



NCSEJ WEEKLY TOP 10  
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## **Israel and Poland try to tamp down tensions after Poland's 'death camp' law sparks Israeli outrage**

**By Ruth Eglash and Avi Selk**

**Washington Post, January 28, 2018**

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/01/27/it-could-soon-be-a-crime-to-blame-poland-for-nazi-atrocities-and-israel-is-appalled/?utm\\_term=.c8d58e498d00](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/01/27/it-could-soon-be-a-crime-to-blame-poland-for-nazi-atrocities-and-israel-is-appalled/?utm_term=.c8d58e498d00)

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki spoke by phone Sunday and agreed to open a dialogue to avoid further diplomatic fallout following Poland's initial approval of a law making it a criminal offense to mention Polish complicity in crimes committed during the Holocaust.

The crisis between the two countries appeared to be deepening Sunday as Poland's deputy chief of mission, Piotr Kozlowski, was summoned to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Jerusalem to explain why his country would promote such legislation.

Polish lawmakers voted Friday for a bill that would fine or jail people who blamed Poland or Poles for Nazi atrocities committed on its soil during World War II, including the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Jews at the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp. The law still needs final approval from the Polish Senate and the country's president.

It comes as the country has become more nationalistic. Tens of thousands of people chanted and marched through Warsaw last year in an annual gathering of Europe's far-right movements, and the majority party has sought to protect Poland's image.

Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs told Kozlowski the vote's timing was "particularly surprising and miserable," pointing out that Friday was the eve of International Holocaust Remembrance Day. It was also the 73rd anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp in southern Poland.

Conveying a message from the Israeli government, the ministry said the "legislation will not help further the exposure of historical truth and may harm the freedom of research, as well as prevent discussion of the historical message and the legacy of World War II."

Following the meeting, Kozlowski told Israeli reporters that the goal of the law "is not to whitewash history, but to safeguard it and safeguard the truth about the Holocaust and prevent its distortion." According to Reuters, Polish officials say the law would not limit Holocaust research or the freedom of expression.

Even though several death camps, including the notorious Auschwitz-Birkenau, were built on Polish soil, Poles say they should be referred to as Nazi extermination camps or camps in occupied Poland, disassociating Poland from the Nazi crimes committed there.

Israelis, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, reacted furiously to the law, seeing it as an attempt by Poland to rewrite history and even deny the Holocaust.

"One cannot change history, and the Holocaust cannot be denied," a statement from Netanyahu said.

In a heated Twitter argument with the Polish Embassy, Yair Lapid, a popular opposition leader in the Israeli parliament, tweeted that "there were Polish death camps and no law can ever change that."

The bill, which would jail even foreigners for up to three years for using terms such as “Polish extermination camps,” passed the lower legislature overwhelmingly. For the country’s ruling Law and Justice party, it is part of a years-long effort to prevent people from “slandering the good name of Poland,” as officials once put it.

Yad Vashem, Israel’s Holocaust Remembrance Center, which last week hosted Vice President Pence, said the law was “liable to blur the historical truths regarding the assistance the Germans received from the Polish population during the Holocaust.”

The center said it agreed that the term “Polish death camps” was a historical misrepresentation — the extermination camps were set up in Nazi-occupied Poland in order to murder the Jewish people within the framework of the “Final Solution.”

“However, restrictions on statements by scholars and others regarding the Polish people’s direct or indirect complicity with the crimes committed on their land during the Holocaust are a serious distortion,” read the Yad Vashem statement.

Many historians warn against trying to simplify Poland’s role in the Holocaust.

The country was occupied for years by the forces of Nazi Germany, who herded Jews into ghettos, shot at least 200,000 of them and killed an additional million in Auschwitz, according to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Throughout the occupation, many Poles fought back through underground movements and resistance armies. A quarter-million Polish civilians died during a 1944 uprising against the German army in Warsaw, according to the museum.

But between these broad strokes of Nazi genocide and Polish heroism, some Poles also turned on Jews — or at least helped Germans kill them.

Villagers in Jedwabne, for example, reportedly locked about 300 Jewish residents in a barn and burned them alive in 1941, the BBC wrote. Some modern-day Poles deny the story or blame Germans for pressuring the villagers, but others see evidence of willing complicity throughout the occupation.

Jan Karski, a famed Polish resistance fighter, once told an interviewer of the “ruthless, often without pity” attitude some of his countrymen held for Poland’s large Jewish population.

The director of the Israel Council on Foreign Relations, Laurence Weinbaum, once wrote for The Washington Post about documented examples of Poles willingly abetting the persecution of Jews.

“Those who see themselves as defenders of Poland’s good name are often quick to point out that in Poland there was no Quisling regime comparable to that which existed in other countries occupied by Germany — and that the Polish underground fought the Germans tooth and nail,” Weinbaum wrote. “The truth is that local authorities were often left intact in occupied Poland, and many officials exploited their power in ways that proved fatal to their Jewish constituents.”

Some Poles welcomed the forced removal of their Jewish neighbors from their homes, he wrote. Some happily enriched themselves at the expense of their dispossessed neighbors, and some “did not recoil from committing acts of murder, rape and larceny — not always orchestrated by the Germans.”

That said, Weinbaum thought then-FBI director James B. Comey went too far when he spoke of Poland’s “murderers and accomplices” during a 2015 speech at the Holocaust Memorial Museum — rhetorically equating the country to Germany.

A few years earlier, President Barack Obama incensed many Poles when, during a speech honoring Karski, he spoke of “Polish death camps”. The White House later apologized.

As The Post noted, Obama's statement helped spur Polish lawmakers' efforts to ban the term and prosecute people who confuse their country with the Nazi regime. They tried to pass a bill in 2013 and failed. But Poland has turned toward nationalism since then, and in 2016, the conservative Law and Justice Party won the first parliamentary majority since the end of communism.

The party has aggressively protected Poland's image. After a massive right-wing march through Warsaw in November, with banners and chants of "white Europe" and "pure blood," some government officials defended the event as a simple independence day rally. One minister even called it "beautiful."

"Poland is being unfairly attack by hostile media," the founder of the Polish League Against Defamation complained after the rally, according to Radio Poland.

Three months later, at least in regard to Nazis, attacking Poland could become a crime.

If the bill passes Poland's Senate and becomes law, which the Israeli newspaper Haaretz reports seems likely, it will apply not just to Poles but to anyone in any country who blames the Polish state for Nazi crimes.

Since the initial vote, Reuters reported, Holocaust survivors have been giving interviews about Poles refusing to help them or turning them over to Nazis.

"When they came to round us up and put us in the ghetto, father said to run away quickly," Esther Lieber told the daily newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth. "We were very scared and fled into the woods. The Poles threw stones at us and cursed us."

Haaretz wrote that, given the proposed law's breadth, survivors could soon face prosecution in Poland for giving such testimony.

"The implication of the new law means that in theory, a Jewish Holocaust survivor from Poland who lives in Israel, who may make a statement such as, 'The Polish people were involved in the murder of my grandfather in the Holocaust' or 'My mother was murdered in a Polish extermination camp,' would be liable for imprisonment in Poland," Haaretz wrote.

## **Poland Senate passes law to criminalize use of terms such as 'Polish death camps'**

**By Katarzyna Markusz**

**Jewish Telegraphic Agency, February 1, 2018**

<https://www.jta.org/2018/02/01/news-opinion/world/polish-senate-approves-holocaust-legislation-that-criminalizes-use-of-terms-such-as-polish-death-camps>

The Polish Senate passed legislation that criminalizes accusing the Polish state of the crimes committed by the Germans during World War II.

The amendment to the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance was adopted early Thursday morning by a vote of 57-23, with two abstentions.

The legislation, designed to make it clear that Nazi Germany is responsible for the crimes against humanity that took place in the camps, was approved last week by the lower house of the Polish Parliament, or Sejm. The legislation must still be signed by the country's president.

The law would make it illegal to use terms such as "Polish death camps" to describe the camps set up by the Nazis in Poland. Violation of the law could result in up to three years in prison. It contains a provision to exclude scholarly or academic works.

Israeli lawmakers, Yad Vashem, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and scholars have criticized the law.

On Sunday, Poland's president, Andrzej Duda, said in a statement that he would carefully review the legislation.

“Everyone whose personal memory or historical research speaks the truth about the crimes and shameful behavior that occurred in the past with the participation of Poles has full right to this truth,” he said.

The same day, Israel and Poland announced that they would open an “immediate dialogue” over the legislation.

Eight U.S. members of Congress signed a joint letter on the legislation to Duda. The American lawmakers point out that Poland was one of the countries that suffered the most during World War II, and recall the merits of many Poles who, despite the threat of the death, saved Jews.

“However, many cases have also been documented where Poles — directly or indirectly — assisted the Nazis in murdering innocent Jews. Punishing anyone for talking about these facts would be an injustice,” the lawmakers wrote.

Patryk Jaki, the author of the legislation, said during debate in the Polish Senate that “Poland was the only occupied country in which no local SS group was active, there was no institutional cooperation with Hitler, which there was in stronger countries.”

Jaki said that Polish citizens tried to sue German newspapers for use of the term “Polish death camps,” but the courts refused because citizens did not have the right to appear on behalf of the state.

In January, a German court in Koblenz issued a verdict ordering ZDF television to apologize for using the term “Polish death camps.” The station had been sued by former Auschwitz inmate Karol Tendera. The court in Koblenz found that there had been a violation of Tendera’s personal rights and ordered publication of the apology. ZDF may appeal the judgment.

Jaki wants the Poles to show their successes in saving Jews and talk about heroes, such as Witold Pilecki, who informed the world about Auschwitz, and publicize the Righteous Among the Nations who saved Jews and the Polish people who helped in deciphering Nazi code.

Jaki said that no one could have predicted Israel’s reaction to the legislation.

“No one was aware that Israel would protest at all,” he said. “There was no signal over that last year that there would be a protest against this law. How could we know? The ambassador’s task was to signal if she has any comments. Let us assume that if there is a dispute, Poland is not always guilty. Let’s look at what words Israeli politicians are using towards Poland now.”

Jaki said he was meeting intensively with Israeli Ambassador Anna Azari, but they were mainly talking about reprivatization of Jewish property and assets.

Jan Dziejczak, secretary of state in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said the new law is part of a struggle for Poland’s reputation on the international stage.

“Our country always stood on the side of the weaker: We first said ‘no’ to Hitler and did not collaborate,” he said. The Polish Underground State unambiguously decided to save Jews. We know it, but now the world has a different picture.”

Dziejczak dismissed comments by Israeli lawmaker Yair Lapid, the son of a Holocaust survivor, who said there was complicity by Poles in the Holocaust.

“This is the proof that this law is essential,” said the Polish official.

The deputy speaker of the Senate, Bogdan Borusewicz, filed a proposal to reject the new law. He said that Jewish organizations in the U.S. supported Polish efforts to join NATO and “fought with the term ‘Polish camps’ with us.”

“This is our most important ally. Now we are entering into conflict with the United States,” he said. “This law makes the seams of anti-Semitism that are in the Polish nation come to the surface. The Polish government is responsible for this.”

Senate Speaker Stanisław Karczewski said the legislation was written “to look after the good name of Poland.”

“We want the Jews to be our friends. We will meet, debate, talk,” he said.

The U.S. State Department on Wednesday criticized the Polish legislation, which it said “could undermine free speech and academic discourse.” According to the State Department’s statement, the bill “could have [repercussions] on Poland’s strategic interests and relationships – including with the United States and Israel. The resulting divisions that may arise among our allies benefit only our rivals.”

Meanwhile, a demonstration of Polish national organizations planned Wednesday in front of the Israeli Embassy in Warsaw did not take place. The organizers canceled the event after officials issued a ban on closing streets near the embassy. The ban is valid until Feb. 5. Nationalists said they would meet on social media instead of at the embassy.

Lawmaker Robert Winnicki, who heads an ultranationalist organization in Poland, in a news conference in the Sejm on Wednesday said that “Poland has been subject of attack by the Israeli elite and Jewish circles in the world for many days.” He said making it impossible to organize a demonstration next to the Israeli Embassy is to limit the “voice of citizens who wanted to defend Polish dignity.” Winnicki called the decision “scandalous and unacceptable.”

“It’s false that we had an excellent relationship with Israel,” he said. “We really had a unilateral unrequited love of the Polish political class to Israel.” The lawmaker urged the Polish government to “rise from its knees in its relations with Israel.”

Winnicki also said he resents that an amendment to the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance was reviewed with the Israeli ambassador. He also called Poland a “hostage” to the United States.

“We have a lot to do with Arab countries,” he said. “It is not our business to stand by Israel’s side. We must behave with dignity.”

## **Netanyahu Meets Putin on Iran: Holocaust Teaches Us to ‘Stand Up to Murderous Ideologies’** **By Noa Landau**

**Haaretz, January 29, 2018**

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/netanyahu-meets-with-putin-in-moscow-to-discuss-iran-1.5770342>

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Russian President Vladimir Putin are meeting in Moscow to discuss Iran's meddling in Syria and Lebanon.

As they headed into their meeting Netanyahu said: "I think that the main lesson of the rise of the Nazis and then the defeat of the Nazis is that we have to face murderous ideologies in time and with power."

"This is our mission today as well," Netanyahu said, noting that their meeting was to focus on the countries' "joint efforts to promote security and stability in our region, and of course our mutual cooperation between Russia and Israel."

The two leaders were meeting at the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center in Moscow, where together they toured a new exhibit on the Sobibor death camp. At the start of the meeting, Netanyahu emphasized that both countries had a "common struggle against the greatest evil that humanity has known." He also stated "the awful price paid by the Jewish people, and the Russian people, and the great sacrifice of 20 million Russians alongside our 6 million, and the heroism of the Red Army in achieving victory over the Nazis."

Netanyahu is expected to raise Israel's right to operate to prevent the smuggling of advanced weaponry to Hezbollah in Lebanon through Syrian territory.

Before Netanyahu flew for the lightning five-hour visit to meet Putin Monday, he said such coordination was essential to stymie Iranian attempts to solidify their forces on the ground there.

"This is something we are adamantly opposed to and are working to stop," Netanyahu said in comments just before flying to Moscow.

Netanyahu said he and Putin will also be talking about Iranian inroads in Lebanon, Israel's northern neighbor. He said Iran was trying "to turn Lebanon into one big missile site, a site for manufacturing precision missiles against the State of Israel. This is something we are not prepared to tolerate."

Netanyahu was accompanied by Minister Zeev Elkin, a member of the security cabinet who is considered to have close ties with Russian officials, as well as National Security Adviser Meir Ben-Shabbat and outgoing Military Intelligence chief Maj. Gen. Herzl Halevi.

The meeting, which was set up earlier this month during a telephone conversation in which the two leaders exchanged New Year's greetings, also dealt with U.S. President Donald Trump's ultimatum to Europe on amending the nuclear deal with Iran.

On the issue of Iran's growing presence in both Syria and Lebanon, Israel's main goal is to maintain its freedom of action in both countries' airspace.

Israeli officials have said they retain the right to operate to prevent the smuggling of advanced weaponry to Hezbollah in Lebanon through Syrian territory.

The Israeli delegation will also seek to understand how Russia envisions its future involvement in the region and to gauge how strongly it opposes the American effort to reopen the nuclear deal.

Specifically, although Israel has assumed the Russians would oppose any changes in the agreement, Netanyahu has been keen to find out how willing they are to put themselves on the line over this issue.

Netanyahu's visit with Putin to the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center's new exhibit of the Sobibor death camp had symbolic resonance after a diplomatic crisis erupted between Israel and Russia after Poland decided not to include Russia in a project to build a museum and memorial to the camp's victims in which Israel was included.

The Nazis closed Sobibor following an uprising led by Alexander Pechersky, a Jewish officer in the Soviets' Red Army, and Russia was angry at Israel over its exclusion from the project even though Israel made clear that it had no objection to Russian participation.

Netanyahu's visit to the Jewish Museum was meant to ease this crisis. But it is also a way for Russia to poke Poland in the eye, just after Poland's parliament infuriated Israel by passing a law which is widely seen as suppressing discussion of the role Poles played in the Holocaust.

Last month, Putin made a surprise visit to a military base in Syria and met with Syrian President Bashar Assad there. The Kremlin said at the time that "Russia gave the broadest military backing to the government in Syria, our longtime ally, in the country's civil war." According to that announcement, Putin said once again that Russia would withdraw its troops from the country, but would leave limited forces at the Hemeimeem air force base, near Latakia, as well as at the naval base in Tartus. The Russian president also said that if terrorism in Syria "raises its head," Russia will strike back at the terrorists with full force.

In a speech to the soldiers, after announcing the withdrawal of troops, Putin said: "Friends, the homeland awaits you." Russian television footage shows Putin getting off the plane at the military base and shaking

hands with Assad. According to Russian media reports, Assad thanked Putin for his soldiers' contribution to the fighting in Syria.

About three weeks earlier, Assad visited Russia. According to the Kremlin's announcement at the time, the leaders agreed that the focus of efforts in Syria were changing from a military operation to "eradicate terror," to the search for a political solution. "We have a long way to go before we declare a complete victory over the terrorists, but the military operation is indeed in its final stages," Putin said, after the meeting in Sochi, on the Black Sea. "I think the most important thing now, of course, is political questions."

Shortly after his meeting with Assad in Russia, Putin held a summit on the issue of Syria with Iranian President Hassan Rohani and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. At the meeting, Rohani said that the foreign involvement in Syria should be ended but that any foreign presence in the country would be acceptable on condition the foreigners were invited by the Syrian government. Rohani did not mention specific countries. He added that the last terror cells in Syria must be uprooted and that conditions are ripe for a political settlement. In his remarks about terrorism, Rivlin also referred to ISIS, which he said practices terrorism such as the world has never known before – and this places everyone everywhere on constant alert.

### **In Ukraine, Ultranationalist Militia Strikes Fear in Some Quarters**

**By Christopher Miller**

**Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, January 30, 2018**

<https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-azov-right-wing-militia-to-patrol-kyiv/29008036.html>

The gathering was large and formidable, with hundreds of mostly young men in fatigues keeping tight ranks on Kyiv's central Independence Square before marching in formation to a torch-lit fortress on a hillside in the Ukrainian capital.

There, in the January 28 spectacle, 600 of them swore an oath to clean the streets of illegal alcohol, drug traffickers, and illegal gambling establishments.

Their mission would seem righteous enough. And it was featured in a slickly produced video with aerial drone footage, sweeping edits, and menacing music that caught the attention of many on social media.

But Ukraine observers and rights groups are sounding the alarm, because this was not a typical commencement, and the men are not police officers. They are far-right ultranationalists from the Azov movement, a controversial group with a military wing that has openly accepted self-avowed neo-Nazis, and a civil and political faction that has demonstrated intolerance toward minority groups.

"We will not hesitate to use force to establish order that will bring prosperity to every Ukrainian family!" reads a message alongside the video, published on the Facebook page of the newly formed group, called the National Militia. In the clip, they vow also to protect the nation "when government organs can't or won't help Ukrainian society."

That approach could concern Western backers in Kyiv's campaign against armed Russia-backed separatists in the eastern part of the country, where a conflict that has lasted nearly four years has killed at least 10,300 people.

"Ukraine would be violating its international obligations under human rights law if authorities either tolerate abusive militia who undermine [the] population's liberty, security, freedoms or provide an abusive militia with the color of law but [do] not impose on them exacting standards on use of force," Tanya Cooper, Human Rights Watch (HRW)'s Ukraine researcher in Kyiv, told RFE/RL in e-mailed comments as media buzzed over the appearance of the National Militia.

Matthew Schaff, Ukraine director of the U.S.-based NGO Freedom House, told RFE/RL by phone that simply their creation "does damage to democracy in Ukraine."

Founded in 2014 as a volunteer battalion to help an overmatched Ukrainian military fight off the threat in its east, the Azov movement uses fascist symbols and has been accused by international humanitarian organizations of human rights abuses in the conflict zone.

The National Militia is an independent group that is merely the latest component of Azov's civilian and political wing, known as the National Corps. It is led by lawmaker and former Azov Battalion commander Andriy Biletsky, once the head of Ukraine's neo-Nazi Social-National Party, who attended the ceremony.

Azov officially founded the National Corps in October 2016, incorporating two other nationalist groups, including Patriot Of Ukraine, which according to Halya Coynash of the Kharkiv Human Rights Group "espoused xenophobic and neo-Nazi ideas and was engaged in violent attacks against migrants, foreign students in Kharkiv, and those opposing its views."

That inaugural ceremony arguably had pomp more reminiscent of 1930s Germany than of postwar democracy. It included nationalist chants, raised fists, and a torchlight march through central Kyiv.

National Corps's political aims at the time of its creation included the restoration of Ukraine's nuclear-power status, which was abandoned in a major boost to nonproliferation soon after the breakup of the Soviet Union; the nationalization of companies that were owned by the government when Ukraine gained independence in 1991; and the legalization of firearms for personal protection.

Its foreign policy sought to cut cultural, diplomatic, and trade ties with Russia, and urged a public discussion about restoring the death penalty in Ukraine for crimes such as treason and embezzlement of government funds.

While the National Corps appears to draw limited support from Ukraine's electorate -- polls show it under the 5 percent threshold to enter parliament -- its public presence has grown, worrying international observers and making it a favorite target for Russian propaganda. Russian state news agencies and politicians suggest the government in Kyiv's perceived tolerance for the far-right movement makes it fascist. The Ukrainian government's failure to aggressively challenge the group has done little to calm its critics.

So it came as something of a surprise on January 30 when Interior Minister Arsen Avakov, who has enjoyed a close relationship with the Azov movement in the past, appeared to distance himself from the group, saying in a statement posted to the ministry's website that "in Ukraine, there is only one monopoly on the use of force -- the state: the National Guard, the National Police, and the Armed Forces."

He added, "All other paramilitary entities that try to position themselves on the streets of cities are not legal."

Ivan Varchenko, an Avakov adviser, told Hromadske Radio that Ukrainian law provides for registration of civic organizations that assist law enforcement agencies.

Roman Chernyshov of the National Corps also tried to calm concerns, telling Hromadske Radio that its members do not bear arms.

Armed or not, as news of the National Militia spread across Ukrainian media, critics raised serious concerns about the type of order the unit may enforce on the streets of Kyiv.

"It's the police responsibility to enforce the law on the street and hold people accountable for crimes they've committed," Freedom House's Schaaf said. "When there are groups that are roaming the streets in units like this, with slogans like this, it definitely raises concerns about what are their intentions, how they will they be implementing their visions, what rules they are trying to enforce."

HRW's Cooper said one of her primary concerns was who would be targeted by the group. "Members of this political party espouse intolerance towards ethnic minorities and LGBT people, so it seems completely absurd that these people would be able [and willing] to protect everyone," she said of the Azovs.

She added, "The bottom line is that if these units are going to be carrying out any kind of policing duty, they have to be held to the exact same human rights standards as regular police: on use of force, powers of detention, nondiscrimination, etc., and they have to be trained and held accountable just like regular police are."

Perhaps in an attempt to alleviate public concerns, Avakov insisted, "I, as a minister, will not allow for parallel structures that try to behave as alternative military formations on the streets."

## **How the Holocaust Haunts Eastern Europe**

**By Lev Golinkin**

**New York Times, January 26, 2018**

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/26/opinion/holocaust-eastern-europe.html>

One of my big shocks upon arriving in America from Ukraine in the 1980s was learning that the United States had museums to commemorate the Holocaust.

We Soviet Jews didn't meticulously construct exhibits — we walked past Nazi killing grounds on the way to buy groceries. Eastern Europe is crisscrossed with ravines holding bones of the millions who, instead of being deported to concentration camps, were massacred on the spot.

Three times cursed are the dead Jews of the old Communist bloc: gunned down outside their towns and villages, ignored and whitewashed by the Soviet Union, and now, their killers glorified by the resurging nationalism of today's Eastern European governments.

Holocaust remembrance posed a threat to the atheist Kremlin dictatorship, which didn't tolerate unsanctioned monuments, houses of worship or any location that could become a potential focal point for ethnic and religious organization; additionally, acknowledging the ethnic roots of the genocide would invariably draw attention to the Soviet Union's own anti-Semitism. As a result, the Holocaust sites went unmourned and unmarked.

The ravines where oblivious schoolchildren played by day and drunk men sprawled at night taunted Soviet Jews, reminding us of our impotence under Communist rule. "Von tam" ("over there"), Jewish fathers whispered to sons in Russian while discreetly nodding at trash-covered pits such as Babi Yar in Kiev and Drobitsky Yar in my home city of Kharkiv. "Von tam" was a rite of passage, like a bar mitzvah in the land where the rabbis had been sent to the gulags and synagogues were refurbished into Komsomol youth centers.

Even after being shamed into confronting its silence by Yevgeny Yevtushenko's seminal 1961 poem "Babi Yar," the Kremlin refused to fully acknowledge the Holocaust. Instead of ignoring the dead Jews, Moscow conscripted them into the Soviet mythos of the Great Patriotic War, as World War II was known. Inconspicuous plaques mentioning "Soviet victims of Nazi aggression" were placed at a handful of the larger sites, where they joined the thousands of plaques and memorials on every corner of the Soviet Union. The K.G.B. continued to monitor the ravines for signs of organized prayer, and the Soviet Jews remained consigned to whispers.

It was only during the late '80s, with restrictions loosened by Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost, that the Holocaust began appearing in the Soviet press. On Oct. 4, 1991, two months before the collapse of the Soviet Union, a monument to Jewish victims was erected in Kiev. "Today at Babi Yar the Spirits Will Rest," proclaimed The New York Times' headline about the opening ceremony. And so they could. For a while.

The Nazis did not act alone. The Holocaust, especially in Eastern Europe, was made possible with the aid of local governments and paramilitaries, which rounded up and massacred Jews, sometimes in the service of the Nazis, sometimes on their own volition.

Today, these collaborators — groups and individuals responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Jews — are being glorified and rehabilitated as part of the ultranationalism surging across Eastern Europe. Nationalists seek to rally around men who fought for independence against both Russia and Germany;

unfortunately, the World War II-era figures being chosen had expressed their vision for independence by murdering Jews.

In 1947, Josef Tiso, a Slovak priest and Nazi collaborator, was hanged for crimes against humanity because of his eager deportation of Slovakia's Jews. Today, he is celebrated with parades and memorials across Slovakia. Marches commemorating local SS units wind through Baltic capitals. With festivals, marches and street names, Ukraine has been glorifying paramilitaries responsible for slaughtering thousands of Jews. Hungary and Croatia are both whitewashing their World War II-era Nazi collaborationist governments. Lithuania has gone so far as to bring criminal charges against Jewish partisans who fought Nazi collaborators.

Today's Eastern European states are, in their way, following in the Kremlin's footsteps by recasting Nazi collaborators as "fellow victims" and "freedom fighters," while whitewashing their anti-Semitism and participation in the Holocaust. Particularly ominous are recent steps taken by some governments, which emulate the Soviets by enforcing the official state narrative using censorship and the threat of imprisonment.

In 2015, Ukraine passed laws making it a criminal offense to deny the heroic nature of two World War II paramilitaries. Earlier this month, Kiev made headlines by banning "Stalingrad," an award-winning book by Antony Beevor, an acclaimed British historian, on account of a single paragraph that mentions a Ukrainian unit killing Jewish children. Poland's ruling far-right Law and Justice Party proposed legislation making it illegal to accuse Poles of participating in the Holocaust, and targeted authors and journalists for daring to say otherwise. Once again, the Jews of Eastern Europe may face persecution and censorship for honoring their slain.

During the Cold War, with Eastern European Jews incapacitated by Communist dictatorships, the American Jewish community was at the vanguard of Holocaust remembrance. One of the most touching revelations I had in the United States was learning that in 1982, when Babi Yar still had no plaques mentioning the slain Jews, Americans had built a Babi Yar memorial in Denver. Today, however, the American Jewish community — including Jewish lawmakers in Washington — is largely silent about the widespread Holocaust distortion being carried out by Eastern European allies.

Breaking that silence is imperative, especially given the current global rise of anti-Semitism and the disturbing correlation between Holocaust revisionism and violence against living Jews. American Jews are already waking up to Holocaust denial on social media and vandalism of Holocaust museums at home. They should not forget to cast their gaze to the Nazi killing fields of Eastern Europe, where old battles are still being waged, and the perpetually inconvenient dead can find no rest.

### **Report: Ukraine had more anti-Semitic incidents than all former Soviet countries combined** **By Cnaan Lipshiz**

**Jewish Telegraphic Agency, January 28, 2018**

<https://www.jta.org/2018/01/28/news-opinion/israel-middle-east/report-ukraine-had-more-anti-semitic-incidents-than-all-former-soviet-countries-combined>

In its main annual report on anti-Semitism, Israel's government singled out Ukraine as unusual in Eastern Europe for the alleged increase in attacks there, triggering protest by Kiev.

The allegation appeared in the anti-Semitism report for 2017 that the Ministry for Diaspora Affairs under Education Minister Naftali Bennett published last week, ahead of the Jan. 27 International Day of Holocaust Remembrance.

"A striking exception in the trend of decrease in anti-Semitic incidents in Eastern Europe was Ukraine, where the number of recorded anti-Semitic attacks was doubled from last year and surpassed the tally for all the incidents reported throughout the entire region combined," the report said.

The report did not name the total number of incidents reported but a ministry spokesperson queried by JTA said that throughout 2017, more than 130 incidents of anti-Semitism had been reported, including violent assaults, in Ukraine. The data came from Jewish communities and Nativ, an Israeli government agency that

used to be part of the intelligence services but today deals exclusively with issues connected to aliyah, or immigration by Jews and their relatives to Israel.

The report also said that 2017 was the second consecutive year that Ukraine had the largest number of anti-Semitic incidents of any other country from the former Soviet Union.

Ukraine is home to approximately 360,000 Jews, according to the European Jewish Congress. Russia has more than 300,000 Jews, according to the World Jewish Congress.

In an article published Saturday in Radio Liberty, a Ukrainian state historian dismissed the Israeli report as anti-Ukrainian propaganda and a researcher of anti-Semitism from Ukraine said the Israeli report was flawed and amateurish.

The researcher, Vyacheslav Likhachev, who is affiliated with the Va'ad Association of Jewish Communities and Organizations of Ukraine, suggested in the article that the report's authors merely summed up the incidents they found reported online, in a "blatant lack of professionalism and violation of all standards of hate crimes documentation, which are guided by professional monitoring groups, both in Ukraine and in the world," he said. Reut Moshonov, the ministry spokesperson, told JTA: "The report is compiled using only credible sources, including about Ukraine. We hope to be able to report the reversal of the current trend next year."

The director of Ukraine's Institute of National Remembrance, Vladimir Vyatrovich, told Radio Liberty that, "It is a pity, but the results of the influence of propaganda are felt even by documents of certain Israeli institutions." The report also noted Vyatrovich's institution and its alleged attempts to rehabilitate the reputation of nationalist leaders from the 1920s and 1940s despite their complicity or that of their troops in killing Jews, in some cases along with German occupation troops during the Holocaust.

Manifestations of the alleged increase in attacks included "anti-Semitic propaganda in the public discourse, vandalism against Jewish sites such as cemeteries, Holocaust commemoration sites and communal institutions," the report said.

The absence of "effective action" by authorities led to repeat attacks against sites that were "targeted consecutively by perpetrators who were never caught," the report also said. In many cases, anti-Semitic attacks are treated as vandalism or thuggery without the aggravated element of a hate crime, the report also said.

Following the 2014 revolution in Ukraine, which ended with the ousting of Viktor Yanukovich by opponents who said he was a corrupt Russian stooge, "there was the impression that Ukraine, which in the past was unusual in the level of use of anti-Semitic speech for the promotion of political goals, had succeeded in leaving the scourge in the past," the report said. But over the past two years, "the use of Jews as scapegoats in public discourse has increased to become very prevalent," the report also said.

Jews were appointed some of the top positions in government following the revolution, including in the case of Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman. But "now the Jewish origins of these individuals is perceived as one of the reasons for the country's difficult socio-political reality," the report stated. Even leaders who are not Jews, such as President Petro Poroshenko, "are perceived on the street as secretly Jewish," it also said.

The report cited the statements by Nadiya Savchenko, a war hero turned nationalist politician, complaining that Poroshenko's government was "non-Ukrainian."

The prevalence of anti-Semitism in Ukraine is a sensitive issue for Israeli diplomacy because the issue has featured prominently in anti-Ukrainian propaganda by Russia, which annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 and is involved in a proxy conflict with Ukraine by funding pro-Russian rebels there.

Russian President Vladimir Putin cited alleged anti-Semitism in justifying the invasion into Crimea, which he said was to protect ethnic minorities there during revolution. Publicly, Israel, which has close relations both with Russia and Ukraine, has remained neutral on the conflict.

The chapter on Russia in the anti-Semitism report contained language that is significantly less harsh than in the one about Ukraine. Last year “saw a continuation of the downward trend in the number of anti-Semitic attacks recorded in Russia,” the report said.

“In a number of cases, politicians and elected officials chose to refer to the ethnic origins of opposition activists and liberal artists whose Jewish identity was not relevant to their actions,” the author wrote. The report noted 11 examples in Russia, including the hurling in September of firebombs at the Moscow offices of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Russia and the shattering of the widows of a synagogue in July.

## **Trump’s Stance on Russia Sanctions Angers Both Moscow and Washington**

**By Neil MacFarquhar and Peter Baker**

**New York Times, January 30, 2018**

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/30/world/europe/kremlin-russia-trump-list.html?rref=collection%2Fsectioncollection%2Fworld&action=click&contentCollection=world&region=rank&module=package&version=highlights&contentPlacement=1&pgtype=sectionfront>

The Trump administration managed the unusual feat this week of outraging both Russia’s leaders in Moscow and Russia’s biggest critics in Washington with its handling of a new law intended to punish the Kremlin for interference in the 2016 American elections.

The State Department angered members of Congress by announcing on Monday that it did not plan to impose new sanctions called for in a measure that President Trump reluctantly signed into law last year. And the Treasury Department angered Moscow late Monday night — Tuesday morning in Russia — with a new name-and-shame list identifying 210 senior Russian political and business figures.

The twin announcements left a muddled impression of how Mr. Trump plans to approach the Kremlin in his second year in office even as investigators search for evidence of collaboration between his campaign and Russian agents. His domestic opponents complained that once again Mr. Trump seemed to be in thrall to Russia, while the Kremlin complained that he was a captive of what it described as the American deep state.

“This is definitely an unfriendly act,” President Vladimir V. Putin said when asked about the Treasury Department list during a campaign event in advance of Russia’s own presidential election in March. “It is complicating Russian-American relations, where the situation is already hard, and is definitely harming international relations in general.”

Mr. Putin said Moscow had pondered virtually breaking ties with Washington over what is known in Russia as the “Kremlin report,” but decided against it. “We were prepared to undertake retaliatory steps, and quite serious ones too, which would cut our relations to zero,” he said. “But we will refrain from such steps for the time being.”

On Capitol Hill, lawmakers criticized Mr. Trump for not imposing additional sanctions on Russia as envisioned in the legislation passed over his objections by veto-proof bipartisan majorities in both houses last August.

“It is a grave breach of President Trump’s responsibilities to reward President Putin by inaction for his intervention in an American election — it represents nothing less than appeasement for an attack on our country’s democracy,” said Representative Adam Smith of Washington State, the ranking Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee. “It is time for us time to stand up for our country. We cannot let these actions to continue to go unpunished.”

The new law made Monday an important date for action. The law required Mr. Trump to begin imposing sanctions on large purchasers of Russian military equipment. But the State Department said it did not need to do so at this point because it had been using the threat of the law in recent months to press customers to cancel potential deals that would have been worth billions of dollars to Russia.

The law also directed Mr. Trump to produce a list of “senior political figures and oligarchs” in Russia. No actions were required against those on the list, but it was meant to signal those close to Mr. Putin that they had

much to lose if Moscow does not pull back from its intervention in Ukraine and its interference in Western elections, and the prospect of being included alarmed many in Russia.

Grilled by Democrats during a congressional hearing, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin rejected suggestions that the administration was delaying action on Russia and said that additional action would be taken. "There will be sanctions out of this report," he said.

But when Senator John Kennedy, Republican of Louisiana, pressed him on whether he agreed that Mr. Putin "has acted like a thug," Mr. Mnuchin demurred.

"Um, I'm not going to use that terminology," Mr. Mnuchin said, "but there are clearly issues that we need to address and that we have done with sanctions."

"Let's go through the list," Mr. Kennedy replied. "Ukraine, Crimea, Syria, he meddled in our election, he's helping North Korea cheat. I mean it seems to me in terms of sanctions, we only hit him so hard he's coughing up bones. I mean he's not getting better. He's getting worse."

The announcements came just days after two senior Russian intelligence officials traveled to Washington to meet with Mike Pompeo, the C.I.A. director. Sergey Y. Naryshkin, director of the foreign intelligence service, was in Washington last week for consultations on terrorism, according to Russian state media, even though he was sanctioned by the American government under President Barack Obama.

According to an American official, he was accompanied by Alexander V. Bortnikov, director of the domestic intelligence service, who has not been sanctioned. The C.I.A. would not confirm the meeting but said any interactions would have been in accordance with American law.

In an interview with the BBC that was broadcast on Monday, Mr. Pompeo said he anticipated that Russia would try to interfere in this year's midterm congressional elections. "Of course," he said. "I have every expectation that they will continue to try and do that, but I'm confident that America will be able to have a free and fair election, that we will push back in a way that is sufficiently robust that the impact they have on our election won't be great."

The Treasury list, released just before midnight in Washington, included almost the entire roster of senior Russian government officials as well as 96 billionaires. The document said that inclusion on the list did not mean involvement in "malign activities."

Dmitri S. Peskov, Mr. Putin's spokesman, called it an "enemies list" that could unfairly tar those on it. "The fact that this list was made public can potentially do damage to the image and reputation of our enterprises, businessmen, politicians and officials," he told reporters, calling the roster "unprecedented."

"De facto everyone is called the enemy of the United States," Mr. Peskov said. "If you read the text and the title of this document, all this is done in accordance with the law on countering the enemies of the United States."

Government figures on the list include more than 40 of Mr. Putin's closest advisers; all 30 members of the cabinet of ministers, including Prime Minister Dmitri A. Medvedev; and the heads of many important state agencies and state-run companies. At least 22 listed people had already been sanctioned by the Obama administration.

The list was met with a combination of disbelief and derision in Russia, as mocking comments ricocheted around social media. Some joked that it had taken the Trump administration six months to photocopy the Forbes list of Russian billionaires, since they were all included, as well as the link detailing senior officials on the Kremlin website. Treasury officials confirmed that they did rely on Forbes, among other publicly available sources.

The 96 oligarchs are each worth more than \$1 billion, including well-known people like Mikhail Prokhorov, the owner of the Brooklyn Nets basketball team, and Eugene Kaspersky, whose antivirus technology firm has been

under fire in the West over allegations that it cooperates with Russian intelligence. One man on the list, Kirill Shamalov, who married one of Mr. Putin's daughters, might no longer be in the billionaire's club since they have recently split, Bloomberg reported.

Kaspersky Labs issued a statement objecting to its founder's inclusion, saying the company did not have political influence, and Mr. Kaspersky commented on his own Twitter account, emphasizing that the company helps protect customers "regardless of their origin."

The businessman Gavril Yushvaev, who said he had invested \$500 million in Western start-ups, told the online news website The Bell that his overseas partners had been calling to say that they would ignore the list. "Everybody needs people who can invest, regardless of these lists," he said. "I am not upset. Whatever happens, happens."

The announcement said there were more names on a classified annex provided by the Treasury Department, including lesser officials or businessmen worth less than \$1 billion.

Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, the Democratic minority leader, said on Tuesday that Mr. Trump was effectively circumventing the law and "afraid to sanction Putin" and his associates.

"If President Trump wishes to save his presidency from the shame of having failed to address one of the gravest threats facing our country, he would announce this evening in no uncertain terms that he was sanctioning President Putin," Mr. Schumer said, referring to the president's State of the Union speech on Tuesday evening. "Any other president would have already made it their priority to take decisive action in their first year."

## **The Inside Story of How Vicious anti-Semitism Quietly Aids Moscow's Covert Influence Campaign in the U.S.**

**By Anton Shekhovtsov**

**Haaretz, January 29, 2018**

<https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-pro-putin-trolls-court-u-s-alt-right-with-hardcore-anti-semitism-1.5770080>

On the 15th of January, the previously little known website, Russia Insider, published a 5000-word long manifesto authored by the website's editor Charles Bausman, in which he demanded the world in general, and Russia in particular, "Drop the Jew taboo," stating that it was high time to start assertively addressing the "pernicious influence" of the "Jewish elites."

The manifesto alleged "Jewish pressure groups" were in no small degree responsible for various sins, ranging from current sex scandals to most of the deadly turmoil in the world over the last 30 years. And, since Russia Insider's contents mostly concern Russia, Bausman claimed that "the unreasonable hostility towards Putin's Russia [was] very much a Jewish phenomenon."

He also invited potential authors to submit (unpaid) articles dealing with the "Jewish problem" and even introduced a new category on the website, 'The Jewish Question', echoing the Nazi, and contemporary neo-Nazi, language of genocide: the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question."

The manifesto was a surprise for two reasons.

The first reason is technical: Charles Bausman has never authored lengthy pieces such as this, therefore – with his "It's Time to Drop the Jew Taboo" – he really put in a lot of effort. Russia Insider itself is hardly known for its original journalism, as most of its contents is copy-pasted or translated from other websites. The overwhelming majority of Bausman's own contributions to the website are usually blog-like entries rather than proper op-eds. This means that the manifesto was quite important for Bausman.

The second reason is that Bausman's piece was a radical departure from the previous articles published by the website.

Not that Russia Insider, which was launched in September 2014, did not publish anti-Semitic texts before – it did, and they were retroactively added to the new category "The Jewish Question" – but none of the pieces demonstrated such straightforward and "unreformed" anti-Semitism.

It is no secret that modern anti-Semites – if they are not blatantly neo-Nazis – prefer to use terms like "New World Order," "international finance" or "global elites" to attack the Jews, but Bausman's manifesto rejected these euphemisms directly and was written in blunt tones about the "Jewish problem."

Doubtlessly, by publishing his anti-Semitic manifesto, Bausman has presented a challenge to his own operation. According to the website, the means of its sustenance come from crowdfunding, and Bausman has been actively campaigning since 2014 to raise funds for The Russian Insider. (The website itself claims that it has been donated around US \$ 300,000 since 2014.) And Bausman himself admitted that, since the website depended on reader contributions, the anti-Semitic publication might repel the audience and "curtail donations from some."

Moreover, RT, which used to quote Bausman and invite him to their shows, and which was one of the main sources of Russia Insider's copy-pasting technique, has now distanced itself from him by saying that it "categorically and unequivocally [condemned] the disgusting hate speech promoted by the recent Russia Insider article."

Why, then, did Bausman start his crusade against the "Jewish elites"? A possible explanation is that Bausman is a very recent convert to flagrant anti-Semitism.

As he himself writes, when he started the website, he "knew relatively little about Jewish influence," but "after three years of immersing [himself] in political analysis and media criticism," he had his eureka moment.

An important observation supports this explanation. Russia Insider was originally launched to attack Ukraine after its former pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich was ousted and fled to Russia, by accusing the new Ukrainian authorities of fascism and anti-Semitism. Therefore the website at that time did not profess anti-Semitism, quite the opposite: it portrayed the Jews as allegedly potential victims of the new Ukrainian government, which Russia Insider opposed, following the Kremlin's line.

If this explanation is correct, then Bausman's anti-Semitic manifesto is a result of a process of radicalization that may have two main sources.

The first is the rise of the American far right inspired by the growing growth of the popularity of Donald Trump. The second is how anti-Semitism is becoming mainstream in particular circles around the Russian Orthodox Church.

It was the rise of the American far right, which manifested itself largely through the growing online visibility of the resources such as Breitbart News, Alt Right, Fash the Nation, The Daily Stormer and some others, that greatly reinforced the anti-Semitic element of the right-wing "alternative media" and made it more pronounced.

The analysis of the contents of Russia Insider, which admits its affiliation with "alternative media," shows that it gradually transformed from a pro-Kremlin and Ukraine-bashing website to a pro-Kremlin far-right resource not unlike the U.S.-based Alt Right or Fash the Nation. This transformation was specifically gradual: it did not happen overnight.

Bausman's proximity to the ultra-nationalist Russian Orthodox circles should also be taken into account.

Bausman, who was born in Germany and studied in the U.S., has been living in Moscow on and off since the 1990s, and it was in Russia where Bausman converted to the Orthodox faith. Around 2014, he made contact with Aleksey Komov, the official Russian representative of the international "pro-family" association, the World Congress of Families, and the head of the international department of Patriarch's Commission on the Family Issues created by the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Komov is also closely related to the Russian Orthodox ultranationalist oligarch Konstantin Malofeev who, in September 2014, co-chaired a meeting of the World Congress of Families in Moscow. The meeting was crowned by an exclusive gala-dinner, and Komov and Malofeev invited Bausman to join it.

In October that year, as leaked communications showed, Bausman turned to Malofeev via his contact with Komov and asked for funding for Russia Insider. Malofeev's press service would later claim that he never sponsored Russia Insider.

In several instances, Bausman's manifesto echoes narratives widely shared in ultranationalist Russian Orthodox circles.

For example, Komov believes that "Communism was imposed on Russia by the international professional forces of evil" who were helped by the Jewish Bolshevik Leon Trotsky and the bankers from the Wall Street. In his manifesto, Bausman writes there are grounds to believe that the Russian Revolution was "a Jewish coup d'etat, financed by wealthy bankers in New York and London," and notes that "much of the Bolshevik leadership was Jewish" and singles out Trotsky as an example.

When Bausman attended the gala-dinner in September 2014, he might have become acquainted with Father Tikhon (Georgiy Shevkunov), who was also invited to the dinner by Malofeev.

Just a few months ago, in November 2017, Tikhon moderated a Russian Orthodox conference that discussed the murder of the Russian Tsar Nicholas II and his family. According to Tikhon, the Tsar was a victim of the "ritual murder" carried out by the Bolsheviks – a poorly-disguised Russian version of the anti-Semitic "blood libel." Bausman does not reproduce this particular narrative in his manifesto, but argues that after the revolution, the Bolsheviks tortured Orthodox priests and subjected them to ritual murder.

Bausman's anti-Semitic inspirations do not necessarily come directly from either Komov or Tikhon: again, these ideas are common for a wider ultra-nationalist Orthodox milieu. But it is viable to suggest that much of Bausman's relatively newly discovered anti-Semitism originates exactly in these circles.

Another important question about Bausman's manifesto is who the targeted audience of The Russia Insider's decided anti-Semitic turn is. The statistics provided by Alexa show that most of the website's audience is based in the U.S. Considering that the website is primarily a pro-Kremlin resource, it seems that Bausman's goal is to use anti-Semitism to reinforce the already existing pro-Kremlin sentiments within the American far right.

Bausman's move is already getting traction among the targeted audience ranging from neo-Nazi Richard Spencer to right-wing libertarian Lew Rockwell. Russia Insider may have lost some of its more moderate readership, but it appears not only to be winning the extremists' hearts and minds, but also contributing to the strengthening of their anti-Semitism.

At the same time, Bausman's manifesto will unlikely find any public support outside the American and Russian far-right circles. The Russian media loyal to the Kremlin, as well as official Moscow, which poses as an anti-fascist state in the international arena, will distance themselves from Russia Insider.

However, while hardly sanctioned by the Kremlin, Bausman's move is still useful for Moscow's covert influence in the U.S. The more extreme the growing American far-right scene is, the more it contributes to the already troubling polarization of the American society.

That, they might be hoping, will turn it more inward-looking, and less engaged in the international fight against authoritarianism and kleptocracy.

## **Kennan Cable No. 30: Democracy in Ukraine: Are We There Yet?**

**By Matthew Rojansky and Mykhailo Minakov**

**Kennan Institute, January 30, 2018**

<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/kennan-cable-no-30-democracy-ukraine-are-we-there-yet>

More than a quarter century ago, the Ukrainian people made a historic choice in favor of independence, democracy, and the free market. Their vision of a fully sovereign, democratic, and prosperous state has been only partially fulfilled. While Ukraine is a clearly established polity with internationally recognized sovereignty, it is nonetheless hampered in its democratic and free market development by endemic corruption, retrograde political cycles, and aggression by its powerful neighbor Russia.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Ukraine emerged as a highly pluralistic but unstable democracy. Through the 1990s, the country's political system developed along two parallel paths, combining a liberal democratic façade with post-Soviet oligarch-controlled distribution of power and resources. The contradictions between these two dimensions of Ukraine's politics yielded two revolutionary cycles, spanning roughly 1992–2004 and 2005–2014. During each of these cycles, a period of popularly supported democratic reforms was soon displaced by simulated democracy, driven essentially by oligarchic competition and then, later, by authoritarian consolidation, resulting in civic protests and eventual regime change, resetting the cycle.

Ukraine's transition from Soviet republic to fully democratic state has been inhibited by these cycles. It is yet to be determined whether Ukraine's democratic development has been set on a sustainable path in the wake of the 2014 Euromaidan, the process of closer political and economic association with the European Union (EU), and the war in Donbas. There are many reasons to hope this is now the case, but there is also cause for serious concern about the sustainability of current reform efforts and democratic politics.

Post-Soviet Ukraine's constitutional order has been subject to several key dichotomies: presidentialism versus parliamentarianism, centralization of power versus local self-governance, and institutionalized democracy versus persistent clan politics.

Competition between the president and parliament began from the earliest post-Soviet period. Presidents Leonid Kravchuk (1991–1994) and Leonid Kuchma (1994–2005) both battled with the Verkhovna Rada for power, resulting in a five-year constitution drafting process that finally produced a new semi-presidential constitution in June 1996. This document elevated the president over the entire executive branch, including the prime minister and cabinet, and a network of regional (oblast') governors appointed by the president. However, the Rada itself retained a high level of independence, and, with the judiciary, helped to bring the system into relative balance.

Kuchma tried to constrain the Rada's independence by proposing a referendum in 2000 to split the legislative body into two chambers. Although a majority of Ukrainians voted for Kuchma's "reform," the Rada blocked implementation. [i] The constitution of 2004, a reaction to the Orange Revolution, readjusted the balance once more, making Ukraine a "parliamentary-presidential" republic. While the president retained considerable power and influence, especially in the security and diplomatic spheres, the ruling coalition in the Rada was awarded control over the Cabinet of Ministers and thus of the bulk of executive branch competencies.

When Viktor Yanukovich was elected president in 2010, he used informal and corrupt influence to secure control over Ukraine's Constitutional Court, and with its support rolled back the 2004 constitutional changes, restoring the previous semi-presidential system with enhanced powers for himself.

The tables turned once again following the Euromaidan protests, which became known as the Revolution of Dignity, in the winter of 2013–14. After Yanukovich fled the country, the Rada again reinstated the 2004 Constitution, giving itself increased authority.[ii] According to its constitution, Ukraine today is once more a parliamentary-presidential republic, but the real power of the president goes far beyond constitutional limits.[iii]

One of the first victims of the recurring battles between presidents and parliaments in Ukraine was local self-governance. In the 1990s, local councils steadily lost power to the central government in Kyiv.[iv] By 2002, the president, the cabinet, and the Rada had assumed so much authority from local governments that Kuchma

decided to begin limited decentralization reforms to reduce the burden on his government of solving every local problem and need. Yet the decentralization was never implemented, and the erosion of local communities' authority continued up to the Yanukovich era.

The trend shifted in 2014. Under intense pressure from civil society, new voices in the Rada, and outside actors like the EU, Kyiv launched a program of decentralization reforms.[v] By 2017, local governments had more responsibility for local services, bigger budgets, and a greater role in serving the needs of their constituents. However, the national government remains much stronger in decision-making on regional development matters than regional officials. The president retains the capacity to appoint heads of local governments at the oblast' and rayon levels, and (if current draft reforms are implemented) plans call for the president to effectively control all decisions by local councils.[vi]

A third factor is the rivalry between public institutions and financial-political groups, which can be termed oligarchic "clans." Lacking strong institutions in the immediate post-Soviet period, emerging elites and the populations and enterprises that depended on them formed patron-client networks to solve collective and individual problems.[vii],[viii] Clans were often organized as regional groups, and as they grew, they competed with one another at the national level for control of the government, parliament, and state-owned monopolies.[ix] The role of the president became that of arbiter among the clans. The victorious groups would gain control of the presidential administration, which in turn developed into a shadow government (displacing the Cabinet of Ministers) in which major clans, like those of Dnipropetrovsk and Donetsk, settled disputes and shared power.[x]

As one prominent clan representative put it, "we are four oligarchic groups, each of which is stronger than the state, and we all hate one another so we cannot agree on anything but balance one another. Therefore, Ukraine is bound to be a democracy." [xi] Of course, rather than a fully democratic system, this clan competition gave rise to something closer to hybrid democracy, or a system of oligarchic pluralism.

All three of these forces in Ukraine's politics exerted pressures on the constitutional order that retarded Ukraine's democratic transition over the quarter century since 1991. Post-Soviet presidentialism concentrated so much power in one person that it inherently threatened civil rights and political representation. Excessive centralization accelerated the decay of many local community institutions. Meanwhile, patron-client networks delivered benefits to some in society, but did so at the cost of public institutions. These networks emerged as the main drivers of Ukraine's systemic corruption.[xii]

Not surprisingly, the clashing forces built into Ukraine's constitutional order eroded both the strength of political parties and the trust of ordinary citizens in the electoral process. This evolution developed over five phases.

In the first phase (1992–1998), Ukraine established direct and majoritarian elections, but the absence of strong political parties left the main stage to the old Communist Party networks and emerging regional clans. The Communist Party remained a strong organized parliamentary force until 2014. Its offspring, the more moderate Socialist Party, was also influential from the 1990s to the mid-2000s. As the registry of the Ministry of Justice shows, there were over 40 other registered parties, but they lacked stable structure and clear ideology.[xiii]

During the second phase (1999–2004), the ruling clans initially supported the creation of a "vertical of power" concentrating authority in the presidency. They then split into pro- and anti-presidential factions. During this period, the model of a "party of power" was tested in Ukraine.[xiv] Several parties were used by president Kuchma and his administration in this role between 1998 and 2004. However, Kuchma's opposition also attempted to unify within the "Ukraine without Kuchma" movement.[xv] By 2004, there were over 80 parties registered in Ukraine.[xvi]

In 2002 the Rada was elected through a mixed electoral system of proportional lists and single-mandate districts.[xvii] As a result, the anti-Kuchma, pro-European groups secured a majority of proportional seats. However, Kuchma's supporters held a majority of seats overall thanks to victories in the single-mandate districts, where candidates relied on the president's "administrative resources" and were more vulnerable to pressure from state agencies.

The third phase (2005–2009) was a period of greater party competition, with the Rada playing a growing role in national political life in the wake of the 2004 constitutional reform. During this period, political parties twice (in 2006[xviii] and 2007[xix]) competed in purely proportional parliamentary elections. The Party of Regions represented primarily the urbanized industrial elites in the southeast, with several Donbas clans joined together under the leadership of then-Donetsk Governor Viktor Yanukovich.[xx] The party had strong ties with southeastern and central Ukrainian local and oblast councils, religious networks, industrial corporations, small and medium enterprises, regional media, and with Moscow, Brussels, and Washington. Yushchenko's Our Ukraine[xxi] and Tymoshenko's BYuT/Fatherland [xxii] parties competed with one another for support in the northwestern and central regions of the country. These parties coopted local elites into their networks, and competed for stronger ties in EU capitals and in Washington.

Electoral competition in the third phase peaked at the time of the economic crisis of 2008–09, when Ukrainian society suffered a kind of democratic fatigue, and entered the fourth phase (2010–2013). In the run-off round of the 2010 presidential elections, Viktor Yanukovich and Yulia Tymoshenko represented two different geopolitical and regional orientations, but both offered authoritarian-leaning political agendas.[xxiii] Although Yanukovich won with only a slim majority, he quickly consolidated power, managing to re-establish Kuchma's presidential model of government by 2010[xxiv] and to win a majority in 90 percent of the regional councils during that year's local elections.[xxv]

In 2012 parliamentary elections were once more conducted under the mixed model of proportional and single-mandate seats.[xxvi] Though the Party of Regions won only 30 percent of seats nationwide, Yanukovich secured a majority in the Rada by banding together with single-mandate representatives from a few minor parties, including the Communists. He imprisoned his most popular opposition politicians, including Tymoshenko and Yuriy Lutsenko, deepening the East-West electoral divide, and contributing to the rise of the far right Freedom Party, which entered the Rada in 2012.

The current fifth period (since 2014) has witnessed a "reset" of the party system following the Euromaidan protests, which were genuinely led from below and in which traditional parties played a very limited role. Candidates in the 2014 presidential and parliamentary elections were mostly not from among the most influential groups in pre-Euromaidan Ukraine. The Party of Regions was thoroughly destroyed, and its constituencies were deconsolidated in the southeast. The Fatherland Party was split into factions supporting Tymoshenko and Arseniy Yatseniuk, who became prime minister. The elected president, Petro Poroshenko, and his supporter, Kyiv Mayor Vitaly Klitchko, formed a dominant block with the parties Solidarity and Strike. Two new political groups, Self-Reliance and the Radical Party, found themselves among the winners of elections but without a clear allegiance.[xxvii]

A key feature of the current period is the sidelining of the once-dominant southeastern electorate. Ukraine's electoral ecology has changed with the loss of all Crimean voters and a majority of voters in Donbas, with remaining elites and voters in the South-East distracted by the ongoing war. Galician and other nationalist groups have gained control over ideological institutions (i.e. the Ministry of Education and Science and the Institute of National Memory) to promote their agenda.

Despite requirements in the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, Ukraine's electoral system remains outside of the reform process so far. The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) is under pressure from the presidential administration: criminal investigations were launched against its chair, while 13 of 15 members have expired mandates yet remain in their positions. Ukraine's electoral system itself is the object of an ongoing battle among the president and the ruling parties, the parliamentary opposition, and the remaining oligarchic clans.

Ukraine has undergone two revolutionary cycles, each resulting in civic protests and a collapse of the ruling power. The Orange Revolution was provoked by fraudulent vote counting in the 2004 presidential elections. Hundreds of thousands supporting opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko peacefully protested for weeks, forcing President Kuchma and Prime Minister Yanukovich to agree to a second vote. It was after this decision that the Rada moved to amend the 1996 constitution and introduced the parliamentary-presidential model to limit Yushchenko's future power.

The second civic revolution also began with peaceful protests provoked by the refusal of then-President Yanukovich to sign the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement in November 2013. However, this time the government and radical opposition provoked a spiral of violence that resulted in bloody street fighting during January 2014, and even mass murder of Ukrainians in February 2014. President Yanukovich fled to Russia, while the Rada restored the 2004 Constitution and voted in a temporary president and cabinet. Soon after, Russia invaded and annexed Crimea, and Russia-backed secessionists attempted to split Ukraine's southeastern oblasts from the country.[xxviii]

In 2005, Yushchenko's winning Orange team was eager to communicate with the opposition, which permitted a smooth re-consolidation of Ukrainian elites in 2005–06. However, after Yanukovich's victory in 2010, the division between ruling groups and the opposition deepened, culminating in the imprisonment of Tymoshenko and Lutsenko.[xxix] Accordingly, when these and other figures came back to politics in 2014, the Communist Party and Party of Regions were effectively banned. The Opposition Block, representing the interests of the former Communist and Regions Party, is seen as illegitimate and not permitted to chair any parliamentary committees.[xxx]

Facing a Russian invasion and Russian-backed separatism in the southeast, the five parties forming the ruling coalition in 2014–16 were not eager to discuss reforms with the largely Russian-speaking and southeastern-based opposition.[xxxi] In April–May 2016, the ruling coalition unraveled, and the president's supporters have since then excluded both old and new opposition groups from policy consultations and decision-making processes. [xxxii]

With a severely eroded election system and sidelined opposition parliamentary groups, the Rada's influence is waning. As a result, some non-parliamentary radical groups, including veterans groups and the extreme right, have gained visibility. [xxxiii] Despite low support in national polls, their engagement in decision-making at local levels is growing, and will likely influence national politics in the coming years.

Ukraine's hybrid politics and resulting political cycles have had important impacts on prosperity, social security, and basic living conditions for ordinary Ukrainians. After losing nearly a quarter of GDP during the deep socio-economic crisis of the 1990s, Ukraine benefitted from some successful liberalization and privatization reforms. By the late 2000s, inflation was under control and renewed growth and investment had helped push output to levels not seen since before the Soviet collapse. Yet these periods of economic growth and social stability fell victim to political and geo-economic cycles as well, with losses of 15 percent of GDP in 2008–09,[xxxiv] and 14 percent of GDP in 2013–16.[xxxv] In 2017 the Ukrainian economy is ranked 166th in terms of economic freedom.[xxxvi]

Not surprisingly, citizens continue to have very little trust toward government in Ukraine. Since mid-2008, trust in courts, the parliament, the cabinet, and the president has been at critically low levels. Today, the most trusted (over 50 percent) institutions include the church, volunteer fighters, and the national army, while the least trusted (under 10 percent) are the government, parliament, and the courts.[xxxvii] Over 70 percent of Ukrainians believe that Ukraine is heading in the wrong direction.[xxxviii]

A major factor driving citizens' distrust of government is, of course, continued corruption. Ukraine scored 29 on the 2016 Corruption Perceptions Index, which rates countries with numbers from 100 (very clean) to 0 (very corrupt). Ukraine's average score from 1998 to 2016 was 24.58 points.[xxxix] Ukraine's 2016 result remains disturbingly poor.

Post-revolutionary politics have had a mixed impact on corruption. In 2005, Viktor Yushchenko fired over 30,000 public servants as part of his anticorruption reform. Nonetheless, the public sector's efficiency declined during the Orange period. [xl],[xli] After the Euromaidan, the lustration process (the purge of government officials based on moral or political grounds) also yielded contradictory results, including diminishing government performance.[xlii] For example, even in the well-regarded new patrol police, there is a lack of experienced criminal investigators, because those who served in the previous police force (militsiya) during the Yanukovich period are blocked. Newly trained investigators, lacking experience, have been unable to deliver results in even the most high-profile murder cases.[xliii]

Under considerable pressure from the post-Maidan civil society activists and Ukraine's Western supporters, the government has introduced some key anti-corruption policies and created agencies to fulfill them. In 2015–16 two new institutions were created to combat corruption, through prosecution (National Anticorruption Bureau, NABU) and prevention (National Agency for Prevention of Corruption, NAPC). The NABU has launched several new investigations against close allies of President Poroshenko and former Prime Minister Yatseniuk.[xliv] Meanwhile, the NAPC established a new e-declaration system for officials to declare assets.[xlv] The e-declaration system was launched in 2016, and by April 2017, over 1 million officials had submitted their e-declarations.[xlvi] These steps hold out the promise for a considerable improvement in governance, use of public resources, and moderating elites' behavior.

However, Poroshenko and other powerful actors continue to apply huge pressure against these new anti-corruption bodies, and their survival likely depends on continued support from the West.[xlvii]

The lack of transparency and effectiveness of government institutions in Ukraine has been one of the major consequences of the country's political cycles. Low citizen confidence and high corruption perceptions are merely a reflection of this reality. Although improvement is visible and measurable for now, results from the reforms have not yet met the expectations set by Ukrainian activists and Ukraine's international supporters.

In an atmosphere with elements of wartime as well as political and economic crisis, the Ukrainian population nonetheless continues to cherish the ideals of democratic governance and state sovereignty championed by civil society in the Euromaidan.[xlviii] Despite some tensions among ethno-linguistic and ideological blocs, Ukrainian society remains relatively united, and its civic activists are taking part in reforms and crisis response.[xlix],[l] Yet it is troubling that not all Ukrainians enjoy unfettered political freedoms and civil rights, and the country is for that reason considered only "partially free" by international watchdogs.[li]

The Ukrainian media space remains an echo of the oligarchic pluralism of previous periods in Ukraine's national life. Major broadcast channels belong to different clans and support rival political parties. On the one hand, this preserves media pluralism; on the other hand, this does not enhance the quality of journalism and society's trust in the media.[lii] For example, the four biggest TV channels, which are Ukrainians' major sources of information about politics, each belong to different owners, some of whom are in opposition to President Poroshenko.

There have been sporadic new media projects in Ukraine, such as Hromadske TV (since 2013) and UkrLife TV (since 2014). The reform of state-owned public television is also slowly being implemented.[liii]

Civil society organizations (CSO) have been politically influential since at least 2004, when CSOs took an active part in the protests that led to regime change.[liv] The CSO sector has also been very active in advocating for deeper and faster democratic reforms. The Reanimation Package of Reforms is an example of a coalition of CSOs that not only advocates for reforms, but even participates in the drafting of reform legislation and key documents together with the government and Rada members in over 10 different areas.[lv] Although this group has been criticized for its over-dependence on outside grant funding and its focus on international rather than domestic opinion, it remains a key example of activist civil society.[lvi]

After Yanukovich's fall in February 2014, civic organizations were the first to fill the power vacuum in the defense, security, and police sectors, as well as many others.[lvii] Volunteer battalions were the first to defend Ukraine against the Russian invasion of Crimea, the Russian-backed secessionist war in Donbas, and attempts to destabilize other regions of the country. However, later many of these organizations were reluctant to cede authority to official state institutions. Now, some have joined forces[lviii] to promote far-right political agendas and/or to call for direct political action.[lix]

The church also plays a significant role in civic and political activism in Ukraine. Different political clans and groups allied with different religious organizations. For example, Viktor Yushchenko supported the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kyiv Patriarchate), which he hoped could consolidate the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church and Ukrainian Orthodox churches under its authority. Viktor Yanukovich backed the Moscow Patriarchate, and regional politicians in the west of Ukraine have had closer ties with the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. In return, these churches have supported their candidates during elections.

Ukraine is a culturally, ethnically, linguistically, and religiously heterogeneous society. The (in)famous divide between eastern and western Ukraine is above all just a function of electoral coalitions that represent clans and interests concentrated in the southeastern and northwestern parts of the country. In cultural, linguistic, and religious terms Ukraine is much more diverse than this binary juxtaposition suggests.,[ix]

Three major orthodox churches, the Greek Catholic Church, the Roman Catholic Church, many protestant denominations, Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, and many other religious groups worship and organize freely in Ukraine. Besides large Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking populations, there are communities speaking Crimean Tatar, Hungarian, Romanian, and other minority languages. For more than a decade after 1991, Ukraine followed the principle of uniform respect and tolerance for this diversity.

Ethno-linguistic and regional identities were strongly politicized during the presidential election of 2004. From that time through the elections of 2014, political parties adopted the habit of using the “language issue” and regional differences to mobilize their electorates, a practice which has, of course, eroded social cohesion.[ixi]

Russia has also manipulated the language issue from the outside. In the spring of 2014, Russian-backed secessionists argued that Russian language rights could be protected only by creating a separate state for Russian speakers in the southeastern oblasts of Ukraine (so-called “Novorossia”).[ixii],[ixiii] Nevertheless, in the war to oppose that separatist movement, both Ukrainian and Russian speaking populations mobilized in large numbers. In fact, all language groups in Ukraine were stable in their support for Ukraine’s independence and sovereignty across all regions.[ixiv]

Conversely, some governmental ideological and language policies continue to erode social cohesion along language and regional lines. The implementation of the so called “Decommunization Laws” in 2015 has added to distrust between the national center and local communities.[ixv],[ixvi] Also, language quotas[ixvii] in Ukrainian media and attempts to ban Russian language social networks may have increased tensions between Ukrainian and Russian speakers.[ixviii] Russophone schools and schools with minority languages could be closed, according to the recently approved law on education.[ixix] All these policies diverge from the civil inclusive approach to nation-building that Ukraine was previously known for.

The cultural challenge is most acute for the populations of occupied Crimea and Donbas. Most information and trade ties with these regions have been severed, and there has accordingly been a dramatic decline in shared identities between communities on opposite sides of the Russian occupation.[lxx] However, 80 percent of Ukrainians remain convinced that eastern Donbas should be a part of Ukraine. Ukraine must therefore consider how to socially reintegrate this population.[lxxi]

For over 20 years, Ukraine was pulled between two rival geopolitical processes: European integration and Eurasian re-integration. Ukraine typically adopted a “multi-vector” foreign policy in response, that aimed to benefit from both integration processes and to limit external influences by balancing Moscow, Washington, and Brussels with one another.[lxxii] However, each Ukrainian administration interpreted the strategy with a different tone: Yushchenko’s administration was pro-Western, while the Yanukovich government leaned toward the Kremlin.

Since the Euromaidan, which was triggered by a crisis point in European versus Eurasian integration, and the subsequent Russian invasion of Crimea and Donbas, the Ukrainian government has severed ties with Russia. By 2017, Ukrainian-Russian ties fell to a historic low, with tight controls on commerce, media/broadcasting, and travel. Today, there is very little, if any, direct influence from Moscow on Ukrainian internal politics.[lxxiii] Meanwhile, Moscow’s own Ukraine policy is aimed at making it impossible for Ukraine to join NATO, at increasing the legitimacy of Crimean annexation, and at supporting the break-away territories of eastern Donbas.[lxxiv] Russia now operates as an outsider to Ukrainian politics, not an inside player.

Conversely, Western influence in Ukrainian politics has only grown since 2014. The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement has set the major goals for reforms, while the IMF continues to administer a special \$17 billion credit program in exchange for progress on these reforms.[lxxv] Yet as Kyiv has become less dependent on

IMF support<sup>[lxxvi]</sup> and internal political competition in Ukraine has intensified, the speed of reforms has slowed and the West has taken more of a backseat in Ukrainian politics.<sup>[lxxvii]</sup>

Ukraine has not yet found balance between positive and negative trends in its democratic development. The positive trends flow from the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, the modestly successful reform agenda, and the support of Western partners.<sup>[lxxviii]</sup> The 2016 referendum in the Netherlands on EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and the denial of a foreseeable EU membership have only slightly diminished these positive impacts.<sup>[lxxix]</sup> Likewise, attempts by Ukrainian elites to reverse some reforms in 2016–17 have thus far been successfully countered by coalitions between civil society, reformist politicians, and Western diplomatic services in Kyiv (e.g., the preservation of NABU's autonomy).<sup>[lxxx]</sup>

On the other hand, Russia's invasion and annexation of Crimea and its continuing support for violent separatists in Donbas have created much more challenging conditions for Ukrainian democracy. As a result of these Russian interventions, the military and security establishment play a far greater role in Ukrainian government, and some prominent civic movements draw inspiration and credibility from war-related ideologies. These new factors increase the political weight of the president as military commander-in-chief, and introduce risks of even more radical authoritarian tendencies on the part of political forces that are now entirely outside the government.

Economic prosperity has been subordinated to security concerns (as the recent blockades of Donbas showed). Voters continue to reject most state institutions as untrustworthy and corrupt.<sup>[lxxxii]</sup> The result is that politics are highly fluid, institutions are weak, and clans dominate political competition, with some indications of the pre-revolutionary cycles witnessed before in the early 2000s and 2010s.

All in all, Ukrainian democracy has come a long way from its earliest post-1991 manifestations. It now boasts a vibrant civil society, well-organized and powerful political parties, and a diverse pluralism of domestic, social, and geopolitical influences. Yet Ukraine's democracy is also hostage to the ongoing war with Russia and the country's continuing socio-economic crisis. The future depends on whether the war can be brought to a peaceful end, national reconciliation can be launched, and ordinary Ukrainians can begin to benefit from the many reforms now underway. With these three foundational tasks achieved, Ukraine's democracy will be back on track.

## **Belarus – Honoring International Holocaust Day, Beit Simha Hosts UN and EU Dignitaries and Jewish Leaders**

**World Union for Progressive Judaism, February 1, 2018**

<https://wupj.org/news/2018/02/7551/belarus-honoring-international-holocaust-day-beit-simha-hosts-the-un-and-eu-among-others/>

On the eve of the Holocaust International Remembrance Day, the Sandra Breslauer Center for Progressive Judaism "Beit Simha" hosted commemorative events dedicated to the day which was launched worldwide in 2005 by the decision of the UN General Assembly.

Taking part in the ceremony were representatives of all Jewish Unions and organizations, the German Educational Center IBB, Netzer and Hillel youth movements, the twelve embassies and international organizations, including the United Nations and the European Union. The ceremony included lighting Shabbat and memory candles for all those killed in the Holocaust in Europe, as well as the recitation of prayers and prayers for peace.

Belarus TV broadcasted the ceremony for over one million viewers including the opening of the international exhibition "Project" Butterfly: Children of the Holocaust." The exhibition was developed by the Religious Union for Progressive Judaism in Belarus by the educational program "The Holocaust and the United Nations," and the Museum of the Holocaust in Houston, with the assistance of the UN Office in Belarus.

Rabbi Grisha Abramovich and Director of the Belarusian Union for Progressive Judaism Michael Kemerov noted that the Butterfly exhibition will travel to the Grodno Choral Synagogue after Beit Simha in time for, and

as part of, the dedication ceremony of the 75th anniversary of the liquidation of Grodno ghetto (March 18, 2018).

Given out to all attendants of the ceremony were decorative memorial pins designed by a Beit Simha congregant. Written on them, in Russian, was the following quote by Leonid Levins, Former Chair of Union of Belarusian Jewish Public Associations and Communities, "The war took everything, but not our love."