



NCSEJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF  
Washington, D.C. June 16, 2017

## **Senate passes sanctions bill on Iran, Russia**

**By Gary Willig**

**Arutz Sheva, June 15, 2017**

<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/231112>

By a vote of 97-2, the US Senate passed a bipartisan bill to impose financial sanctions on Iran and Russia on Wednesday.

The sanctions on Russia serve as punishment for alleged interference in the 2016 presidential election. The bill imposes sanctions on a number of important sectors of the Russian economy, such as mining, metals, shipping and railways. Individuals believed to have carried out the alleged cyber-attacks on behalf of the government of Russian President Vladimir Putin were also targeted.

The sanctions on Iran target individuals involved in the Islamic Republic's ballistic missile program, as well as anyone who does business with them. In addition, the resolution applies sanctions on Iran's Revolutionary Guards as a terrorist organization and calls for the enforcement of an arms embargo against the organization.

The bill does not impose sanctions on Iran's nuclear weapons program in compliance with the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

The sanctions bill was introduced by Senator Bob Corker, R-Tenn, and was supported by all senators except Senators Bernie Sanders I-Vt., and Rand Paul, R-Ky.

The bill will now move to the House of Representatives, which is also expected to pass it. It will then have to be signed by US President Donald Trump to become law.

The American Jewish Committee praised the bill's passage.

"In the aftermath of the Iran nuclear deal, AJC has continued to raise concerns about Iran's threatening behavior with our own and other governments," AJC associate executive director for policy Jason Isaacson said in a statement.

"Iran's ballistic missile program, the regime's support for international terrorism, and its blatant and egregious human rights violations should not be ignored. This bill demonstrates to the Iranian regime that they will not be tolerated."

The bill was also praised by the Christians United for Israel organization, which called it a "good first step."

"While the Iran nuclear agreement was sold to the American people with the promise that Tehran would moderate its behavior, the Islamic Republic continues to work to consolidate power and export bloodshed," CUI said in a statement. "Iran's support for terror, ballistic missile program and human rights record demand US action."

## Ukraine's ultra-right militias are challenging the government to a showdown

By Joshua Cohen

Washington Post, June 15, 2017

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2017/06/15/ukraines-ultra-right-militias-are-challenging-the-government-to-a-showdown/>

As Ukraine's fight against Russian-supported separatists continues, Kiev faces another threat to its long-term sovereignty: powerful right-wing ultranationalist groups. These groups are not shy about using violence to achieve their goals, which are certainly at odds with the tolerant Western-oriented democracy Kiev ostensibly seeks to become.

The recent brutal stabbing of a left-wing anti-war activist named Stas Serhiyenko illustrates the threat posed by these extremists. Serhiyenko and his fellow activists believe the perpetrators belonged to the neo-Nazi group C14 (whose name comes from [a 14-word phrase](#) used by white supremacists). The attack took place on the anniversary of Hitler's birthday, and C14's leader published a [statement](#) that celebrated Serhiyenko's stabbing immediately afterward.

The attack on Serhiyenko is just the tip of the iceberg. More recently C14 [beat up](#) a socialist politician while other ultranationalist thugs stormed the [Lviv](#) and [Kiev](#) City Councils. Far-right and neo-Nazi groups have also assaulted or disrupted [art exhibitions](#), [anti-fascist demonstrations](#), a "Ukrainians Choose Peace" [event](#), [LGBT events](#), a [social center](#), [media organizations](#), [court proceedings](#) and [a Victory Day march](#) celebrating the anniversary of the end of World War II.

According to a [study](#) from activist organization Institute Respublica, the problem is not only the frequency of far-right violence, but the fact that perpetrators enjoy widespread impunity. It's not hard to understand why Kiev seems reluctant to confront these violent groups. For one thing, far-right paramilitary groups [played](#) an important role early in the war against Russian-supported separatists. Kiev also fears these violent groups could turn on the government itself — something they've [done](#) before and continue to [threaten](#) to do.

To be clear, Russian propaganda about Ukraine being overrun by Nazis or fascists is false. Far-right parties such as Svoboda or Right Sector draw little support from Ukrainians.

Even so, the threat cannot be dismissed out of hand. If authorities don't end the far right's impunity, it risks further emboldening them, argues Krasimir Yankov, a researcher with Amnesty International in Kiev. Indeed, the brazen willingness of Vita Zaverukha — a [renowned neo-Nazi](#) out on bail and [under house arrest](#) after killing two police officers — [to post pictures of herself](#) after storming a popular Kiev restaurant with 50 other nationalists demonstrates the far right's confidence in their immunity from government prosecution.

It's not too late for the government to take steps to reassert control over the rule of law. First, authorities should enact a "zero-tolerance" policy on far-right violence. President Petro Poroshenko should order key law enforcement agencies — the Interior Ministry, the National Police of Ukraine, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and the Prosecutor Generals' Office (PGO) — to make stopping far-right activity a top priority.

The legal basis for prosecuting extremist vigilantism certainly exists. The Criminal Code of Ukraine [specifically outlaws](#) violence against peaceful assemblies. The police need to start enforcing this law.

Most importantly, the government must also break any connections between law enforcement agencies and far-right organizations. The clearest example of this problem lies in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which is headed by Arsen Avakov. Avakov has a long-standing relationship with the Azov Battalion, a paramilitary group that uses the SS symbol as its insignia and which, with several others, was integrated into the army or National Guard at the beginning of the war in the East. Critics [have accused](#) Avakov of using members of the group to threaten an opposition media outlet. As at least one commentator [has pointed out](#), using the National Guard to combat ultranationalist violence is likely to prove difficult if far-right groups have become part of the Guard itself.

Avakov's Deputy Minister Vadym Troyan was a member of the neo-Nazi Patriot of Ukraine (PU) paramilitary organization, while current Ministry of Interior official Ilya Kiva – a former [member](#) of the far-right Right Sector party whose Instagram feed [is populated with images](#) of former Italian fascist leader Benito Mussolini – [has called](#) for gays “to be put to death.” And Avakov himself used the PU to promote his business and political interests while serving as a governor in eastern Ukraine, and as interior minister [formed and armed](#) the extremist Azov battalion led by Andriy Biletsky, a man nicknamed the “White Chief” who [called](#) for a crusade against “Semite-led sub-humanity.”

Such officials have no place in a government based on the rule of law; they should go. More broadly, the government should also make sure that every police officer receives human rights training focused on improving the policing and prosecution of hate crimes. Those demonstrating signs of extremist ties or sympathies should be excluded.

In one notorious incident, media captured images of swastika-tattooed thugs — who police [claimed](#) were only job applicants wanting to have “fun” — [giving](#) the Nazi salute in a police building in Kiev. This cannot be allowed to go on, and it's just as important for Ukrainian democracy to cleanse extremists from law enforcement as it is to remove corrupt officials from former president Viktor Yanukovich's regime under Ukraine's [“lustration”](#) policy.

It's still not too late for Poroshenko to end the far right's growing sense of impunity. But he must act now.

*Josh Cohen is a former U.S. Agency for International Development project officer involved in managing economic reform projects in the former Soviet Union.*

## **Telling The Truth in Lithuania**

**By Rhona Lewis**

**Jewish Press, June 12, 2017**

<http://www.jewishpress.com/indepth/interviews-and-profiles/telling-the-truth-in-lithuania/2017/06/12/>

Who is telling Lithuanians about the Jewish communities that vanished during World War II Richard Schofield, founder and Creative Director of the International Centre for Litvak Photography (IC4LP), has brought together a group of Lithuanian activists to spearhead a number of ambitious projects that are opening the minds of Lithuanians, particularly young Lithuanians, to what really happened.

Born in Crawley, in southern England, documentary filmmaker Richard Schofield has always been empathetic to the underdog. His five documentaries on everyday life in Cuba are proof of this. But since his move to Vilnius, Lithuania, in 2001, and to Kaunas (Kovno) two years later, Schofield's focus has changed. In Kaunas, he took up the editorship of an English language magazine. Although he isn't Jewish, one section in the magazine, “Jewish Vilnius,” regularly drew Schofield's attention. “I read all of the articles, but found no mention of local participation in the Holocaust,” he says.

Jews began settling in Kovno as far back as the second half of the 17th century. Forbidden from living in the city, many of them stayed in nearby Vilijampolė, where the Slabodka yeshiva, one of Europe's most prestigious, was established. Less than 80 years ago, a quarter of the population of Kaunas was Jewish, but those Jews are no longer there.

“I'm haunted by these ghosts and refuse to rest until their memory is properly respected. As a photographer who understands the power of images, it seemed like a good idea to set up the International Centre for Litvak Photography,” says Schofield. Schofield's NGO, IC4PL, has organized a range of events to awaken Lithuanians to their full history. “The Holocaust in Lithuania is a Lithuanian issue, not a strictly Jewish one. More and more people are realizing this, and realizing too that it's okay for your country to have some pretty dark moments in history,” says Schofield.

After taking a course in photojournalism in 2008, Schofield became very interested in every-day photography, particularly family photography. At first, his focus was on family life in the Soviet Union, but by 2013, his focus

had narrowed down to family (specifically Litvak) life in post-Holocaust Kaunas. Which was why, when he found a collection of family photographs in the library at The Sugihara House Museum in Kaunas in 2013, his interest was lighted.

(The museum is named for Chiune Sugihara – a Japanese diplomat who served as Vice-Consul for the Empire of Japan in Lithuania. During World War II, with the help of his Dutch counterpart, Jan Zwartendijk, he helped between 10,000 and 40,000 Jews leave the country by issuing transit visas so that they could travel to Japanese territory.)

### To Every Face a Name

The photos Schofield found had been smuggled out of the ghetto and entrusted to a non-Jewish family for safe-keeping. Presumably, no one from the family had survived the war. Schofield was determined to give every face a name. With the help of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, he scanned the 111 photos, set up a Facebook page to showcase them and commissioned a piece of music to accompany an exhibition of the photographs.

Two years later, Saule Valiunaite, an archivist working at the Jewish museum in Vilnius, realized that one of the photos appeared in a Holocaust documentary film that had been made in 1999. A little more sleuthing and they found out that the album belonged to Anushka Varsavskiene, the aunt of two of America's best-known Yiddish scholars: Ruth Wisse of Harvard and her brother David Roskies of the Jewish Theological Seminary. Of Anushka's ten siblings, only two had survived the war. One had immigrated to America decades before the Holocaust. The other, Wisse and Roskies' mother, Masha, had fled to Montreal in 1940.

### The Kaunas Requiem

Anushka, a professional singer, had included a program from an opera in which she appeared with the photos. That was the catalyst for Schofield's next project: "The Kaunas Requiem." Launched in the New Sanciai Synagogue in September 2016, on the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the Kovno ghetto, the Requiem is a long-term artistic venture that is proposed to run for a full seventy-five years. The launch, a six-day live musical performance, has segued into the second stage of the project – three years of silence that reflect the duration of Kovno ghetto's existence. The third stage, a computer-generated musical automation, will continue for the remaining 72 years.

The dilapidated synagogue, situated in the southeastern suburbs of Kaunas, was originally constructed in 1932 and converted into a bakery during the Soviet era. The IC4LP is pushing to buy the building and transform it into a center of Jewish cultural remembrance. The price? Schofield wants to pay just one euro. After all, several governments the world over have already handed buildings of Jewish significance to community-oriented NGOs.

### Fifty Schools Project

IC4LP's newest project targets the youth. "Litvaks are not being correctly taught their own history," says Schofield. His conclusion is backed by sixteen years of calling Lithuania home as well as a friendship with Dr. Christine Beresniova of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Dr. Beresniova recently authored a book titled Holocaust Education in Lithuania on how to deal with the history and legacy of mass atrocities and local collaboration during the Holocaust.

Schools teach about the medieval Kingdom of Lithuania, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the occupation by the Soviet Union, the Nazis and once again by the Soviets. But the participation of the Litvaks in the Holocaust and the murder of over 120,000 Jews (about 95% of the Jewish community) is brushed over. And Schofield is out to change that.

As part of Lithuania's centenary independence celebrations next year, throughout 2017 IC4LP will be working with 50 secondary schools around the country in an ambitious educational project. "Kids have flexible thinking,"

says Schofield. The project, "A Young Persons' Guide to Lithuania's Vanished Litvak Communities," is opening their minds to a past they don't know about.

To highlight how important working with young people in Lithuania really is, IC4LP set up a page to showcase Holocaust selfies. With the increasing popularity of Instagram (a mobile, desktop, and internet-based photo-sharing application and service) it has become fashionable for young people in Kaunas to snap them at the 32-meter high concrete Holocaust Monument at the city's Ninth Fort. The monument marks the place where over 30,000 European Jews and others were buried after being murdered by the Nazis and their local helpers. Notable among these victims was Rav Elchonon Wasserman of Baranovitch.

"We're not here to shame these young people. We know they're mostly good kids like most kids are," says Schofield. They simply haven't been given the facts, or, worse yet, they've been misinformed. Like the student who stood up and told Schofield that they had been taught that the Jews were killed in the Holocaust because they were communists. "We are opening doors for the students. Telling them to look at the world they didn't know about and asking them to think about it."

Does it work?

Certainly. Schofield cites the example of a student who stood up and admitted that his grandfather was Jewish. The popular boy had never spoken about it before, but in this comfortable setting, he was able to share the information.

So far, Schofield has visited six schools (500 students) in Kaunas, Naujoji Vilnia, Birštonas, Kėdainiai, Jieznas and Vilnius. The visit, which is conducted in English, presents as an opportunity for the students to practice English-language speaking skills, something which makes it attractive to the school administration. The session begins with introductions.

"The kids have never done this before, so I explain to them that this is a life-skill that they have to learn," says Schofield. The session is divided into two parts. "In the first part, I talk to students about my own journey of self-discovery," says Schofield. In 1994, working in a media center in Brighton, Schofield walked down a street named Jew Street daily. "Those were my pre-Jewish days and the street name didn't register on my radar," Schofield says.

Years later, with a wider view on life, Schofield is encouraging Lithuanian youth to similarly broaden their viewpoints. At the end of this session, there is a break. "I tell the students that whoever isn't interested doesn't need to come back. We are left with the students who are genuinely interested," he says. "I get the impression that the history teachers simply don't have the courage to teach the truth and that they breathe a sigh of relief when we do it for them."

"I'm not a qualified educator," says Schofield. But that's okay, because he isn't there to simply pass on the facts; he's here to motivate the kids to think for themselves. "Kids in Lithuania today are taught in a lecture-style traditional setting that is becoming fast outdated. We encourage student-centered instruction that encourages the students to participate," says Schofield.

With that in mind, the classes, with one student appointed to hold everything together, are encouraged to write an e-book about Lithuania's forgotten history, heritage and culture. Every school will write a chapter. Topics will cover a wide spectrum: history, interviews, poetry... everything is encouraged. The innovative project will begin to break Lithuania's dominant Holocaust taboo and encourage the next generation of the country's decision makers to start dealing with this difficult subject.

"I'm not on a big mission," says Schofield. "In fact, I've always tried to avoid the Holocaust. But no one teaches the children that about 120,000 people were murdered. We need to put this in context."

Not on a big mission? On behalf of the Jewish people, we thank you, Richard.

\* \* \* \* \*

Anti-Semitism in Lithuania?

“Most of the problem lies with the state,” says Schofield when I ask him about anti-Semitism in Lithuania. Lithuania, invaded by the Soviet Union in 1940 and by the Nazis in 1941, attempts to minimize the local collaboration with Nazis by equalizing Communist with Nazi crimes and white-washing the collaboration with the Nazis. The result? Perpetrators of the Holocaust are venerated for their nationalistic actions.

In the capital city Vilnius, a council vote to rename a street named for Kazys Škirpa to the “Street of Righteous Among the Nations” has been deferred. Škirpa authored the Lithuanian equivalent of Mein Kampf and started an organization to remove Lithuania’s Jewish population.

A plaque on the facade of the Library of the Academy of Sciences honors notorious Holocaust collaborator Jonas Noreika. In Vilnius, he is honored with an inscription in stone high on the capital’s central boulevard.

In June 1941, Hitler invaded the Soviet Union and Soviet forces fled Kaunas. Lithuanian anti-Communists began to attack Jews, blaming them for the Soviet repressions. The government established a concentration camp at the Seventh Fort, where 4,000 to 5,000 Jews were murdered. Today, the fort has been privatized. Amusement activities and children’s birthday parties are being held here.

Certainly, a society displays its community values by the heroes it chooses to promote.

### **Navalny, Hundreds Of Others Detained At Russian Anticorruption Protests RFE/RL, June 12, 2017**

<https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-navalny-anticorruption-protests-kremlin-detentions-moscow/28542055.html>

MOSCOW -- A Russian court has sentenced opposition leader Aleksei Navalny to 30 days in jail for staging unsanctioned rallies at which an estimated 1,150 anticorruption protesters were detained.

The judge at the Simonovsky district court ruled early on June 13 that Navalny, who was detained outside his home in an outlying Moscow neighborhood on June 12 before the rallies started, repeatedly violated the law against unauthorized public gatherings.

Navalny supporters were detained by Russian riot police at rallies in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Vladivostok, Blagoveshchensk, and Kazan on June 12.

Rights watchdog Amnesty International said the crackdown "demonstrates the authorities' utter contempt for fundamental human rights," while the United States called on Russia to release the demonstrators, saying their detention was "an affront to core democratic values."

The European Union said the detention of peaceful demonstrators "threatens the fundamental freedoms of expression."

Police detained more than 650 people at the June 12 protest on Moscow's central Tverskaya Street, according to OVD-Info, which monitors police actions at protests.

Reports said about 5,000 people participated in the Moscow protest.

Some 3,500 people attended the protest in St. Petersburg, and 500 were detained, Russia's Interior Ministry said, although AP reported that up to 10,000 people attended.

Activists in St. Petersburg immediately began collecting money for a legal-defense fund, while the United States condemned the crackdown and called on Moscow to release the demonstrators.

Opposition politician Ilya Yashin and Maria Baronova, an activist with former oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky's Open Russia movement, were among those detained in Moscow.

Dozens of people were detained at some of the more than 200 similar demonstrations held in cities and towns nationwide on the Russia Day holiday. There were no reports of violence or injuries.

"The Russian authorities' stranglehold on freedom of expression grows tighter by the day," Denis Krivosheyev, deputy director for Europe and Central Asia at Amnesty International, said in a statement.

"Peaceful protest is a fundamental human right, not a privilege to be bestowed or refused on a whim. We are calling for all peaceful protesters swept up in these arrests to be immediately freed, and the right to hold peaceful rallies fully and genuinely respected."

White House spokesman Sean Spicer told a news briefing in Washington that "the United States strongly condemns the detention of hundreds of peaceful protesters throughout Russia.... Detaining peaceful protesters, human rights observers, and journalists is an affront to core democratic values."

EU foreign-policy chief Federica Mogherini said the Russian authorities' move "threatens the fundamental freedoms of expression, association and assembly in the Russian Federation."

"These fundamental rights are enshrined in the Russian constitution and we expect them to be protected, not eroded," Mogherini spokeswoman Maja Kocijancic said in a statement.

"We expect the Russian authorities to abide fully by the international commitments Russia has made, including in the Council of Europe and the OSCE, to uphold these rights, and release without delay peaceful demonstrators or those people who intended to exercise their fundamental rights."

Opposition activist Yashin posted on Facebook that when he asked the police why he was being detained, an officer told him, "Russia Day must be celebrated normally."

In Moscow, there was a heavy police presence in the city center after Navalny announced plans to protest on Tverskaya Street instead of a less central site that was proposed by the city government.

Police linked arms and batons and herded protesters together in an area far from the Kremlin as demonstrators periodically chanted slogans like, "Shame, shame," "Putin is a thief," and "Freedom for Navalny."

The Reuters news agency reported that pepper spray was used during the Moscow protest, but that it was not immediately clear who sprayed the gas. Interfax reported that one demonstrator had been detained for purportedly spraying a police officer with pepper spray.

A helicopter was flying overhead throughout the demonstration.

Sources at Navalny's Anticorruption Foundation (FBK) reported that electricity and Internet access at their offices were cut off before the demonstration started. Several FBK activists, including director Roman Rubanov, were detained at the Moscow protest.

The Moscow demonstration had been planned to be held at a city-approved location outside the center. But on June 11 Navalny urged supporters to march instead on the downtown thoroughfare of Tverskaya Street, near the Kremlin.

Navalny said authorities had pressured suppliers not to provide audio, video, or other equipment for the demonstration.

Moscow authorities said before the demonstration that citizens would be allowed to "stroll" on Tverskaya, which has been turned into a pedestrian zone for Russia Day, but that anyone carrying political signs or shouting slogans would be subject to arrest.

Because the protest was taking place together with the Russia Day celebrations, it was difficult to estimate the number of demonstrators.

Some of the demonstrators were seen holding toy rubber ducks, a reference to an allegation in one of Navalny's videos that Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev controls a lavish vacation house with a pond and duck house.

"I'm completely sick of putting up with these authorities," 70-year-old Anatoly Kyurin told RFE/RL in Moscow. "I'd have been ashamed of myself if I didn't come."

In St. Petersburg, demonstrators inflated a large duck, which police quickly pulled down.

Navalny was hoping to build on momentum gained by a national anticorruption protest in March, which drew unexpectedly large crowds and ended with more than 1,000 people detained in Moscow alone.

Navalny was detained amid those demonstrations -- the biggest antigovernment rallies since a wave of protests that he helped lead in 2011-12 -- and served 15 days of administrative detention in jail.

According to the OVD-Info website, demonstrators and demonstration organizers were detained in several cities, including Nizhny Tagil, Lipetsk, Tula, Tambov, and Sochi. Thirty-six protesters were reportedly detained in the far western exclave of Kaliningrad.

In Russia's Far East, which is up to seven hours ahead of Moscow time, police detained several people participating in the anticorruption protests. At least four people were detained in Blagoveshchensk, including the organizer of the unauthorized protest there.

Local media reports said riot police scuffled with demonstrators and detained at least 20 people as a few hundred people protested in Vladivostok, which is seven hours ahead of Moscow.

Video footage showed helmeted officers with batons dragging two men or boys from a crowd of people while protesters shouted "Shame! Shame!"

"I'm here because of the corruption that is reaching huge proportions in Russia," said Aleksei Borisenko, a protester in Vladivostok who said he narrowly escaped police trying to detain him. "It's a dead end for the country's development."

"We have been silent, but we won't be anymore. We will make the authorities answer!" a woman at the Vladivostok protest shouted.

Sizable crowds turned out in the Siberian city of Novosibirsk and in Barnaul, capital of the Altai Krai region bordering Kazakhstan, and protests were held in other cities -- from Kazan in Tatarstan on the Volga River to the Pacific coast.

An unauthorized protest was also planned for St. Petersburg. Andrei Pivovarov, an organizer in the northern capital, posted on Facebook on June 12 that police had come to his residence and accused him of "organizing mass disorder." After he refused to open his door, police took up positions outside, Pivovarov said.

In Moscow, Tverskaya Street was turned into a pedestrian zone and the authorities have planned a celebration focusing on Russia's military glory. Photographs on social media showed the street blocked with sandbags, antitank emplacements, and vintage military equipment.

Navalny announced the location change less than 24 hours before the protest, accusing the authorities of pressuring providers of audio, video, and stage equipment not to work with demonstration organizers.

On June 12, an anonymous pro-Kremlin Twitter account posted a video purporting to show an empty stage and sound equipment at the originally approved protest site.

Russian state media reported that 1,000 people were protesting at the officially approved site and that police and National Guard troops were "providing security."

In his June 11 video, Navalny called on supporters to march peacefully and not to allow themselves to be caught up in provocations.

After Navalny announced the switch, the Moscow prosecutor's office warned that "any attempts to hold an unauthorized event on Tverskaya Street" would be illegal and "law enforcement organs will be forced to take all necessary measures" to maintain order.

In a separate statement issued hours before the planned march, Moscow police warned that "any provocative actions by protesters will be considered a threat to public order and immediately halted."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the issue was a matter for city authorities, adding that it was "important to avoid any provocations or illegal actions."

Vladimir Chernikov, head of the city's regional security and anticorruption department, told Ekho Moskvyy radio that citizens would be allowed to stroll on Tverskaya but would not be allowed to carry signs or shout slogans.

"If someone appears with a political sign or shouting slogans, then the chances are 100 percent he will be a potential client of the police," Chernikov said. "If a citizen is strolling peacefully and is demonstrating a spirit of solidarity with the majority of people who come out to mark Russia Day, everything will be calm and fine."

The demonstrations were being held to protest what Navalny says is a system of corruption and cronyism that President Vladimir Putin presides over.

Navalny, 41, is trying to get on the ballot for the presidential election next March in which Putin -- who has held power as president or prime minister since 1999 -- is widely expected to seek and secure a fourth term as president.

Navalny has been convicted three times in financial-crimes trials that he calls Kremlin-orchestrated retribution for his activism, though he has been handed suspended sentences rather than actual prison time.

Russian authorities have suggested that he could be barred from the presidential ballot due to his criminal record. But his backers say the rules are unclear, and Russian officials have not stated clearly whether he will be allowed to run.

A day before the planned June 12 protests, a video produced by Navalny and his supporters accusing Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev of corruption was published on two government websites.

The video, which played a central role in galvanizing protesters for the March 26 demonstrations, was published briefly on the websites of the regional prosecutor's office in the central city of Yaroslavl and the St. Petersburg regional administration.

Yaroslavl prosecutors said they suspected their website was hacked.

*With reporting by Tom Balmforth in Moscow, Current Time TV, Dozhd TV, Meduza, AP, and RBK*

## Russian Lawmakers Approve Plan to Relocate 1.6 Million Muscovites

By Ivan Nechepurenko

New York Times, June 14, 2017

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/14/world/europe/russia-moscow-resettlement-plan.html>

MOSCOW — At least 16 protesters were detained in front of the Russian Parliament building on Wednesday as legislators approved a plan that could uproot up to 1.6 million Muscovites from their aging Soviet-era residences and move them into newly built apartments.

The resettlement plan, which has been hotly contested, has been one of the issues feeding protests this spring in the capital. Opponents of the plan also participated in demonstrations against corruption and political stagnation on Monday.

Yulia Galyamina, the leader of the resettlement protests, was one of more than 850 people detained by the Moscow police on Monday at a large anti-Kremlin rally on the city's main Tverskaya thoroughfare. Ms. Galyamina said she had been beaten by the police officers who detained her and that she had been hospitalized for a concussion.

Nationwide, 1,721 people were detained on Monday, according to OVD-Info, an independent organization that tracks arrests, during one of the most sweeping anti-government demonstrations since President Vladimir V. Putin came to power.

Continue reading the main story

Many of the predominantly young protesters were released, but some were fined or sentenced to jail for 30 days for participating in an illegal gathering. Aleksei A. Navalny, Russia's main opposition leader, switched the protest location at the last minute to the central downtown avenue from a different venue approved by the city. Mr. Navalny was sentenced to 30 days in jail.

In a video message recorded and distributed on social media after the sentence, Mr. Navalny said he would spend the month reading, playing backgammon and sleeping, but he urged supporters to continue fighting corruption.

On Wednesday, a court in the Orlov region of central Russia refused to release Mr. Navalny's brother, Oleg, on early parole, according to the Interfax news agency. Oleg Navalny was convicted in 2014 of fraud and sentenced to three and a half years in prison. Aleksei Navalny said earlier that his brother's conviction had been politically motivated to turn him into a hostage.

All of those detained outside Parliament on Wednesday while protesting the resettlement law were released, according to OVD-Info.

The government said it planned to spend up to \$61 billion over 15 years on the resettlement, which most opponents consider an infringement of property rights and an effort to justify large-scale public expenditures that can be siphoned by corrupt officials.

Some residents of the 4,500 buildings targeted for demolition fear that the quality of the new housing will be inferior and that mass resettlement will ruin local communities. Supporters of the plan say that the affected buildings are shabby prefabricated apartment blocks, meant as temporary shelter in Soviet times.

On May 14, thousands of Muscovites protested the plan, and dozens picketed the lower house of Parliament, the Duma, every time it was debated, ultimately pushing the government to change some aspects of the law.

Residents of the affected buildings have a voice on whether they want them razed. Under the law, a building can be demolished only if two-thirds of its residents approve. Also, residents have been given the right to claim full financial compensation instead of a new apartment. But those concessions did not mollify some protesters, who have little trust that the government will honor its promises.

Parliament generally does the government's bidding. The vote on the resettlement in the Duma was 399 in favor, with two opposed and one abstention. The rest of the 447 deputies were absent.

The upper house of Parliament, the Federation Council, must approve the version of the plan passed Wednesday by the Duma, and Mr. Putin must sign it. Both steps were considered formalities.

### **Polish prime minister under fire for defending refugee ban during Auschwitz speech**

**JTA, June 15, 2017**

<http://www.jta.org/2017/06/15/news-opinion/world/polish-pm-under-fire-for-defense-of-rejecting-refugees-during-auschwitz-speech>

Poland's prime minister is under fire for a speech at the Auschwitz Museum that appeared to defend her government's refusal to accept refugees.

Beata Szydlo spoke Wednesday at ceremonies marking the 77th anniversary of the first deportation of prisoners to the Nazi concentration camp.

"Auschwitz is a great lesson in today's turbulent time that everything must be done to protect the security and life of one's citizens," Szydlo said.

The quote was published on the official Twitter account of the ruling Law and Justice Party. It was removed after a few hours.

The comment spurred outrage throughout Poland, with many believing it to be a defense of the nationalist party government's decision not to accept any refugees as part of a European Union plan to resettle migrants from Africa and the Middle East.

"Such words in such a place should never fall from the lips of the Polish prime minister," the president of the European Council and former Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said in a tweet.

Polish writer Jacek Dehnel, who in 2011 was honored by the Israeli Embassy and the Polish Ministry of Culture for organizing a regular volunteer cleanup of the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw, wrote in a post on Facebook that "there should be no politics over the graves," referring to the refugee crisis.

Dehnel noted wryly that Nazi SS head Heinrich Himmler "for the security of the citizens created a concentration camp."

Opposition centrist leader Katarzyna Lubnauer said Szydlo had "exploited the cruelty of Auschwitz to make Poles afraid of refugees," the BBC reported.

Government spokesman Rafal Bochenek said that bad intentions can be read into every statement, and the prime minister did not mean anything sinister in her statements at Auschwitz.

On Tuesday, the European Commission began legal proceedings against Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic for failing to play their part in easing the migration crisis.

### **Rex Tillerson retreats from commitment to fill anti-Semitism envoy position**

**By Ron Kampeas**

**JTA, June 14, 2017**

<http://www.jta.org/2017/06/14/news-opinion/politics/rex-tillerson-retreats-from-commitment-to-fill-anti-semitism-envoy-position>

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson retreated from his department's commitment to fill the post of envoy to combat anti-Semitism, saying the effort may be more effective without one.

“One of the questions I’ve asked is, if we’re really going to affect these areas, these special areas, don’t we have to affect it through the delivery on mission at every level at every country?” Tillerson said in testimony Wednesday to the foreign operations subcommittee of the U.S. House of Representatives Appropriations Committee. “And by having a special envoy, one of my experiences is, mission then says, ‘oh, we’ve got somebody else that does,’ and then they stop doing it.”

Since Congress established the position with a 2004 law, the role of the envoy has been to train career State Department officers and diplomats in identifying and combating anti-Semitism and to encourage embassies and bureaus to more closely monitor anti-Semitism. The envoy has not functioned as a stand-alone entity but rather is part of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, and supervises about five career State Department staffers.

European Jewish community officials have said that having an envoy has delivered a message to their governments that the United States is focused on anti-Semitism.

At the subcommittee hearing, Rep. Grace Meng, D-N.Y., asked Tillerson for a timeline for the hire. Earlier this year there were reports that the Trump administration, eyeing massive budget cuts to the State Department, planned to eliminate the role. National Jewish groups and Congress members expressed outrage, and in April a State Department spokesman told JTA that the department did not in fact plan to eliminate the position and was reviewing candidates to fill it.

Lawmakers have noted that because the role was created by statute, the Trump administration cannot eliminate the post. Tillerson said he would seek to persuade Congress to cut the position if he deems it necessary.

“Those that are mandated by statute, we will be back to talk with you about those as to whether we think it’s good to have it structured that way or whether we really think we can be effective on those issues in a different way,” he said at the hearing.

Rep. Nita Lowey, D-N.Y., the ranking Democrat on the foreign operations subcommittee, was appalled by the possibility of the position being eliminated.

“It is outrageous and offensive that Secretary Tillerson would even suggest appointing a Special Envoy for Monitoring and Combating Anti-Semitism is unnecessary, particularly given that his State Department committed to filling the post back in April,” she said in an email to JTA. “As reports of hate crimes against Jews continue to rise in the United States and around the world, it is essential that Secretary Tillerson fill the Special Envoy position immediately.”

Bipartisan legislation under consideration would enhance the position to ambassador level.

“It is essential that the administration fill the position now more than ever, and we appreciate Congress to make sure the administration hears this message loud and clear,” William Daroff, the Washington director of Jewish Federations of North America, told JTA in an interview.

## **Anti-Semitism lives on in Belarus, despite small number of Jews**

**By Alexander Burakov**

**Deutsche Welle, June 13, 2017**

<http://www.dw.com/en/anti-semitism-lives-on-in-belarus-despite-small-number-of-jews/a-39243007>

A higher court in Belarus has confirmed the verdict in the case of three young neo-Nazis from the city of Mogilev. In November 2016, the skinheads smeared black paint on a monument for Holocaust victims. Investigators worked on their case for three months. In February, they were convicted of hooliganism. Appeals in their case took another three months. But now, the oldest of the group, a 19-year-old student, has been

sentenced to two years in prison. His 18-year-old friend will serve six months behind bars, while the third member of the group was given six months on probation on account of being a minor.

### Criticism of the authorities

Anti-Semitism remains an issue in Mogilev, according to the coordinator of the Viasna human rights center, Alexei Koltshin. The center regularly produces a "Nazi graffiti map" showing all the places where Nazi symbols or racist slogans have been discovered. Koltshin says it's unfortunate that many people in Belarus continue to tolerate such graffiti on the walls of buildings. Human rights activist Alexei Kaplan agrees with him. He is the chairman of the Directorate of the Jewish Community in Mogilev. The monument in the middle of the city was covered in black paint at night, he says, but it went unreported for the whole of the following day. Only after activists posted photos of the desecration on social media and journalists began asking questions did the authorities get active.

### New educational approach needed

Boris Buchel is also a human rights activist. He has Jewish roots, and says that the case of the three skinheads highlights a need to examine homegrown anti-Semitism. According to Buchel, one of the young men was accused in court of not knowing the difference between nationalism, National Socialism and fascism. He also said that at any time in the court, there were at least two dozen other skinheads there to support the accused, yet, as a group, they seemed to know nothing about the victims of the Nazi regime. The accused seemed surprised to learn that some 6 million Jews were murdered by the Nazis during World War II, including one in three Belarusian citizens, he said.

Buchel says there needs to be a new way to reach these young people and educate them about the past. But he adds there is a tendency to shy away from such topics in Belarusian schools. "If teachers were to start speaking openly about the rise of National Socialism in Germany in the 1930s, you would as a matter of course also have to address violations against freedom of speech and civil rights in Belarus," said Buchel.

### Anti-Semitism without Jews

The skinheads of Mogilev make no bones about the fact that they targeted the memorial stone in the town center. Semen Glasstein, an elder in the Jewish community "Arche," said the monument was erected in 2008 at the entrance to the former ghetto. The handprints imprinted on it are meant to represent the souls of the people who perished in the ghetto. As many as 12,000 prisoners were shot. As Glasstein says, the current act of anti-Semitism has occurred in a city that is home to barely any Jews anymore. Of the city's 370,000 residents, only around 3,000 are Jewish, he said. Alexei Kaplan says Jews living in Belarus do not generally feel threatened. It's a totally different situation today than it was during the Soviet era, he said. At the same time, Kaplan notes that Jewish institutions in Mogilev tend not to place identifying signs on their exteriors, out of fear of possible attacks.

Alexei Kaplan, a Jewish community leader, believes that more vigilance is necessary

Historian Igor Pushkin, a resident of Mogilev, says the small number of Jews living in Belarus today reflects the tragedies of history. A century ago, Jews made up 52 percent of Mogilev's population. Over five centuries, Jews and Belarusians had been able to live in harmony. Many Jews became well-known writers, artists, and dramatists. Today, Pushkin says, that's all been forgotten. "That is what Belarus has lost forever," he said.

### **Jewish film and culture celebrated at Moscow festival**

**By Juri Rescheto**

**Deutsche Welle, June 14, 2017**

<http://www.dw.com/en/jewish-film-and-culture-celebrated-at-moscow-festival/a-39251531>

Moscow Jewish Film Festival organizer Egor Odinzov addressed the press this week in Moscow's grand old cinema, the Oktyabr: "Do not just write that the Jews had, of all things, served alcohol on Russia Day in vain!"

The audience laughs. The best Jewish jokes come from Jewish people themselves, the presenter added mischievously. He actually only wanted to thank the sponsor.

For a week, Jewish jokes, Jewish customs, Jewish culture, Israel's politics, but also topics such as the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel, will enrich the Moscow public. The aim of the festival is to show how special Jewish cinema can be.

"Is not all cinema a bit Jewish?" joked jury chairman Pavel Lungin at the opening. "The Jews invented Hollywood. They came from all over the world, including from Russia. And now Jewish cinema is coming back to Moscow."

The festival comprises 50 screenings in eight days, including feature films, short films and documentaries from Israel, Russia, Europe and the US, plus special events and discussions. The packed program is dedicated to one thing above all: faith in humanity and the belief that it can be improved.

Festival opens with a German romantic comedy

Opening the festival is the off-beat German farce, "Die Blumen von gestern" (Yesterday's flowers), in which a good-humored German and a Jewish-French woman come together in a clash of cultures. Actor Lars Eidinge portrays a Holocaust scholar and grandson of a Holocaust perpetrator who meets a French student (Adèle Haene) who is a Holocaust victim's granddaughter.

The result is a humorous love story reminiscent of Roberto Benigni's "Life is Beautiful," in which director Chris Kraus pokes fun at the phoniness of German memorial culture.

The reception in Russia of this difficult piece of German heritage is of particular interest to German actor Lars Eidinge, who attended the festival opening in Moscow.

"As we all know, Jewish people have an excellent sense of humor, which can be found in their films," Eidinge told DW. "But this is something special for me as a German who has come to Russia to present a film that explores this."

Dispute over Eidinge film in Russia

Eidinge, however, is also particularly interested in the current dispute over his new film "Matilda," in which he plays the last Russian tsar, Nicholas II. The film by Russian director Alexei Uchitel allegedly insults religious feelings and should therefore be banned, the Russian prosecutor's office has determined.

"The Flowers of Yesterday" has had it easier in Russia, with no one complaining that the film could injure the religious feelings of Jewish people - at least not at the Moscow Jewish Film Festival. "The Flowers of Yesterday" and its lead actor, Eidinge, were cheered at Cinema Oktyabr.

The Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia, which organizes the festival, is currently undergoing a cultural revival. It opened a Jewish Museum in 2012 in Moscow that is one of the best in the country and a huge crowd puller.

Meanwhile, the Moscow Jewish Film Festival aims to "create a symbiosis between the love of Jewish culture and love for film art," the organizers promise on their website. They will surely succeed, and will inspire a predominantly young Moscow audience.

The Moscow Jewish Film Festival runs from June 12 through June 20.

## Hamas, Hezbollah 'not terrorists,' Russian envoy to Israel says

By Sue Surkes

Times of Israel, June 14, 2017

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/hamas-hezbollah-not-terrorists-russian-envoy-to-israel-says/>

Russia's ambassador to Israel has said that his country does not consider the Islamist groups Hamas and Hezbollah to be terrorist organizations, as they have not carried out attacks on Russian territory or against Russian interests abroad.

In a June 9 [interview](#) with the Israeli Russian-language Channel 9 TV, Alexander Shein said, "We do not consider these organizations to be terrorist," according to a translation by the Middle East Media Research Institute media watchdog, which [posted and translated the clip](#).

Hamas, based in the Gaza Strip, is dedicated to the eradication of the Jewish state and has fought three major rounds of conflict with Israel since seizing control of the enclave from Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah group in 2007.

Hezbollah, based in Lebanon, is a Shiite organization backed by Iran. It last fought a full-blown war with Israel in 2006. Earlier this month, the US Justice Department said it [arrested two men](#) tied to the organization who had been plotting attacks against Americans and Israelis in the US and Panama.

Both groups are considered by Israel, the US and much of the West to be terror organizations.

Shein said both were "radical organizations, which sometimes adhere to extremist political views," but explained that Russian law defined terrorist organizations as those who "intentionally conduct acts of terror in Russian territory, or against Russian interests abroad – installations, embassies, offices, or citizens."

Over 1 million Russian-speakers from the former Soviet Union live in Israel and Russian President Vladimir Putin has noted Israel's position as an outpost of Russian culture given the large number of Russian speakers living there.

"Russia and Israel have developed a special relationship primarily because 1.5 million Israeli citizens come from the former Soviet Union, they speak the Russian language, are the bearers of Russian culture, Russian mentality," Putin said last year.

Shein rejected a comparison of the groups to the Islamic State jihadist group and said Hamas rocket fire on Israeli cities during the 2014 Gaza war, was not terror "at all," despite also affecting Russians.

"You equate ISIS [with Hamas and Hizbullah], but we think this is wrong," he said. He said he condemned the rocket fire — "of course" — and was then asked, "That's all you can say? There are bad terrorists and good terrorists?"

"No," replied Shein, "we do not consider them to be terrorists at all."

Russia and Hezbollah are both fighting alongside Syria's President Bashar Assad in the ongoing Syrian civil war. Hamas enjoys support from Iran, which is also a key ally of Russia in the Syrian fighting.

## **UN Says Ukraine Conflict Escalating Amid Cease-Fire Violations**

RFE/RL, June 13, 2017

<https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia-un-report-conflict-escalating-cess-fire-violations/28545098.html>

A United Nations report says hostilities have been escalating in eastern Ukraine in recent months because parties to the armed conflict there have "repeatedly failed to implement cease-fire agreements."

The report by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on June 13 says cease-fire violations on both Ukrainian armed forces and Russia-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine have allowed "hostilities to escalate and claim more lives as the conflict moved into its fourth year."

The report says that since the conflict began in mid-April of 2014, at least 10,090 people have been killed -- included 2,777 civilians. It said at least 23,966 people have been injured and more than 1.6 million people displaced by the fighting.

The report says the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine recorded 36 conflict-related civilian deaths and 157 injuries from February 16 to May 15 -- a 48 percent increase on the previous three months.

It also says people continue to be abducted, unlawfully deprived of freedom, and held incommunicado -- particularly in districts controlled by Russia-backed separatists.

It also says torture has persisted, with new incidents recorded on both sides of the contact line.

The OHCHR also expresses concern that, after three years, none of the senior officials responsible for deaths during antigovernment protests in Kyiv and violence in Odesa have been brought to account.

## **Trump calls Romanian Holocaust remembrance a 'vital cause'**

JTA, June 13, 2017 2:21pm

<http://www.jta.org/2017/06/13/news-opinion/united-states/trump-calls-romanian-holocaust-remembrance-a-vital-cause>

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump saluted the Holocaust remembrance efforts in Romania as a "vital cause." Trump made the remarks during a joint news conference Friday in Washington, D.C., with Romanian President Klaus Iohannis.

"Romanians have made many contributions to the United States, and to the world," Trump said. "Very notable among them was Nobel Prize laureate Elie Wiesel, who was born in Romania and, sadly, passed away almost one year ago. And I understand that earlier this week, the American Jewish Committee presented President Iohannis with its very prestigious Light Unto the Nations Award for his work to further Holocaust remembrance and education in Romania. I join the AJC in saluting your leadership in that vital cause."

In January, Trump drew sharp criticism from an array of Jewish organizations after neglecting to mention Jews in his International Holocaust Remembrance Day statement. He has since more robustly embraced the Jewish meaning of the Holocaust, particularly in a speech in the Capitol in April at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's Days of Remembrance commemoration.

## **The Czech town trying to keep its Jewish past buried**

By Rob Cameron

BBC News, June 13, 2017

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39973195>

Prostejov, Czech Republic -- Plans to rehabilitate a pre-war Jewish cemetery in the Czech town of Prostejov have run into fierce local opposition. The foundation behind the plan says it has been torpedoed by deliberate misinformation and anti-Semitism.

Tomas Jelinek stands over a broken headstone and scrapes at patches of cement obscuring the name. Sweating heavily in spite of the chilly afternoon, he brushes away the last patches and squints at the inscription.

"Herlitzka," he decides. "Bernhard Herlitzka. Died... April 1879. I can't make out the date."

There's not much more to go on. The broken tombstone lies face up in the grass, with perhaps a dozen or so more beside it, some whole, others in fragments. The inscriptions are a mixture of German and Hebrew. "Beloved daughter..." begins one. "Here lies..." reads another. The rest is lost.

"We can find the story of a person," says Tomas Jelinek, formerly head of Prague's Jewish community.

"We have the files of the Chevra Kadisha - the Jewish burial society, where we can find the position of the graves, the text that was on the gravestone and so on."

"We usually try to contact the relatives. We sometimes find direct heirs," he adds. "They're surprised, touched. Some of them are really excited."

So far Mr Jelinek has recovered 34 headstones in and around Prostejov. He has just loaded this one and a dozen more into a trailer at a nearby village, hence the sweating.

"The whole cellar was made from them. They weren't hard to find," the villager tells me. He says he'd rather not give his name.

"I'm just returning what should never have been taken."

A town 'renowned for anti-Semitism'

Every few months, says Mr Jelinek, someone from Prostejov will call him to say they've found a stone with Hebrew writing propping up a chicken coop or lying at the bottom of the garden.

One family discovered their entire back yard was paved with marble tombstones. Unfortunately, they have been reluctant to part with them.

"Prostejov had a very bad history in the relationship to the Jews. It was famous for its anti-Semitism in the 19th Century," he tells me.

"And it's still in the population. You can hear it on the street, and you can also see that they just reinvent things which people thought would disappear for ever after the Second World War."

For centuries Prostejov was an important centre of Jewish life in Moravia, producing a number of influential rabbis. In 1942, that history came to an abrupt end, when the town's Jews were deported by the Nazis.

The following year, Prostejov's ethnic German mayor bought the town's old Jewish cemetery from the Reich authorities. It contained the graves of 1,924 people; the last burial had been in 1908. The tombstones were marked with crosses; high quality marble was sold; lesser quality softer stone was handed out free to locals.

After the war, the site stayed empty for years. People remember playing there as children. They told their parents they were going to play "na zidaku" - down at the Jews' place. Some remember unearthing bones.

Anger, lies and opposition

Today, it is a small park, bordered by houses and a school. But 74 years after its desecration, plans to rehabilitate it have caused uproar.

"I think the mayor pretty much summed it up when she said the rights of the living must take precedence over the rights of the dead," deputy mayor Zdenek Fiser told me at Prostejov's splendid town hall.

He was referring to one of many stormy public meetings held in the town on a proposal put forward by the US foundation Mr Jelinek now represents - Kolel Damesek Eliezer. The foundation wants to demarcate the old cemetery with a knee-high hedge and place some of the recovered tombstones there.

But after a petition signed by 3,000 locals the town council quickly withdrew its support. A visualisation was attached to the petition, falsely showing the park surrounded by a brick wall.

"The thing is, there are only a few descendants of people of Jewish origin left here in Prostejov," Mr Fiser told me, explaining the overwhelming opposition to the plan, which would involve rerouting several paths leading to the school.

"Most of the people who signed the petition live opposite the park or are parents of kids who go to the school. So most people who signed the petition against it actually live there."

He also dismisses Tomas Jelinek's claims that Prostejov was a hotbed of anti-Semitism.

"You're asking me about anti-Semitic articles in the local press, but we didn't write those articles, did we? As you well know, journalists need controversy, a 'cause celebre', to make their articles interesting," Mr Fiser explained.

"If they'd just written about plans to turn a local park into a place of remembrance, no-one would be interested. But put 'anti-Semitism' in the headline, and all of a sudden everyone's up in arms."

For now, Bernhard Herlitzka's tombstone is being stored with the rest at Prostejov's New Jewish Cemetery, a short drive out of town. It is a provisional arrangement, until the foundation and the town council can agree what to do with the old one.

Judging by the atmosphere in Prostejov, it could be some time.

Broken gravestones - then and now

There's a post-script to my visit. I'm given a guided tour by a local historian who's researched Prostejov's Jewish community. She takes me down a little alley between a cluster of buildings.

"That was the main synagogue. That was the reform one. And that was the yeshiva," she says. The synagogues are now churches; one Catholic, one Protestant. The yeshiva is now where you go to pay your parking fines.

Finally, we end up at the Old Jewish Cemetery - the park that the Jewish community still regards as a burial ground. Shouting teenagers rush past us in groups. Mothers push prams. A small black monument faces the school.

She takes me a few metres' further to a second monument, a plexiglass replica of the tombstone of Prostejov's most famous rabbi, Zvi Horowitz.

"Oh," she exclaims.

The plexiglass has been snapped in two. Half of it is lying in the grass. I make sympathetic noises to hide her evident embarrassment. It has clearly just happened.

I take a photo and show it to deputy mayor Mr Fiser. I ask him who he thinks could have been responsible.

"I don't know," he replies, peering at my phone. "Perhaps it was the wind?"

## **Warsaw mayor may have to return her home to Jews**

**Associated Press, June 12, 2017**

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4974915,00.html>

Warsaw's city mayor and other officials will be summoned this month to testify before a special state commission investigating questionable restitution of private property that was seized under communism, the deputy justice minister said Monday. The committee may eventually decide that the mayor must return her home to the Jews it was taken from during WWII.

The commission was formed recently in response to growing outrage at the returns, which concern highly valuable plots and buildings, in Warsaw and some other cities, that were seized by the state from private owners—Poles, Jews and others—under a 1945 communist-era decree.

Democratic Poland opened the possibility of the return of property, but in many cases the process has gone wrong, the rightful heirs have been tricked out of their rights and the tenants evicted by the new owners, sometimes with nowhere to go.

The commission led by Deputy Justice Minister Patryk Jaki will review cases. It has the power to take wrong decisions to court to seek their reversal or compensation for the rightful inheritors. It is beginning with restitutions in Warsaw.

Jaki said Monday that the first hearings will be June 28-30 and will concern a building in Twarda street from which a renowned high school was evicted.

Warsaw Mayor Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz refused to appear and had questioned the commission's authority. The panel wanted to know to what extent she was aware of the irregularities that had been described in the media.

A house returned to her family was among those investigated.

Some other city officials have been put under arrest on suspicion of helping in the irregular restitutions and will be brought before the panel.

## **Anti-Semitic messages found at historic Romanian synagogue**

**AFP, June 13, 2017**

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/anti-semitic-messages-found-at-historic-romanian-synagogue/>

Members of Romania's Jewish community filed a complaint with police Monday after anti-Semitic graffiti and Holocaust-denying messages were discovered on the facade of a synagogue in the of Cluj-Napoca.

"It is the desecration of a historical monument, we notified the police, the gendarmes and the town hall," said Robert Schwartz, president of the Jewish community of Cluj.

He said the wall of the building had been defaced with graffiti of a Star of David crossed out with an 'X' and a message written in English "The Holocaust never happened."

"I hope that anti-Semitism will not re-emerge. Here in Cluj the inhabitants are known for their tolerance," Schwartz said, adding that "this has not happened for at least 10 years" in the city.

Built in the Moorish style at the end of the 19th century, the synagogue was dedicated to the memory of the more than 130,000 Jews deported from Northern Transylvania to Auschwitz in May 1944, including about 17,000 Jews from Cluj and surrounding towns.

Today the Jewish community has 400 people in Cluj and several thousand in the rest of Romania — both due to the Holocaust and the departure of many Jews to Israel under the communist regime of Nicolae Ceausescu.

## **Putin Emphasizes The Positive In Marathon Question-And-Answer Show**

**By Robert Coalson**

**RFE/RL, June 15, 2017**

<https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-set-for-annual-question-answer-marathon-/28553707.html>

In his last scheduled televised question-and-answer session with the public before Russia's next presidential election in March 2018, President Vladimir Putin sought to convey confidence and competence.

Putin responded to a wide range of questions in the four-hour Direct Line program on June 15, which was heavily stage-managed to depict him and his government in the best possible light.

He sought to deflect blame when faced with queries, complaints, and pleas from Russians desperate for higher wages, better health care, or life a little further from a massive garbage dump on Moscow's outskirts, acknowledging problems but saying that Russia's economy was on the mend and that Western countries had similar troubles.

He blamed the dire state of U.S-Russian relations on what he called "Russophobia" in some circles in the United States and took aim at political opponents at home, suggesting that anticorruption activist Aleksei Navalny organized nationwide protests earlier this week to advance his own interests and not those of the people.

Although the lavish, high-tech production was meticulously managed, Russian state television raised eyebrows while Putin was speaking during the first hour of the broadcast by flashing written versions of extra questions and comments being sent by text message, including some about whether Putin tolerates corruption, when he plans to retire, and whether three terms as president are enough for him.

Putin avoided answering that last question during Direct Line, steering clear of confirming the widespread assumption that he will run for a new six-year Kremlin term in March, at age 65. Asked toward the end of the marathon whether he will "leave anyone after him" when he vacates the presidency, he responded: "First of all, I am still working. And secondly, I want to say that this should be determined by the voters -- the Russian people."

Another pointed message flashed on the screen denouncing the entire Direct Line program as a "circus" and asking Putin whether he really thought people take it seriously.

Most of the questions that Putin did address focused on domestic economic and social issues such as low wages in the state sector, demographic problems, and improving health care.

Asked about relations with the United States, which have reached a nadir following a U.S. intelligence assessment that Putin ordered an effort to influence the 2016 U.S. presidential election, Putin blamed what he called "Russophobia" in the United States on domestic U.S. politics.

Putin compared former U.S. FBI Director James Comey, who recently testified to Congress that he felt President Donald Trump tried to influence his work on the investigation into alleged Russian interference to Edward Snowden, a former U.S. security consultant who leaked sensitive U.S. documents before obtaining temporary political asylum in Russia.

Putin said Comey's leaking of details of his conversations with Trump was "strange" and added jokingly that Russia was ready to provide Comey with political asylum as well.

At the same time, Putin said Moscow was ready to cooperate with the United States on issues such as preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, combating international terrorism, and resolving the conflicts in eastern Ukraine and Syria.

Some of his remarks about U.S. ties came in answer to a question posted on YouTube by a man in the U.S. state of Arizona who said he supported Putin and asked what people like him can do to combat anti-Russian

sentiment in the United States. Putin thanked the questioner for his support, but said there was no advice he could give in response to the question.

Putin also denied that Moscow has interfered in the domestic affairs of neighboring Ukraine, despite Moscow's seizure of the Crimean Peninsula and overwhelming evidence that it has provided massive military, economic, and political support to separatists in the conflict in eastern Ukraine that has left more than 10,000 dead since it began in April 2014.

Asked about the country's economy, Putin said that the recession Russia entered in 2014, the year world oil prices collapsed and Western countries imposed sanctions on Moscow over its interference in Ukraine, "has been overcome."

"The economy has moved into a period of growth," he said, citing data going back to the fourth quarter of 2016.

One questioner asked how long Russia could expect to live under the sanctions introduced by the United States, the European Union and other countries.

Putin responded by claiming the sanctions were a bid by Western countries to prevent Russia from playing a competitive political and economic role in the world.

"Russia's history shows that our country has always been under sanctions," Putin said. "Every time Russia begins growing stronger, sanctions are introduced. It has always been like that."

"If there was no Crimea or other problems, they would still create some pretext to contain Russia," Putin said.

Putin said the sanctions -- and countersanctions Moscow imposed in response, which consist largely of trade restrictions -- also have benefits for Russia and were helping the country develop its intellectual potential and reduce its reliance on energy exports.

An audience member representing the agricultural sector thanked Putin for the "antisanctions" and expressed the hope that they would remain in place. Putin responded that when Western countries drop their sanctions, Russia will cancel its countermeasures.

Putin was also asked about his family. He responded that he guards their privacy so that they can have "normal" lives, but he said both his daughters live in Moscow and are not involved in politics. He said he has two grandsons, one of which was born "recently."

He was not asked to confirm or deny widespread Russian media that one of his daughters is Katerina Tikhonova, an acrobatic dancer and the director of two state-funded initiatives at Moscow State University.

When a journalist from the BBC asked Putin about a national wave of anticorruption protests held on June 12 at which security forces detained more than 1,500 people, Putin quipped that he knew the journalist would ask that question "because in a certain way this is propaganda for the people you are supporting."

Putin then criticized the organizers of the protests of "aggravating the situation for public-relations purposes."

Putin was not asked about the allegations put forth in an investigation by opposition leader and June 12 protest organizer Navalny that Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev has abused his office to gain control of massive wealth both in Russia and abroad.

When one young man in the audience asked a pointed question about official corruption, Putin asked back whether the question was the man's own or whether someone had given it to him.

"Life gave it to me," the young man responded.

Putin was also not asked about media reports of human rights abuses in the North Caucasus region of Chechnya, particularly allegations that gay men are being systematically rounded up, abused, and, in some cases, killed.

Asked whether he would be willing to speak with anyone in the political opposition, Putin said he was ready to speak with anyone who genuinely has Russia's best interests in mind. He accused his opponents of using the real problems Russians face to promote their own political interests.

Among the questions, the program featured optimistic vignettes showing upbeat scenes such as locals dancing on the shores of Lake Baikal, a father in Ufa seeing his newborn son for the first time, construction at a new airport in the city of Rostov-on-Don, and a nearly completed nuclear-powered icebreaker being built in St. Petersburg.

Together with a televised press conference and an address to parliament, Direct Line is one of three high-profile annual events that Putin uses to burnish his image in Russia, send signals abroad, and offer hints about future plans.

Putin has held the event annually since 2001, except for 2004 and 2012. Since 2013, it has been held in April, but in March the Kremlin announced it was being postponed this year because of Putin's "tight schedule."

Russian citizens have used a special website and social media to submit 1.8 million questions and messages for the event, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists on June 14.

Kremlin critics say one of the main purposes of the Direct Line program is to perpetuate the idea that Putin, who has been in power as president or prime minister since 1999, stands above ineffectual or corrupt officials and is the only person who can ultimately be counted on to address the problems of ordinary Russians.

At one point in the June 15 session, a woman from southern Russia showed Putin her recently flood-damaged home and said that local officials had refused to help her repair it unless she paid money.

Putin expressed consternation and said he would ask the Prosecutor-General's Office to look into how the federal funds allocated for flood relief had been spent. He ended the exchange by saying: "I hope [Stavropol Krai Governor] Vladimir Vladimirovich [Vladimirov] will be at your house by the end of the day."

Putin has been particularly visible in recent weeks. Earlier this month, he gave an exclusive interview to U.S. journalist Megyn Kelly of NBC.

On June 12, the U.S. network Showtime began showing a four-hour collection of interviews with Putin by Oscar-winning filmmaker Oliver Stone. Russia's state Channel One television was scheduled to air the programs on June 19-22.

*With reporting by RIA Novosti and Interfax*