



NCSEJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF  
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**Firebomb hurled at Ukrainian synagogue**  
**JTA, July 4, 2017**

<http://www.jta.org/2017/07/04/news-opinion/world/firebomb-hurled-at-ukrainian-synagogue>

Unidentified individuals hurled a firebomb at a synagogue in Lviv and, in a separate incident, wrote anti-Semitic slogans on another Jewish community building in the western Ukrainian city.

The incident involving a firebomb occurred on June 30 but was discovered only Monday, according to the Strana news website. The perpetrators may have aimed the firebomb at a window of the synagogue on Mikhovsky Street but missed it, hitting the building facade, the director of the Chesed-Arieh Jewish group, Ada Dianova, **told** Strana.

The contents of the firebomb fell to the foot of the building and burned there, resulting in no damage to the interior, she added. No one was hurt in the incident.

The anti-Semitic slogans painted on a former building of the community on Sholem Aleichem Street included the words "Down with Jewish power" and "Jews, remember July 1," an apparent reference to a pogrom that took place in Lviv on that date in 1941.

In recent days, Jewish groups in Ukraine and abroad protested the municipality's sponsoring of a celebration of Roman Shukhevych, a collaborator with the Nazis whose troops perpetrated the July 1 pogroms.

In Ukraine, many people admire Shukhevych because he fought Russian domination, alongside the Germans, before his UPA militia group turned also against the Germans.

Shortly before the celebration, titled Shukhevychfest and held on the nationalist's 110th birthday, city officials in Lviv published online security camera footage of vandals painting Nazi symbols on a Holocaust memorial in a bid to identify them.

**Stakes are high for Trump's meeting with Putin. Here's what to expect.**

**By Brian Bennett**

**Los Angeles Times, July 4, 2017**

<http://www.latimes.com/politics/la-fg-trump-putin-20170704-story.html>

The White House confirmed only on Tuesday that the most highly anticipated meeting of President Trump's tenure — with Russia's President Vladimir Putin — will take place Friday in Germany. But among advisors mindful of the many pitfalls, both domestic and global, preparations have been intense for some time.

The meeting of the two presidents, whose mutual admiration during the 2016 American presidential campaign stoked allegations of collusion that are now at the center of a criminal investigation in Washington, is certain to be a highlight of a summit of the world's 20 wealthiest countries starting Thursday in Hamburg.

With issues of North Korea's continued nuclear threats, Syria, Islamic State and global terrorism on the agenda — and Trump's political future on leaders' minds — the eyes of the world are trained toward the two men's meeting on the sidelines of the Group of 20 summit.

"I worry a little about this meeting because Putin is going to walk into the room very well prepared, and I'm not certain Trump will come into that room prepared," said Steven Pifer, a former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine and career diplomat who now is a senior foreign policy fellow at the Brookings Institution think tank in Washington.

Leading up to his first face-to-face meeting with Putin, U.S. intelligence officials have prepared a detailed psychological profile of the long-serving Russian strongman, a former KGB officer who spent decades recruiting spies for the Soviet Union and mastered the art of bending people to his will.

The profile, according to two U.S. officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the preparations, is part of a thick binder prepared for Trump. The president often doesn't read the usual briefing books and relies on in-person briefings, the officials said, so aides also have written a list of tweet-length sentences that summarize the main points Trump could bring up with Putin.

Yet senior aides have been mute on exactly what the two men will discuss. "There's no specific agenda," Trump's national security advisor, H.R. McMaster, told reporters. "It's really going to be whatever the president wants to talk about."

Trump should expect a strong backlash if he doesn't tell Putin to keep out of future U.S. elections, warned the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, Rep. Adam B. Schiff (D-Burbank), in a telephone interview.

"If he doesn't have the courage to raise the issue, Putin will conclude he can walk over our affairs and the president won't object," Schiff said. "That would be a big mistake."

Advisors including Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Defense Secretary James N. Mattis are trying to carefully script Trump's interaction to head off any attempt by Putin to manipulate the encounter to his advantage, the U.S. officials said.

Putin is known to prepare assiduously for such high-stakes encounters with foreign counterparts, developing a command of policy objectives and honing a strategy to extract concessions, one U.S. official said.

"Putin was and is a KGB officer, and KGB officers are specialists at one thing: seduction, how to persuade others to do what you want," said John Herbst, a foreign policy expert at the Atlantic Council and a U.S. ambassador to Ukraine under President George W. Bush.

"The odds are the atmosphere will be good because our president seems to love Putin, even though it is bad policy," Herbst said.

Herbst, who as a career foreign service officer helped prepare presidents and secretaries of State before such high-stakes interactions, suggested that Putin will try to establish a personal connection with Trump, who is widely seen among his global counterparts as particularly susceptible to flattery. And Putin will want to convince Trump that Russia is not a danger and NATO is "not as important" as Trump's advisors say, Herbst said.

The White House said Tuesday that Trump and Putin will have a "normal bilateral meeting" Friday afternoon during the G-20 summit. That implies a longer, more formal meeting than the conversation he will have with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Friday, as well as other "pull aside" meetings with the leaders of Mexico, Japan and several other countries that day.

Trump is also scheduled to meet with China's President Xi Jinping at the gathering and is sure to keep pressing Xi to use China's considerable influence over North Korea to get Pyongyang to cease its nuclear program. Trump could well raise North Korea with Putin too amid evidence that Russian firms have been selling arms and oil to the rogue state.

The session will be the first formal conversation between Putin and a U.S. president in nearly two years, since the Obama administration moved to isolate Moscow after Russia's annexation of Crimea and its interference elsewhere in Ukraine.

It comes amid tension over Moscow's efforts to influence the 2016 presidential election and its support for the government of Syrian President Bashar Assad. A special counsel is directing an FBI investigation into whether people associated with Trump's campaign colluded with Russia to help Trump by hurting Hillary Clinton's chances of being elected.

Besides preparing Trump for the Putin dialogue, administration officials are seeking to bolster his leverage with Putin going into the talks. The president's schedule calls for him to speak on Thursday in Warsaw and to meet with leaders of other Eastern European countries in an effort to highlight the U.S. commitment to stand with them to counter Russia's efforts to regain influence there.

Trump will deliver his speech Thursday in front of a monument to the 1944 Warsaw Uprising against Nazi occupation. During the uprising, the Soviet army did not aid the Poles and many blamed Moscow for standing by as the Nazis crushed the rebellion and emptied the city.

Trump's initial stop in Poland also suggests at least implicitly the continued significance of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, contrary to his denigration of the alliance as "obsolete" while campaigning. Russian and European leaders will be watching closely to see whether he underscores the U.S. commitment to protect other NATO states under Article 5 of the alliance's founding charter.

Defense Secretary Mattis called the U.S. obligation "ironclad" during a speech in Germany last week. But Trump's failure to endorse it during a NATO conference in Brussels in May deeply unsettled allies, though he subsequently voiced support at a news conference in Washington.

Trump's show of solidarity with Eastern Europe going into the meeting with Putin could complicate his stated desire to usher in a new era of good U.S.-Russian relations.

Putin is expected to look for ways to further undermine NATO and exploit divisions within, such as the tension between Trump and Merkel evident at the NATO summit and after Trump's disavowal of the Paris accord on climate change. She told reporters in Germany that the G-20 meetings would be "thorny."

Russian officials have also made overtures to the Trump administration about regaining two properties previously used by Russian intelligence services: a mansion on Long Island, N.Y., and a large house in Maryland. The Obama administration demanded the Russian government vacate both properties in December and kicked out 35 alleged spies in retaliation for Russian interference in the U.S. election.

Audiences in the U.S. and Russia will be watching closely to read any signs that one president got the better of the other, said Pifer, the former ambassador.

Seemingly small things could make a huge difference.

When Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Ambassador to the U.S. Sergey Kislyak met with Trump in the Oval Office in May, only a photographer from the Russian state news agency Tass was allowed to take pictures. To the chagrin of the White House, which expected the photos would not be shared, the images were released and showed Trump and the two Russians smiling and apparently laughing together — a day after Trump had fired FBI Director James B. Comey out of frustration about the Russia investigation.

"My fear would be Putin comes out and says something that on the face of it looks like a pretty good deal," Pifer said, "but when you look at the pieces, there are some hidden downsides that don't appear until after the president has said yes."

### **For Russia, Trump-Putin Meeting is a Sure Winner**

**By Neil MacFarquhar**

**New York Times, July 6, 2017**

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/06/world/europe/donald-trump-vladimir-putin-g20.html>

MOSCOW — With the long-awaited first meeting between President Vladimir V. Putin and President Trump finally in sight, the Kremlin is hoping at a minimum to inject some clarity into a relationship so far marred by contradictions, anxiety, scattered recriminations and, on occasion, astonishing bonhomie.

“As for the policy of the U.S. administration, we have to understand first what it will involve,” Sergei A. Ryabkov, the deputy foreign minister, said last week in Moscow at a conference of foreign policy experts from both countries. “This is what we are actually trying to do, in an utmost active manner, right now.”

Whatever the outcome of the encounter on Friday — which will be on the sidelines of the Group of 20 summit meeting of world leaders in Hamburg, Germany, but is expected to overshadow it — the Kremlin is betting that Mr. Putin can stage-manage the event so that he comes out looking like the stronger party.

If nothing much emerges from the meeting, analysts said, the Kremlin can repeat the standard Russian line that Mr. Trump is weak, hamstrung by domestic politics.

But if Mr. Trump agrees to work with Mr. Putin despite a list of Russian transgressions beginning with the annexation of Crimea and ending with its interference in the 2016 presidential election, he will also look weak while Mr. Putin can claim that he reconstructed the relationship.

“It is a win-win situation for Putin,” said Andrei V. Kolesnikov, a political analyst at the Carnegie Moscow Center.

Mr. Putin nevertheless does face some hurdles. First and foremost, it is unclear what he has to offer in exchange for American cooperation — other than collaboration in Syria and great sympathy for Mr. Trump’s plight at the hands of what Russia refers to as the American “deep state,” including the news media.

There is some speculation that Mr. Trump may be glibly walking into a trap where he will be played by the Russian leader. On the American side, Mr. Trump’s national security adviser, Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster, said last week that there was “no specific agenda — it’s really going to be whatever the president wants to talk about.”

In contrast, Mr. Putin will surely show up with finely honed talking points aimed at forging closer cooperation and reaffirming Russia’s old Soviet role as the equal of the United States in umpiring global affairs.

“Putin will try to exploit that advantage,” said Vladimir Frolov, a prominent columnist who writes frequently on foreign policy. Mr. Putin has made it his mission to curb what he considers the dangerous impulse of all American presidents, including Mr. Trump, to interfere globally without consulting other powers.

Some in the United States, and in the West in general, view Mr. Putin with new distrust given the sense that Russia has abandoned cooperation in favor of actively working to undermine Western alliances and open, democratic systems.

Yet, Mr. Trump has shown little stomach for condemning Russia, and both presidents will most likely want to avoid as much as possible the topic of Russian meddling in last year’s election.

The Kremlin is aware that Trump critics will be watching for further signs that the American leader is soft on Russia. “Trump is being accused of cooperating with Russia, so if he makes any concessions to Moscow, these accusations will gain strength,” said Aleksei Makarkin, deputy head of the Center for Political Technologies, a Moscow think tank.

Mr. Putin has repeatedly denied any meddling, and Russia habitually blames endemic “Russophobia” for preventing Mr. Trump from being himself. That is how Moscow explains any American action seen as hostile, ranging from more aggressive military attacks in Syria to congressional efforts to buttress economic sanctions first prompted by the Ukraine crisis.

The Kremlin has watched, chagrined, as the Trump administration has rolled back various positions stated during the campaign — his questioning of the viability of NATO, for example, or his expressions of sympathy for the Russian position on Crimea.

“The Kremlin is astonished that the president cannot behave like a real president, like ours, so what can they do in this situation?” Mr. Kolesnikov asked.

Commentary in the official Russian news media suggested that Moscow was baffled by the lack of a confirmed agenda, while various senior officials and the Kremlin press service have listed possible talking points that cover virtually every major international issue.

Syria, where there has already been a measure of uneasy military coordination, is of “particular importance,” according to the Kremlin list.

Asked last month about possible outcomes from meeting Mr. Trump, Mr. Putin said, “On the Syrian problem and the Middle East in general, it is clear to all that no progress will be made without joint constructive work.”

Cooperation from Washington on Russia’s plan to create “deconfliction zones” inside Syria would go a long way toward reviving Russia’s role as a key power in the Middle East. While both leaders have expressed an interest in working together on counterterrorism, the United States still wants to see President Bashar al-Assad step down.

Another main item on the Russian agenda will be what it lumps together as “strategic stability,” including nuclear weapons. Russia wants the United States to remove the new missile defense shield based in Romania and Poland. In return, analysts said, Mr. Putin might respond to accusations about a new Russian missile that the United States says violates the historic 1987 treaty on limiting intermediate-range nuclear weapons.

Economic sanctions applied after the Ukraine crisis could come up, since Russia is struggling to revive its economy in the face of low oil prices and an uneven investment climate. In terms of Ukraine itself, Dmitri S. Peskov, Mr. Putin’s spokesman, said on Wednesday that the meeting would be too short to discuss Ukraine with the needed detail.

On Tuesday, Russia and China announced a joint effort to address the North Korea crisis, with the first step an agreement by the United States and South Korea to freeze military maneuvers in exchange for Pyongyang’s freezing its nuclear missile program. Mr. Putin is deemed likely to seek Mr. Trump’s endorsement of the deal.

But that poses problems for the American military, potentially limiting its freedom of movement in the Pacific and possibly eroding the American-South Korean deterrent.

Russia has also been publicly grinding its teeth over the loss of its two American diplomatic dachas, a penalty imposed by the Obama administration for Russia’s election meddling.

In the absence of any clearly achievable goal, Moscow has been playing down expectations, with the state news media saying just an agreement to meet again would be good enough. Yuri Ushakov, the presidential foreign policy adviser, told reporters on Tuesday that “first contact is very important.”

Aside from four telephone calls between the two presidents since Mr. Trump’s election victory, there have been minimal talks between the two governments.

Mr. Trump infamously met with Sergey V. Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, in the Oval Office. After Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson visited the Kremlin in April, the two sides set up a working group to try to iron out some differences. In June, after just one meeting, Russia suspended the work because of new economic sanctions.

Ultimately, a lot will ride on the chemistry between the two men, and much like any elements mingling in the same test tube for the first time, the reaction is unpredictable.

In the best case for the Kremlin, the two will get along swimmingly: Mr. Trump will be as admiring of Mr. Putin in the flesh as he was on the campaign trail, and he will emerge to treat Russia as his new best friend.

There is also the outside chance of a train wreck, with one of the prickly men somehow insulting the other and pushing already bad relations off the rails, hardening differences and prompting Twitter salvos. (Mr. Putin doesn’t tweet but his bots do.)

The Kremlin is betting on the positive, hoping that personal chemistry can slice through the problems. “They hope to sway the policy deliberations with direct contact,” said Mr. Frolov, the columnist.

## Trump, in Poland, Asks if West Has 'Will to Survive'

By Glenn Thrush and Julie Hirschfield Davis

New York Times, July 6, 2017

[https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/06/world/europe/donald-trump-poland-speech.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&clickSource=story-heading&module=first-column-region&region=top-news&WT.nav=top-news&\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/06/world/europe/donald-trump-poland-speech.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&clickSource=story-heading&module=first-column-region&region=top-news&WT.nav=top-news&_r=0)

WARSAW — President Trump said on Thursday that Western civilization was at risk of decline, bringing a message about “radical Islamic terrorism” and “the creep of government bureaucracy” to a European capital he views as hospitable to his nationalist message.

Mr. Trump, who broke with tradition by attacking American leaders and his country’s intelligence services while abroad, delivered his message in a speech to a friendly Polish crowd before a two-day summit meeting of [Group of 20](#) leaders in Hamburg, [Germany](#).

Hours later, he flew from Warsaw to Hamburg, where he held a low-key private meeting with the German chancellor, Angela Merkel. She perhaps best symbolizes the deep skepticism shared by Western leaders toward Mr. Trump’s persona and his policies, ranging from addressing climate change to confronting [Russia](#).

In what may be a foretaste of the scene during the gathering, 12,000 protesters vowing to disrupt the [G-20](#) summit meeting converged for a demonstration in Hamburg on Thursday night called “[Welcome to Hell](#).” There were reports that dozens of police officers had sustained minor injuries as a small group of protesters attacked them with bottles, poles and iron bars in clashes that lasted until midnight. Up to 100,000 protesters were expected in the coming days.

Mr. Trump roused his Polish hosts by recounting the country’s history of resistance to invaders, including Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. But he said nothing about the right-wing government’s crackdown on judges and journalists and its refusal to accept more migrants, policies that have upset European Union leaders. He instead praised [Poland](#) as a defender of liberty in the face of existential threats.

“The fundamental question of our time is whether the West has the will to survive,” he said. “Do we have the confidence in our values to defend them at any cost? Do we have enough respect for our citizens to protect our borders? Do we have the desire and the courage to preserve our civilization in the face of those who would subvert and destroy it?”

Pressed at a news conference earlier in the day about [Russian interference in the American election](#), he said that “nobody really knows” if other countries were involved. He blamed President Barack Obama for not responding publicly after learning about reports of possible election meddling last summer.

Mr. Trump — who is under pressure to confront President [Vladimir V. Putin](#) of Russia during their first face-to-face meeting in Hamburg on Friday over Mr. Putin’s attempts to sway the election — delivered a mixed message on Russia.

The president made his sharpest criticism of Moscow since taking office, urging Russia to “cease its destabilizing activities in Ukraine and elsewhere and its support for hostile regimes, including Syria and Iran,” and asserting that it must “instead join the community of responsible nations in our fight against common enemies and in defense of civilization itself.”

And Mr. Trump moved to reassure Poland and other allies fretful about Russia’s aggression, making a full-throated endorsement of the collective defense principle that undergirds NATO, something he was [unwilling to do](#) during his first trip to Europe as president in May.

“The United States has demonstrated not merely with words but with its actions that we stand firmly behind Article 5, the mutual defense commitment,” Mr. Trump said.

But he also said he was not entirely convinced that Russia was solely responsible for interference in the 2016 election, breaking with [American intelligence agencies](#), which have agreed that the efforts emanated from Moscow and were directed by Mr. Putin.

“I think it was Russia, and it could have been other people in other countries,” Mr. Trump said when asked for a yes-or-no answer to the question about Russian meddling. “Nobody really knows for sure.”

To back up his message about uncertainty, he recalled the intelligence failures that preceded President George W. Bush’s decision to invade Iraq in 2003. “Everybody was 100 percent sure that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction,” Mr. Trump said. “They were wrong, and it led to a mess.”

He also had harsh words for North Korea after its [recent test of a new long-range missile](#), but he refused to say what [steps he would take to punish it](#).

“We’ll see what happens — I don’t like to talk about what we have planned — but I have some pretty severe things that we’re thinking about,” Mr. Trump said at the news conference, standing next to his Polish counterpart, Andrzej Duda. “They are behaving in a very, very serious manner, and something will have to be done about it.”

After meeting with Ms. Merkel in Hamburg on Thursday evening, Mr. Trump dined with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan and President Moon Jae-in of South Korea, discussing a response to the latest threats from North Korea.

Asked by a reporter whether he had given up on President Xi Jinping of China, whom he has repeatedly criticized for failing to apply enough pressure on North Korea to de-escalate, the president said, “Never give up.” He and Mr. Xi will meet separately in Hamburg on Friday or Saturday.

The trip to Warsaw gave Mr. Trump an opportunity to showcase his willingness to defend Poland against aggression in the face of threats from Russia, and his commitment to helping American workers. He praised Mr. Duda for moving forward with the purchase of the Patriot missile defense system from the United States, which he called “the best anywhere in the world.”

Mr. Trump emerged from a Marriott hotel in Warsaw on Thursday a little after 9:15 a.m., and his sprawling motorcade rode along the Vistula River to a back entrance to the presidential palace. He was greeted by Mr. Duda and disappeared for closed-door meetings after a session with photographers, emerging only for the news conference.

Unlike in Hamburg, there were no major protests in Warsaw, although there were signs of dissent.

Michael Schudrich, Poland’s chief rabbi, and other Jewish leaders criticized Mr. Trump’s decision not to visit a monument to the 1943 ghetto uprising.

Every American president and vice president who has visited Warsaw since the fall of Communism in 1989 has visited the monument. “We deeply regret that President [Donald Trump](#), though speaking in public barely a mile away from the monument, chose to break with that laudable tradition, alongside so many other ones,” the statement read. “We trust that this slight does not reflect the attitudes and feelings of the American people.”

Hours after the Jewish leaders issued their rebuke, the White House sent word that Ivanka Trump, the president’s daughter and senior adviser, who is an observant Jew, had visited the ghetto site and laid a wreath at the monument there, visiting the Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews.

In a statement distributed to reporters, Ms. Trump said her visit was “a deeply moving experience.”

“It was a privilege to pay my respects and remember, with gratitude, those who tenaciously fought against all odds,” Ms. Trump said in a statement that did not mention Jews or the Holocaust. “The monument, erected on the rubble of the Warsaw Ghetto, symbolizes the fight for freedom. I am profoundly grateful for those who fought and all those who continue to fight today.”

Mr. Trump's speech in Krasinski Square, which memorializes the Polish people's resistance to tyranny, was well received, as was his message likening the fight against the Islamic State to Poland's resistance of German invasion and occupation during [World War II](#).

"We must stand united against these shared enemies to strip them of their territory, their funding, their networks and any form of ideological support," Mr. Trump said. "While we will always welcome new citizens who share our values and love our people, our borders will always be closed to terrorism and extremism."

The pro-Duda crowd at Krasinski Square, where many waved American and Polish flags, serenaded reporters from both countries with periodic chants of "fake news."

That came about an hour after Mr. Trump tag-teamed with Mr. Duda in a transnational denunciation of journalists who write negative stories about them.

The American president criticized CNN and defended what he suggested was [a lighthearted tweet](#) of a video depicting him [body-slammng a figure](#) whose head had been replaced by the CNN logo.

What made Mr. Trump's sermon against the mainstream news media different this time was that Mr. Duda's center-right party, Law and Justice, proposed restricting the news media's access to Parliament last year. The government backed down after street protests.

"They have been fake news for a long time," Mr. Trump said of CNN when asked about the tweet, adding that the network had been covering him in "a dishonest way."

"We don't want fake news," he continued, as Mr. Duda nodded vigorously in agreement.

Mr. Duda, responding to an American reporter's question about his own actions toward the news media, accused Polish journalists of intentionally distorting his record and failing to include his positions in articles critical of his government.

After chastising CNN — a go-to move on both sides of the Atlantic — Mr. Trump went after NBC, his former employer. "NBC is nearly as bad, despite the fact that I made them a lot of money on 'The Apprentice,'" he said.

Krasinski Square is considerably smaller than Zamkowy Square, outside the Royal Palace, where Mr. Obama spoke in 2014. Worried that crowds would not show up on Thursday — Mr. Trump is less popular in Poland's liberal capital than in the conservative countryside — the authorities chose a smaller, though still symbolically rich, site.

## **Israel accepts Hungary's clarification over PM's praise for Nazi-allied WWII leader**

**By Stuart Winer**

**The Times of Israel, July 2, 2017**

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-accepts-hungarys-clarification-over-pms-praise-for-nazi-allied-wwii-leader/>

Israel on Sunday indicated that all was forgiven after receiving an official explanation concerning Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's praise for Miklos Horthy, the World War II-era leader who allied Hungary with Nazi Germany leading to the deportation and murder of half a million Jews.

Orbán's statements, made during a speech he gave on June 21 in which he described Horthy and other Hungarian leaders as "exceptional statesmen" for leading the country after the traumatic disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after World War I, raised the ire of Israeli officials and Jewish groups.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is scheduled to visit Hungary for a meeting with Orbán on July 18 and the comments had created tension ahead of the visit.

Orbán's comments were criticized by Andras Heiszler, president of the Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities, who said the Horthy era's anti-Semitism "cannot be put as an example for future generations."

The World Jewish Congress also slammed the sentiments, with WJC President Ronald Lauder saying his organization would always condemn “deplorable actions” like Horthy’s and reject any attempts to excuse or justify them.

Israeli Ambassador Yossi Armani had been in contact with Hungarian officials since the speech, Haaretz reported Sunday, seeking an official clarification over the praise of Horthy who, after allying his country with the Nazi regime, then facilitated the deportation of over half a million Jews to death camps where almost all of them were killed.

Having received no response, Armani aired his grievances on a Hungarian national television station last week. On Saturday, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto spoke by phone with Armani and then published a statement detailing the content of the conversation.

Szijjarto said he assured the Israeli envoy that the Hungarian government has “zero tolerance for anti-Semitism.” Concerning Horthy, the foreign minister said that he had “positive periods but also very negative periods.”

“We need to respect historical facts that clearly point to that,” Szijjarto said.

Referring to Horthy’s failure to protect the Jewish population during the war and his passing of anti-Semitic laws, the foreign minister said “all those are historical transgressions the seriousness of which can’t be diminished.”

In response, Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Emmanuel Nahshon said the explanation was sufficient.

“Israel believes the things that the Hungarian foreign minister said to the Israeli ambassador in Budapest are an important clarification concerning the recognition of the crimes by Horthy against the Jews of Hungary,” Nahshon said. “We will always remember the 564,500 of our brothers and sisters from the Hungarian Jewish community who were murdered in the Shoah [Holocaust].”

Opposition MK Ksenia Svetlova of the Zionist Union, nonetheless, called on Netanyahu to cancel his trip to Hungary, Haaretz reported.

“Just like you dared to cancel your meeting with the German foreign minister after he met with Breaking the Silence, I demand that you cancel your visit to Hungary and your meeting with Viktor Orban, who expressed admiration for the dark past of his country during the Shoah, and not for the first time,” she demanded.

Netanyahu canceled an April 25 meeting with the visiting German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel after the latter refused to cancel a sit-down with Breaking the Silence, an NGO that collects anonymous testimonies from IDF soldiers on alleged human rights abuses in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Gabriel also met with B’Tselem, another left-wing NGO group that deals with human rights issues and campaigns against Israeli settlement building. Relations between Israel and Germany were calmed when German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier arrived for a visit in May.

## **Russia’s future looks bleak without political and economic reform**

**By Kenneth Rogoff**

**The Guardian, July 5, 2017**

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/jul/05/there-is-little-reason-to-be-cheerful-about-russias-growth-prospects>

When the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, meets his US counterpart, Donald Trump, at this week’s G20 summit in Hamburg, he will not be doing so from a position of economic strength. To be sure, despite the steep drop in oil prices that began three years ago, Russia has managed to escape a deep financial crisis. But while the economy is enjoying a modest rebound after two years of deep recession, the future no longer seems as

promising as its leadership thought just five years ago. Barring serious economic and political reform, that bodes ill for Putin's ability to realise his strategic ambitions for Russia.

Back in 2012, when Putin appeared onstage with the Nobel laureate economist Paul Krugman at a Moscow bank conference, Russia's 1998 economic crisis seemed a distant memory. With oil prices well over \$100 a barrel, the government's coffers were bursting. So Putin could proudly contrast Russia's government budget surplus with the large recession-driven deficits across the west. He surely delighted in having Russian audiences hear Krugman's view that western democracies had come up badly short in handling the global financial crisis.

In a different session, Russian academic economist Sergei Guriev (who later had to flee the country) argued there was no hope for diversification of Russia's resource-based economy as long as institutions such as courts were so weak. Too many key decisions rested with one man. Speaking in the same session, I emphasised that without fundamental reforms, a sharp drop in global energy prices would create profound problems.

Inevitably, that drop came, with prices plummeting from \$119 in February 2012 (for Brent crude oil in Europe) to \$27 in 2016. Even the current level (under \$50 in early July 2017), is less than half the 2011-2012 peak. For a country that depends on oil and natural gas for the lion's share of export revenue, the price collapse has been a massive blow rippling through the economy.

The fact Russia has avoided a financial crisis is remarkable – and largely due to the efforts of the Central Bank of Russia. Indeed, Elvira Nabiullina, the CBR's governor, has twice won international central banker of the year awards.

But the burden of adjustment has largely fallen on consumers, owing to a roughly 50% drop in the ruble's value relative to the dollar; real wages and consumption both fell sharply. As one Russian put it to me, he used to take 1,000 rubles to the supermarket and come home with two bags; now he comes home with one.

The shock to the real economy has been severe, with Russia suffering a decline in output in 2015 and 2016 comparable to what the United States experienced during its 2008-2009 financial crisis, with the contraction in GDP totalling about 4%. Many firms went bankrupt, and in 2016 the International Monetary Fund estimated that almost 10% of all bank loans were non-performing (a figure that surely understates the severity of the situation).

In many cases, banks chose to re-lend funds rather than take losses on to their books or force politically connected firms into bankruptcy. At the same time, though, the CBR moved aggressively to force smaller banks to raise capital and write down bad loans (something European policymakers have taken forever to do). And, in the face of intense lobbying by powerful oligarchs, the CBR kept interest rates up to tame inflation, which had reached more than 15% but has since fallen to close to 4%.

Of course, western sanctions – particularly restrictions on banks – have exacerbated the situation. But the media tend to over-emphasise this aspect of Russia's economic woes. All countries that rely heavily on energy exports have suffered, especially those, like Russia, that have failed to diversify their economies.

In a western democracy, an economic collapse on the scale experienced by Russia would have been extremely difficult to digest politically, as the global surge in populism demonstrates. Yet Putin has been able to remain firmly in control and, in all likelihood, will easily be able to engineer another landslide victory in the presidential election due in March 2018.

Russia's state-owned media juggernaut has been able to turn western sanctions into a scapegoat for the government's own failures, and to whip up support for foreign adventurism – including the seizure of the Crimea, military intervention in Syria, and meddling in US elections. Most Russians, constantly manipulated by their country's schools and media, are convinced that conditions are much worse in the west (a hyperbolic claim even in the era of "fake news").

Unfortunately, such disinformation is hardly a recipe for generating reform. And, without reform, there is little reason to be optimistic about Russia's long-run growth trend, given its poor demographic profile, weak institutions and abject failure to diversify its economy, despite having an enormously talented and creative population.

Where will future growth come from? If the world continues to move toward a low-carbon future, Russia will confront an inevitable choice: launch economic and political reforms or face continuing marginalisation, with or without western sanctions. No meeting between the US and Russian presidents can change that reality.

**Russia Sent 2,500 Troops to Its Border Near Latvia and Estonia Amid Fears of Conflict and Annexation**  
**By Damien Sharkov**  
**Newsweek, July 5, 2017**

<http://www.newsweek.com/russian-forces-drop-nato-border-632178>

Russia has called 2,500 troops to an airborne military drill in its Pskov region, bordering NATO allies Latvia and Estonia, state news agency Itar-Tass reported on Wednesday. The drill will involve 40 aircraft, with airborne troops practicing landing in unfamiliar lands. The exercises were described as "counterterrorist" drills.

Concern has been mounting for years among some European officials over whether Russia could strike the Baltics following its annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014. The sizeable exercise of Russia's elite paratrooper division (VDV) is set to take place off the town of Kislovo, less than 50km from Russia's border with Estonia, around the base of the very unit that reportedly endured heavy losses in Ukraine in 2014. The disappearance of the Pskov soldiers, reported killed, was one of the first high-profile pieces of evidence that Russian forces had entered Ukraine.

Concern about a possible war in the Baltics is high, with majorities in Lithuania and Latvia naming armed conflict as a prime concern and all three fearing the likelihood of war more than that of extremist attacks, according to various polls. Russia has formally denied it would ever attack a member of NATO, which all three nations of the Baltics are.

But the promises of Moscow diplomats have done little to assuage worries in the former Soviet Union states, largely because of Russia's interpretation of events in Ukraine. Russia initially insisted its troops were not participants in the Crimean annexation and continues to deny that it has a military presence in eastern Ukraine.

Russian military experts have warned that deploying staff involved in events in Ukraine to territory near the Baltic may be a deliberate, implicit scare tactic by Moscow, rather than a genuine intention to attack the Baltics.

Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are among the biggest beneficiaries of NATO's updated eastern strategy as three battalions are set to rotate between them. Besides NATO support, citizens and officials in Latvia and Lithuania have backed an idea less fondly thought of among many of their allies: a European armed force.

**U.S. Taps Ex-NATO Ambassador As Special Ukraine Envoy**  
**By Christopher Miller**

**Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, July 7, 2017**

<https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-kurt-volker-special-envoy-to-ukraine-united-states/28601529.html>

KYIV -- The United States has tapped its former U.S. ambassador to NATO as a special envoy to negotiate over the fate of war-racked Ukraine.

U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on July 7 announced that Kurt Volker, who served as Washington's NATO ambassador under the previous two U.S. administrations, will "take responsibility for advancing U.S. efforts to achieve the objectives" of a peace deal known as the Minsk agreements, which has yet to stop hostilities.

"Kurt's wealth of experience makes him uniquely qualified to move this conflict in the direction of peace," Tillerson said in a statement. "The United States remains fully committed to the objectives of the Minsk agreements, and I have complete confidence in Kurt to continue our efforts to achieve peace in Ukraine."

A pooled media report on July 7 also quoted State Department official R.C. Hammond as saying that Volker "will coordinate all State Department efforts to bring a resolution to the conflict created when Russia invaded Crimea and later eastern Ukraine."

Volker's appointment came shortly before U.S. President Donald Trump was to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin for highly anticipated bilateral talks on the sidelines of the Group of 20 summit in Hamburg, Germany.

There was expected to address tensions between Moscow and Washington over Russia's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula and continued backing of armed militants in eastern Ukraine.

Trump has said he wants to improve ties with Russia, though his administration so far has maintained the punitive measures targeting Russia for its actions in Ukraine that began under Trump's predecessor, Barack Obama.

The U.S. Senate, meanwhile, has tried to put itself in position to block efforts to ease Russia sanctions.

As special envoy, Volker is tasked with pushing for a solution to a conflict that is now in its fourth year. More than 10,000 people have been killed and nearly 2 million have been displaced by the fighting between Ukrainian forces and Russia-backed separatists.

During the Obama administration, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland served in the envoy role that Volker is set to take over.

Volker is likely to be dealing directly with Vladislav Surkov, a longtime senior aide to Putin.

The State Department said Volker would accompany Tillerson during his visit to Kyiv on July 9, when Tillerson will meet with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and civil-society activists.

Poroshenko's administration and the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv confirmed Poroshenko and Tillerson will deliver statements following their meeting.

A U.S. diplomat source told RFE/RL that Volker was expected to stay over until July 10 to meet with other Ukrainian officials.

### **U.S. Top Diplomat to Visit Kyiv Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, July 5, 2017**

<https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-us-russia-tillerson-visit-kyiv/28596209.html>

The United States has confirmed that Secretary of State Rex Tillerson will make his first official visit to Kyiv on July 9 and hold talks with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko.

The State Department said on July 5 that Tillerson will also meet with "young reformers from government and civil society" in the Ukrainian capital.

During his visit, the secretary of state will "reaffirm America's commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, while encouraging the government of Ukraine to continue implementing reforms that will strengthen Ukraine's economic, political, and military resilience," a statement said.

The Ukrainian president's office said on July 4 that Poroshenko will discuss with Tillerson ways to strengthen relations between Kyiv and Washington and further coordinate efforts to counter Russia's actions against Ukraine.

Moscow illegally annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in March 2014 and has been backing separatists in the country's east in a conflict that has killed more than 10,000 people since April 2014.

Tillerson's visit to Kyiv will come after a planned meeting between the U.S. President Donald Trump and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, on July 7 in Germany, on the sidelines of the Group of 20 summit.

### **Azerbaijani Ambassador about his country's unshakable bond with the Jewish people**

**News.Az, July 1, 2017**

<http://news.az/articles/politics/123116>

"There's no way it can be done," the man whispered cautiously to his visitor. "You'll never get away with it, and everyone involved will be sent to the gulag, if not executed outright!" But the visitor, a rabbi from the city of Quba in Azerbaijan, would not relent. "Please!" he implored. "There must be some way for us to obtain matzah. For many of the Jews living here, this is all they have left. Take it away from them and they will have nothing. As a man of G-d, I beg you to work with us." The man behind the desk, Major General Heydar Aliyev, First Secretary of the Communist Party in Azerbaijan and the Soviet Union's highest-ranking Muslim, considered the request. Shortly afterwards, an ordinance was passed shutting down the country's largest bread manufacturing plant for one day a year. Subsequently, shrouded in secrecy but with a nod and a wink from Aliyev, enough matzah was produced every year to satisfy the community's needs. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Aliyev went on to become the democratically elected president of the country, a post he would occupy for a decade. Throughout his tenure he solidified relationships between the government and citizens of all ethnic backgrounds and religions. To this day his name is still spoken with the utmost reverence.

### **BETWEEN CHANUKAH AND RAMADAN**

The Uber drops me off outside the Azerbaijani Embassy on a hot and muggy morning in Washington, DC. The building is completely covered in video cameras, perhaps as many as one for every three bricks. It would be impossible for a Muslim to eat anywhere near the building during Ramadan without being exposed. I am ushered into the conference room 15 minutes early. One of the ambassador's assistants brings out some dates and tea. He himself fasts during Ramadan, but not everyone at the embassy does, and no one judges them for their laxity. The people of Azerbaijan are proudly Muslim, but they are also proud of their reputation for tolerance and their embrace of Western values. My first meeting with Elin Suleymanov, Azerbaijan's Ambassador to the United States, had actually taken place the previous December, when he invited me to a Chanukah party hosted by the embassy at the Trump International Hotel. Today, as then, he had one goal: to show the world that a Shiite Muslim country on Iran's northern border could serve as a beacon of acceptance in a troubled region. I've only been waiting two minutes when Ambassador Suleymanov enters the room, still 13 minutes early. He's in his mid-50s, huskily built and with a disarming smile. We spend several minutes engaged in friendly conversation. "If you look on a map," he tells me, "we are right in the middle of the former Soviet Union. So you have a confluence of cultures coming together—Ottoman, Turkish, Persian, Russian, Christian, Sunni and Shiite—all merging together. This creates almost a necessity for acceptance and tolerance, because otherwise it would be difficult to survive. "In 1918, when the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was founded, it was the first Muslim republic in the world. With its generous reserves of oil, Baku, its capital, quickly became one of the major international producers of petroleum. This brought about a cultural renaissance, as you had people from all different backgrounds coming together to develop this wealth. That's why there were Rothschilds, Rockefellers and Nobels investing their money in Azerbaijan. You think Alfred Nobel made his money from dynamite? Well, he actually made his fortune from Azerbaijani oil!" "But then communism arrived," I point out, "which tries to make everyone equal and is the exact opposite of the entrepreneurial spirit you're describing."

"That's true," the ambassador confirms. "Communism dealt a devastating blow to Azerbaijani culture. We often say that had it not been for Soviet rule we would have become one of the foremost cultures in the world. Being under the Soviet Union's influence had very negative consequences for us, but there were some positive aspects too. One of the good things it brought about was an increase in gender equality, and they also contributed a lot to our education. There is no place on earth that develops in a vacuum, isolated from the rest of the world. Still, the fact that the Soviet Union was a totalitarian regime that didn't allow much space for creativity also didn't permit us to flourish in the same the way we did following independence.

“One of the reasons the Soviet Union was victorious over Nazi Germany in World War II was that Baku was one of the main oil producers. In a famous news clip, Adolf Hitler is presented with a birthday cake in the shape of a map of Eurasia. When they ask him what his favorite piece is he takes out a knife, cuts out Baku and says, ‘I want that!’

“All of the post-USSR newly independent countries started off the same way, not really knowing what to do and experiencing economic devastation. Very few countries had an actual elite to run them. Still, I believe that part of why Azerbaijan is so successful today is not just because of its history but thanks to President Aliyev [Ilham Aliyev, son of Heydar]. Our president is a friend of every Azerbaijani regardless of background and he is very open to the Jewish community, which only reinforces our preexisting tradition.”

## THE JEWISH SHAHID

“You know the story of Albert Agarunov, right?” he suddenly asks me. He is taken aback when I shake my head no. “Albert is one of the three top national heroes of my country. The word shahid, martyr, often has negative connotations, but in Azerbaijan the term is used for someone who died for our independence. While it’s unusual, we have our own Jewish shahid! They even made a film about him, and there’s also a school that bears his name.” Albert Agarunov was a 23-year-old Jewish tank commander who served during the war with Armenia over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, which both sides claim as their own. (It is currently occupied by Armenia.) On a single day, December 8, 1991, Albert reportedly destroyed nine Armenian tanks and two armored personnel carriers. He was such an accomplished marksman that the Armenians placed a bounty of five million rubles on his head. According to Agababa Gasimov, a comrade and close friend of Albert, the Armenians “hated Albert more than other Azerbaijanis and often asked each other, ‘Why is this Jewish guy fighting so bravely? Is it his homeland that he is ready to die for it?’” During a lull in the fighting, a reporter asked why he took his duties as a fighter so seriously. “I was born here and I live here,” Albert replied. Already a national hero during his lifetime, Albert’s death was even more heroic.

On that fateful morning, Azerbaijani troops outside the city of Shusha received intelligence that the Armenians were preparing to attack the city. At the first sign of assault, Albert, ahead of the pack, entered the city. Maneuvering his tank through the streets of Shusha, he saw corpses in the streets. He had just gotten out of his tank to show the driver how to avoid desecrating the bodies of his countrymen when a sniper’s bullet ended his life.

“I once saw an uncut video of what happened,” the ambassador tells me. “There was one last Azerbaijani tank in Shusha with someone standing next to it. When a journalist asked the man if he knew how to shoot he replied, ‘No, I only know how to drive.’ ‘Then turn the tank around and get out of here!’ the journalist urged him. ‘You’re the last one left.’ ‘You don’t understand,’ the man declared. ‘This is Albert Agarunov’s tank. Albert would never turn around and run.’”

The ambassador then launches into another tale of a heroic Jew. “On January 20, 1990, when the Soviet troops attacked Baku, many innocent civilians died. One of the victims was a 16-year-old Jewish girl who was killed when a shot came through her window. Then, to compound the tragedy, the Jewish doctor who arrived on the ambulance to bring her to the hospital was also killed when he threw himself over her body. I’m just telling you this to illustrate the emotional connection Azerbaijanis have to the Jewish community

## AZERBAIJAN, HAVEN FOR THE JEWS

I ask Ambassador Suleymanov if he was aware of the hardships faced by the Jewish people while he was growing up in the Soviet era. After relating the story of Heydar Aliyev and the rabbi’s request for matzah, he tells me that at one point there was so much matzah being produced in Azerbaijan that it was being smuggled into Georgia and southern Russia.

“Heydar Aliyev accommodated the Jewish community because he understood how important it was to them,” he explains. “As the rabbi himself later told me, ‘I will always be grateful to him for making it happen. Thanks to him, we were able to preserve our traditions and sense of community.’”

In fact, while the Holocaust raged in Europe, thousands of Jews found refuge in Baku. For three years the Soviets held off the Nazi invaders until the war front shifted away from Azerbaijan.

“Many Jews came to Azerbaijan from those areas of the Soviet Union that were under Nazi occupation,” he explains. “But even before that you had Jews like Dr. Lev Landau, the famous Nobel Prize-winning physicist, moving to Azerbaijan because they felt more comfortable and safer there. In the late 1800s and early 1900s it was very dangerous for Jews to live in the Christian parts of the Russian Empire. That continued up until the 1940s. Azerbaijan was much more accommodating, and even now the Jewish community lives safely and soundly in our country. Such an arrangement is beneficial to our society. There is nothing to be gained by exclusion. There’s no benefit in xenophobia.”

“Why haven’t other countries in the region figured that out?” I ask.

“Every nation has its own culture and history. Even our conflict with neighboring Armenia is a result of different visions. Armenia is very homogeneous place; 99.9% of its citizens are followers of the same religion. So perhaps it’s difficult to perceive a completely different world.

“We have very good relations with the rest of the Muslim world. A few years ago we hosted the European Games, and more recently, the Islamic Solidarity Games. The very fact that the Vice President of Azerbaijan, who presided over the event, is an accomplished female doctor and was responsible for making the event happen speaks volumes. This makes an impact on many people.”

## THE JEWISH CONNECTION

What about Jews who used to live in Azerbaijan but left after the collapse of the Soviet Union? Does the government have any plans to convince them to return?

“Most Jewish people of Azerbaijani background have very strong ties to Baku,” the ambassador says. “Recently they brought two Torah scrolls back to Azerbaijan. One was from Los Angeles and the other was from Brooklyn. There was a big celebration and I attended it. As for people moving back, that’s a decision that every individual has to make for himself. But a lot of people go back and forth all the time. Many have permission to live in Azerbaijan as permanent residents and buy real estate. We’ve made it very simple to obtain visas and travel permits. There’s also a direct flight from New York to Baku, and a very convenient connection to Tel Aviv. The Jewish community in New York has become a bridge with Azerbaijan in the same way that the Jewish community in Azerbaijan is a bridge with the State of Israel.

“I definitely wouldn’t want the Jews to leave Azerbaijan. As much as I understand the desire to make aliyah and go to the Holy Land, this is their home. Even if they do leave because they feel they’ll be better off in Israel or the United States, they will always be connected to us.”

Several weeks before our meeting, the ambassador invited me to Azerbaijan’s Republic Day celebration in Washington. Mentioning the event now, he points out the large number of Jews who were in attendance. “An American friend of mine said, ‘This looks like a rabbinical convention. I’ve never seen so many chareidim in one place outside Israel.’ ‘You should come to Azerbaijan,’ I told him. It made me very happy because we’ve always had a mix of cultures. It’s good to celebrate Azerbaijan this way.”

“I’ve heard that the government is very involved in helping to fund Jewish education and culture.” “Azerbaijan is one of the very few predominantly Muslim nations that builds synagogues and churches for its citizens, not just mosques. We also try to ensure that every community receives not only a general education but is able to educate its members in its own culture.”

“I would imagine that when Azerbaijan became a republic in 1918, most governments didn’t fund religions.” Cheder boys performing in Baku, Azerbaijan

“At that time, it was very difficult to imagine.”

“And all this started within the last 20 years?”

“Yes. Another interesting fact is that the Grand Mufti of the Caucasus [who lives in Baku] is also a great believer in supporting the various religions. Very often he will advocate not just for Islamic education but for Jewish education as well. It’s good for him too, because it creates a better dialogue. Not only that, he’s a Shiite—and one of his deputies is a Sunni! Azerbaijan is one of the few places you will ever see Sunnis and Shiites together. We don’t discriminate.”

## ISRAEL’S CLOSEST MUSLIM ALLY

“How do you see the future of Azerbaijan and Israel?” I ask.

“I think we are in a very good place and I hope it will only get better,” he says. “Israel is a very good partner for us and Azerbaijan is a very good partner for them. But I’d like to make a very important distinction: we are not partners against anybody. We aren’t allies simply because it’s convenient at the moment. Our cultural openness is the reason we have this long-term connection. It’s also a mutually beneficial relationship. The Israelis supply us with IT and agricultural and medical assistance, while we provide energy to Israel, mostly oil but hopefully gas in the future.”

“In your opinion, is there anything Azerbaijan could do to bring Israel and some of its neighbors to a better understanding of each other?”

“Perhaps, but you have to put things in perspective. Azerbaijan is only a small country with ten million people. It’s also not technically in the Middle East, and doesn’t participate directly in the region’s politics. Still, we’ve had conversations with both the Palestinians and the Israelis, and we are actively creating platforms and opportunities for the Israelis and Islamic countries to talk to each other. One of these was our recent Republic Day reception here in Washington. Our Chanukah party, which you attended, was another. Baku is also a popular place for hosting events. A lot of Israelis visit all the time. We always tell people they have to understand the Israelis’ concerns, and we tell the Israelis that they have to understand the concerns of others, and try to bridge them. Azerbaijan is a very strategic place. Baku would be a perfect location for all kinds of negotiations. Why not? I think it would be very helpful.”

## A STITCH IN TIME

On my way out, Ambassador Suleymanov directs my attention to a huge handmade tapestry hanging on the wall depicting the map of Azerbaijan. He shows me where many of the Jewish communities were traditionally located, including the city of Krasnaya Sloboda in the Quba district. With a population of close to 4,000, it is presumably the only all-Jewish city in the world outside of Israel. He traces the path of the Silk Road and proudly enumerates which of the world’s largest empires have fought over his homeland.

Suddenly he becomes very solemn as his finger arrives at the occupied Nagorno-Karabakh region, a 4,400-square-mile territory between Azerbaijan and Armenia, where a state of war still exists between the two countries. He talks affectionately about the Azerbaijani towns claimed by his nation that are now under Armenian control. He tells me about the thousands who have been forced to flee their homes, and points to the cherished city of Shusha, where the Azerbaijani Jewish hero Albert Agarunov was killed.

“I don’t think we can afford to lose any more of our land,” the ambassador whispers.

“Otherwise, I’ll have to call in the designer who made this map and he’ll have to undo more of the stitching.”

## **Deaths of Azerbaijan villagers brings new all-out war fears**

**By Aida Sultanova**

**Associated Press, July 6, 2017**

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/deaths-of-azerbaijan-villagers-brings-new-all-out-war-fears/2017/07/06/a19fffa8-6257-11e7-80a2-8c226031ac3f\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.638ab717ef39](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/deaths-of-azerbaijan-villagers-brings-new-all-out-war-fears/2017/07/06/a19fffa8-6257-11e7-80a2-8c226031ac3f_story.html?utm_term=.638ab717ef39)

ALKHANLI, Azerbaijan — At the spot in an Azerbaijani front-line village where a woman and her 16-month-old granddaughter died this week in shelling, a few residents were gathered to mourn. As a delegation of international military attaches and journalists approached, some of the residents shouted that only full-out war could truly free them.

The deaths of 52-year-old Sahiba Guliyeva and granddaughter Zahra on Tuesday were the latest bloodshed in the decades-long “frozen conflict” over Nagorno-Karabakh, a region of Azerbaijan under the control of forces that claim to be local ethnic Armenians; Azerbaijan claims the forces include regular Armenian military.

Those forces took control of the region and some surrounding territories in a separatist war that was supposed to be halted by a 1994 cease-fire, but that left the sides facing off across a demilitarized buffer zone. Outbursts of fighting are frequently reported by both sides.

International mediators have been unable to resolve the tense limbo, and fears persist that a full-scale war could resume. The Guliyevas’ deaths, which brought wide dismay and anger on social media in Azerbaijan, bolstered the worries.

“It’s necessary to understand that the Armenian-Azerbaijani, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is not frozen; it could flare up at any moment and bring serious consequences to the region,” Ramiz Mekhtiyev, the head of Azerbaijan’s presidential administration, said in a statement Thursday.

A spokesman for Nagorno-Karabakh’s leader blamed Azerbaijan for the increased tensions, saying the mortars that hit Alkhanli were fired in response to Azerbaijani shelling.

“In fact, the losses among the civilian population favor the ruling regime in Azerbaijan. Thus, they try to distract the population from internal problems, intoxicate, aggravate the image of the ‘hated enemy’,” David Babayan told The Associated Press.

Gurban Ismaylov, a 37-year-old resident of Alkhanli, said that Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has called for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, but Ismaylov disagrees.

“We are waiting for the call from President Aliyev to free our lands and everybody, as one, will go to war,” he said.

## **More than 300 Jews Take Part in Moldovan Limmud**

**By Jenni Frazer**

**Jewish News/Times of Israel, July 4, 2017**

<http://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/more-than-300-young-jews-take-part-in-moldovan-limmud/>

More than 300 young Russian-speaking Jews have taken part in a one-day annual Limmud FSU event in Chisinau, the capital of Moldova.

It was the fourth such gathering in Moldova and the event has become one of the most eagerly anticipated for the country’s young people, many of whom are heavily involved in the renaissance of Moldovan Jewry.

Limmud FSU — founded just over 10 years ago — has formed a focus for young Jews who are eager to learn more about their roots and want to express their Jewish identity.

The founder of Limmud FSU, former Jewish Agency treasurer Chaim Chesler, spoke at the opening ceremony of Sunday’s conference. He told a packed audience: “There is no doubt that Limmud FSU has become an important element in the Moldova Jewish community, not just in providing events packed with Jewish content,

but also for the many people who have joined us as volunteers, working on the planning, programming, logistics and administration of all our events. Through this, no less important, we're happy to be nurturing a new generation of leaders who are creating or revitalising the Jewish community in Moldova”.

The Limmud FSU event was held in Kedem, the Chisinau Jewish Community Centre. With more than 60 different sessions on offer, and 50 prominent speakers from around the world, the festival offered a dynamic and pluralistic array of culture, creativity and learning/ Subjects ranged from art to Jewish culture and tradition, history, politics, academics, business, Zionism ,Jewish cooking and lifestyles. Other themes for the day included Jewish views of astrology and superstition, childrearing, demystifying Shabbat, and religious Zionism.

Limmud FSU's co-founder, the New York philanthropist Sandra Cahn, said: “Since its inaugural conference in Moscow in 2006, Limmud FSU events have attracted more than 50,000 participants in Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Israel, North America, Western Europe and Australia. We hope that our conferences in Moldova will continue and bring a spirit of intellectual freedom to young Jews in a liberal, pluralistic, egalitarian, non-demanding and gender-free atmosphere of study – the personification of the Hebrew word ‘Limmud’ in its widest possible sense”.

Among the featured presenters were the Moldovan minister of culture, Monika Babuk; the chairman of the board of the Jewish Museum and Centre of Tolerance in Moscow, Rabbi Boruch Gorin; Russian-Israeli comedian Ilya Axelrod, and Dr Joel Rappel, the founder of Nobel laureate and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel's archive at Boston University.

The president of the Jewish community of Moldova and honorary chair of Limmud FSU Moldova, Alexander Bilinkis, was one of the most popular presenters for his lecture about entrepreneurship and business —hardly a surprise as he is one of the most successful businessmen in the country.

At the closing event, Mr Bilinkis told the young audience: “Limmud FSU is a tradition that unites people who are close to each other in spirit. It's a celebration of intellect, and the place of gathering for the most interesting, bright and educated audience. I want to thank all involved, and may our next event will be an even bigger success than this one”.

Roman Kogan, Limmud FSU executive director, highlighted the volunteerism, a guiding principle of the very first Limmud in the UK almost 40 years ago. He said: “We cannot praise highly enough our volunteers who undertake the planning, programming, recruitment and administration of Limmud FSU Moldova, that wouldn't be possible without enormous efforts made by its team of local leaders and volunteers”. The Moldovan organisers included Marina Shuster, Kolea Railean, Julia Sheinman and Galina Rybnikova.

Tributes were also paid to the event's sponsors: the Claims Conference, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), Nativ, and the Jewish community of Moldova

### **Bulgaria is a Step Closer to Full Membership of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance The Sofia Globe, July 1, 2017**

<http://sofiaglobe.com/2017/07/01/bulgaria-is-a-step-closer-to-full-membership-of-the-international-holocaust-remembrance-alliance/>

Bulgaria is a step closer to full membership of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Written by The Sofia Globe staff on July 1, 2017 in Bulgaria - Comments Off on Bulgaria is a step closer to full membership of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) has decided to accept Bulgaria as a liaison country, the first state to take the next step towards full membership since 2009.

The decision was taken at the IHRA's first bi-annual plenary meeting under the Swiss Chairmanship in Geneva, the organisation said after the conclusion of the meeting on June 29 2017.

The IHRA unites governments and experts to strengthen, advance and promote Holocaust education, remembrance and research world-wide, and to uphold the commitments of the 2000 Stockholm Declaration.

At the four-day meeting in Geneva, more than 200 experts and policymakers from the IHRA's 31 member countries, 11 observer countries, and seven international partner organizations gathered to discuss Holocaust education, research and remembrance as a contemporary political issue.

The Bulgarian government decided on March 8 2017 to apply for full membership of IHRA.

Bulgaria's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that the country's candidacy had prompted a strong interest among the member states that have highly appreciated Bulgaria's performance as an observer in the IHRA from December 2012, as well as the commitments made to strengthen the commemoration, education and research activities on Holocaust issues.

During the presentation of the Bulgarian candidacy, the honorary president of the IHRA, Professor Yehuda Bauer, expressed his full support for Bulgaria's membership and noted that the alliance held open discussion and the presentation of concrete results on all issues on the agenda of the organization, and that Bulgaria has the capacity and opportunity to contribute to this process, the Foreign Ministry statement said.

Bulgaria was allied to Nazi Germany in World War 2, but in 1943, thanks to the initiatives of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, some political leaders and civil society, refused to hand over Bulgarian Jews to the death camps of the Holocaust where more than six million Jews were murdered. In northern Greece and Yugoslavia, under Bulgarian control on behalf of Germany, a total of 11 343 Jews were deported, mainly to Treblinka, where they were murdered by the Nazis. These Jews, through earlier legislation approved in Sofia, did not have Bulgarian citizenship.

Because of the events of 1943, a number of Bulgarians are honoured at the Yad Vashem Museum as Righteous Among the Nations. An initiative is underway for the Bulgarian Orthodox Church to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its role in the prevention of the deportation of Bulgarian Jews to the Holocaust.