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House passes bill that would enhance reporting on European anti-Semitism
JTA, May 18, 2017

<http://www.jta.org/2017/05/18/news-opinion/politics/house-passes-bill-that-would-enhance-reporting-on-european-anti-semitism>

WASHINGTON — The U.S. House of Representatives unanimously approved a bill that would add greater detail to State Department reporting on anti-Semitism in Europe.

The Combating European Anti-Semitism Act of 2017 passed Wednesday requires the State Department to report to Congress on security challenges to European Jewish communities and to the police forces where they live, and on efforts in Europe to educate against anti-Semitism.

The bill, which must be approved by the Senate and then signed by the president, also encourages European nations to adopt a uniform definition of anti-Semitism.

The State Department currently must report to Congress on the level of threats against Jews in European countries.

“This bill would require the U.S. government — and encourage our global partners — to continue to take a hard look at anti-Semitism in Europe, provide a thorough assessment of trends, and outline what the United States and our partners are doing to meet this challenge,” said a statement from the Bipartisan Taskforce for Combating Anti-Semitism.

The co-chairwomen of the task force are Reps. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Fla., who is also the chairwoman of the House Middle East subcommittee, and Nita Lowey, D-N.Y., also the ranking Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee.

Other members of the task force, which was key in advancing the legislation, are Reps. Chris Smith, R-N.J., Eliot Engel, D-N.Y., Ted Deutch D-Fla., Kay Granger R-Texas, Marc Veasey D-Texas, and Pete Roskam, R-Ill.

Congressional leadership backed the bill. Rep. Ed Royce, R-Calif., the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, commended the bill for encouraging the adoption of a uniform definition of anti-Semitism.

“Absent a clear-eyed definition of anti-Semitism, perpetrators of violent attacks have at times been given a pass for their actions due to the flimsy defense of political protest,” Royce said in his remarks on the House floor prior to the vote.

“Adoption across Europe of a single definition of anti-Semitism would provide an important foundation for law enforcement officials, enabling them to better enforce laws and develop strategies for improved security for the Jewish community.”

Ukrainian Jew in serious condition after altercation with neighbor

JTA, May 14, 2017

<http://www.jta.org/2017/05/14/news-opinion/world/ukrainian-jew-in-serious-condition-after-altercation-with-neighbor>

A Ukrainian Jew in his twenties was critically injured by his neighbor.

The incident happened in Dnepropetrovsk in eastern Ukraine on Friday, according to a [statement](#) on the community's website, which identified the injured community member only as Abraham, 26.

The neighbor attacked the man with a sharp object, hitting his leg, according to the statement. The incident is the subject of an ongoing investigation, the Politeka news website reported. Police apprehended the neighbor.

Chabad.org reported that the man was rushed to surgery, which was successful and saved the man's foot, but that he remains in serious but stable condition.

Separately, media in Ukraine [reported](#) last month that the prosecutor's office in Uman, a city in central Ukraine, is investigating an ultra-Orthodox Jew for alleged abuse of a horse.

Passersby filmed the man, who was identified only by his first name, Maxim, standing by a car with a prostrate horse tied with a rope to its rear bumper. He said the horse had escaped the stable and that he was trying to retrieve it before the horse lay down in the middle of the road.

Like Dnepropetrovsk, Uman has a population of several hundred Jews who live there permanently.

In addition, Uman receives tens of thousands of observant Jewish visitors annually who come there to pray on the grave of the Breslover movement's founder, Rabbi Nachman.

The pilgrimage often has created friction between the predominantly Israeli new arrivals and locals, many of whom resent the cordoning off by police of neighborhoods for the pilgrims.

Poland unveils memorial to WWII hero who entered Auschwitz voluntarily

Resistance fighter Witold Pilecki provided firsthand accounts of atrocities in Nazi death camp, was later executed by communists

Associated Press, May 13, 2017

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/poland-unveils-memorial-to-wwii-hero-who-entered-auschwitz-voluntarily/>

WARSAW, Poland — Warsaw's mayor unveiled a monument Saturday to a World War II hero who volunteered to go to the Nazi's Auschwitz death camp and informed firsthand on atrocities there but was later executed by Poland's communist regime.

The stone-and-metal memorial for Capt. Witold Pilecki is located near the place where in September 1940 the clandestine army fighter let himself be caught by the occupying Nazi Germans. It was a step toward becoming an inmate of Auschwitz, which the Germans operated in southern Poland.

Pilecki's son, Andrzej Pilecki, and daughter, Zofia Pilecka-Optulowicz, and other descendants joined hundreds of Warsaw residents and authorities at Saturday's ceremony.

Deputy Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said Pilecki was twice victorious, first when he was ready to sacrifice his life for the defense of Poland and second when the memory of him and other resistance fighters survived the communist regime.

Pilecki wrote and smuggled out secret reports from Auschwitz to his superiors before fleeing under the cover of the night in April 1943. As a freedom fighter, he was caught by the Moscow-backed communist government imposed on Poland after the war, and after a year of brutal questioning and torture, was executed in May 1948.

His body was dumped in a mass grave and his name was taboo, as the regime wanted to erase every trace of the freedom fighters from public awareness while trying to subdue the nation.

Historians are still looking for Pilecki's remains.

Poland, now a democracy, is making efforts to fill in such blank pages from the nation's past with ceremonies honoring wartime and anti-communist heroes.

At first, Polish resistance fighters were held and executed at Auschwitz. In 1942, the Birkenau part was added as a death camp for Europe's Jews, who were the majority among some 1.1 million people killed there. The Soviet Army liberated Auschwitz in January 1945.

Marking end to spat, Netanyahu meets with Ukraine's Jewish premier

After nadir in ties over Kiev's support for anti-settlement UN measure, PM says countries' 'friendship on a new path'

By Alexander Fulbright

Times of Israel, May 15, 2017

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/marking-end-to-spat-netanyahu-meets-with-ukraines-jewish-premier/>

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday met with his Ukrainian counterpart in Jerusalem, marking a formal end to a spat between the two countries over Kiev's support for a UN Security Council resolution against Israeli settlements.

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During a meeting at the Prime Minister's Office with Volodymyr Groysman, who became Ukraine's first Jewish prime minister last year, Netanyahu described the premier's visit and the mending of ties between Jerusalem and Kiev as a "moment of courageous friendship."

"This is a moment of courageous friendship because of the shared history that connects Ukraine and Israel," he said, according to a statement from the Prime Minister's Office.

Groysman was originally scheduled to come to Israel for a two-day visit in December, but after Ukraine voted in favor of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 condemning Israeli settlements as having "no legal validity" and "a flagrant violation under international law," Jerusalem disinvited the premier to protest Kiev's support for the resolution, which Israel denounced as "shameful."

Emphasizing that there were no longer hard feelings over Kiev's support for December's Security Council resolution, Netanyahu said that ties between the two countries were on a "new path" after Ukraine voted against a [UNESCO decision earlier this month](#) denying Israeli claims to Jerusalem.

"You reaffirmed the friendship between us with the important vote at UNESCO, which puts our friendship on a new path," he said, while adding that "I am aware of your personal involvement in this decision, which I doubly appreciate."

Continuing to lavish praise on Groysman, Netanyahu also thanked his counterpart for taking a stand against anti-Semitism.

"I also know your and your government's stance against anti-Semitism and for this you have our triple appreciation," he said.

Groysman also praised the "shared history" between Israel and Ukraine, which he noted "was all the more important as we mark 25 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between our nations."

Earlier Sunday, Groyzman told President Reuven Rivlin during a visit to the President's Residence that the purpose of his trip was to "develop [an] even better relationship with our friend Israel, and to deepen our strategic partnership," according to a statement from the President's Residence.

Although Groyzman's visit was seen as marking a formal end to the spat between the two countries, a February phone call between Netanyahu and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko effectively put an end to tensions between Jerusalem and Kiev, with a statement from the Prime Minister's Office at the time saying "the two leaders agreed to resume their efforts to further strengthen the friendship between Israel and Ukraine."

In the wake of the passage of the Security Council measure, Ukraine defended its vote in favor of Resolution 2234 by hinting at its own conflict with Russia as a driving force behind the decision.

Without explicitly mentioning Moscow's annexation of Crimea and a civil war in the country's east with Russian-backed separatists, the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry said it "experienced itself the tragic consequences brought by" the violation of international law, effectively drawing a parallel between Israeli building in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and Russian policies.

After the measure was passed, the Israeli government took a number of retaliatory measures against countries that supported its passage, including an official dressing-down of the Security Council members' ambassadors to Israel.

The Security Council resolution, which passed 14-0 with the United States abstaining rather than vetoing, also called on Israel to "immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem," while also expressing its "grave concern that continuing Israeli settlement activities are dangerously imperiling the viability of the two-state solution."

Raphael Ahren contributed to this report.

Russia Recognizes Jerusalem as Israel's Capital. Why Can't the U.S.?

Trump must soon decide whether to move the embassy. Doing so would help promote peace.

By Eugene Kontorovich

Wall Street Journal, May 14, 2017

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-recognizes-jerusalem-as-israels-capital-why-cant-the-u-s-1494795684>

President Trump's visit to Israel next week is expected to lead to some announcement about his Jerusalem policy. The trip will coincide with celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the city's reunification after the Six Day War. Only days after the visit, the president will have to decide between waiving an act of Congress or letting it take effect and moving the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv—as he promised last year to do if elected.

Jerusalem is the only world capital whose status is denied by the international community. To change that, in 1995 Congress passed the Jerusalem Embassy Act, which mandates moving the U.S. Embassy to a "unified" Jerusalem. The law has been held in abeyance due to semiannual presidential waivers for "national security" reasons. President Obama's final waiver will expire June 1.

There's no good reason to maintain the charade that Jerusalem is not Israeli, and every reason for Mr. Trump to honor his campaign promise. The main arguments against moving the embassy—embraced by the foreign-policy establishment—is that it would lead to terrorism against American targets and undermine U.S. diplomacy. But the basis of those warnings has been undermined by the massive changes in the region since 1995.

While the Palestinian issue was once at the forefront of Arab politics, today Israel's neighbors are preoccupied with a nuclear Iran and radical Islamic groups. For the Sunni Arab states, the Trump administration's harder

line against Iran is far more important than Jerusalem. To be sure, a decision to move the embassy could serve as a pretext for attacks by groups like al Qaeda. But they are already fully motivated against the U.S.

Another oft-heard admonition is that America would be going out on a limb if it “unilaterally” recognized Jerusalem when no other country did. An extraordinary recent development has rendered that warning moot. Last month Russia suddenly announced that it recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Note what happened next: No explosions of anger at the Arab world. No end to Russia’s diplomatic role in the Middle East. No terror attacks against Russian targets. Moscow’s dramatic Jerusalem reversal has largely been ignored by the foreign-policy establishment because it disproves their predictions of mayhem.

To be sure, Russia limited its recognition to “western Jerusalem.” Even so, it shifted the parameters of the discussion. Recognizing west Jerusalem as Israeli is now the position of a staunchly pro-Palestinian power. To maintain the distinctive U.S. role in Middle East diplomacy—and to do something historic—Mr. Trump must go further. Does the U.S. want to wind up with a less pro-Israel position than Vladimir Putin’s ?

The American response to real attacks against U.S. embassies has always been to send a clear message of strength. After the 1998 al Qaeda bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, Washington did not shut down those missions. Instead it invested in heavily fortified new facilities—and in hunting down the perpetrators.

Moving the embassy to Jerusalem would also improve the prospect of peace between Israel and the Palestinians. It would end the perverse dynamic that has prevented such negotiations from succeeding: Every time the Palestinians say “no” to an offer, the international community demands a better deal on their behalf. No wonder no resolution has been reached. Only last week, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas insisted that new negotiations “start” with the generous offer made by Israel’s Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in 2008. Relocating the embassy would demonstrate to the Palestinian Authority that rejectionism has costs.

If Mr. Trump nonetheless signs the waiver, he could do two things to maintain his credibility in the peace process. First, formally recognize Jerusalem—the whole city—as the capital of Israel, and reflect that status in official documents. Second, make clear that unless the Palestinians get serious about peace within six months, his first waiver will be his last. He should set concrete benchmarks for the Palestinians to demonstrate their commitment to negotiations. These would include ending their campaign against Israel in international organizations and cutting off payments to terrorists and their relatives.

This is Mr. Trump’s moment to show strength. It cannot be American policy to choose to recognize a capital, or not, based on how terrorists will react—especially when they likely won’t.

EU approves visa-free travel for Ukrainians

Ukraine passport holders will be able to travel visa-free to most EU countries under new rules approved by the bloc.

AlJazeera, May 11, 2017

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/05/eu-approves-visa-free-travel-ukrainians-170511140552955.html>

The European Union has adopted a [regulation](#) granting visa-free travel for Ukrainians, fulfilling a key promise to cement ties with Kiev.

Under the regulation, Ukrainian citizens holding a biometric passport can travel to an EU country for up to 90 days out of any 180-day period for business, tourism or family purposes. The measure will not apply to Ireland and the UK, while travellers will not be permitted to work or reside in EU member states.

"YES, we did it!", Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko wrote on Facebook after Thursday's decision, which Ukraine had been trying to clinch for years.

Talks between Kiev and Brussels on a liberalised visa deal began in 2008 but the European Commission only gave the green light in 2015.

"It feels like coming home after a long and exhausting journey," Poroshenko said, adding that Ukraine was gradually "becoming part of a common European civilization".

The EU and Ukraine sealed a broad trade and political association agreement after the ousting of President Viktor Yanukovich in 2014. The agreement included the offer of the removal of visa requirements.

According to Carmelo Abela, the Maltese minister for home affairs and national security, the approval follows the completion of "necessary reforms" by Ukraine in a number of areas including "migration, public order and security, external relations and fundamental rights".

The [European Council](#) said in a statement that that the decision followed an EU agreement on a suspension mechanism that would allow member states to halt the scheme "if there are serious migration or security issues with Ukraine".

The decision was welcomed by the European Commission which said in a statement that, "visa-free travel to the Schengen area will soon become a reality - it is an important and well-deserved moment for Ukraine and its citizens that will make our already close relations even stronger".

The regulations will enter into force 20 days after being signed by the Council on May 17 in Strasbourg and published in the EU Official Journal.

Russia annexed Crimea in March 2014 following Yanukovich's overthrow, saying the peninsula had voted overwhelmingly in favour of returning to its Russian homeland.

Kiev remains embroiled in a deadly conflict with pro-Russian fighters ever since.

Russian TV uses Nazi film in segment advancing Jewish world domination theory Moscow's Channel 1 employs anti-Semitic tropes in promoting a conspiracy about the Rothschild family

By Yaakov Schwartz

Times of Israel, May 10, 2017

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/russian-tv-uses-nazi-film-in-jewish-world-domination-theory/>

Russia's Channel 1 aired a segment on the Rothschild family containing classic anti-Semitic tropes and Nazi propaganda.

The piece's narration, captioned in English this week by the media watchdog MEMRI, [paints the Rothschild family as an international cabal](#). Enlisting various "dog-whistles" and strategic omissions, the report asserts that the dynasty is part of a Jewish conspiracy to take over the world.

A Nazi propaganda movie about Nathan Rothschild in 19th century England is referred to as one of "dozens of documentaries and several feature films... made about this family."

The piece, which aired on April 2, describes the Nazi movie as "One of the first of these films, shot back in 1940 in Germany, at the UFA film studios." And though it does go on to say that UFA was the primary production company of the Third Reich, headed by Joseph Goebbels, MEMRI-TV described the lack of explicit reference to the Nazi party as "unusual in public broadcasts on Russian media."

In addition, the segment describes an anti-Semitic cartoon depicting a sow marked with a Star of David and the word "Rothschild" nursing six piglets (labeled as MI6, ISIS, Al-Qaeda, CIA, Israel, and Boko Haram) as a "typical modern caricature."

The piece aired following the March 20 death of billionaire David Rockefeller.

This week, at a far-right demonstration in Dresden, Germany, Emmanuel Macron's May 7 victory in the French presidential race was described as "the long arm of the Rothschilds."

The rally was held Monday by two extreme nationalist groups, the Alternative for Germany party (AfD) and the anti-Islam Pegida movement, both of which have grown quickly since their founding less than five years ago.

Macron got his start as an investment banker at France's Banque Rotschild. Friday night, just prior to France's Sunday election, a Normandy campaign office for Macron was vandalized with anti-Semitic graffiti including "Sioniste," (Zionist) and "Israel=Mossad de Rothschild."

The French president-elect, who supports Israel and has said that he would not unilaterally recognize a Palestinian state, is a baptized Roman Catholic.

Far-right activists film anti-Soros 'raid' on Budapest Jewish center

JTA, May 12, 2017

<http://www.jta.org/2017/05/12/news-opinion/world/far-right-activists-film-anti-soros-raid-on-budapest-jewish-center>

Far-right activists in Budapest targeted a Jewish community center that serves as the headquarters of several ethnic and refugee activist groups, filming themselves as they put up defaced posters of the Jewish billionaire George Soros.

The [video](#) was filmed last week outside the [Aurora community center](#) by members of the far-right Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement and posted online by ultranationalist media including Szent Korona Rádió. Seven men, dressed in black and sporting the very short haircuts in the skinhead neo-Nazi style, are seen walking through Budapest's 8th district, a poor area with many immigrants and Roma, or gypsy, residents. Seven men, dressed in black and sporting the very short haircuts in the skinhead neo-Nazi style, are seen walking through Budapest's 8th district, a poor area with many immigrants and Roma, or gypsy, residents.

The men place posters reading "Stop operation Soros" on the message board of Aurora, established in 2014 by Marom, a Jewish identity group affiliated with the Conservative/Masorti Movement. Aurora functions as the headquarters of several additional groups, including the Roma Press Center, Budapest Pride (a gay rights organization), the Migszol refugee advocacy group and the Zold Pok agency for social activism.

Aurora is not funded by Soros, an American Jewish businessman and philanthropist who was born in Hungary and who has clashed with the government over his funding for several organizations in Hungary with a liberal, pro-democracy agenda.

In a text on its website about the "raid on Aurora," the far-right youth movement said the Jewish center promoted "deviant circles, hosting Budapest Pride" and are "of course always open to the offices of the Roma Press Center." Extremist groups in Hungary [regularly target](#) the Roma minority.

The activists spray-painted anti-Soros slogans on the sidewalk outside Aurora's entrance.

The youth movement's account of the incident ended with a menacing message, informing the groups at Aurora that they are "far from untouchable." Time permitting, "we will say hello again," the authors wrote, adding an emoticon of a smile and a wink.

Adam Schonberger, the president of Marom, said the action by the far-right youth movement was the first case of such intimidation targeting Aurora. The organization alerted authorities as to the incident, he said.

In March, the former leader of Britain's far-right British National Party, Nick Griffin, delivered a lecture at an anti-Soros conference in Budapest in which he devoted long minutes to discussing Aurora. He demonstrated "astonishingly detailed knowledge" of the place, [according](#) to the news site 444. Griffin quoted heavily from an [article](#) published in JTA in February about Aurora.

In recent weeks, the government of Hungary under Prime Minister Viktor Orban, a center-right politician, has escalated its rhetoric against Soros, who for years has been financing opposition to Orban and pro-democracy causes that are not popular among supporters of Orban's ruling party, Fidesz.

In March, Orban vowed to shutter a university established by Soros, the Central European University, and has introduced legislation to that effect.

Last month, Orban told Kossuth Radio that Soros is behind an attempt to limit Hungary's sovereignty as part of "a well-established international campaign, which has been ongoing for more than a decade and can be [linked](#) to the name of George Soros." He added this campaign is "extremely dangerous."

Last week, European Commission First Vice President Frans Timmermans, a center-left Dutch politician, [appeared](#) to agree during a press conference with a journalist who suggested that Orban's comments sounded anti-Semitic.

"I understood that exactly the same way and was appalled," Timmermans said. Hungarian ministers demanded an apology for the statement. Slomo Koves, leader of the EMIH group, which is affiliated with Chabad, also said that the clash between Orban and Soros was not anti-Semitic.

A government campaign against George Soros splits Hungarian Jews

By Cnaan Liphshiz

JTA, May 16, 2017

<http://www.jta.org/2017/05/16/news-opinion/world/a-government-campaign-against-george-soros-splits-hungarian-jews>

On a recent Sunday, eight far-right activists filmed themselves on what they called a "raid" on the Aurora Jewish community center in Budapest.

Sporting crewcuts and black clothes, the men affixed [posters](#) with a crossed-out picture of the Hungary-born Jewish American billionaire George Soros to the entrance of the building, which along with [having a Masorti, or Conservative, synagogue](#), also serves as the headquarters for a gay rights group, a Roma advocacy lobby, a hotline for immigrants and several other nongovernmental organizations with liberal agendas.

The activists then spray-painted the words "Stop Operation Soros" on the sidewalk opposite Aurora's front door.

"Time permitting, we will say hello again," read an article published about the action on May 2 on the website of the ultranationalist Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement. The menacing article did not mention Jews, but did note the Roma and gay rights activity at Aurora, which it falsely claimed is financed by Soros.

To Adam Schonberger, a Hungarian Jew who runs Aurora, the raid was an anti-Semitic attack arising from a campaign that is being led in billboards, television ads and speeches by Hungary's right-wing government against Soros. In recent months Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who is critical of the European Union's federalist and progressive agendas, has [flagged as "dangerous"](#) Soros' promotion of those plans by funding grassroots activism and some higher education frameworks in Hungary.

Occurring in a conservative society that is [still struggling with the complicity of its wartime governments](#) in the murder of nearly half a million Jews during the Holocaust, the campaign against a Jewish billionaire has prompted [warnings](#) that Orban's crusade against Soros is anti-Semitic. Earlier this month Frans Timmermans, a senior EU official, [suggested](#) that the Hungarian government is channeling anti-Semitic sentiment to delegitimize a powerful critic of its nationalist policies.

That view, however, is not shared by the main leaders of Hungary's 100,000-strong Jewish community. In interviews with JTA, its leaders rejected allegations that the government is using anti-Semitic dog whistles

consciously. At the same time, they warned that the campaign against Soros may embolden anti-Semites regardless of the government's intentions.

"Orban is not anti-Semitic. His government is not anti-Semitic," said Rabbi Zoltan Radnoti, the chairman of the rabbinical council of the Mazsihisz Jewish umbrella group in Hungary. "I believe that Soros was selected as a target because he is a progressive billionaire regardless of the fact that he's Jewish."

Yet Orban failed to stop the anti-Soros campaign even after it appeared that the rhetoric "may have a possible anti-Semitic interpretation," Radnoti added, saying the prime minister "should have known that this campaign of hatred and scapegoating would increase anti-Semitic feelings."

Soros, an 86-year-old banking and investment magnate who survived the Holocaust in hiding in Budapest, is not particularly known for funding Jewish causes in Hungary — or anywhere else.

In Hungary, Soros has given away approximately \$400 million since the early 1990s — part of a \$12 billion expenditure, [according](#) to the Open Society Foundations, which is Soros' network of organizations throughout Eastern and Central Europe. Much of the money has gone to supporting progressive causes, including the promotion of minorities and multiculturalism. But other programs offered tuition to needy students — including Orban, who [studied](#) at Oxford in 1989 on a scholarship provided by a Soros-funded organization.

Soros is best known in Hungary for opening the Central European University, which he founded in 1991. Orban's government is [promoting](#) legislation that could lead to its closure.

The conflict between Soros and Orban, who have long tried to avoid a collision, escalated in 2015 when the prime minister [clashed](#) publicly with leaders of the European Union over Hungary's refusal to take or let in hundreds of thousands of immigrants, including refugees, from the war-torn Middle East.

Under attack from Brussels over the migrant crisis, as well as his crackdown on foreign funding from Norway and beyond for Hungarian nongovernmental organizations, Orban lashed out at Soros, [accusing](#) him of trying to flood Europe with foreigners. Soros hit back with a defiant statement that won him some acclaim, but also deepened resentment toward him on a continent where Muslim immigration and extremism is leading far-right parties to unprecedented gains.

"Our plan treats the protection of refugees as the objective and national borders as the obstacle," Soros [said](#).

Upping the ante, Orban gave a speech last month at the European Parliament [calling](#) Soros a "financial speculator" who is now "attacking Hungary and who — despite ruining the lives of millions of European people with his financial speculations" is nonetheless "received by the EU's top leaders." The scathing rhetoric was followed by the appearance in Hungary of posters demonizing Soros, which are widely believed to be printed and distributed by nationalists with the government's blessing.

And that's a problem, according to Radnoti, because it risks awakening anti-Semitic sentiments that Radnoti believes Orban neither shares nor seeks to embolden.

"The problem is not that Soros was selected as a public enemy because he is Jewish," Radnoti said. "The problem is that in a country like Hungary, which has a xenophobia and anti-Semitism problem, the government should have known better than to take someone who happens to be Jewish and make him a public enemy over his globalist politics. It's not anti-Semitic, it's just irresponsible."

Compared to the Hungarian Jewish leaders, Timmermans went too far, said Janos Gado, an editor of the Hungarian Jewish monthly Szombat.

"The leftist, Social Democrat EU politicians are failing to understand the nature of the new right wing to which Orban belongs," he said. "It's not dictatorial, it's authoritarian. It's not racist, but it is illiberal. So they refer to it in anti-fascist terminology that frankly does not apply to the situation."

Notwithstanding, Soros has inspired much anti-Semitic rhetoric in Hungary and beyond. In Poland, a far-right nationalist at an anti-immigration rally in Poland set fire to an effigy of an Orthodox Jew that he later [said represented Soros](#). And in March, the American radio host Alex Jones, a Donald Trump supporter, [ranted](#) about “the Jewish mafia” that he said was run by Soros.

But Hungary has not seen any significant increase in anti-Semitic rhetoric or incidents since the escalation of the fight between Orban and Soros, according to Daniel Bodnar, chairman of the board of the TEV watchdog on anti-Semitism in the country. The group’s annual report, which was published this month, noted surveys suggesting hostility toward Jews has not increased this year.

“The government’s motivations are definitely not anti-Semitic,” Slomo Koves, the leader of the Chabad-affiliated EMIH Jewish group, told JTA. “So when Jewish community leaders inject themselves into the debate about Soros, they are in a sense appropriating his politics and associating them with the Jewish community. Not only is this a misrepresentation of the spectrum of opinions held by Hungarian Jews, it is also a dangerous game.”

While many Hungarian Jews who support liberal causes view Soros favorably, other Hungarian Jews take issue with some of his positions and actions – including his funding for groups seen as anti-Israel.

In addition to funding Israel-based organizations critical of their country’s policies — notably Breaking the Silence and B’Tselem — Soros’ Open Society Foundations [have donated](#) millions of dollars to groups that NGO Monitor, a right-leaning group in Israel, calls anti-Israel. They include Al-Haq and Al Mezan, Palestinian groups that promote boycotts against Israel.

Hungarian Jews were widely critical when Soros’ Central European University extended an [invitation](#) in 2015 to Joseph Massad, a Palestinian academic from Columbia University who has said Israel does not have a right to exist as a Jewish state.

“It was absolutely scandalous,” said Laszlo Seres, a Jewish journalist for the *Heti Világgazdaság* who has written critically about Soros, calling him a “self-hating Jew.”

(In 1995, Soros [wrote](#) that “I am proud of being a Jew,” but added that in the past he had “suffered from the low self-esteem that is the bane of the assimilationist Jew.”)

Yet even Soros’ Jewish critics feel uncomfortable in the face of the government-led campaign against him, Seres said.

“First of all, Soros despite all the problems connected to the man has donated to a lot of worthy causes in Hungary,” Seres told JTA. “And the government’s hysteria around him, well, it’s ugly and counterproductive. It makes it very difficult to criticize him.”

Armenians in Holy Land and Jews in Armenia

By Lilit Khachatryan

Mediamax, May 12, 2017

<http://www.mediamax.am/en/news/society/23401/>

Professor Michael Stone is an Israeli scholar who has dedicated his life to Armenian studies and founded and directed for many years the Program of Armenian Studies at Hebrew University of Jerusalem. [He talked to Australian SBS radio recently](#) and Mediamax presents some fragments of that interview.

Jewish cemetery in Yeghegis

In early 1990s an ancient Jewish cemetery was discovered in Yeghegis, which used to be the capital of the province of Vayots Dzor in 12th-14th centuries. An archbishop from Jerusalem was in Echmiadzin at that time and recognized Hebrew and Aramaic inscriptions on tombstones.

These were Jewish tombs dated back to 13th-14th centuries. The Jews were socially and culturally assimilated in Armenia and people who made the tombstones of the church of Yeghegis had also made those tombstones from the same rock. These Jews came to live in Yeghegis in the aftermath of the invasion of Seljuks at the beginning of the 14th century. The end of the Jewish settlement seems to have come under the Mongols who ruled that area back then, and the Jewish community disappeared at that time. The results of the excavation of the cemetery were published in the Journal of Jewish Studies and one of the articles dedicated to the cemetery was written by Professor Stone.

Jewish Community of Armenia throughout centuries

As Professor Stone says, there is a lot of evidence of Jews living in Armenia throughout history. According to Armenian historians Movses Khorenatsi and Pavstos Buzand, the king of Armenia Tigran the Great transferred thousands of Jews to Armenia and they seemed to have been living in Armenia until the invasion of Shapur II in 4th century, when Jews were exiled to northern Mesopotamia.

There are also facts of Jews living in Armenia in the medieval period from Hebrew language travel books, some medieval Armenian historians, as well as some colophons and tribal notes written by Armenians at the end of manuscripts.

In 19th century French armenologist Frederic Makler came across a village of Georgian speaking Jews near Yerevan which is a strange phenomenon. Jews lived in Armenia in the modern period as well. In 1986 there were about 3 000 people in the Jewish community, most of who left in early 90s.

Armenians in Holy Land throughout ages

Prof. Stone spent a lot of time studying the history of Armenians in the Holy Land. The antiquity of the Armenian settlement is very strikingly witnessed by the fact that stones with Armenian written on them were found in Nazareth under the new Roman Catholic Basilica. Those stones are believed to have come from the 1st half of the 5th century. This is the oldest known written inscription in the world. Mr. Stone believes it was written probably when Mesrop Mashtots was still alive, which is in fact incredible.

From that time down to the 10th -11th century there has been a lot of evidence of Armenians in the Holy Land. For example the founder of monasticism in the Holy Land was St. Euthymius, an Armenian from Malatia. There were many others who came during this period as monks or pilgrims.

There have been Armenians in Jerusalem all the way along. There is also a lot of evidence from the Crusade period; there are many connections between Cilicia and Jerusalem. When the Christian crusaders arrived in the Middle East, there weren't any Christian European women to marry, so many crusader princes and kings married Armenian women.

Zeman says he wished to 'liquidate' press; critics unamused Associated Press, May 15, 2017

<http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/zeman-wished-liquidate-press-critics-unamused-47413704>

PRAGUE — The Czech presidential office said President Milos Zeman's latest shot at the media was a joke. Politicians and journalists just don't seem to get it.

Before meeting Russia's president Sunday in [China](#), Zeman commented on the presence of journalists, telling [Vladimir Putin](#) that they were too numerous and they should be "liquidated." Putin countered that it could be enough to "reduce" them.

Their conversation was captured by a television microphone and posted on social media.

Czech Foreign Minister Lubomir Zaoralek said he "strongly" disliked discussion of such an inappropriate topic.

Culture Minister Daniel Herman called Zeman's remarks "unacceptable." Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka simply re-tweeted a message about the number of journalists who were killed or attacked in [Russia](#) in recent years.

European Parliament lawmaker Pavel Telicka said the incident was evidence that Zeman doesn't deserve to win another term in the election early next year.

Zeman's sparring with the country's press goes back to his time as prime minister from 1998 to 2002. In 2001, he threatened to destroy a weekly publication that accused his government of non-transparent policies supporting corruption, triggering protests by journalists at home and abroad.

When he was sworn in in 2013, he attacked the country's media on his first day in office, saying some of them "brainwash" and "manipulate public opinion," and has continued to make critical remarks.

Zeman, who opposes Western sanctions against Russia, met Putin on the sidelines of a conference in Beijing centered on President Xi Jinping's "One Belt, One Road" initiative.

One in Six Soviet Children Who Moved to Israel in the Early 1990s Have Since Left Young and creative Russian-speaking Israelis who made aliyah are several times more likely to leave the Jewish state than their native-born Israeli counterparts

Liza Rozovsky

Haaretz, May 9, 2017

<http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.788205>

Data from the Central Bureau of Statistics reveal that nearly 20 percent of the children who came to Israel from the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s has since moved abroad. Furthermore, Russian-speaking immigrants at the peak of their creative powers are more inclined to leave than other immigrant groups. They are also several times more likely to leave than their native-born Israeli counterparts.

About 17 percent of the children of Russian parents who immigrated to the Holy Land in the early and mid-1990s have since emigrated, either to other Western countries or their native land, according to the data, which was requested by Haaretz.

Although there is no official information about the education levels of immigrants who leave the country, a study conducted about a decade ago by Eric Gould and Omer Moav at the Hebrew University found that the brain drain among former Russian immigrants was particularly high.

"The emigrants have a relatively clear profile: most are young and educated," says Dr. Michael Philippov, from Jerusalem's Myers-JDC Brookdale Institute. He has done years of research on the 1990s wave of Russian aliyah.

"This is a major national problem," says Prof. Larissa Remennick, a Bar-Ilan University sociologist who is researching "Generation 1.5" – those who fall between the immigrant generation and the native-born one. "Israel is not making sufficient efforts to retain these talented and educated young adults who were brought here with such a major investment," she says.

"Israel has been making huge efforts in arranging aliyah – in looking for Jews, half- and quarter-Jews in every corner of a huge Russia," she continues. "They bring them to programs such as Na'aleh and Sela and Birthright, and whatnot, just so they come. But when they do come, they allow them to fend for themselves as they try to keep their heads above water. That's particularly true regarding the large [Russian] aliyah of the early 1990s."

CBS figures show that between 1990 and 1996, some 650,000 immigrants moved to Israel from the former Soviet Union. About 185,000 of them were less than 20 years old. But the data reveal that some 32,000 of them (17.3 percent) no longer live in Israel.

For purposes of comparison, the emigration rate is between 11 and 13 percent among all immigrants from the former Soviet Union. Among native Israelis born between 1970 and 1995, the emigration rate is much lower – about 5 percent.

However, Hebrew University's Prof. Sergio DellaPergola – who studies Jewish migration – counseled caution over the numbers. "The expectation that everyone will come and not a single person will leave is baseless," he says. "Jews are immigrants, like everyone else. Of course the added value of the ideological and religious direction is very important. But we are dealing with human beings who need to work and earn a living, to adjust and be happy."

DellaPergola and Remennick agree that the emigration of young, educated people is, among other things, a by-product of the good education they receive in Israel, along with the country's relatively limited job market.

Prof. Yossi Harpaz, from the sociology and anthropology department at Tel Aviv University, who also studies migration, says the emigration of young educated people is typical of relatively wealthy countries.

"People with higher human capital are inclined to look for opportunities in larger, wealthier countries," says Harpaz. "That's in contrast to emigration from countries such as Turkey and Mexico, where it is actually the poorer and less well-connected people who seek to leave."

Harpaz may be referring to people like Ilana Dvorkin, a management engineer who moved from Be'er Sheva to Montreal nine years ago. "I was in the last year at university and my husband had just started a career service," she recalls. "We decided we had nothing to lose, and that if we wanted to make a change, we had to do it then." Their decision was also based on fear, she says, following a spate of terror attacks in Israel.

Philippov, meanwhile, suggests looking at emigration data with a more critical eye. "Anyone who was satisfied that there were fewer emigrants this year than the year before should ask what will happen if one year all of those who want to leave do so. The year after that, we would report no emigration. Would we be happy with that?"

DellaPergola suggests that among those who are not Jewish according to religious law (i.e., they were not born to a Jewish mother), the emigration rate is particularly high. He points a finger at the Israeli Chief Rabbinate, which is responsible for conversion of residents in the country. He called the Rabbinate's conversion policy "selective and lazy, and not in keeping with the supply."

But the percentage of non-Jews among those who immigrated from the former Soviet Union in the early '90s is a relatively low 11.2 percent, so it's hard to believe the lack of recognition of Jewish identity is a major reason these immigrants leave as adults.

However, it was a factor for Daniel Tkatch, who came to Israel from Kazakhstan in 1992, at age 13. He could have been a successful engineer, but emigrated to Germany immediately after receiving his degree in materials engineering from the Technion – Israel Institute of Technology, Haifa.

"I was integrated according to all the formal parameters, but I'm not a Jew and was always reminded of that," he says. "It caused a type of schizophrenic split within me. It follows me to this day: this feeling that I'm not what I really am, and this unending search for what's wrong with me. It's something internal that interferes with your life, and with accepting your whole self."

Tkatch says he hadn't clearly formulated his reasons for leaving when he departed. "I just ran," he says. "I fled the lack of a future." In retrospect, he understands one of the things that pushed him to leave was the Zionist ideology, plus his inability to reconcile the concepts of "Jewish" and "democratic."

Sophie (not her real name), 37, left Israel two years ago with her husband and two daughters, after being accepted to a postdoctoral program in New York. She doesn't plan to return to Israel, to which she came from Ukraine, in 1990 with her parents. She lived a typical Israeli life – army service, followed by university, a job

and then marriage. Before leaving for New York, she lived with her family in the Tel Aviv suburb of Givatayim. She does not intend to pursue an academic career after her postdoctoral work.

“We wanted to try living in New York, and if we liked it we would stay,” she says. “The postdoctorate is necessary to continue in academia, but it’s also a good means of living legally in the United States for a time.”

Sophie and her family didn’t have a bad life in Israel. Her husband, a high-tech programmer, earned a good living, while she had received a generous scholarship and studied life sciences. But the opportunities for future development were limited. The couple felt they had reached their maximum income potential, but still couldn’t afford to buy an apartment in the places where they wanted to live.

Sophie adds that the security issue in Israel had started to stress her out. Referring to the 2014 war with Hamas in Gaza, Sophie notes: “When rockets fell on Tel Aviv [none actually hit Tel Aviv, because they were intercepted by the Iron Dome defense system], it was already too much – especially when there are little children sleeping and it’s not clear what to do.”

Sophie says there are major disparities among schools for her children in the United States, but it was possible to choose between them. In Israel, she says, the choice was more limited and the level of education did not meet her standards. She also hesitantly admits that in Israel she was bothered that her daughters spoke to her in Hebrew (rather than Russian), but now she is less bothered by their speaking English.

In addition to Israel, sizeable number of Jews leaving the former Soviet Union in the ’90s went to the United States, Canada and Germany. There are no official figures that would allow for comparing the rate of emigration from those countries. However, Remennick says that, based on expert assessments and personal meetings abroad, she believes the inclination of talented and educated former Soviet Jews to leave those countries is lower than their counterparts in Israel.

“That’s not surprising,” she says, “because we have a small country with a small job market and very limited opportunities.”

But Remennick believes emigration also enriches Israel. “In the fields of science and the arts, it doesn’t necessarily matter where a person lives. Anyone who lives here at least 10 years is infected by the Israeli ‘virus’ and isn’t able to cut his ties to the country completely.”

A study conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute in 2009 (with Philippov’s participation) showed that half of young people who had originated in the former Soviet Union unequivocally linked their future to Israel, compared to 80 percent of young, native-born Israelis, and that less than 30 percent of the young Russian speakers wanted to raise their children in Israel. A study commissioned by the Russian-language Israeli website Newsru, published last week, showed more moderate numbers, with 66 percent saying they weren’t planning to leave Israel, and only 4 percent to 5 percent weighing a move abroad.

Philippov says there are two types of factors pushing Russian-born young adults to emigrate; some are common to all young adults in Israel, while others are unique to them. “The Israeli middle class is suffering from the cost of living,” he notes. “The situation becomes a lot more complex when a young family isn’t supported at all by their parents, or in cases in which the parents need their children’s help. That’s the typical reality of immigrant families and is less typical of ‘sabra’ families.”

The lack of separation between religion and state is also an issue troubling large parts of Israeli society, but the lack of civil marriage can be a serious problem for immigrants – who are more likely to face obstacles to marrying in Israel. Additionally, “A migrant may feel fewer sentiments toward a country in which he wasn’t born or raised,” says Philippov. “He has fewer family ties encouraging him to stay.”

After leaving Israel, Tkatch has become a German citizen and renounced his Israeli citizenship. He says giving up his Israeli passport was a liberating move, but immediately after getting German citizenship, he moved to Brussels. “Again I was an immigrant,” he says.

Sophie, meanwhile, says it wasn't until she was living in New York that she recognized what bothered her about Israel. "When I got here, I saw that everything was much calmer and more polite. People know how to line up for the bus without pushing, they don't talk on their cellphone on public transportation – and if they do, they lower their voices. Everyone is polite in the stores, and it's customary to hold the door open for one another. That's something I still have to learn; I'm not used to it."

Philippov notes it is in Israel's interest to ascertain how many of its best and brightest young people have been lost in recent years. "Why did we lose them? This is an important question from a socioeconomic perspective," he says.

**Ukraine Prime Minister condemns Russian aggression during Israel visit
Trade and bilateral agreements signed on "friendly and constructive" visit.**

By Seth J. Frantzman

Jerusalem Post, May 16, 2017

<http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Ukraine-Prime-Minister-condemns-Russian-aggression-during-Israel-visit-490906>

"Every day they [separatists] fire at us from the temporarily Russian-occupied territories; every day we have 40 to 50 to 100 firings a day from Russian weapons, from Russian tanks, Russian artillery, and innocent people die as a result," Ukrainian Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman said in an interview with The Jerusalem Post on Tuesday.

Groysman, the first openly Jewish prime minister of Ukraine, is in Israel for a multiday visit that has included meetings with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, President Reuven Rivlin and various ministers and Knesset members. He stressed the close relations between Kiev and Israel and emphasized that the world should stand on the side of what he termed democratic Ukraine against Russian aggression.

At 38, Groysman became the youngest prime minister just over a year ago with the support of the majority of parliament, and he is a close ally of President Petro Poroshenko.

Formerly the mayor of Vinnytsia in western Ukraine, he was heralded for developing the city, and, as prime minister, said he has sought to turn around the country's economic crises and work closely with Western democracies, including the EU and NATO.

After Ukraine supported UN Resolution 2334, which condemned Israel's settlement policies in the West Bank, relations between the two countries appeared strained.

Indeed, Netanyahu canceled Groysman's planned visit in December 2016. But happy days are back again, according to Israel and Groysman. "This is a friendly and constructive visit," he said.

"Yesterday, in the presence of [Netanyahu], we signed several bilateral agreements, including healthcare, employment, customs and finalizing work on the freetrade area agreement. The first months of 2017 saw increased trade turnover between our countries," he added.

He doesn't see Israel-Ukraine relations as having suffered a decline in December, but argued that "every country has its national interests" and stated that "Israel is an absolute friend of Ukraine with a common history."

There are not only many Israeli citizens with origins in Ukraine, but the countries have a strong strategic partnership.

Israel also has warm relations with Russia, which have deepened in recent years as the two seek to reach an understanding about the Syrian conflict. "We don't interfere in relations with other countries; we respect sovereignty of other states," said Groysman.

But the Ukrainians have been fighting a tough conflict over the last three years in eastern Ukraine against separatists, and accuses Russia of being an aggressor.

"I don't want to say anything toward the Russian people, but I speak about the Russian government. I think this position is clear and close to Israel," Groyzman stated.

Israel has experience, like Ukraine, of having its territory under shelling and suffering pain and tragedy, he said.

Groyzman is optimistic that "Israel will never support an aggressor and terrorist, so you should be careful in relations with third countries, especially when these countries are inclined toward aggression."

This is a thinly veiled reference to the accusations against Russian actions in eastern Ukraine, which he asserted include the use of economic, energy, information and cyber attacks in the conflict. "It is a fight between two worlds: [the] democratic world defending its values, and another world which has no respect for international law, democracy or the territorial integrity of other states," he said.

Ukraine also hopes that US President Donald Trump, who is visiting Israel and the region soon, will stand by Kiev. "He is president of America, a superpower and world leader, and I am certain he will defend values and democracy and will fight for these values, and this equals support for Ukraine," he added.

See also <http://www.jta.org/2017/05/15/news-opinion/israel-middle-east/ukraines-jewish-prime-minister-meets-with-netanyahu-in-jerusalem>

Poroshenko rejects idea of Ukraine's cutting Donbas loose Interfax-Ukraine, May 15, 2017

<http://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/421399.html>

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko has maintained that he does not share the idea of relinquishing the territories currently not controlled by Kyiv in Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

"I hear some proposals. The proposals are: "Let us cut this land off "; "Let us give it to Putin as a present"; "Let us build up a wall"; "Let us forget about Donbas", because we are never going to get it back, they say," Poroshenko said at a news conference in Kyiv on Sunday.

"They and I, we have different paths to follow. End of story," Poroshenko said.

1,000+ Russian-speaking Jews pay tribute to troubadour Leonard Cohen At Limmud FSU conference in New York, youth connect to Jewish roots through cultural touchstones. By Daniel K. Eisenbud Jerusalem Post, May 13, 2017

<http://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/1000-Russian-speaking-Jews-attend-NY-Limmud-Leonard-Cohen-exhibit-490627>

Some 1,000 young Russian-American Jewish professionals paid out of pocket to attend a three-day conference in Rye Brook, NY, to seek knowledge about a shared past once obscured by Communism, learn about Jewish history, network and meet like-minded peers.

There are an estimated 200,000 Russian Jews in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, and more than 700,000 throughout the US.

"The New York Russian-speaking Jewish community is thriving and going from strength to strength, and Limmud FSU New York has become an integral part of this exciting growth," said Limmud FSU founder Chaim Chesler on Saturday.

The conference has been designed for Birthright and MASA Israel Journey participants who live in the New York area, according to Chesler.

“These young leaders have traveled to Israel to learn about their Jewish heritage, but when they returned to America no one is taking care of them as they continue their education,” he lamented. “So Limmud FSU took upon itself the mission, and it has been a wonderful success.”

Sponsored by the Koret Foundation and Blavatnik Family Foundation, Limmud FSU New York features 80 speakers and 120 panels, workshops and discussions on subjects ranging from art, to Jewish culture and tradition, history, politics, academics and business.

Included among the featured presenters are acclaimed Russian animator Oleg Kuvaev; Consul General of Israel in New York Dani Dayan; Stand-up comedians Dmitry Romanov and Igor Meerson; UJA-Federation of New York director of learning and development and Jewish Parent Co-Founder Yelena Kutikova; American rabbi and bestselling author Joseph Telushkin; Muslim interfaith activist Nadiya Al-Noor; and Abby Stein, the first openly transgender woman raised in the Hasidic community.

The New York conference “grows by leaps and bounds each year,” Limmud FSU US project manager Noam Shumakh-Khaimov said. “We sold out for the weekend and had to create a waiting list.” One of the most popular lectures included a standing-room only panel discussion about the damaging implications of the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) movement on college campuses across the country, which was led by Nadya Drukker, executive director at Tanger Hillel at Brooklyn College; Ilya Bratman, executive director of Hillel at Baruch College; and Martin Yafe, a Jewish Community Relations Council of New York consultant, who trains Jewish high school students to defend Israel when they enter college.

Citing a lack of resources in California’s Russian-Jewish community, Yehuda Katz, a 35-year-old hi-tech employee, who has attended four Limmud FSU conferences, said he flew from the Bay area to attend the weekend conference.

“There is a lack of programming for young Jewish Russian-American professionals where I live, and this is a conference where young Jews and young professionals can get together and explore many different aspects – from political to religious to historical,” said Katz.

“I think that some of the people who come here have specific speakers and subjects that they are attracted to. And one of the speakers I wanted to hear is Rabbi Pinchas Polonsky, who is bringing something that doesn’t exist where I live now. So I came here to hear him speak.”

Asked what he likes about Limmud FSU, Katz, whose family emigrated from Belarus, cited the social nature of the conferences.

“On the one hand we came to learn, but on the other we come to socialize and meet people,” he said, while sitting next to four young men and women. “I mean, a lot of us are planning on getting married soon and we meet people we wouldn’t normally come across here.”

Indeed, according to Chesler, there have been over 100 “Limmud FSU babies” born to parents who met at the international lecture series since it launched in Moscow 10 years ago.

“We are not only educating about Jewish history, now we are creating new Jewish lives and families,” said Chesler with a wide smile.

Limmud FSU has become the most successful venue of its kind and is aided by – among others – philanthropists Matthew Bronfman, Aaron Frenkel, Ronald Lauder and Diane Wohl; the Jewish National Fund; UJA-Federation of New York; Israel Bonds; the Jewish Agency; and the Claims Conference.

Its conferences are regularly held in 11 countries, including Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, England, Canada, Israel, Australia and Moldova.

Ukraine Banned Its Biggest Social Network Over Fears of Russian Influence **The ban extends to over 400 companies total.**

By Nicole Kobie

Vice News, May 16 2017

https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/ukraine-banned-its-biggest-social-network-over-fears-of-russian-influence

Ukraine is blacklisting the country's most popular social network VKontakte, email provider Mail.Ru and a host of other companies—all because they're Russian businesses. President Petro Poroshenko updated the official sanctions list, banning more than 400 companies from doing business for three years in the Ukraine.

The government said the sanctions aimed to protect against companies "whose activities threaten information and the cyber security of Ukraine," according to a Reuters report.

Tanya Cooper, an analyst at Human Rights Watch, told Motherboard the official aim is to prevent Russian companies from profiting in Ukraine and taking money out of the country, but also to "protect the country from Russian propaganda [and] to protect the sovereignty of the country."

But she criticized the move, saying "restricting people's right to choose the information source of their liking does not satisfy the test of proportionality and necessity under international law."

The Ukrainian government's desire to limit Russian influence makes sense, given the ongoing tensions between the two countries. But blocking Ukrainians' access to the social network vKontakte and other sites raises concerns of censorship, and puts Ukraine and Poroshenko in the same club as Turkey and China.

Not surprisingly, the move has angered some Ukrainian social media users, with analyst Kantar [saying](#) VKontakte is the third most visited site after Google and YouTube. It wasn't immediately clear how VKontakte and the rest would be banned from a technical standpoint. The most recent reports suggested the affected sites remained accessible online, and any measures are likely able to be circumvented by the usual proxies, mirrors, or VPNs.

"Millions of Ukrainians are affected by this ban," Cooper said. "The president blatantly ignored public interest and went for an easy and politically expedient move."

Response ranged from outrage to bemusement. Kateryna Kruk, a civil rights activist in Kiev, [tweeted](#) that security was important but it will "backfire strongly", while others [joked](#) that schoolchildren will riot. The unpopularity of Russian influence meant the ban was welcomed by some, or at least the reasoning behind it was. The [Ukraine Crisis Media Centre](#) cited the founder of an anti-propaganda television show StopFake as saying the move was "the greatest contribution to the protection of information sovereignty of Ukraine ever", while one media expert was cited as saying that though the threat was real, the decree wasn't the right response.

Indeed, BBC World Journalist Patrick Jackson [noted](#) that "if I want Russian propaganda about East Ukraine or Crimea, I can find it on Facebook as easily as vKontakte."

The sanctions list also included security firm Kaspersky, which is based in Moscow— and is currently [being investigated by US authorities](#). The security company has repeatedly had to defend itself against accusations of Russian meddling, though it's repeatedly worked with Interpol and Europol to target Russian criminals.

Why These Cutesy Putin Articles Must Stop

By Jake Romm

Forward, May 15, 2017

<http://forward.com/culture/371977/why-these-cutesy-putin-articles-must-stop/>

Footage of Vladimir Putin playing the piano prior to his meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping has recently been making its way across the internet. He sits down, haltingly taps out a couple sentimental Russian tunes, smirks at the camera, and then we're off. An [article in the Huffington Post reads](#), "The Russian leader isn't shy about displaying himself as a macho renaissance man, also participating in judo, ice hockey and horseback riding — the latter sometimes shirtless" while an article from [Time Magazine tells us that](#) "This is not the first time the Russian leader has flaunted his musical skills. Putin performed Fats Domino's "Blueberry Hill" at a charity concert in 2010, which was attended by actors Sharon Stone, Kevin Costner and Gérard Depardieu."

Putin is indeed quite the Renaissance man. In between hobnobbing with Kevin Costner and Sharon Stone, he manages to cavort with perhaps more niche celebrity types like Bashar al Assad and Ramzon Kadyrov. Even though he spends time "participating in judo" and performing "Blueberry Hill," he is still somehow able to find the time to commit war crimes in Chechnya and Syria, all while murdering journalists and dissenters both in Russia and abroad.

There is something wrong, indeed, something disgusting, unforgivable even, with abstracting a dictator from his crimes. With publishing the mildly cutesy takes about a childish piano performance, with mentioning Putin's performance at a charity concert without also noting that he is a moral monster on par with his cohorts Assad and Kadyrov.

These short articles are unforgivable because they offer us a moment's reprieve, a moment to snicker (one can already imagine the "US Magazine" "Dictators: They're Just Like Us!" column), a moment to forget. Because unless we forget, there is no reprieve, and there is no snickering. Here is what we omit when we type 200 words on a piano performance by a dictator, when we gently mock his machismo. Here is what we must forget:

We must forget that at this moment Chechen forces under the control of Putin stooge Ramzon Kadyrov are arresting, torturing, and in some cases [killing, gay men](#) and arresting those who might come to their aid.

We must forget that the Syrian military, with both material and diplomatic support from the Putin regime, has murdered hundreds of thousands of civilians in bombing and gas attacks.

We must forget [the images](#) of naked, mangled, emaciated corpses strewn across the floor of the Syrian torture compounds — their gray anonymity evoking, yes, Hitler's concentration camps.

We must forget that Assad has learned more than just brutality from the regimes of the past, and that, as has just been reported, the Assad regime has started to use a [crematorium at the Sednaya prison facility](#) in order to destroy the evidence of its crimes and to keep pace with the facility's (at least) 50 executions a day.

We must forget that Putin rose to power after committing war crimes in Chechnya during the Second Chechen War in which up to 50,000 civilians were murdered. We must forget that this war was started on the pretext of the 1999 Russian Apartment Bombings in which over 1,200 people were either killed or wounded — bombings that were, likely, [perpetrated on the orders of Putin himself](#).

We must forget that Putin has invaded both Ukraine and Georgia, supported various violent insurgencies in both countries, and continues to threaten the sovereignty and safety of the Baltic states.

We must forget that the Putin regime has been responsible for the murder of journalists and dissenters such as Alexander Litvinenko, Boris Nemtsov, and Anastasia Baburova.

We must forget that the infamous Soviet "Gulags," prisons in which prisoners, political or otherwise, were tortured and kept in degrading and intolerable conditions, [continue to exist in Putin's post-Soviet Russia](#) as well.

Now, there is nothing wrong with mocking murderous dictators. Humor can be a weapon, and it can be defense against despair. But if we choose to laugh, it is of the utmost importance that we remember exactly who it is we are laughing at.

Ukrainian Jews call for help from world to end Russian conflict

By Sheri Shefa

Canadian Jewish News, May 16, 2017

<http://www.cjnews.com/news/canada/ukrainian-jews-call-for-help-to-end-russian-conflict>

It's been more than three years since the Russian-Ukrainian conflict began, and the Kyiv-based vice-president of the World Jewish Congress, Josef Zissels, said the conflict will not end without intervention from the international community.

"The international community has a lot more potential than it is currently expending, to try to bring this conflict to a close," said Zissels, through a translator.

In 2014, 40,000 Russian troops invaded the Crimean Peninsula. The conflict between the Ukrainian military and pro-Russian rebels in Ukraine continues to this day.

Zissels, who was in Toronto recently at the invitation of Ukrainian-Canadian Encounter, a non-profit cultural group that promotes stronger ties between Ukrainians and Jews, said he met with leaders of the Canadian Jewish and Ukrainian-Canadian communities.

He said Ukraine needs help from the international community to pressure Russia to abide by international law, but the main question is how to "withstand the Russian aggression."

"The people who have a real influence on Russia speak with Russia very gingerly, very delicately. But Russia's history has been rough and tough and Russia understands only more direct forms of communication," Zissels said.

"They respond when they see power or force and when they cannot ignore or avoid it. So Russia is currently an authoritarian country, a kind of hybrid country. It is trying to convince the world that it has its own kind of democracy, but almost nothing is left of the limited democracy that was there in the 1990s," he said, adding that Russia "doesn't trust its people, doesn't feel that the kind of democracy that Ukraine has should be granted to the people."

Zissels said that Jewish community leaders in Ukraine, which has a Jewish population of about 300,000, are playing an important role when it comes to addressing the country's economic crisis and the need to "undertake essential and fundamental reform."

"Because of the war in the east and the conflict, the Jewish community feels it is also important to play an important role in helping to stabilize Ukraine and help it preserve its independence and meet this military and existential challenge," he said.

Masha Shumatskaya, who was also visiting Toronto from Ukraine late last month on behalf of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), an overseas partner of UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, shared her personal story at a UJA Federation lunch and learn program, about how the ongoing conflict and political crisis in Ukraine affected her directly, and also about the work the JDC does to assist those who are displaced in their own country.

Shumatskaya, 26, spoke about the conditions that caused her and her boyfriend to flee the violence in her hometown of Donetsk, Ukraine, to live in Ukraine-controlled Kharkiv.

“We couldn’t believe what was about to happen. In April 2014, there were some armed people who blocked the road in a small town in the Donetsk region, and they were claiming that they were going to create the independent people’s republic,” she said.

Following a conflict that broke out at the Donetsk airport, which was eventually destroyed, she and her boyfriend made the difficult decision to flee Donetsk.

“We didn’t want to because it was unbelievable to think that something like a major conflict would come to Donetsk, because it was the biggest industrial city in Ukraine, with over one-million dwellers. The turning point was when we went to the hospital together and there was a shelling that exploded next to the hospital and everyone was running away from the hospital – the doctors, the patients – and it was terrifying,” she said, adding that her parents remain in Donetsk.

As the hardships continue in Ukraine, Shumatskaya has not turned her back on volunteerism for the Jewish community.

“I was 17 when I decided to participate in a leadership program – it was a one-year long program for young leaders all over Ukraine, where we learned such concepts like responsibility, what community is, why it is important not just to receive, but to give, and we learned about the concept of volunteerism, because it wasn’t that common in Ukraine in general,” she said.

“I started volunteering with Joint, working with orphans, with elderly people, with Jewish teenagers in Donetsk.”

Using what she learned in the JDC’s Metsuda Young Leadership Development program, Shumatskaya launched an initiative that provides food baskets and small gifts to Jewish seniors on Jewish holidays.

Shumatskaya said the generosity of Jewish community groups all over the world does not go unnoticed by the Jews in Ukraine.

“The people of Ukraine feel connected to Jewish people overseas and all over the world, because every single day, they receive help and they know where it comes from,” she said.

Ukrainian Jews Find Safe Haven, Challenges in Israel

By Larry Luxner

Atlantic Council, May 15, 2017

<http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/ukrainian-jews-find-safe-haven-challenges-in-israel>

Every Sunday and Tuesday evening, Alena Sapiro, 26, takes the hour-long bus ride from her home in Lod to attend Ramit Avidan’s intermediate Hebrew classes at Ulpan Gordon, a Tel Aviv school for new immigrants run by the Israeli Ministry of Absorption.

Sapiro, who helps develop mobile apps for a local software company, came on a ten-day Taglit program to Israel in May 2014, the same month the war in her native Donetsk began. Within a few months, as Russian-backed separatists intensified their offensive throughout eastern Ukraine, Sapiro returned to Israel with a group of 130 other students from various former Soviet republics—and has never looked back.

“In Ukraine, I had a flat, a job, a boyfriend, and a cat. I had everything,” she said. “I finished university with two degrees. I started to study for a doctorate in cybernetics and wanted to be a teacher at the university. But then my university was bombed. My best friend was killed in the war, and my stepfather was killed also. My mother told me, ‘go away from here.’”

Of the thirty students in Avidan’s Hebrew class, eight are Ukrainian Jews—and nearly all have settled here to escape the violence tearing apart the land of their birth.

Since 2014, some 19,000 Ukrainians have “made aliyah” or moved to Israel, according to statistics provided by the Jewish Agency and the Ministry of Absorption. In 2015 alone, 7,400 arrived, more than triple the 2,020 who came in 2013. Although the influx has subsided somewhat, Ukrainians are still trickling in every month.

Today, about 500,000 of Israel's 8.7 million inhabitants have Ukrainian origins.

The newest immigrants arrived May 8, when a chartered plane carrying 240 Ukrainian “olim” touched down at Ben-Gurion Airport in Lod. The group, consisting of sixty-two families—including sixty children, ten immigrants older than 70, and fourteen cats and dogs—will settle in twenty-six cities and towns throughout Israel, from the southern port city of Eilat to Qatzrin in the northern Golan Heights.

Like many such flights, these new arrivals were brought to Israel largely through the efforts of a Chicago-based nonprofit group, the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews—which according to a recent JTA story offers grants—\$1,000 or six months’ rent per adult—beyond what immigrants receive from Israel when they immigrate through the Jewish Agency.

Valery Nevler, 24, lives in Bat Yam, a coastal suburb of Tel Aviv that’s already home to tens of thousands of immigrants from the former Soviet Union. Like Sapiro, he came on the ten-month Masa program in 2014 and began learning Hebrew. He eventually got an internship at the CheckPoint software firm, but is currently unemployed.

“I was planning on coming to Israel anyway, but what was going on just made me decide faster,” he told UkraineAlert. “My father was living here for twenty years. I wasn’t aware I was Jewish at all until four or five years ago, when I started communicating with him. It was a big surprise for me. I didn’t know I had a right to come to Israel.”

Nevler, whose great-grandfather survived the Holocaust, said he left just in time.

“There was fighting in the streets,” he recalled. “I got one of the last trains to Lviv [in western Ukraine], and a few days later the train station in Donetsk was hit by a missile attack.”

Nevler wouldn’t dream about moving back. Nor, he estimated, would 95 percent of the other Ukrainians living in Israel today.

“Life is way better here than in Ukraine. It’s very difficult economically there,” he said. “People’s salaries are not enough even to buy food, not to mention paying taxes and rent. So many people who are stuck in Donetsk would love to go to a peaceful place, but they don’t have money, so they stay.”

That doesn’t mean Israel is a paradise, however.

“It’s not easy to live here. It’s a different mentality. In the beginning, it was so hard to understand the bureaucracy,” said Sapiro. “At the bank, I tried to use my Visa card but I couldn’t. You go to the hospital and can’t explain what you want. I waited for months to see a gynecologist.”

Sapiro’s mother could not accompany her to Israel because she’s not Jewish, though her Jewish father has lived here for many years. Upon her arrival, Sapiro spent ten months in temporary housing. She also studied Hebrew twice a week for four hours a day and did a five-month internship at IBM.

Asked about the loyalty of Ukraine’s Jewish citizens, Sapiro shrugged. “Some Jews wanted to be a part of Russia, some wanted to stay part of Ukraine,” she said. “It’s like any country. Some American Jews like Trump. Some don’t.”

Like Sapiro, Alexander Katsovykh—a firefighter with the Israel Defense Forces—came from Donetsk. He also left his university after it was bombed, arriving in Israel in September 2014.

The 21-year-old combat soldier is currently stationed at the international airport, but lives in the Tel Aviv suburb of Ra'anana.

"I made aliyah because the war started. I had already been on Taglit and knew I had to leave that country and that crazy situation," said Katsovyeh, who came by himself. His parents still live in Donetsk.

"Israel is very nice. People here are wonderful, and everybody wants to help you," he said. "I wish I had come here when I was 15."

At 65, Svetlana Baranovich is clearly the oldest student in Avidan's Hebrew class. She speaks the unfamiliar language with a heavy, halting Slavic accent. A lifelong resident of Simferopol, she left her native Crimea in October 2014, five months after Russia annexed the Ukrainian peninsula following a highly controversial referendum.

Yet unlike most Ukrainian Jews here, Baranovich left her country not because of the fighting—but because this is where her children are.

"For a long time, I wanted to live in Israel," she told us. "I traveled to Israel every three years, whenever I had a vacation, to visit my son and daughter. But my husband didn't want to come because he thought it was too hot."

Baranovich, who was an engineer at the state-run telephone company, eventually made aliyah with her husband Marat. Soon after, though, 69-year-old Marat developed heart disease and died at Tel Aviv's Ichilov hospital. She now lives in the northern suburb of Kochav HaTzafon with her daughter and extended family.

"I love Israel. I have my family here," says the pensioner. "But I loved Crimea too. And I still feel Ukrainian."

Tel Aviv-based journalist Larry Luxner is news editor of The Washington Diplomat. He tweets @LLuxner.

Ukraine PM: I never hid my ethnic origins

By Seth J. Frantzman

Jerusalem Post, May 17, 2017

<http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Ukraine-PM-tells-Post-I-never-hid-my-ethnic-origins-490966>

"I believe it would be humiliating to hide someone's roots, to hide someone's family or last name, and once again for all these reasons, we view the relations with Israel as very important."

Last year, Volodymyr Groysman became the first openly Jewish prime minister of Ukraine.

Born in 1978, he grew up after the worst strictures of official Soviet anti-Jewish policies, and rose to be mayor of the city of Vinnytsia.

"All my ancestors I know of from 18th century [onward] lived in Ukraine," he said in an interview with the 'Post' on Tuesday.

Groysman speaks with pride of Ukraine as a multi-ethnic country. "Ukrainian citizens have good will and are nice people. Ukraine is my country; it's a great honor to be a citizen and born in Ukraine."

He describes the relationship between Ukraine and Israel as close and friendly, and one that goes beyond just state relations. "It [Israel] is a holy land for Ukrainians, and we see an ongoing stream of pilgrims of different faiths to see holy places."

Ukraine has experienced antisemitism, but Groysman says that he would never hide his ethnic origins. "I believe it would be humiliating to hide someone's roots, to hide someone's family or last name, and once again for all these reasons, we view the relations with Israel as very important."

Groysman attended synagogue on Rosh Hashana and Hanukka, according to an article in the JTA last year. In January 2016, Groysman, then-chairman of the parliament, held a minute of silence to mark Holocaust Remembrance Day.

He visited Yad Vashem on Sunday, and in conversations with President Reuven Rivlin, he spoke of the 2,500 Ukrainians recognized as Righteous Among the Nations.

Antisemitism in today's Ukraine is a contentious issue, amid accusations that populists seek to commemorate nationalists such as Symon Petliura or Stepan Bandera, the latter of which was recently honored with a street name in Kiev. For some, these past leaders are antisemites or Nazi collaborators, but history is not so simple.

Bandera was sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp by the Nazis after initial warm relations. According to an article in Tablet, Bandera's brothers were murdered in Auschwitz. For some Ukrainians, the Soviet mass murder during the 1930s famine is as much a crime as the Holocaust. Ukraine's current leaders prefer to present the country as diverse. Certainly Groysman is an example of that image of Ukraine.

Knesset speaker to address Russian parliament 30 years after Gulag release

By Lahav Harkov

Jerusalem Post, May 16, 2017

<http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Knesset-speaker-to-address-Russian-parliament-30-years-after-gulag-release-490838>

Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein, a former prisoner of conscience in the Soviet Union, will address the Federation Council in Moscow next month, 30 years after he was released from the gulag.

"This is a special trip and there is great excitement about it," Edelstein said Monday. "We can't ignore the symbolism of something that could have been considered a mirage not that many years ago, that someone who was a prisoner in the Soviet Union will stand on the stage of the parliament in Moscow and give a speech as the speaker of the Knesset of Israel."

Edelstein was denied permission to move from the Soviet Union to Israel in 1977, and became one of the most prominent refuseniks.

He clandestinely taught Hebrew and was arrested on trumped-up drug charges in 1984. Edelstein spent nearly three years in Siberian gulags and was released in 1987, making him one of the last prisoners of Zion to be freed.

Edelstein plans to revisit sites with personal meaning to him in Moscow, including where he was active as a refusenik, where he was held before being sent to the gulag, the court where he was tried, and others.

The Knesset Speaker's trip to Moscow on June 27-29 follows a visit from Valentina Matviyenko, Chairwoman of the Federation Council, the upper house of the Russian parliament, to the Knesset in February.

Edelstein is also expected to meet with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, and the two are likely to discuss Russian influence in the Middle East.

"Our goal is to further develop the excellent ties between our countries, especially the ties between the Knesset and the Russian Parliament," Edelstein said.

"They are better than ever, with excellent cooperation in different areas and deep friendship."

MKs Robert Ilatov (Yisrael Beytenu) and Yoel Razbozov (Yesh Atid), as well as Knesset Director-General Albert Sacharovich, will join Edelstein on the trip.

New OSCE/ODIHR publication aimed at assisting governments in addressing security needs of Jewish communities

EJC, May 16, 2017

<http://www.eurojewcong.org/news-and-views/16683-new-osce-odihr-publication-aimed-at-assisting-governments-in-addressing-security-needs-of-jewish-communities.html>

The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) released on Monday a new publication aimed at assisting governments in addressing the security needs of Jewish communities, at a launch event in the Parliamentary Society of the German Bundestag.

Recent years have seen deadly antisemitic attacks in Toulouse, Brussels, Paris, Copenhagen and elsewhere, as well as frequent non-lethal assaults, underscoring the urgent need for greater efforts to address antisemitism. Participants at the launch event stressed the importance of the publication at a time when the threat level for some Jewish communities in the OSCE region is high and immediate.

“Antisemitic incidents across the OSCE region in recent years have not only had a profoundly negative impact on the daily lives of Jewish individuals and communities and on their enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms, but have also created a widespread sense of fear and insecurity among them,” Michael Georg Link, ODIHR Director, said at the event. “This publication, in light of the urgent need for greater efforts to confront antisemitism, provides governments with effective measures and practices that can be implemented, in co-operation with Jewish communities, to better address their security needs, and thus remove this sense of fear and insecurity.”

The publication, *Understanding Antisemitic Hate Crimes and Addressing the Security Needs of Jewish Communities*, was produced within the framework of ODIHR’s “Words into Action to Address Antisemitism” project, in consultation with experts from throughout the OSCE region, to reflect good practices in addressing the security needs of Jewish communities. It lays out practical steps governments are recommended to take to address security needs in co-operation and partnership with these communities.

ODIHR has developed the Words into Action to Address Antisemitism project, generously funded by the German Federal Government, to strengthen the capacity of governments and civil society in OSCE participating States to prevent and respond to antisemitism. The multi-year project, launched in 2016, focuses on three broad areas: addressing the security needs of Jewish communities, countering antisemitism through education, and fostering coalition building among communities.

Kremlin Cancels Voter Turnout Boost Over Fears of Opposition Victory — Reports Moscow Times, May 18, 2017

<https://themoscowtimes.com/news/kremlin-cancels-plans-to-boost-voter-turnout-over-fears-of-opposition-victory-reports-58020>

Kremlin plans to boost voter turnout in the country's regional elections have been scrapped over fears that opposition candidates could be pushed into victory.

The Russian government had planned to launch initiatives encouraging Russians to head to polls in 16 regions scheduled to hold gubernatorial elections this September, [Russia's Vedomosti newspaper reported Thursday](#).

Party officials believe that the regions of Sverdlovsk, Yaroslavl, Kaliningrad, Kirov and Buryatia could all return opposition governors after the vote, toppling their current United Russia leaders.

Vedomosti reported in February that the Kremlin hoped for a strong turnout in the gubernatorial elections in order to shore up support before the presidential elections in 2018.

Officials are currently hoping for a 70 percent turnout, with 70 percent of votes cast for United Russia, the newspaper reported.

European Parliament MPs slam Hungary, call on EU to explore sanctions
Resolution wins broad backing, including from traditional allies of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.
By Maia de La Baume
Politico.eu, May 18, 2017

<http://www.politico.eu/article/meps-slam-hungary-call-on-eu-to-explore-sanctions/>

STRASBOURG, France — The European Parliament condemned on Wednesday a “serious deterioration of the rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights” in Hungary and called for a process that could theoretically lead to EU sanctions against Budapest.

Although sanctions are widely regarded as unlikely, the vote shows how frustrated MEPs across party lines have become with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s government — especially with its anti-migrant policies, [anti-EU communication campaign](#) and laws targeting NGOs that receive foreign funding and Budapest’s [Central European University](#).

The vote shows how frustrated MEPs across party lines have become with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s government.

In a resolution adopted by 393 votes to 221, the Parliament called for the EU to start so-called Article 7 proceedings against Hungary. [Article 7](#) of the Treaty of the European Union says the bloc can impose sanctions, such as the suspension of voting rights, against a member country found to be in “serious and persistent breach” of founding values such as “respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights.”

However, all other EU members would have to conclude that there had been such a breach — setting a very high bar for action. Suspending voting rights is regarded as a “nuclear option” and has never been used.

The text was tabled primarily by the liberal ALDE parliamentary group, which has long promoted the use of Article 7 against Hungary. The center-left Socialists & Democrats, the Greens, the far-left GUE and some members of the center-right European People’s Party (EPP) also supported the resolution. Orbán’s own Fidesz party is a member of the EPP group.

The text asks the Parliament’s Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs to draw up a resolution calling on the European Council — the body made up of the leaders of the bloc’s member countries — to “act pursuant to Article 7.” That resolution would then be the subject of another plenary vote.

The resolution also calls for the EU to reach an agreement with U.S. authorities, making it possible for the Central European University to remain in Budapest. The university is supported by U.S.-Hungarian financier George Soros.

President Aliyev receives Executive Vice Chairman of Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations
AzerNews, May 16, 2017

<https://www.azernews.az/nation/113197.html>

Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev received Executive Vice Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations Malcolm Hoenlein in Baku on May 16, Azertac reported.

Executive Vice Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations Malcolm Hoenlein recalled his meeting and a very interesting conversation with national leader of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev. Malcolm Hoenlein said the American Jewish community is planning to invest in the construction of a Jewish school in Azerbaijan.

Malcolm Hoenlein hailed the Azerbaijani-U.S. relations, particularly Azerbaijan’s successful cooperation with American Jews. He stressed the importance of strengthening this cooperation.

President Ilham Aliyev remembered their meeting with Malcolm Hoenlein, which took place during his previous visit to Azerbaijan with a large delegation. The head of state noted that Azerbaijan`s Jewish community co-exists together with members of other nationalities in an atmosphere of peace and tranquility.

The declaration of 2017 as a “Year of Islamic Solidarity” in Azerbaijan, the country`s successfully hosting the Islamic Solidarity Games in Baku and the excellent organization of the 4th World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue was hailed as Azerbaijan`s contributions to strengthening intercultural dialogue. The importance of the fact that multiculturalism was ensured in Azerbaijan was emphasized at the meeting, and it was noted that measures taken in this regard are followed with great interest.

The sides stressed the successful development of bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and the U.S. in various areas.

Protesters Hit Moscow’s Streets to Fight Mass Renovation Plan

By Neil MacFarquhar

New York Times, May 14, 2017

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/14/world/europe/protesters-hit-moscows-streets-to-fight-mass-renovation-plan.html>

MOSCOW — Demonstrators packed a downtown Moscow avenue on Sunday, angered by plans for the mass demolition and replacement of huge apartment blocks and by what they called the highhanded way that City Hall, and by extension the federal government, trampled on their basic rights.

“We are not serfs,” a hand-lettered sign pinned to the chest of one woman read, while another held aloft a placard reading “Renovate the government!”

A draft law, proposed by Mayor Sergei Sobyenin, would replace about 4,500 apartment buildings built mostly in the 1950s and ’60s and currently home to about 1.6 million people, or more than 10 percent of the capital’s population. Much about the plan remains vague, but the underlying idea is that owners would abandon their apartments on the promise that the city would build them something better.

The mayor and the government seem rattled by the backlash, with Mr. Sobyenin suggesting constant revisions and the federal parliament postponing its vote on the law until July.

After what for Moscow was a fairly large rally on Sunday — organizers said up to 30,000 people attended, whereas the police put the number at 8,000 — the mayor wrote on social media that the opinions voiced at the protest would be taken into account. (Presumably he was not referring to repeated chants of “Sobyenin must go!” that occasionally morphed into “Putin must go!”)

The demonstration, organized mainly by women, galvanized people who described themselves as previously apathetic.

“I have never been to a demonstration before in my life,” said Leonid Sladkov, 68, a retired crossword puzzle designer who has lived since 1962 in Cheryomushki, a neighborhood where 121 out of 125 five-story apartment buildings have been designated for demolition. “They finally infiltrated my soul with their idiotic ideas.”

The mayor announced the plan during a meeting with President Vladimir V. Putin that was televised in late February. Although the city had already relocated about 160,000 families through a renovation program started in 1999 under the previous mayor, Mr. Sobyenin said, “there is still plenty of uncomfortable housing” and the new project would completely transform the city.

Mr. Putin gave the idea a public blessing, but seemed to backtrack last month by saying that “nothing should be forced upon people, and their rights should be fully respected.”

Critics are unsure what inspired the plan. Some think it was a misguided attempt to woo Muscovites, traditionally against Mr. Putin, into voting for him and Mr. Sobyenin, both of whom are up for re-election next year.

A more common explanation is that it is a gift to the powerful construction industry. Builders would gain access to vast swaths of valuable land to construct hulking towers where stretches of mostly five-story buildings now stand, replacing the 80 apartments in each building with hundreds to be sold for enormous profits.

Homeowners and tenants got virtually no say in the grandiose and wildly expensive beautification projects introduced by the mayor since he took office in 2010, which included knocking down hundreds of small kiosks that sold discount goods and widening the sidewalks. Such renovations were often seen as enriching the mayor's friends.

The anger finally boiled over because the latest plan literally struck too close to home.

"This was not something abstract like civil rights, like freedom of speech," Julia Galyamina, a civic activist and linguistics professor who was one of the protest's main organizers, said in an interview. "If you have an apartment and someone wants to confiscate it, that is awful. They are afraid."

Although the Soviet Union distributed apartments at a time when private property did not exist, the Soviet-educated generation still running Russia lost sight of the fact that that mind-set shifted after the Communist system collapsed in 1991.

"They did not notice that our society has changed," Ms. Galyamina said. "They thought they were doing people a favor to give them new apartments. The government did not consider that the people think of themselves as owners. They became owners and they want to decide for themselves: That is the main point."

Take Cheryomushki, a neighborhood six stops on the Metro from the center of Moscow.

It was created in the late 1950s and '60s with hundreds of prefabricated apartment buildings rising in what had been cherry orchards, part of a nationwide wave of building to address a chronic housing shortage.

The graceless, boxy, five-story buildings here were christened Khrushchevki, after Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet leader who ordered their construction.

Designed to last just 25 years, they were revolutionary because ordinary people could get their own space away from communal apartments for the first time. In 1963, the movie "Cheryomushki" celebrated the freedom with a Soviet version of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers singing: "The whole apartment is ours, ours! The kitchen is also ours, ours."

The district feels like a verdant oasis despite being surrounded by boulevards throbbing with traffic. Trees planted when the buildings went up now shade benches and playgrounds.

But the apartments have not aged well. And despite the protests on Sunday, one opinion poll suggests 80 percent of residents affected want new apartments. The smallest apartments are about 300 square feet, including a tiny kitchen and one bathroom.

Alexei and Elena, both 30, were walking with their 6-month-old son, Artem, in the neighborhood. The infant is the fourth generation of the family to live in the building since his great-grandfather moved there in 1956.

"We will be happy if they tear it down. We have been waiting for that day our whole lives," said Alexei, a car salesman, shrugging off any nostalgia. "We want something more modern."

Given the tensions over the plan, some residents did not want to give their surnames.

His wife, weary of carting Artem up and down the stairs because there is no elevator, concurred. “We want to improve our lives,” she said. “You cannot even turn around in the bathroom.”

Supporters of the reconstruction plan catalog crooked walls, leaking ceilings, weak plumbing and faulty electricity. They are convinced that they will get something larger and better, echoing reports on state TV.

Maria Volkonskaya, a 32-year-old university lecturer in English literature, inherited her apartment in Cheryomushki from her grandparents, who had moved there in 1961. In an interview in the neighborhood last week, she said she did not want to move to a high-rise “human ant hill.”

The mayor’s announcement drove her to read the new law, the Constitution and the housing code. “Everything connected with this law is suspicious,” she said. “When we start asking questions, there are no answers.”

For example, the draft law seems to guarantee only an apartment of exactly the same size, not larger nor in the same neighborhood, meaning residents could be pushed to Moscow’s outskirts.

“We have to show the government that there is a limit,” she said. “They cannot behave as if we are just slaves who can be moved from one location to another and we should just be grateful for this wonderful gift that they prepared for us.”

Sophia Kishkovsky and Oleg Matsnev contributed reporting.

**Ukraine’s Jews walk narrow line between murderous past and uncertain future
As Groyzman winds up three-day visit to Israel, Jews back home cope with economic difficulties, war
By Sue Surkes**

Times of Israel, May 17, 2017

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/ukraines-jews-walk-narrow-line-between-murderous-past-and-uncertain-future/>

ODESSA, Ukraine — At two years of age, Masha cannot walk yet, although she has learned to sit and stand. When she arrived at the Tikva foster home in Odessa six months ago, she could not even hold her head. Since then, she has had four epileptic fits.

When her mother went to hospital to give birth, doctors said she needed a Caesarean section. But they would only operate if she paid them the usual bribe. The mother — so poor that she lived with 11 others in a single, filthy room — did not have the cash. It was only when Masha was starting to choke in the womb that hospital staff agreed to carry out the surgery.

Although it is too early to tell how Masha will fare — neurosurgeons say she has not sustained brain damage — she is lucky to have been rescued and brought to a place with around the clock care, along with her brother Mishka, one and a half, who came to Tikva with a lung infection but is now developing normally.

The two were discovered by Tikva social workers as they lay seriously ill in a hospital. They were on their way to a state orphanage. Masha just lay in bed, not moving.

Their father is an alcoholic. Their mother, who is thought to be mentally ill, is pregnant again.

100,000 orphans

Masha and Mishka are two of an estimated 100,000 orphans in Ukraine, around 80 percent of whom are described as “social orphans” whose parents are either too poor, abusive, drunk or high on drugs to raise them.

These children end up in bleak and dilapidated state orphanages where they receive minimal education, hygiene and emotional support. At age 18, they are spat out onto the streets where most enter the same cycle of poverty and addiction that trapped their parents.

Tikva, a non-profit organization, managed on Jewish Orthodox lines by British-born Refael Kruskal, has rescued some 2,250 abused, abandoned and homeless Jewish children over the past 15 years.

The organization estimates that another 2,500 Jewish orphans are spread around the country and it employs 30 full-time agents to find them.

The 300 orphans currently residing at Tikva are schooled from kindergarten on, together with 700 Jewish children and youth from normative homes.

Many Tikva alumni immigrate to Israel. Others go onto the organization's university courses in Odessa.

Society in crisis

The plight of orphans like Masha and Miskha illustrates the crisis in which Ukrainian society is mired, punch drunk by repeated blows that began in recent history with the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990's.

Jobs for life disappeared overnight and people used to depending on the state for their every need suddenly had to fend for themselves, without a social safety net to catch those who failed.

The Orange Revolution, which began in late 2004 to protest a corrupt presidential election, was followed in early 2014 by the so-called Revolution of Dignity – a mass protest in Kiev's Maidan Square against then President Viktor Yanukovich's failure to sign a deal with the EU, in favor of closer ties with Russia. As the result of clashes between protestors and police, 100 Ukrainians died and more than 1,000 were injured.

That was followed by Russia's military intervention and subsequent annexation of Crimea and the so-called frozen war in eastern Ukraine which has pitted pro-European Ukrainian government forces against Russian-backed separatists, hitting the Ukrainian economy hard.

The International Monetary Fund has already transferred around half of a \$17.5 billion rescue pledge to Ukraine. But in a report published in April, it says that while growth is starting to return, some structural reforms are being carried out and serious attempts are being made to root out endemic corruption, much remains to be done.

Incomes are still just 21% of the EU average with the result that the black market is still an integral part of everyday life. Gas and oil prices have spiraled upwards, much of industry and all agricultural land is still state controlled, over-regulation deters foreign investment and dreadful roads make travel bumpy and interminably slow.

Huge wealth gaps persist between the majority of poor to just-about-managing and the so-called oligarchs who lined their pockets in the early post-Soviet years by snapping up privatized industries.

A colonial pawn

Ukraine – sandwiched between Europe to the west and Russia to the east and located just a stone's throw from Turkey across the Black Sea – has been tossed back and forth over the centuries by the vicissitudes of colonial rulers, its borders shifting back and forth over the centuries like sand.

Home to one of the world's biggest Jewish communities before World War II, the territory occupied by today's Ukraine witnessed more than its fair share of murderous pogroms against the Jews. The local Orthodox church raised – some say still raises – its flocks on anti-Semitic tropes, such as that Jews suck the blood of Christian children to make matza on Passover.

Indeed, it was the intensity of violence against Jews encapsulated by four pogroms in the cosmopolitan city of Odessa in the 19th and early 20th centuries that drove a group of Jewish intellectuals in that city to lay the foundations for modern Zionism.

One in four Jewish Holocaust victims

During World War II, an estimated 1.5 to 1.6 million out of 2.7 million Jews living in shtetl villages and market towns across the country were murdered, often with the enthusiastic involvement of local Ukrainians and of Romanians (the latter in the Romanian-controlled area of Transnistria in the south west).

That is one in every four of all Holocaust victims in Europe.

Whereas Jews in other countries were deported to the gas chambers to be exterminated, the vast majority of Ukraine's Jews were either shot or starved to death, their bodies left to rot in an unknown number of unmarked graves.

The best known mass graves are in a Kiev ravine, known as Babi Yar, where 33,771 Jews were gunned down over just two days in September 1941.

But fields and forests all over the country are blighted by the bulges indicative of mass graves, not all of them Jewish. They are still being discovered to this day.

The Soviet-era moratorium on discussion about the Holocaust led to an explosion of Holocaust testimony after the Communist order collapsed, to the identification of many of the sites of murder, and to the start of moves by private organizations to erect memorials to the dead.

Giving testimony

Rita Schweibes, now nearly 81, was born in the town of Tulchyn, in western Ukraine – once the seat of the Polish Potocki family, whose vast Palladian palace is currently undergoing renovation.

Several thousand Jews – sources give different numbers — lived in the town when the Nazis entered in July 1941.

A deal between the Axis powers placed the town under the Romanian-administered area of Transnistria until it was retaken by the Soviet army in 1944.

Soon after occupation, the Jews were herded into a ghetto. Some were put into a former Jewish school building, where they were deprived of food and water for two days. “Children were so thirsty, they were licking the windows,” Rita recalled.

“A doctor from Tulchyn came to inject the Jews with three types of typhus. We were all taken to have showers, and when we looked for our clothes, they were all wet and had been covered with lice. It was December 7, 1941. We had to put the clothes back on. Then we were driven 40 kilometers by foot to the Pechora death camp – [a former hospital and barracks complex] — through snow and mud – 20 km on the 7th and another 20km on the 8th. Those who couldn't walk were killed on the spot.”

Rita, then aged five, was with her father, mother, brother, uncles and aunts. All took turns carrying her. “All the Jews wanted to push their children into the Ukrainian crowds lining the road, to save them. My father tried to exchange a tablecloth for bread with someone, and suddenly SS police arrived in a car with three soldiers. They shot and killed my father right there.”

Rita's mother died a month later in the Pechora camp of grief. Rita was left with her 15-year-old brother, who temporarily lost his mind, and who, following the Soviet liberation, was to die in action fighting with the Soviet army.

“The doctor who had given us the injections would come every day to check how many Jews had died. He would always say ‘It's not enough’”.

As typhus began to spread to the local population, a decision was made to bury Jews who had died from disease, cold and starvation in pits in the forest. Some victims – rejected in the selections for labor forces to build roads – were even buried alive.

Between 150,000 and 250,000 Romanian and Ukrainian Jews died at Pechora. Rita somehow survived typhus and starvation, thanks to individuals who took great risks to get her food.

“I vowed to God that if I survived, I would tell the story until my dying day,” Rita said.

She was one of just 330 residents of Tulchyn who returned to the town after the war.

Today, just 11 Jewish Holocaust survivors live in Tulchyn, only four of whom are still mobile, out of a total Jewish population of around 150.

Across the country, an estimated 2,700 survivors are still alive, spread across 42 locales.

Support for the poor

Several Jewish and Christian organizations provide support for those Jews in need, among them the American Joint Distribution Center’s Hesed program and Christians for Israel, based in Holland, which works with other Christians bodies as part of the Christian Aliyah Alliance.

Katja, one of a handful of Jews waiting for CFI food parcels in Tulchyn last week, said, “Everybody knows what the Jews went through, but they’re a little envious that the Jews know how to organize themselves. To them, the food parcels we get look like manna from heaven.”

Katja is recognized as a victim of the 1986 nuclear disaster in Chernobyl, some 400 km (250 miles) to the north. Childless, she has had her thyroid and part of her kidneys removed.

Galina Delezha-Pysko, 78, who worked as a pediatrician for more than 50 years, has spent her whole life in Tulchyn.

She has two sons, both university-educated and married, both unable to find work.

One daughter-in-law works for the ambulance service. The other recently lost her job.

One son, now 30, periodically goes missing. “He’s lost his memory,” says Galina. “There’s something wrong with his brain. He was at Maidan Square and it seems he was injured. Who needed Maidan? People’s lives have just become worse.”

Galina – who is elegantly turned out in what she reveals are second hand clothes — receives a monthly pension of 55 Euros (NIS 217, or \$60). This is roughly a third of the budget an individual needs to subsist without extras such as medicines and travel.

Galina tries to give as much as she can to her children. For her, the food parcels from Christians for Israel are like a lifeline.

Christians for Israel, headquartered in Holland, is motivated by the Bible and biblical prophecies predicting that the Jews will be returned to the Land of Israel from “the land of the North” and that gentiles from the nations will help them.

Since 1996, in cooperation with other organizations, it has been helping Jews to immigrate to Israel from the former Soviet Union, Ethiopia, India and France.

To date, CFI Ukraine — with eight buses, ten employees and many volunteers — has probably distributed 100,000 food parcels, says Belgian Koen Carlier, who founded the organization's Ukrainian branch in 2004. He predicts that 25,000 parcels will be delivered in the coming year.

The organization also helps Jewish orphans, provides for meals and other needs in Jewish schools and has erected 20 memorials to Holocaust victims.

To help with the practical side of encouraging immigration to Israel – its main aim – CFI Ukraine also ferries those about to emigrate to get their passports and other documents, and to get onto Israel-bound planes.

CFI, which has been working closely with the Jewish Agency in the Ukraine since the 1990s, has been active in rescuing Jews from the eastern Ukrainian battle front and helping them emigrate to Israel.

In 2014, it established a 29-bed shelter in a rented house in a quiet village outside Kiev. "People stayed for anything from one night to nine months before flying to Israel," recalled Natasha Kryzhanovsky, 55, a former journalist and editor, now a CFI field worker, who found Christianity in 1993 after hearing about "G-d's plan for the Jewish people." A ball of energy with a keen ability to multitask, she has since visited Israel 21 times.

Battlefield rescue

While reviewing some of the photos pinned to the staircase of individuals and families who have stayed at the shelter – 2,800 individuals, of whom almost all were from eastern Ukraine — Natasha recalls, "Some of the people who came to us couldn't speak because they were so deeply in shock. Russian propaganda had told them that there were Nazis in Kiev, and they thought we would put them in a camp."

"During the early period of the war, I had no time to watch the news. I knew where the bombing was taking place according to where people were phoning from."

"During those first months of war, it was still possible to cross the border from eastern Ukraine. People found back roads, they stayed with relatives. When it got harder, people who wanted to get out had to go into Russia and re-enter Ukraine from another part."

Thanks to CFI's work to raise awareness about Israel and the Jewish people in the church — the organization does not preach to the Jews — the Baptist church has helped in eastern Ukraine, while also looking after many Jewish mass graves.

Natasha stops at a photograph of the late Lala Moisevna, then 92, who had spent four years hiding under the floorboards during the Second World War, protected by a Christian family. In old age, she had become paralyzed, and received food parcels from CFI. "She so wanted to go to Israel that we put her on a stretcher for the plane. Three days after she arrived in Israel, she died. I will never forget her eyes. They were so full of light."

Many of the oldest Jews still living in eastern Ukraine will not leave and are supported with food parcels.

Other Jews from the region have become internal refugees in the main cities.

A second CFI shelter operates out of Dnipropetrovsk in south central Ukraine, in cooperation with the Jewish Agency and the Christian Aliyah Alliance.

Chabad

The Chabad organization is also active, present in nearly all of Ukraine's 200 Jewish communities. That is with the exception of the Russian-backed separatist areas of Donetsk and Lugansk, whose Chabad rabbis left their flocks after the war started and who today operate out of Kiev and travel the world in search of funds.

Chabad helps to run schools for Jewish children, most of whom arrive with next to no knowledge about their Jewish heritage, and to manage Jewish orphanages in Odessa and the north western city of Zhytomyr.

Chabad, which was founded in the Ukraine, accepts children as Jewish under the broadest definition, which allows repatriation to Israel so long as the individual has a Jewish grandfather. This is in contrast to the Tikva organization, which sticks to the Jewish Halachic definition of a Jew as the child of a Jewish mother.

Unlike Romania, whose government held its first Holocaust Memorial day in 2004, Ukraine has not yet taken responsibility for its role in the Holocaust and only recently decreed that Ukrainian pupils should study the subject – for one session of 55 minutes.

Authorities have not yet funded any memorial for Jewish Holocaust victims, preferring to commemorate all of Ukraine's wartime dead.

But while there are plenty of testimonies to the cruelty of local Ukrainians, more than 2,500 Ukrainian non-Jews have been given the title of Righteous Among the Nations by Israel's official Holocaust memorial body, Yad Vashem.

Celebrating Ukrainian nationalists

One consequence of the war in eastern Ukraine has been a move by the authorities to replace Russian street names and monuments with Ukrainian ones, some of which honor people associated with anti-Semitism.

In the city of Vinnitsa, one street has been newly named for Symon Petliura, a Ukrainian leader who fought for Ukrainian independence after the Russian revolution, but whose role in anti-Jewish pogroms is still controversial.

In Uman, a new monument recently appeared to commemorate Ivan Gonta, an 18th century Cossack involved in a massacre of Jews, Poles and Eastern Catholics.

Some Ukrainians told the Times of Israel that out of economic despair, anti-Semitism is being directed against the country's prime minister, Volodymyr Groysman, who is Jewish on his father's side, and against President Petro Poroshenko, who is not.

Groysman has been in Israel this week, meeting among others with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, patching up bilateral relations that were marred when Ukraine backed a UN Security Council resolution lambasting the Israeli settlement enterprise last December.

Historian Dr. Boris Zabarko, chairman of the Ukrainian association of Holocaust survivors, says there is no anti-Semitism coming from the government today because, "Now, Ukraine has a new enemy — [Russian President] Vladimir Putin – so they're paying less attention to the Jews."

Nevertheless, there have been isolated attacks on Jewish cemeteries and institutions. Earlier this month, for example, Ukrainian nationalists daubed Nazi swastikas and the words "tolerance is weakness" on headstones in a Jewish cemetery in Cherkasy in central Ukraine.

Natella Shapiro, the Orthodox principal of the Jewish school in central Ukraine's Bila Tserkva, was shocked in March to hear a member of a Ukrainian nationalist party address an annual celebration attended by central and local government officials with a poem that excoriated Jews as the enemy and included classic anti-Semitic slurs.

"I posted something about this on Facebook, and received many anti-Semitic responses, such as 'go back to Israel' and 'this isn't your country,'" she said.

Some 500,000 Ukrainian Jews are estimated to have immigrated to Israel since the fall of the Soviet Union. But in the absence of relevant Ukrainian census figures – religion is no longer included on identity documents –

the number of Jews still in the country who have the right to emigrate to Israel cannot be fixed definitively. Some say 200,000. Others estimate that there are up to one million.

The Jewish Agency runs a variety of activities to attract the attention of potential Jewish immigrants and to educate them about Jewish life and possibilities in Israel.

Is there a future?

Judging by gaudy real estate adverts in Hebrew, the only place in Ukraine where the Jewish presence might be booming is Uman.

Here lies the burial place of Rabbi Nahman, founder of Breslav Hasidism and a great grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, who founded the Hasidic movement nearby.

Thousands of Orthodox pilgrims and not a few traditional working class Israelis looking for blessings flood into Uman from all over the world, and plans are for a multi-million dollar complex to replace the ramshackle building that houses the tomb and the tacky souvenir stores around it.

Nearby Breslav is also undergoing small-scale renovation with the building of souvenir stalls near to the grave of Rabbi Nahman's disciple and scribe, Nathan Sternhartz.

But elsewhere, is there a future for the Jews in Ukraine? Most community leaders who spoke to the Tol said no, although religious figures were careful to emphasize that not all Jews would leave and that Jewish institutions had to continue operating for as long as Jewish communities were around.

The CFI's Koen Carlier, who married a Ukrainian woman 11 years ago and is raising three children in Vinnitsa, is also in for the long haul.

"It wasn't easy to come here and leave everything behind. Many of my family members thought I was crazy," he said.

"But God was leading me and I went to the right place at the right time. And I'm still here!"