airlift to Tel Hashomer hospital in Ramat Gan.

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.

Righteous Among the Nations meet in Warsaw
Radio Poland, October 17, 2016

<http://www.thenews.pl/1/11/Artykul/275686,Righteous-Among-the-Nations-meet-in-Warsaw>

A meeting of over 70 Polish Righteous Among the Nations has been held at the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Polin, in Warsaw, the first such gathering ever organised.

Polish citizens who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust took part in a ceremony held on Sunday.

"Each month, sometimes even each week, one of us passes away. We will soon be gone," said Józef Walaszczy, Deputy President of the Polish Society of the Righteous Among the Nations.

Jan Kasprzyk, Head of the Office for Veterans and Victims of Oppression, noted that Poland was the only country in occupied Europe where offering any kind of help to a person of Jewish faith or origin was immediately punished by death.

"Despite that there were those who were ready to sacrifice their life so that their compatriot, fellow citizen and human being could survive," Kasprzyk said.

"And it was Poland's Underground State that operated a council of aid to Jews 'Żegota'," he added.

The meeting took place on the 30th anniversary of the Polish Society of the Righteous Among the Nations.

The Righteous Among the Nations medal has been awarded since 1963 by the Institute of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

To date, 6,643 Poles have received the medals. They constitute the largest national group honoured in this way by the Yad Vashem Institute.

In total the Righteous Among the Nations medal has been awarded to 26,119 people so far.

Jewish Center Opens in a Historical Building in Petersburg

eJewishPhilanthropy, October 20, 2016

<http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/jewish-center-opens-in-a-historical-building-in-petersburg/>

A new Jewish educational center opened last week in Petersburg, Russia, marking an exciting step in the city's Jewish history. The building, constructed on behalf of the Jewish community in 1896, was returned to them in 2005 and took another 10 years to restore.

The new center, symbolically named 'Sinai,' will host a kindergarten, a girl's school and dormitory, and an entire floor dedicated to youth programs and activities, clubs and events.

"The name of the center is not coincidental," said the city's chief rabbi Menachem Pevzner. "We wanted to underline the idea of continuity in our tradition, of the connection between generations," he said.

The plot of land on Dekabristov 42, the center's location next to the city's main Grand Choral synagogue complex, was purchased by the Jewish community in 1879. A Jewish trades school was opened there in 1896, sponsored by Baron Ginzburg, a prominent Jewish philanthropist. After the revolution in 1917, the trades school became a Jewish public school, and later was transformed again, this time into a children's hospital.

At the turn of 21st century, the Petersburg community began the process of re-claiming the property and asked for the city's assistance in finding new premises for the hospital. In 2005 the hospital was relocated and the building returned to the community.

It partially opened in 2010 as the location of the city's Georgian synagogue and the restoration project was completed this year.

Russia, Ukraine Agree To Draft New Road Map Carrying Out Peace Deal

RFE/RL, October 20, 2016

<http://www.rferl.org/a/russia-ukraine-germany-france-agree-draft-new-road-map-carrying-out-minsk-peace-deal/28064303.html>

The leaders of Ukraine, Germany, France, and Russia agreed to draw up a road map by the end of next month to carry out the Minsk peace agreement for eastern Ukraine.

After six hours of talks on the wars in Ukraine and Syria in Berlin on October 19-20, German Chancellor Angela Merkel emerged to say the leaders "didn't achieve miracles," but the road map would enable all sides to keep pushing ahead with the 2015 Minsk peace agreement.

The leaders also discussed creating zones of disengagement between the warring parties in eastern Ukraine, as well as measures to improve the humanitarian situation there, she said.

"It's urgently necessary to keep having such talks in order not to lose momentum," she said.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said the road map "should have the sequence of the implementation of the Minsk agreements and guarantee their implementation."

He also said they agreed to withdrawals of Ukrainian troops and Russia-backed separatists in four new areas on the front line of the fighting in the Donbas region.

The leaders also agreed on deploying an armed police mission in eastern Ukraine, allowing monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to be armed and given unimpeded access in the region.

The OSCE said in May that it would consider sending an armed mission to help conduct elections in separatist-held areas.

Poroshenko said that Germany, the current chair of the OSCE, would present the mission proposal to the organization.

But he said elections in Donbass would not occur until all foreign forces are withdrawn.

Separatist violence erupted in eastern Ukraine in 2014 and has killed 9,600 people so far despite the Minsk cease-fire deal.

Czech police arrest Russian in connection with U.S. hacking attacks

Reuters, October 19, 2016

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-czech-usa-russia-cybercrime-idUSKCN12J0MV>

Czech police have detained a Russian man wanted in connection with hacking attacks on targets in the United States, the police said, without giving further details.

The arrest was carried out in cooperation with the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, Czech police said on their website on Tuesday evening. Interpol had issued a so-called Red Notice for the man, seeking his arrest, they added.

The Russian citizen was detained at a Prague hotel. Police said he collapsed and was hospitalized. Czech courts will decide whether he will be extradited, police said.

A police spokesman declined to give further details on the arrest. It was not immediately clear what hacking attacks the Russian citizen was wanted for.

The U.S. government this month formally accused Russia for the first time of a campaign of cyber attacks against Democratic Party organizations ahead of the Nov. 8 presidential election. Russian President Vladimir Putin has said a hacking scandal would not be in Russia's interests.

Russian shortie about Holocaust included in Oscar long list

Interfax-Religion, October 19, 2016

<http://interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=13351>

Film about Holocaust Brutus supported by the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia is included in the long list of nominees for Oscar, the FJCR press service reports on Wednesday.

"We pleased to learn that the committee of the major world's cinema award prefers films touching the theme of World War II and the Holocaust tragedy. It will certainly help focus on the actual problem of ethnic and religious intolerance and its terrific consequences," the press service quotes FJCR president Alexander Boroda as saying.

Brutus filmed on the story of Czech writer Ludwig Ashkenazi is the second part of the cinema almanac The Witnesses that includes three novels representing unusual view on Holocaust. Violent human world is shown through the eyes of the dog named Brutus.

The first novel of the cinema almanac The Shoes was presented in 2012, it won prizes of several movie festivals and also participated in fight for Oscar.

The third novel The Violin is filmed in Byelorussia, it tells about destiny of the musical instrument, which goes through the horrors of the war and ends its way at the Wall of Tears in Jerusalem.

Warsaw's Jewish Theatre finds temporary spaces to perform JTA, October 19, 2016

<http://www.jta.org/2016/10/19/default/warsaws-jewish-theatre-finds-temporary-spaces-to-perform>

The Jewish Theatre in Warsaw has found new temporary venues with the help of two government ministries. The historic company has faced eviction since [the beginning of June](#) when its landlord, looking to build a new high-rise on the site, blocked access to the theater.

At a news conference this week, the theater unveiled plans to launch a new season on Thursday at two temporary sites, the Club of the Warsaw Garrison Command and the home of the Warsaw Chamber Opera.

"It is for us a new stage and a challenge," said Golda Tencer, director of the Jewish theater, at the news conference. "Theater dies when it is not playing. We are coming back. And some day we will return it to the city center because this is our place."

The ministries of culture and defense assisted the theater find the venues.

Wojciech Falkowski, secretary of state in the Ministry of Defense, which runs the Garrison Command headquarters near the central Piłsudski Square, said the decision to help the theater was a natural.

"This is an important artistic institution which has its permanent place in Polish culture," he said.

Next year the theater is seeking to move to the Prague district in Warsaw, on the east bank of the Vistula River. Ghelamco, which owns its current building on Grzybowski Square, has pledged space for the Jewish theater in its new high-rise, but those plans have been vague.

Formed in 1950, the troupe is a link to the rich pre-Holocaust culture of Poland's Yiddish-speaking Jewish community. Earlier this year, Poland's president [honored](#) the actors for their contributions to Polish and Polish-Jewish culture.

Russian lawmakers back Putin's suspension of plutonium deal AP, October 19, 2016

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/russian-lawmakers-back-putins-suspension-plutonium-deal-122358720.html>

The lower house of the Russian parliament unanimously approved Wednesday President Vladimir Putin's move to suspend a deal with the United States on the disposal of weapons-grade plutonium.

Amid growing strains between Moscow and Washington, most recently over the conflict in Syria, Putin has cited the "emerging threat to strategic stability as a result of U.S. unfriendly actions" for his decision. He has also noted a failure by the U.S. to meet its end of the deal.

Under the agreement, which was first signed in 2000 and hailed as a symbol of the rapprochement between the two countries, Russia and the U.S. were each set to dispose of 34 metric tons of weapons-grade plutonium, which is enough material for about 17,000 nuclear warheads.

Putin said the deal could be restored if the U.S. pulls back forces deployed near Russia's borders and revokes anti-Russian sanctions.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told lawmakers Wednesday that Moscow could take other steps that would hurt the U.S. if Washington ratchets up sanctions.

"If the U.S. moves to expand sanctions, we will take measures that would be quite painful to the U.S. positions in the world," he said without elaboration.

Relations between the two countries have been badly strained over the Ukraine crisis and the situation in Syria, where Russian warplanes have backed Syrian President Bashar Assad. The collapse of a U.S.-Russia-brokered cease-fire in Syria has fueled tensions between Moscow and Washington.

Czech lower parliament: UNESCO Jerusalem resolution strengthens anti-Semitism Jerusalem Post, October 19, 2016

<http://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/Czech-lower-parliament-UNESCO-Jerusalem-resolution-strengthens-antisemitism-470432>

The Jerusalem resolution "discredits" UNESCO's "neutrality" and "strengthens the international anti-Semitic tendencies, the politicians stated.

The Czech Republic's lower parliament voted 119-4 on Wednesday to condemn UNESCO Jerusalem resolution which it warned only strengthened anti-Semitism.

The parliamentarians called on their government not to vote for UNESCO resolutions containing text that ignores Jewish ties to the Temple Mount.

They also asked the Czech Republic to protest "against the politicization" of the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization, a body originally designed to be dedicated to the preservation of the world's heritage.

The vote in the 200-seat Chamber of Deputies was taken with 149 parliamentarians present.

It comes as Israel is gearing up to sway a majority of the 21-member World Heritage Committee not to support any text at its October 24-26 meeting in Paris that refers to the Temple Mount and its adjoining Western Wall solely by their Muslim names of Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the Buraq Wall.

Israel's Ambassador to UNESCO Carmel Shama- Hacoen welcomed the vote and said the Czech Chamber of Deputies was the first European Parliament to take such a vote but that it would likely not be the last.

"I want to thank the Czech Republic for its vote, which sends a sane and human message of moral truth from the parliament in Prague to UNESCO in Paris that is losing itself in a politicization of lies," Shama-Hacohen said.

Any similar statement that is taken before next week's vote, Shama-Hacohen said, could help show the Arab states and the Palestinians are acting dangerously with a religious subject that should be removed as far as possible from any regional conflict.

The Jerusalem resolution is part of a drive by the Palestinians to change UNESCO's terms of reference for the Temple Mount that began in 2015.

Shama-Hacohen said that the lack of historical reference goes beyond the Israeli- Palestinian conflict and is now much more about the Jewish and Christian heritage in Jerusalem's Old City.

Israel has not yet seen the final draft of the resolution that is due to come before the World Heritage Committee but it presumes that it is similar to the one that was approved Tuesday by UNESCO's Executive Board which used solely Muslim terms for the Temple Mount.

The Czech parliamentarians in their statement said that such resolutions "carries the spirit of hateful anti-Israel" sentiment, adding that it also ignored Christian ties to the holy sites in Jerusalem.

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Belarus Welcomes U.S. Decision To Prolong Suspension Of Sanctions

RFE/RL, October 19, 2016

<http://www.rferl.org/a/belarus-us-extends-suspension-of-sanctions/28063269.html>

Belarus has welcomed a U.S. decision to prolong the suspension of sanctions against nine Belarusian companies.

In an October 19 [statement](#), the Foreign Ministry in Minsk also expressed "confidence" that "full removal of all sanctions would lead to the more dynamic development of Belarus-America ties."

The U.S. Treasury Department announced on October 18 that it had extended the suspension of sanctions against nine Belarusian oil and chemical companies until April 30, 2017.

Washington imposed sanctions against the state-owned companies in June 2006 in response to human rights violations in Belarus.

In October 2015, Washington suspended the sanctions for six months after Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka released several political prisoners and brokered cease-fire talks between Ukraine, Russia, and Russia-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine.

The suspension had been extended by another six months in April 2016.

Pro-Western Moldovan Presidential Hopeful Warns Of 'Massive Fraud' In Looming Vote

RFE/RL, October 19, 2016

<http://www.rferl.org/a/moldova-presidential-candidate-warns-eu-massive-election-fraud/28063659.html>

One of the leading pro-Western candidates in this month's presidential election in Moldova has warned of "risks of massive fraud" in the vote, which has further divided the tiny post-Soviet state's already fractious political scene.

Speaking to RFE/RL on October 19 during a visit to Brussels for meetings with officials from the European Union, Action and Solidarity candidate and former Education Minister Maia Sandu said she was "here to warn the international partners of Moldova about the risks of massive fraud of the election and to ask them to help."

The presidential vote is Moldova's first by direct election since 1996, a change whose legitimacy is being challenged by the Communist Party and other opposition elements.

"We do want to have democratic elections. We do deserve to have democratic elections," Sandu told RFE/RL's Brussels correspondent. "Unfortunately we can't count on the Moldova state institutions these days because they are not free and independent, and that is why we count so much [on] support from EU institutions."

Moldova signed and began provisionally applying an Association Agreement with the European Union in 2014, opening up visa-free travel to the bloc but providing no guarantees that Chisinau would follow through with reforms or clean up its rampant corruption.

Sandu and others have suggested that inaccurate voter lists and pressure on state employees could mar the results of the looming vote.

Speaking to RFE/RL, she urged the international community to closely scrutinize the run-up to this month's elections and the balloting itself.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) was expected to field [around 30 experts](#) and long-term observers and some 200 short-term observers in Moldova for this month's vote.

Opinion polls have consistently shown Socialist Party candidate Igor Dodon with a double-digit lead over Sandu and the rest of the pack in the presidential race ahead of the October 30 election, but a two-candidate runoff is likely to follow on November 13.

A former Communist who has held senior government posts including as minister of trade and economics, Dodon has said his first foreign visit if he wins the presidency will be to the Russian capital. On October 18, Dodon pledged to "restore broad and friendly ties with Russia" and "initiate the development and signature of an agreement on strategic partnership with the Russian Federation," according to Interfax.

Polling has shown the country divided between favoring closer trade ties to traditional partner Russia and its Eurasian Union, on one hand, and the European Union on the other.

Moldova has struggled to get its political footing since flawed elections sparked mostly nonviolent street protests that helped push longtime Communist Party leader Vladimir Voronin from power in 2009.

But pro-Western governments in Chisinau have proved quarrelsome and were hurt by their failure to prevent a [massive multibank fraud](#) that was estimated to have cost Moldova, one of Europe's poorest countries, more than \$1 billion, or around one-eighth of its GDP.

Moldova's breakaway region of Transdnister, where many residents favor the Russian language and Moscow still maintains troops, has contributed to the country's economic and political malaise.

Ukraine approves joint WW2 declaration with Poland, Lithuania

Ukraine Today, October 20, 2016

<http://uatoday.tv/politics/ukraine-approves-joint-ww2-declaration-with-poland-lithuania-789884.html>

Ukraine's Parliament has approved a joint World War 2 declaration of Remembrance and Solidarity with Poland and Lithuania that pays respects to the victims of the war in the three countries, and condemns 'foreign aggressors'.

The document, approved by 243 Ukrainian lawmakers, says that the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, also known as the Nazi-Soviet pact, had led to the second World War.

'The pact between the two totalitarian regimes led to the explosion of the World war 2, started by the German aggression and joined by the Soviet Union. The aftermath of these events was occupation of Poland by Germany and the USSR, and later the occupation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia', the document says.

The document will reportedly be approved by Polish Sejm today, and the Lithuanian Parliament should do it sometime later.

The text of the declaration also puts responsibility on the international community for 'the lack of strong reaction to the escalation before the war' and its appeasement policy.

The document has been approved due to the 'Russian aggression against Ukraine, that continues the predatory practice of the Soviet Union'.

Czechs set up unit to counter perceived propaganda threat from Russia

Reuters, October 20, 2016

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-czech-security-russia-idUSKCN12K22V>

The Czech interior ministry has set up a unit to counter what it sees as propaganda from Russia and elsewhere that has been affecting public opinion in the European Union and NATO member nation, Interior Minister Milan Chovanec said on Thursday.

The counterintelligence service said in September that Russia was conducting "an information war" in the Czech Republic, building a network of puppet groups and propaganda agents that could be used to destabilize the country.

Chovanec said the ministry's new 20-member team will act to disperse misinformation in the public domain but also train public officials to be prepared to deal with disinformation.

"We want to get into every smartphone," Chovanec said at a conference on strategic communications which he attended alongside general Petr Pavel, head of NATO's military committee.

The center will need to be able to respond almost in real-time to various misinformation, using Facebook, Twitter and other means of communication, Chovanec said.

Kremlin officials were not immediately available for comment.

Dozens of websites in the Czech Republic, home to 30,000 Russians as of a 2011 census, promote Moscow's stance toward the West.

Chovanec said an opinion poll showed a quarter of people believe what they read on "alternative" news websites.

The Czech Republic has stuck to the common European Union stance toward Russia.

But a number of politicians - in particular president Milos Zeman - have echoed Russia's views on the situation in eastern Ukraine, including its insistence that no Russian troops are there, and spoken out against economic sanctions on Russia.

Money has fled Ukraine for decades

The Economist, October 20, 2016

<http://www.economist.com/blogs/freeexchange/2016/10/thats-bad>

IT IS an accepted fact that Ukraine suffers from a high level of "capital flight". The term refers to a process by which people pull money out of a country and buy foreign assets instead. Ukraine is highly corrupt. If you make money in Ukraine, you often want to get it out of there, lest someone else steal it from you. Ukrainian oligarchs are big fans of London property, where their capital is safe.

So we suspect there is capital flight from Ukraine, but how much? The problem is that the term "capital flight" has a variety of definitions. This means that there are no easy-to-find statistics on capital flight for most countries.

Therefore, we have tried to estimate capital flight for Ukraine. The details should not concern the casual reader, but we have used the methodology shown in [this](#) paper.

Ukraine, it turns out, has pretty much always had a high level of capital flight since the end of Soviet times: billions of dollars a year, in fact. This is bad news for what is by some measures Europe's poorest country. To put this in perspective, we're looking at roughly 10% of GDP in the 1990s and 2000s. That's an incredibly high level of wealth, vanishing from the country each year.

(Interestingly enough, the last few years have actually seen relatively low capital flight. This is probably to do with the capital controls implemented by the central bank following the Russian invasion, and also possibly weird valuations of assets linked to the collapse in Ukraine's currency.)

Why Ukraine's New Ultranationalist Party Will Not Last

By Alina Polyakova

Atlantic Council, October 19, 2016

<http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/why-ukraine-s-new-ultranationalist-party-will-not-last>

On October 14, the Azov Battalion—Ukraine's controversial ultranationalist paramilitary group that has been fighting in the Donbas as part of the National Guard—entered the political fray. Registered as a political party under the name National Corps, the new party proposes an ambitious military and nationalist agenda, including a re-nationalization of Ukraine's private sector and nuclear re-arming. Azov counts some unsavory members among its ranks, including self-proclaimed fascists, but its main front has been the battlefield. In August 2014, Azov's fighters were [reportedly](#) key in helping fend off a major Russian offensive on Mariupol. Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko has hailed the battalion for its military prowess. But unlike Azov's achievements on the battlefield, its time in politics is likely to be very short lived.

Ultrnationalist parties have never been popular in Ukraine, and Azov is just another boogiemanager in a long line of failed ultrnationalist groups that have tried their hand at politics. Before Azov, the boogiemanager and darling of the Kremlin's propaganda machine was the Right Sector. During the Maidan protests, Right Sector, with which Azov coordinates some of its activities, received a disproportionate amount of media attention (partially due to its prime location on Kyiv's Independence Square close to international journalists). In reality, Right Sector members, who share some ideological leanings with Azov, were a tiny presence on the Maidan. While leaders of the group [boasted membership of more than 10,000](#), most experts at the time estimated that the number was closer to 300 to 500. Like Azov, Right Sector became a political party in May 2014. Right Sector's leader, Dmitry Yarosh, ran for president in May 2014 and received less than one percent of the vote. According to

polls at the time, 1.7 percent of Ukrainians supported Right Sector. The party did eventually win two seats in parliament (one is Yarosh's) in October 2014, but they have acted mainly as backbench MPs and refused to join any political faction. Yarosh left the party in 2015. Today, Right Sector has little influence in Ukrainian politics.

Even more "mild" ultranationalists have failed to gain a foothold in Ukrainian politics. Svoboda, the closest Ukrainian version of the populist parties surging in Europe today, is the only such party to enter parliament in Ukraine's twenty-five years of independence. It did so in 2012, when the party won just over 10 percent of the popular vote. But its support was mainly driven by growing anger at the incumbent Yanukovich government and growing pro-European sentiment in Ukraine (Svoboda, unlike European far-right populists, is a pro-EU party whose supporters tend to be the most pro-European among Ukraine's political parties). After Ukrainians ousted Yanukovich, the party lost its favorite punching bag and support along with it. By 2014, Svoboda didn't pass the five percent threshold needed for parliamentary representation. The party's well-spoken leader, Oleh Tyahnybok, was active on the Maidan along with other political opposition leaders, but his charisma was not enough to sustain the party.

The National Corps, as the latest incarnation of an extremist group going political, is on the same path as those that came before it. Its ideology offers little in terms of realistic policy ideas for solving Ukraine's many challenges. Its leader, Andriy Biletsky, is new to politics, having won his seat in parliament in October 2014 against a corrupt Yanukovich supporter who ran as an independent. In parliament for two years, he has done little to follow through on his platform of "Strong nation! Honest government! Powerful state!"

Unlike many European countries, where far-right parties have quickly become the norm in politics, Ukraine is different. Ukrainians have had little appetite for extremist groups and radical solutions even as they have sought new political leaders. In the post-Maidan years, new parties, such as Self-Reliance have emerged to offer policy solutions rather than empty slogans. Reformers from civil society and journalism have also entered politics seeking to institute long-lasting change. These fledgling pro-democratic forces are still weak in Ukraine, and it is these parties and reformers that need our attention rather than fringe extremists who will be a flash in the pan.

In a Catholic Town, a Tribute and Reunion For Poland's Jews

By Samuel Norich

Forward, October 16, 2016

<http://forward.com/culture/352039/in-a-catholic-town-a-tribute-and-reunion-for-polands-jews/>

I came to Poland for the opening of a new Jewish museum in Czestochowa, and found myself participating in a four-day "reunion," as it was called, though most of the 125 participants seemed to be meeting for the first time. They were, almost all of them, Jews from Israel, the U.S., and other countries whose parents had lived in the city before "the war," and had been among the few who survived the destruction of European Jewry.

Their parents had left Czestochowa and Poland in the late 1940's, in the '50's, or even in the '60's. Now that their parents were gone, these descendants had come back to Czestochowa to witness the opening of the Jewish museum, to walk the streets and buildings their parents had once called home, to connect the stories they had heard from their parents with the places in which they had occurred. They came to do the emotional work of commemorating the lives their parents had led before the war, the decimation of their families during the Nazi occupation, and the sometimes heroic, sometimes accidental miracles of survival that allowed them to start new families in the years after their liberation.

This was the fifth reunion of Czestochowa Jews and their descendants in a series stretching back to 2004. The first reunion still attracted a considerable number of the Saving Remnant, the *Sheris Ha'pleyta*, as the survivors called themselves. Their postwar task had been nothing less than to save their families after they'd been murdered. Our task was an easier one, to remember their lives, to retell their stories. Doing that in this place was hard enough for some.

Czestochowa may be the most Catholic place in Poland. An industrial city of 230,000 in the south central part of the country, it has been a Catholic pilgrimage destination for centuries. Millions of pilgrims from all corners of the world come each year to pray to the Black Madonna in the Jasna Gora Monastery. But in 1939, Jews were a quarter of its 135,000 inhabitants. The main purpose of this year's reunion was to open a permanent exhibition about the Jews of Czestochowa in the town's municipal museum, so that today's citizens of Czestochowa, young and old, as well as the growing number of Jewish tourists, are reminded of the Jewish life that once flourished there.

That exhibition turned out to be an enlarged version of an exhibition on the same theme that had been shown at the first reunion in 2004, and had then toured 7 American cities in the intervening 12 years. It was the creation of that exhibition that had first introduced me to Sigmund Rolat and Alan Silberstein, first cousins who were the exhibition's initiators, as they were the impetus behind the establishment of the new museum. Rolat, a businessman and philanthropist, who had lived his childhood years in Czestochowa, was 15 years old at war's end, managed to come to the US and get a university education while still in his teens, and then had extensive business ties in post-Communist Poland. He was one of the major donors to the POLIN Museum on the History of Polish Jews established in Warsaw three years ago. Silberstein, born in Munich in the late 1940's, as I was, had been raised and educated in the US, had become a friend and colleague over the years, and is now a member of the Forward's board of directors. It was to support their efforts that I went to Czestochowa for the first time.

The exhibition is now installed in a series of rooms on the ground floor of an impressively renovated and elegant old apartment building at Katedralna 8, near the center of town. It spans three centuries of Jewish contributions to the economic and cultural life of Czestochowa, but devotes most of its attention to the 20th century part of that story, particularly to the restoration of Polish sovereignty after World War I, the interwar years, and the period of the Nazi occupation after September, 1939.

One set of wall panels, for instance, tell of the violin prodigy Bronislaw Huberman, born there in 1882, who went on to found the Palestine Symphony Orchestra in the 1930's (later called the Israel Philharmonic) and rescued 1000 people by bringing musicians and their families out of countries that would be overrun by the Nazis a few years later. Other panels show the desperate resourcefulness of Jews caught in the ghetto set up by the Nazis, their finding ways to hide and save family members and friends, to smuggle weapons and fight back against impossible odds.

The exhibition is the product of a joint effort by survivors and their families, on the one hand, and Polish historians and designers led by Prof. Jerzy Mizgalski, on the other.

What seemed most surprising over the course of the four days were the many ways the city of Czestochowa has found in recent years to mark and honor the memory of the one-time Jewish presence in the city. It goes beyond the striking memorial at the Umschlagplatz, where 40,000 Jews were put on trains to Treblinka between September 22 and October 8, 1942, a memorial dedicated at the 2009 reunion that had been designed by the late Samuel Willenberg, the Israeli sculptor, born in the city, who died this summer. The recently renovated concert hall, built on the site of the magnificent New Synagogue that the Nazis had razed in 1939, has been named after Bronislaw Huberman. An art school located a few blocks from the Jasna Gora monastery has made a point of teaching its students about Jewish culture and religious ritual, and for the last seven years its students have produced remarkable sculptures, paintings and ritual objects inspired by what they've learned. Polish high school students have volunteered with Israeli students who've spent weeks each summer cleaning and identifying graves in the largely overgrown Jewish cemetery outside the city.

Other local high schools have had their students interview Poles who hid and saved Jews during the occupation, and one evening of the latest reunion was devoted to presentations to an audience of several hundred by teams from four high schools about specific Polish families from Czestochowa and its vicinity who had been recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations.

Once the student presentations concluded, Ada Freiman Ophir, a survivor who was attending the reunion with four generations of her Israeli family, speaking in her fluent, native Polish, told of her father's hiding 27 Jews for several weeks in a bunker at 24 Stary Rynek, a house in the old town market square. This was in late September, early October, 1942: had her father not found a way to hide those 27 people, they would undoubtedly have been among the 40,000 Jews sent to their deaths in Treblinka. Her father and mother were murdered a few months later, but 23 of the 27 survived the war. Mrs. Ophir concluded, "Had my father not been a Jew, he would also have been recognized later as one of the Righteous Among the Nations."

Krzysztof Matyjaszczyk, Czestochowa's 42-year old mayor, who previously served in the Sejm, the national parliament, as a Social Democrat and is clearly being groomed for national office, participated in almost each event of the four-day reunion. Speaking in an interview in his office one morning, he pointed to times when many ethnic groups – not only Poles, Jewish and Catholic, but also Germans and Russians – filled the streets and factories of Czestochowa as the city's golden age. That diversity doesn't exist today, but the mayor maintains that there is "something for everyone" in the full calendar of events being offered to visitors to the city, some 140 events in the course of the four months each year that the city becomes a tourist and pilgrimage destination.

Asked about Poland opening its gates to some of the refugees from Muslim countries that are streaming into Europe to find refuge from war, drought and economic disaster, Mayor Matyjaszczyk answered that Poland and Czestochowa should be open to anyone who wanted to make their lives there. But he wants to focus on people who share Poland's history and Slavic traditions. He is particularly eager to bring back the millions of Poles who've moved to Germany, the United Kingdom and the US, and to integrate the million Ukrainians who've come to Poland in recent years.

"Muslim refugees don't see Poland as their destination. For them, Poland is a transit point. They see it as a way to get to Germany, England or maybe France, where they already have relatives and friends, other people with similar cultural backgrounds," he said.

Finally I asked him why he devotes so much time and attention to the memorialization of the one-time Jewish presence in his city. "Because Sigmund Rolat is my friend, and he's a good man. And thanks to him, I've been able to meet other good people who've become my friends as well."

Russians Increasingly Indifferent to Idea of 'Russia for the Russians,' Polls Show

By Paul Goble

Window on Eurasia, October 18, 2016

<http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.com/2016/10/russians-increasingly-indifferent-to.html>

The share of Russians who back the idea of "Russia for the [ethnic] Russians" has remained almost unchanged at around 50 percent over the last 14 years, but the share of those who are indifferent to this idea has gone up by almost half from 14 to a high of 23 percent in 2013 and 21 percent now, according to the latest Levada Center polls.

According to a report by Viktoriya Kuzmenko on the OpenRussia portal, fewer Russians this year than at any point in the past— 18 percent -- say there is inter-ethnic tension in their city or district. Only 12 percent say that such conflicts could arise where they live, although one in four said they were a problem for Russia as a whole (openrussia.org/post/view/18486/).

The survey firm found that "the level of ethnophobia has been stable for the last three years in a row, with only a fifth of respondents expressing ethnic prejudices." At the same time, however, 70 percent say that there should be limitations on the number of certain ethnic groups in Russia and almost that share call for Moscow to adopt a tougher immigration policy.

Kuzmenko spoke with Aleksandr Verkhovsky, the director of the SOVA Information-Analytic Center, about the reasons behind xenophobia in Russia. He said that “xenophobia is in a certain sense a normal condition for people,” although people vary widely in their willingness to express it and the objects of this hatred for those who are viewed as different.

“The Soviet experience of the peaceful coexistence of nations should not be idealized,” Verkhovsky continued. “There was xenophobia even in Soviet times, but to express such ideas was dangerous. After the disintegration of the USSR, this became permissible” and not subject to draconian punishments.

“Moreover,” he added, “we had an empire which in one instance fell apart. When this happens, then ethnic tensions always grow. In this sense, it was a normal process. But the problem is that in Russia, the process of the disintegration of the empire still has not come to some kind of conclusion.”

As a result, interethnic relations in the Russian Federation remain unstable, the sociologist explained. “As long as this process is real and not viewed as finished in the heads of people, xenophobia will not simply exist but clearly manifest itself.”

From approximately 2000 to 2012, Verkhovsky said, “the situation [in Russia] regarding inter-ethnic tensions was stable but bad. And in 2013, it got much worse as a result of the conduct of the anti-immigrant campaign which was notable most of all on federal television.” That year was the peak so far.

The situation has improved or at least changed since then, he pointed out. “On the one hand, the campaign ended ... and on the other began [the war in] Ukraine. And people thus shifted to the latter theme. Xenophobia didn’t disappear entirely, simply its indicators fell. A certain part of the population forgot that it didn’t like migrants ... and completely turned its attention to Obama and the Banderites.”

The growing indifference among Russians about the idea of “Russia for the [ethnic] Russians” reflects this shift of negative attitudes away from domestic targets to foreign ones. In addition, he noted, “Russian ethnic nationalism ... has entered its own crisis” as a result of government repression and its own internal conflicts.

Suppressing organized Russian nationalists is relatively easy, the shift in public opinion at large, Verkhovsky said, is more difficult and has been achieved not so much by repression as by the television. But even “it is not capable of curing people from aggressiveness and the inclination to blame one’s neighbor.”

All Moscow television can do is “to change the vector of this aggression, and therefore we see now this shift from hostility to migrants to hatred of the West,” Verkhovsky concluded.

Georgia's Long-Shot Democracy

By Michael Cecire

Foreign Affairs, October 20, 2016

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/georgia/2016-10-20/georgias-long-shot-democracy>

On October 8, Georgia held what may have been its freest, fairest, and most competitive elections in its independent history. The vote proceeded more smoothly than many observers had expected, given the rising tensions between the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party and the chief opposition party, what was once the ruling United National Movement (UNM), and the brief spike in political violence in the days leading up to it.

The vote marked Georgia’s third consecutive round of free elections since 2012, when a GD-led coalition overcame the odds to push the entrenched UNM out of power. Today, Georgia can certainly be called a democracy; it is home to a relatively open and competitive political and electoral environment. Yet whether the country’s democracy is a liberal one is less of a settled matter: the victorious GD may yet seek to mold the constitution to its own advantage, and hard-line factions within the UNM continue to agitate for GD’s ouster through extrapolitical means.

Georgia's ability to consolidate its political institutions around a [durable democratic culture](#) is uncertain. In that quest, the seeds have only just been sown. As recent trends in the United States and Europe suggest, democracy is a garden in need of constant tending—and that is especially the case in Georgia.

[Read the full article here](#)

The threat from Russia

The Economist, October 21, 2016

[http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21709028-how-contain-vladimir-putins-deadly-dysfunctional-empire-threat-russia?fsrc=scn%2Ftw_ec%2Fthe threat from russia](http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21709028-how-contain-vladimir-putins-deadly-dysfunctional-empire-threat-russia?fsrc=scn%2Ftw_ec%2Fthe%2Fthreat%2Ffrom%2Frussia)

FOUR years ago Mitt Romney, then a Republican candidate, said that Russia was America's "number-one geopolitical foe". Barack Obama, among others, mocked this hilarious gaffe: "The 1980s are now calling to ask for their foreign policy back, because the cold war's been over for 20 years," scoffed the president. How times change. With Russia hacking the American election, presiding over mass slaughter in Syria, annexing Crimea and talking casually about using nuclear weapons, Mr Romney's view has become conventional wisdom. Almost the only American to dissent from it is today's Republican nominee, Donald Trump.

Every week Vladimir Putin, Russia's president, finds new ways to scare the world. Recently he moved nuclear-capable missiles close to Poland and Lithuania. This week he sent an aircraft-carrier group down the North Sea and the English Channel. He has threatened to shoot down any American plane that attacks the forces of Syria's despot, Bashar al-Assad. Russia's UN envoy has said that relations with America are at their tensest in 40 years. Russian television news is full of ballistic missiles and bomb shelters. "Impudent behaviour" might have "nuclear consequences", warns Dmitry Kiselev, Mr Putin's propagandist-in-chief—who goes on to cite Mr Putin's words that "If a fight is inevitable, you have to strike first."

In fact, Russia is not about to go to war with America. Much of its language is no more than bluster. But it does pose a threat to stability and order. And the first step to answering that threat is to understand that Russian belligerence is not a sign of resurgence, but of a chronic, debilitating weakness.

Vlad the invader

As our special report this week sets out, Russia confronts grave problems in its economy, politics and society. Its population is ageing and is expected to shrink by 10% by 2050. An attempt to use the windfall from the commodity boom to modernise the state and its economy fell flat. Instead Mr Putin has presided over a huge increase in government: between 2005 and 2015, the share of Russian GDP that comes from public spending and state-controlled firms rose from 35% to 70%. Having grown by 7% a year at the start of Mr Putin's reign, the economy is now shrinking. Sanctions are partly to blame, but corruption and a fall in the price of oil matter more. The Kremlin decides who gets rich and stays that way. Vladimir Yevtushenkov, a Russian tycoon, was detained for three months in 2014. When he emerged, he had surrendered his oil company.

Mr Putin has sought to offset vulnerability at home with aggression abroad. With their mass protests after election-rigging in 2011-12, Russia's sophisticated urban middle classes showed that they yearn for a modern state. When the oil price was high, Mr Putin could resist them by buying support. Now he shores up his power by waging foreign wars and using his propaganda tools to whip up nationalism. He is wary of giving any ground to Western ideas because Russia's political system, though adept at repression, is brittle. Institutions that would underpin a prosperous Russia, such as the rule of law, free media, democracy and open competition, pose an existential threat to Mr Putin's rotten state.

For much of his time in office Mr Obama has assumed that, because Russia is a declining power, he need not pay it much heed. Yet a weak, insecure, unpredictable country with nuclear weapons is dangerous—more so, in some ways, even than the Soviet Union was. Unlike Soviet leaders after Stalin, Mr Putin rules alone,

unchecked by a Politburo or by having witnessed the second world war's devastation. He could remain in charge for years to come. Age is unlikely to mellow him.

Mr Obama increasingly says the right things about Putinism—he sounded reasonably tough during a press conference this week—but Mr Putin has learned that he can defy America and come out on top. Mild Western sanctions make ordinary Russians worse off, but they also give the people an enemy to unite against, and Mr Putin something to blame for the economic damage caused by his own policies.

Ivan the bearable

What should the West do? Time is on its side. A declining power needs containing until it is eventually overrun by its own contradictions—even as the urge to lash out remains.

Because the danger is of miscalculation and unchecked escalation, America must continue to engage in direct talks with Mr Putin even, as today, when the experience is dispiriting. Success is not measured by breakthroughs and ceasefires—welcome as those would be in a country as benighted as Syria—but by lowering the chances of a Russian blunder.

Nuclear miscalculation would be the worst kind of all. Hence the talks need to include nuclear-arms control as well as improved military-to-military relations, in the hope that nuclear weapons can be kept separate from other issues, as they were in Soviet times. That will be hard because, as Russia declines, it will see its nuclear arsenal as an enduring advantage.

Another area of dispute will be Russia's near abroad. Ukraine shows how Mr Putin seeks to destabilise countries as a way to stop them drifting out of Russia's orbit (see article). America's next president must declare that, contrary to what Mr Trump has said, if Russia uses such tactics against a NATO member, such as Latvia or Estonia, the alliance will treat it as an attack on them all. Separately the West needs to make it clear that, if Russia engages in large-scale aggression against non-NATO allies, such as Georgia and Ukraine, it reserves the right to arm them.

Above all the West needs to keep its head. Russian interference in America's presidential election merits measured retaliation. But the West can withstand such "active measures". Russia does not pretend to offer the world an attractive ideology or vision. Instead its propaganda aims to discredit and erode universal liberal values by nurturing the idea that the West is just as corrupt as Russia, and that its political system is just as rigged. It wants to create a divided West that has lost faith in its ability to shape the world. In response, the West should be united and firm.