



NCSEJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF
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**Kremlin Says Russia Hopes Huntsman Will Help Improve U.S. Ties
Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, October 3, 2017**

<https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-huntsman-kremlin-improve-us-ties-peskov/28771147.html>

Russian President Vladimir Putin has told the new U.S. ambassador to Moscow, Jon Huntsman, that he hopes badly strained ties will improve.

Receiving Huntsman's credentials at a Kremlin ceremony on October 3 that marked the start of the new envoy's tenure, Putin said that the current state of U.S.-Russia relations "cannot satisfy us."

"We advocate for constructive, predictable, and mutually advantageous cooperation," Putin said. "We are convinced that it should build upon the stringent adherence to the principles of equality, respect for national interests, and noninterference with each other's internal affairs."

He also offered his "utmost and sincere condolences" to the American people for the "horrendous tragedy" that happened in Las Vegas, where a mass shooting killed 59 people late on October 1.

The severe tension in bilateral ties stems in part from allegations that Putin violated that very principle: In January, the U.S. intelligence community said it found that Putin ordered an "influence campaign" targeting the 2016 presidential election in the United States.

At a confirmation hearing before a Senate panel on September 19, Huntsman said that there is "no question -- underline, no question -- that the Russian government interfered in the U.S. election last year. And Moscow continues to meddle in the democratic processes of our friends and allies."

Ahead of the ceremony, which also included new ambassadors from other countries, Putin's spokesman said the Kremlin hopes that with Huntsman as ambassador, the "American diplomatic mission in Moscow can make a weighty contribution to the restoration of our relations."

Spokesman Dmitry Peskov blamed the United States for the severe troubles in the relationship, asserting that Putin believes closer cooperation is in the interests of both countries and the world but that "it is impossible to realize those intentions on our own, without a partner."

"So far, there are problems with reciprocity," Peskov.

In addition to the alleged meddling in the election, ties between Washington and Moscow have also been frayed by deep discord over issues including Russia's seizure of Crimea from Kyiv's control, its support for separatists in war that has killed more than 10,000 people since 2014, and its military and diplomatic backing for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in a devastating war in the Middle Eastern country.

Huntsman takes over a diplomatic mission whose size has been reduced drastically after Russia ordered the United States to cut its embassy and consulate staff in Russia by 755 people, or by two-thirds, after the U.S. Congress approved legislation tightening sanctions against Russia.

Russian officials initially voiced confidence that Trump's election would help improve ties, but those hopes appear to have faded substantially as the U.S. Justice Department and congressional committees investigate

Moscow's alleged interference in the election and seek to determine whether associates of Trump colluded with Russia.

Putin denies that Russia meddled in the election despite what U.S. officials say is powerful evidence. Trump, who repeatedly indicated during the campaign that he wanted relations with Russia to improve, denies any collusion.

Huntsman, a former governor of the U.S. state of Utah who at one point called for Trump to drop out of the presidential race, easily won U.S. Senate confirmation as ambassador last week. Now 57, he was ambassador to Singapore under President George H.W. Bush in 1992-93 and ambassador to China in 2009-11, under President Barack Obama, before returning to the United States to run for president in 2012.

In Crimea, Russian Land Grab Feeds Cries of 'Carpetbaggers!'

By Neil MacFarquhar

New York Times, September 30, 2017

https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/30/world/europe/crimea-annexation-russia-ukraine.html?ref=collection%2Fsectioncollection%2Furope&action=click&contentCollection=europe®ion=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=6&pgtype=sectionfront

More than three years after Russia snatched Crimea from Ukraine, the peninsula is suffering through an extended season of discontent.

Shady, Kremlin-appointed bureaucrats are proving to be just as corrupt and inept as their Ukrainian predecessors. International sanctions, shrugged off in the heady days after the Russian annexation, have jacked up food prices while endlessly complicating ordinary aspects of life, like banking and travel.

Perhaps most galling to Crimeans, the government is hauling thousands of residents into court to confiscate small land holdings distributed free as a campaign ploy in 2010 when Ukraine controlled the Black Sea peninsula.

Residents of Sevastopol, famous as a historic battleground and home to the Black Sea fleet, were among the most vocal, militant supporters of Russia when it annexed Crimea.

That was then.

"I supported reunification because I thought that with Russia's arrival things would improve," said Lenur A. Usmanov, a rare outspoken Kremlin partisan from the Tatar minority who has since become a serial protester. "But there is no change."

Yevgeny V. Dzhemal, an activist lawyer fighting the mass land expropriation, put it even more succinctly: "They were bastards under Ukraine, too. Nothing has changed."

The United Nations issued a report this week accusing Russian security agencies of committing "grave" human rights abuses since the annexation. Many of those abuses occurred right after the annexation against those who resisted the takeover. Russia dismissed the report as "absurd" inventions spread by its opponents.

Locals largely focus on different complaints. They invariably denigrate the new bureaucrats as carpetbaggers, using the word "varyagi" in Russian, an old word for Viking outsiders, especially when it comes to land confiscation.

The city of Sevastopol claims that it must repossess at least 10,000 plots to help create a rational development plan. The owners howl that the "mass land grab" will benefit crooked developers and senior officials who covet what when stitched together amounts to sprawling tracts of choice seaside property.

"Nobody thought it would be as bad, with issues emerging suddenly like the land plots," said Roman Kiyashko, the burly Communist Party candidate for governor whose campaign slogan, "Your man from Sevastopol,"

emphasized his native roots. “Russian officials act like an elephant in a china shop. They just implement their policies with no feedback.”

Yet many natives stress that their grievances have not reached the point of reconsidering the internationally criticized 2014 referendum in which they voted overwhelmingly to rejoin Russia. “Stones can fall from the sky as long as we live in our Motherland,” said Oleg Nikolaev, a successful restaurateur, quoting a Russian expression.

Taking back Crimea by force in 2014 was celebrated across Russia as a long-overdue restoration of lost superpower might. It made President Vladimir V. Putin wildly popular, something the Kremlin clearly hoped to capitalize on when it scheduled the upcoming presidential election for March 18, the fourth anniversary of the formal annexation of Crimea.

For many, however, the euphoria around that date has gone as flat as old champagne.

In Sevastopol, the main target of local ire is Dmitri Ovsyannikov, 40, one of a new, nationwide generation of young governors. Appointed acting governor by Mr. Putin last year, he has alienated many Sevastopolians by filling virtually every administrative post with fellow Moscow imports. Even some local officials who support Mr. Putin wonder privately why the president picked someone so aloof.

Mr. Ovsyannikov managed to win a rare election to his post earlier this month. But analysts attributed that to a dismal turnout of just under 33 percent and the fact that Mr. Putin campaigned for him.

Mr. Putin enjoys cultlike status for both taking back Crimea and for promising to rescue the Black Sea fleet that anchors in Sevastopol from rust bucket oblivion. “I remember at some point in the middle of 2000s I came here for the first time and I almost wept because Sevastopol — a special city for every Russian — was in a terrible state,” Mr. Putin said during one recent visit.

Some Sevastopolians are doing the weeping now, convinced that Mr. Putin should rescue them anew.

“Putin does not know what these rascals are doing — they want to seize all our land!” cried one man at a small, illegal protest in early September on Nakhimov Square, the heart of a city that hugs a series of spectacular inlets.

Sevastopol has a long history of fractious politics and quirky demonstrations, but recently strife escalated markedly, said Volodymyr P. Kazarin, a university rector and former vice governor who opposed annexation and has since moved to Kiev. “Sevastopol is once again among the most rebellious cities in Crimea,” he said.

After the annexation, Crimea was divided into two districts, with the larger Sevastopol metropolitan area designated a Federal city while the rest of the peninsula became the Crimean Republic, a Russian province with extra autonomy. Resentments similar to those in Sevastopol have erupted in the republic as well.

For example, the government in Simferopol, the capital, imported a Moscow architect to supervise a master regional development plan. One of her first proposals included revamping the central Lenin Square by removing the Lenin statue. Simferopol removed her instead.

“Crimea did not like this idea of destroying monuments,” said Aleksandr A. Formanchuk, a veteran local government official.

In Yalta, one land confiscation ended in tragedy after the longtime owner of a beachfront cafe discovered that it had been demolished and the cafe contract awarded to a different, anonymous developer. He committed suicide by setting himself on fire in a city park last September.

Oligarchs and other wealthy businessmen, mostly Ukrainian, lost billions of dollars in properties expropriated after annexation. But the land fight in Sevastopol seems to affect mostly ordinary people like retired teachers and navy veterans.

The city has filed 3,800 lawsuits so far, with more expected, some possibly even involving long abandoned Soviet military property. “Representatives of the government agencies just laugh at us,” said Lubov Zvonik, 60, a retired store manager. “They have an unspeakable attitude toward us, because there are orders from the top to get our land.”

Sevastopol was once a center of the nation’s defense industries. But after the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union the plants all closed, and land remains the only significant resource left to the city, said Mr. Nikolaev, the restaurateur, who also leads an official effort to attract new investors.

Some of the confiscated land “will be offered as tenders that investors can bid for, some will be preserved in protected areas,” he said, noting that Ukrainian developers often bent the rules through bribery and other means, leading to “barbarian construction” that still scars the city.

While the land confiscation is the hot-button issue currently, residents of Sevastopol tick off a long list of grievances.

They say government jobs have become a license to steal or extort, with wave after wave of officials across Crimea dismissed for corruption or incompetence, even more than under Ukraine. Russia is pouring money onto the peninsula — \$650 million last year — and the scale of corruption has expanded accordingly, experts said.

Sanctions are another constant source of irritation, leading to higher food prices and complications in banking, agriculture, transportation and securing visas to travel abroad. Fearful of international repercussions, no major Russian supermarket chain, bank or other business has set up shop since the annexation.

Most goods have to be imported on the unreliable ferry, driving up prices at least until the end of 2018, when a spectacular bridge to Russia is due to be completed. A Russian federal agency recently accused gasoline importers of colluding to keep prices high.

Because of Sevastopol’s military history, its residents have long prided themselves in being a little more Russian than the rest of the country. Perhaps Leo Tolstoy best captured that mood in “Sevastopol Sketches,” when he reflected on his experiences as a young officer during the 1853-1856 Crimean War.

“At the thought that you too are in Sevastopol, a certain feeling of manliness, of pride,” penetrates your soul, he wrote, and your blood begins “to flow more swiftly through your veins.”

Hence some find it infuriating that outside officials have begun tampering with history in a city where nearly every major square or avenue is named for a battle or military hero.

The Kremlin recently adopted the proposal by a group of expatriate nobles to erect a monument to reconciliation in the city, given that Crimea is where the Russian aristocracy and its White Army made their last stand after the 1917 revolution.

It garnered some local support. Yet many grumble that a city of 418,000 people — including numerous descendants of Red Army soldiers — and 2,000 monuments does not need another one.

“This is a hero city, a city of warriors, and a warrior is not supposed to reconcile,” barked Mr. Kiyashko, the local Communist leader, sitting in the party headquarters decorated with giant portraits of Lenin.

The economic ills and constant meddling by Moscow make even senior government officials acknowledge widespread disillusionment reminiscent of Ukrainian days. The Kremlin was too quick to treat Crimea like the rest of the country despite its long, traumatic history, said Mr. Formanchuk, the longtime local official.

“Many Crimeans are unhappy that the Russian Federal center is also trying to do the same thing — to grind everything up and say you are like everyone else,” he said. “We suffered on our own, and what are you doing telling us how to live?”

Israel-Russia trade leaps by 25%
Jewish Telegraphic Agency, September 29, 2017

<https://www.jta.org/2017/09/29/news-opinion/world/israel-russia-trade-leaps-by-25>

Trade between Russia and Israel has grown this year by 25 percent, officials from both countries revealed, amid complications with other Russian trading partners.

The first six months of 2017 saw increased trade between the nations of about \$380 million over the corresponding period last year.

Zeev Elkin, the Israeli Cabinet minister responsible for environmental protection and issues connected with Jerusalem, announced the figures earlier this week at a conference in Moscow about Russian-Israel relations.

“There is still great potential for increase in trade and there is much work ahead of us,” Elkin said in reference to ongoing talks since 2013 on signing a free trade agreement with Russia.

Temur Ben Yehuda, chairman of the Israeli Russian Business Council that organized the Moscow conference, cited primarily the attractiveness of Israeli businesses to Russian counterparts and vice versa in explaining the increase in trade between Russia and Israel.

“We are not only conducting dialogue on increasing trade, we are also signing major agreements between Israel and Russian firms, including Watergen, Assuta and many others,” he said.

The increase comes amid tightening cooperation between Israel and Russia on security issues connected with Syria, where the Russian government is engaged in propping up the beleaguered regime of the country’s president, Bashar Assad. Its involvement in Syria has complicated Russia’s relations with Turkey, which has aided some forces fighting Assad in Syria’s civil war dating to 2011, and soured trade between those nations.

Separately, Russia’s trade with the European Union and the United States has also suffered due to sanctions imposed by the West over its invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and annexation of land.

During that period, Russia’s relations with Israel, which have remained neutral both on the Syrian issue and Ukraine, have noticeably improved, with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu traveling to Moscow at least five times in the space of one year.

The strengthening of the ruble, which had lost half its value against the dollar due to dropping oil prices, has also helped Russia’s ability to conduct international trade.

Arsen Avakov: Ministry of Internal Affairs Has Stopped the Activity of A Criminal Group that Provoked Xenophobia and International Conflicts

Ministry of Interior of Ukraine, October 2, 2017

http://mvs.gov.ua/en/news/10170_Arsen_Avakov_MIA_has_stopped_the_activity_of_a_criminal_group_that_provoked_xenophobia_and_international_conflicts_PHOTOS_VIDEO_PRESENTATION.htm

On October 2, 2017, the Minister of Internal Affairs Arsen Avakov announced the exposure of an organized criminal group (OCG), whose activities were supervised by former People's Deputies from the “Party of Regions” and some leaders of the “Opposition bloc” party. According to the investigation, causing harm to the life and health of people was not the main goal of this group. The group specialized in organizing terrorist acts that were supposed to cause international conflicts between Ukraine and other countries and feed animosities based on intolerance and xenophobia.

The members of the OCG are credibly suspected of committing nine crimes related to the bombings on the territory of the embassies, the desecration of historical monuments and religious shrines. Three members of this group were detained on October 1, 2017, on the Ukrainian-Hungarian border where they have planned to blow up the monument to the Hungarians located at the Veretsky Pass in the Transcarpathian province.

"They were going to carry out the latest order: to blow up a Hungarian monument on the Ukrainian-Hungarian border. The order had to be executed urgently. Ukrainian-Hungarian relations have recently deteriorated, so the act of terrorism against the Hungarian monument at the Veretsky pass in the Transcarpathian region was supposed to stir the pot. The criminal investigation unit of the National Police has worked accurately and quickly: the culprits were detained near the border", - said the head of the MIA.

Police seized from the detainees a specially prepared explosive device with a connected gas cylinder for better detonation and RGD-5 grenades.

After examination of physical evidence (including DNA analyzes), intelligence and testimonies of detainees, the group was found to participate in committing nine crimes during 2016-2017. These crimes were aimed at inciting xenophobia, religious intolerance, and international conflicts.

1. In the city of Chernovtsy on the night of November 19, 2016, the Central Jewish synagogue was desecrated, its main facade was marked with an anti-Semitic inscription.
2. In the city of Uman on December 21, 2016, the perpetrators infiltrated the complex, containing the grave of famous Rabbi Nachman, and threw the head of a pig with the swastika carved on it.
3. In Kiev on June 8, 2017, the malefactors threw a grenade at the US Embassy.
4. In the city of Lvov on June 30, 2017, intruders tried to set afire the synagogue.
5. In the city of Lutsk on July 10, 2017, the perpetrators threw an explosive device at the consulate of Poland.
6. In Kiev on August 24, 2017, the Independence Day, on the Hrushevsky Street a grenade was tossed which wounded relatives of the Hero of Ukraine Valery Chibineev.
7. The same day In Kiev on the Kurbas street a monument to Ukrainian combatants was blown up by grenades.
8. In the city of Uman on September 21, 2017, a grenade was tossed which injured the citizens of the State of Israel.
9. A terrorist act of blowing up the monument to the Hungarians at the Veretsky Pass in the Transcarpathian region: this time the culprits were detained while attempting to commit a crime.

The perpetrators of these and, in the opinion of the investigation, other unlawful actions are members of the so-called OCG "Torpedos". According to information provided by the head of the MIA, during the Revolution of Dignity members of this group, led by the "Party of Regions" instructors, were engaged in the recruitment and transfer to Kiev of half-criminal militants which took part in the violent actions against participants of Euromaidan.

"The detained perpetrators and their leader belong to the group which is guided by the former "Party of Regions" MPs from the Cherkasy province: Vladimir Oleinik and Sergei Tulub who now stay in the Russian Federation. The investigation revealed a chain of contacts of detained criminals with the persons mentioned above as well as some leaders of the "Opposition block" party, who are in Ukraine", - the minister said. At present, authorities detained two participants of a terrorist group who are citizens of Ukraine and its mastermind whose name and personal data are not disclosed in the interests of the investigation.

The head of the MIA informed that at this stage experts from the Security Service of Ukraine joined the investigative team. Investigation of detainees as well as a special operation to suppress the activities of the entire group will be continued. The head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs assumes that new arrests will follow.

"We will strictly suppress the instigators, terrorists, and provocateurs of inter-ethnic discord and international conflicts. I thank the special group of the National Police for its work!" - Arsen Avakov stated.

Germany Not Prosecuting 8 Members of SS Death Squad, Despite Knowing Their Names

By Ofer Aderet

Haaretz, October 1, 2017

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.815003?=&ts= 1507125833720>

Eight elderly Germans who served in a unit that participated in the mass murder of Jews in the Holocaust will not be prosecuted, even though their names were given to the German authorities three years ago, according to an investigation by a German TV channel.

The decision has sparked sharp criticism in the German media.

The eight men served in Einsatzgruppe C, which took part in the Nazi-perpetrated massacre of tens of thousands of Jews in Babi Yar, Ukraine, in September 1941. The men's names were given to the German authorities by Israeli Nazi hunter Dr. Efraim Zuroff in 2014.

But though TV journalists from ARD were able to track two of the men down and heard incriminating admissions, the German authorities have taken no steps. "What are they waiting for? For them to die?" Zuroff, of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Jerusalem, wrote on his Facebook page. "The Germans should now be pressured into expediting proceedings against them before these criminals die and evade justice."

Former German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, who is now a member of the association that runs the memorial site at Babi Yar, said on the TV show "Kontakt" that he couldn't understand why steps have not been taken. "It's the duty of the prosecuting authorities to take action in cases of mass murder," he said.

Jens Rommel, who heads the Central Office for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes – the body responsible for filing indictments against former Nazis – told the Associated Press that his team lacked the resources to investigate these individuals, and that the evidence presented to him was poor.

Rommel claimed he would have to prove that the men took an active part in the murders to prosecute. But this claim does not hold water legally: Following the precedent set in the 2011 trial of former Nazi guard John Demjanjuk in Germany, individuals considered "accessories to mass murder" can be prosecuted even if they did not actually kill a person, but rather based only on their service in the unit that committed the murders.

Prof. Cornelius Nestler, a legal expert from the University of Cologne, said: "We presume that any person who was a member of an Einsatzgruppe was an accessory to murder, because that was their role." The Einsatzgruppen were SS death squads.

The German television report found two of the suspects, Kurt G. and Herbert W., who are both in their 90s, and both admitted serving in Einsatzgruppe C. Kurt G. said he repaired trucks on the home front and did not take part in any shooting. He said he was surprised to hear that 6 million Jews had been killed in the war. Zuroff said that even a Nazi who served in a repair shop was an accessory to mass murder, because he repaired the vehicles used by murderers.

Herbert W., meanwhile, said, "I have nothing to hide." During the investigation, it emerged that the German authorities knew about the men's Nazi past as far back as 1965, but did not take any action against them.

The ARD exposé casts a heavy shadow over German efforts in recent years to find the last of the living Nazi war criminals. The last prominent case was that of Oskar Gröning, known as the "bookkeeper of Auschwitz,"

who was sentenced to four years in prison in 2015. But the authorities have had difficulties completing legal proceedings against many other alleged Nazi war criminals because of their poor health.

U.S. to provide \$5 million in additional cyber assistance to Ukraine

By Olena Goncharova

Kyiv Post, October 1, 2017

https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/u-s-provide-5-million-additional-cyber-assistance-ukraine.html?utm_source=traqli&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=traqli_daily

The United States will provide over \$5 million in new cyber assistance, U.S. Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch announced during the first United States-Ukraine Bilateral Cyber Dialogue in Kyiv on Sept. 29.

The additional funds will go to help Ukraine improve its ability to prevent, mitigate, and respond to cyberattacks.

Yovanovitch announced the sum in a bid to underly a bilateral meeting between the two countries' national security apparatuses with concrete action.

The meeting brought together Ukrainian representatives of the National Bank, Ministry of Defense, the National Security and Defense Council, the State Security Service, the State Service for Special Communication and Information Protection, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On the American side, officials from the Department of State, Treasury, Defense, Justice, Energy, and Homeland Security were present, along with FBI members.

The Trump Administration also sent Joshua Steinman, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for International Cybersecurity Policy on the National Security Council to the meeting.

During his stay in Kyiv, Steinman also met with Ukrainian Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman.

A press release said that the attendees discussed ways to protect critical infrastructure and military systems, and exchanged views on building a cyber confidence at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Finding a way to recognize the nature of cyber threats and cyber incident response procedures is a hot topic in Ukraine, where cyber police record several hacking-related incidents each day.

Head of the cyber police department Serhiy Demediuk said they "record several cyber incidents every day, but this does not mean that these are threats targeted specifically at our citizens. Malicious software is sent from around the world," he said in remarks on Sept. 27.

In early July, computers from around the world were crippled by a global ransomware cyberattack.

The attack appeared to deal the greatest damage to Ukrainian telecom companies, banks, postal services, big retailers, and government bodies using Windows software.

Among those hit were state-owned bank Oschadbank, private bank Ukrgazbank, the energy utilities Kyivenergo and Ukrenergo, national telecommunications operator Ukrtelecom, mobile carrier Lifecell, postal companies Ukrposhta and Nova Poshta, Kyiv Boryspil International Airport, DIY chain Epicenter, petrol retailers, and several media companies, including Channel 24 and Korrespondent news website.

The virus took over the computers, encrypted data, and demanded a ransom of \$300 in bitcoins, a digital currency used to carry out untraceable transactions. Some people paid to get their data back — the bitcoin wallet used in the attacks in Ukraine received 45 transactions.

Many computer systems took weeks to recover.

Deport ex-Nazi guard, NY Congress members urge Rex Tillerson
Jewish Telegraphic Agency, October 2, 2017

<https://www.jta.org/2017/10/02/news-opinion/united-states/deport-ex-nazi-guard-ny-congress-members-urge-rex-tillerson>

The entire New York congressional delegation has sent a letter to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson urging him to deport a former Nazi concentration camp guard.

Jakiw Palij, 92, of Queens, was a guard at the Trawniki concentration camp in Nazi-occupied Poland in 1943.

The 29 members of Congress representing New York, Democrats and Republicans, signed the letter calling for his deportation, the New York Daily News reported. In August, 21 members of the New York's House delegation wrote a similar letter to Tillerson.

Palij, who has lived in the United States as a war refugee since 1949, has claimed that he was forced into working as a guard and never actually killed anyone. His U.S. citizenship was revoked 13 years ago after a federal judge ruled that he lied on his application for immigration, but Poland, Germany and Ukraine all declined to take him.

"Removing Mr. Palij from American soil will send a message not only to the citizens of New York, but to the entire world," the letter said. "It has been 13 years since Mr. Palij lost his right to remain here, and it has taken far too long for these court orders to be carried out."

Polish institute rebuffs historian who said Nazi invasion was not so bad for Jews
Jewish Telegraphic Agency, October 4, 2017

<https://www.jta.org/2017/10/04/news-opinion/world/polish-institute-rebuffs-historian-who-said-nazi-invasion-was-not-so-bad-for-jews>

The Polish Institute of National Remembrance has distanced itself from one of its historians who wrote in an op-ed that the situation of the Jews "did not look very bad" after the Nazis entered Poland.

The piece by Tomasz Panfil, the historian responsible for education at the Polish Institute of National Remembrance, or IPN, appeared Monday in the Gazeta Polska, a weekly newspaper.

"After the aggression of Germany into Poland, the situation of the Jews did not look very bad," Panfil wrote. "Although the [Nazi] occupation authorities took over, they ordered the wearing of armbands with the star of David, charged them heavy taxes, began to designate Jews-only zones only for the Jews, but at the same time permitted the creation of Judenrat, that is, organs of self-government. "

Institute leaders in a statement sent to the media said the statement "is in no way consistent with the position of the IPN."

"In connection with the thesis in the article by Tomasz Panfil in the Gazeta Polska, the Institute of National Remembrance declares that position presented there is in no way compatible with the historical knowledge about the situation of the Jewish population in Poland after September 1, 1939."

The statement added that the IPN management "expects that Tomasz Panfil will, in his scientific and journalistic activities, show diligence and respect to the principles of historical and research reliability."

Other Polish historians criticized the op-ed.

"This is a complete absurdity. This ignorance is frightening," Dariusz Libionka, head of research at the State Museum at Majdanek, told the Polish-language Kurier Lubelski newspaper.

Poland urged to fire publisher of works by Holocaust denier

By Vanessa Gera

Associated Press, October 3, 2017

<https://apnews.com/28bf4c4b4faf4fea87eb8989896c8b84/Poland-urged-to-fire-publisher-of-works-by-Holocaust-denier>

A Jewish rights group is urging a Polish state historical institute to fire an official who has published several books by notorious British Holocaust denier David Irving.

But the Polish historical body, the Institute of National Remembrance, says the official, Arkadiusz Wingert, is not a Holocaust denier himself so there is no reason to dismiss him.

Wingert was appointed earlier this year as deputy director of the publishing office of the institute, whose mission is to investigate crimes carried out against Polish citizens during World War II, when Poland was under German occupation, and during the subsequent communist era.

Wingert previously ran a publishing house that printed Polish translations of several of Irving's works.

Irving is a revisionist historian who has declared that the Auschwitz gas chambers were a hoax. He has been declared guilty of Holocaust denial by courts in Britain and Austria, where he served a 13-month prison sentence.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center, headquartered in the United States, said it was a "shameful farce" to give Wingert responsibility for publishing works devoted to the victims of World War II given that he had published the works of Irving and also of a Belgian Nazi collaborator, Leon Degrelle.

"If the (institute) is to maintain any shred of credibility it must end its relationship with Wingert immediately and stop all efforts aimed at undermining the history of the Holocaust in Poland," Mark Weitzman, director of government affairs for the Wiesenthal center, said Monday.

Institute spokesman Jaroslaw Tesiorowski told The Associated Press on Tuesday that Wingert is not a Holocaust denier and that the works he published added critical context on Irving's claims.

The institute has also previously argued that nothing that Wingert published violated Polish law, which makes Holocaust denial a crime. It also made the point that all of the Irving works that Wingert put out had been previously published in other languages.

Rediscovered Jewish cemetery opened to public

Slovak Spectator, September 28, 2017

<https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20660405/re-discovered-jewish-cemetery-opened-to-public.html>

Today, when entering Čerhov village in the Trebišov district, it is possible to see roughly 20 tombstones and their fragments which make up the old Jewish cemetery.

15 years ago, however, the dense undergrowth covering the stones meant that nobody knew about it.

"It was hidden behind the bushes, and it was impossible to see anything," said the mayor of the village, Pavol Balogh, as quoted by the TASR newswire. He added that the cemetery is now maintained in good condition.

It draws the attention of tourists; Jews from Hungary often stop by when passing through the village.

The cemetery was functional from the first half of the 19th century until 1944 when the deportation of the Jews from Hungary began. In those years Čerhov was part of that country.

There were three Jewish families living in the village at that time, nineteen people altogether. Fourteen of them died in the Nazi camps. Only 5 girls and young women returned but they have lately moved to Israel and Canada.

The cemetery served as a place of burial, not only for the Jews from Čerhov, but also from the surrounding area. After the Second World War, the cemetery sank into oblivion until 2003/04 when it was rediscovered as the area was cleared and the grass cut.

Rights groups slam Hungary's new hate campaign against Soros

The Times of Israel/AFP, September 29, 2017

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/rights-groups-slam-hungarys-new-hate-campaign-against-soros/>

Rights groups on Friday slammed Hungary's new "national consultation" targeting George Soros and what Budapest says is the billionaire philanthropist's intention to flood Europe with a million migrants per year.

The campaign, accompanied by a blitz of billboards and TV adverts, will from Sunday see the government send households questionnaires seeking opinions on this "Soros Plan."

This is thought to refer to proposals by the Hungarian-born Soros, long a bete noire for European nationalists and conspiracy theorists, in a 2015 opinion piece in the midst of Europe's migrant crisis.

It included the European Union accepting at least a million asylum seekers annually as part of a global response to vast numbers of people fleeing Syria and other conflict zones.

Since then, thanks in large part to a 2016 deal between Brussels and Turkey, the number of people risking their lives crossing the Aegean to EU member Greece has dwindled.

Large numbers have crossed the Mediterranean to Italy although these too have fallen since mid-July, reportedly due to Libyan militias ending their involvement with trafficking.

Human Rights Watch said that the Hungarian government's claims in its new "hate campaign" are "a very distorted half-truth, as Brussels is asking EU governments to resettle only 50,000 refugees over two years."

The campaign will likely fuel a "hostile climate for civil society driven by campaigns to smear real and perceived government critics" and is to distract voters ahead of 2018 elections, HRW said.

Amnesty International's Hungary director Julia Ivan called the campaign, which follows a similar one earlier this year, "absolutely absurd and unbelievable."

That earlier campaign included billboards — some were daubed with anti-Semitic graffiti — described as "poisonous" by Hungary's main Jewish organization.

The new questionnaire will ask whether Hungarians support certain ideas such as Soros wanting to "dismantle (EU) border fences" and "milder criminal sentences" for migrants.

Another states that Soros, 87, wants to "push the languages and cultures of Europe into the background" and to "severely punish" countries that oppose immigration.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has called immigration "poison" and a "Trojan Horse for terrorism", accusing Soros of seeking to undermine Hungary by funding civil society groups.