



NCSEJ WEEKLY TOP 10
Washington, D.C. August 24, 2018

Ratas meets with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu
ERR, August 24, 2018

<https://news.err.ee/856027/ratas-meets-with-israeli-prime-minister-netanyahu>

Prime Minister Jüri Ratas said at a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his Baltic counterparts that the European Union needs "peace and stability" in its neighboring regions, and seeks to contribute to the peace process in the Middle East.

Netanyahu and Ratas as well as Latvian Prime Minister Māris Kučinskis and Lithuanian Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis met in Vilnius on Friday to discuss relations between the European Union and Israel, the security situation in the Middle East and the Baltic Sea region, and Russia's activities near the EU. "The activities of Russia in Syria are worrying, and we are following these developments very closely," Ratas was quoted in a government press release.

The prime ministers had a longer discussion on how to fight terrorism, but also on co-operation in the field of cybersecurity as well as how to deal with disinformation. "Terrorism is global, it endangers us all, and we have to fight it together. It is clear that no country is completely protected against attacks. Therefore, Estonia contributes to Operation Barkhane in Mali, and the Estonian Defense Forces are deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan," the prime minister added.

Estonia and Israel both belong to the Digital 7, a network of leading digital governments. According to Ratas, the contribution of Israel to the security of digital identity and digital signatures will help simplify communication between Estonia and Israel. "Hopefully this will soon enable us to mutually recognize each other's digitally signed documents," Ratas said.

Ratas stated at the meeting that the head of government of Israel is always welcome in Estonia. So far, no prime minister of Israel ever visited Estonia, though President Shimon Peres visited Estonia in 2007 to attend the opening of Tallinn's synagogue.

Nazi Camp Guard Jakiw Palij Deported from U.S. to Germany
JTA, August 21, 2018

<https://www.jta.org/2018/08/21/top-headlines/nazi-camp-guard-jakiw-palij-deported-u-s-germany>

A former guard at a Nazi concentration camp was deported to Germany overnight from the United States, where he had lived for decades.

Jakiw Palij, 95, had lived in Queens, New York. He served as a guard at the Trawniki concentration camp near Lublin, Poland, during World War II, and may face prosecution in Germany for his actions.

Members of New York's congressional delegation last year urged the Trump administration to deport Palij, whose citizenship was revoked in 2003 based on his wartime activities, human rights abuses and immigration fraud, NBC [reported](#). A federal court also ruled that he had assisted in the persecution of prisoners at the camp, though it stopped short of finding him responsible for deaths.

A statement released by the White House after Palij landed in Germany early Tuesday commended President Donald Trump and Immigration and Customs Enforcement for "removing this war criminal from United States soil."

“Despite a court ordering his deportation in 2004, past administrations were unsuccessful in removing Palij,” the statement said. “To protect the promise of freedom for Holocaust survivors and their families, President Trump prioritized the removal of Palij.”

Palij was born on former Polish territory, an area now located in Ukraine. He immigrated to the United States in 1949 and became a citizen in 1957, but concealed his Nazi service saying that he spent World War II working in a factory on a farm.

Palij told Justice Department investigators who showed up at his door in 1993, “I would never have received my visa if I told the truth. Everyone lied.”

He later admitted to officials that he attended a Nazi SS training camp in Trawniki in German-occupied Poland and then served as an armed guard at its adjacent forced-labor camp.

According to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Trawniki camp was part of Operation Reinhard, the Nazi operation to murder the approximately 2 million Jews residing in German-occupied Poland.

Because Germany, Poland, Ukraine and other countries refused to take him, he continued living in limbo in the two-story, red brick home in Queens he shared with his wife, Maria, now 86.

Germany’s Foreign Office said its decision to accept Palij showed the country was accepting its “moral responsibility.” And Foreign Minister Heiko Maas told the German tabloid Bild that those who “committed the worst crimes on behalf of Germans” would be held accountable.

A reporter from [ABC News](#) who was present when Pajil was removed by ICE on Monday morning described him as “looking frail with missing front teeth visible through his white beard. The only noise he made was a pained howl as agents hoisted him from his wheelchair onto the ambulance stretcher.” His deportation comes after years of protests by Jewish groups. Earlier this year, a group of more than 80 New York politicians, led by Assemblyman Dov Hikind, petitioned the Trump administration regarding Pajil.

“I never gave up on this issue because Palij’s presence here mocked the memory of the millions who perished,” Hikind said in a statement Tuesday. “There was no question of his guilt. It was imperative that someone responsible for Nazi atrocities be held accountable for his crimes. While his victims can no longer seek justice, I am delighted that our President’s administration took it upon themselves to deliver justice.”

Although members of the Jewish community of New York have held demonstrations outside of his house in Queens for years, Palij seemed unimpressed, telling the New York Post in 2013 that he was “starting to get used to it.”

“They told us we would be picking up mines. But that was a lie,” he told the paper. “In that camp they took us — 17-, 18-, 19-year-old boys. I am one of them. They did not give us Nazi uniforms. They gave us guard uniforms: pants, black; shirts, light brown; and hats with one button in the front. You could tell we were not Nazis. If you tried to run away, they take your family and shoot all of them.”

“I am not SS. I have nothing to do with SS,” he added.

Efraim Zuroff, the Eastern Europe director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, said in a statement that a “14-year long campaign has finally been crowned with success. Trawniki guards do not deserve the privilege of living in the United States and that was finally achieved last night.”

Edward Mosberg, a 93-year-old Holocaust survivor from Poland and now a property developer from New Jersey, said that although the “decision comes late, it is a good and positive action and we are grateful to the United States for bringing this evil man to receive punishment for his crimes.”

Mosberg was quoted Tuesday during a tour of the Auschwitz memorial museum in Poland. He attended it with four Republican members of Congress as part of a delegation of the From the Depths Holocaust commemoration group.

Trump names Jewish Security Expert to Senior Intelligence Post

JTA, August 22, 2018

<https://www.jta.org/2018/08/22/news-opinion/trump-names-jewish-security-expert-to-senior-intelligence-post>

President Donald Trump chose a Jewish national security expert as the deputy chairwoman of the intelligence advisory board.

Samantha Ravich is well known in the pro-Israel national security community.

She was named to the board, which helps shape intelligence policy, on Tuesday.

Ravich, a former deputy national security adviser to Vice President Dick Cheney, is a senior adviser to the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, an influential hawkish pro-Israel think tank. She is also a senior adviser to the Chertoff Group, founded by Michael Chertoff, a Homeland Security secretary in the George W. Bush administration. She has worked with the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. One of her specialties is combating extremists.

She has also worked with the pro-Israel community helping to raise money for Israel Bonds.

Ravich does not require confirmation.

Also Tuesday, Jeffrey Gunter, a dermatologist from Los Angeles, was nominated as the ambassador to Iceland. Gunter, a board member of the Republican Jewish Coalition, must be confirmed by the U.S. Senate.

Holocaust Victim Memorials Vandalized at Kalevi-Liiva

EER News, August 21, 2018

<https://news.err.ee/855579/holocaust-victim-memorials-vandalised-at-kalevi-liiva>

Sometime Saturday overnight or on Sunday, just days ahead of the European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism, unidentified individuals vandalized multiple Holocaust memorials at Kalevi-Liiva, Harju County, the execution site of thousands of victims of Nazism.

The memorials were tagged with a swastika, penises and anti-Semitic and Nazi messages as well as burned, likely using a blowtorch.

The vandalism was discovered by local residents, who notified the police, the municipal government and Estonia's Jewish community about it.

Jewish Community of Estonia chairwoman Alla Jakobson said that she was shaken and outraged by the news.

"I can't call these Nazi-sympathizers who attack the memory of innocent victims with such brutality and anger human," she said. "The memory of the dead has always been regarded with such great respect and honour in Estonia, regardless of ethnicity. An Estonian resident cannot act like this, which is why I am sure that the memorial was vandalized by people who hate Estonia, and this should also be seen as a provocation timed to coincide with the Day of Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Estonia."

Jakobson also thanked those who alerted the authorities and the Jewish community to the incident.

Police seeking help to catch vandals

Police are asking the residents of Jõelähtme for help in tracking down the vandals.

"This is a very unfortunate case," said Urmas Krull, operations manager of the North Prefecture of the Police and Border Guard Board (PPA). "Memorials erected in memory of victims killed during the war deserve respect. We will do everything we can to identify the culprits, because there is no justification for such behaviour."

Krull requested that anyone with information about the possible vandals is asked to call the emergency line at 112.

A criminal investigation was launched into the incident under § 149, Clause 1 of the Penal Code, according to which the desecration of a grave or other place designated as a last resting place or memorial erected for the commemoration of a deceased person is punishable by a pecuniary punishment or up to one year in prison.

This is not the first time that the memorials at Kalevi-Liiva have been vandalized.

Jewish memorial erected in 1960, Roma memorial in 2007

Kalevi-Liiva is the final resting place of an estimated up to 6,000 people murdered by the Nazis, and memorials were erected at the site for both Jewish and Roma victims of the Holocaust. In 1942, it was used as the execution site for the Nazi-established Jägala concentration camp.

"This is the place where Jews were brought from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Germany to be executed," Jakobson said.

An estimated 2,000 of those executed at Kalevi-Liiva were Roma. The memorial erected at the site in 2007 is also the first Roma memorial in Estonia, and it took six years for the North-Estonian Roma Association to receive the necessary permission to do so.

Jewish memorials have previously been the target of vandalism in Estonia as well.

"There have been cases, but I can't say that this is a regular thing, or that we feel concerned by it," Jakobson said. "I think that [such behavior] isn't inherent to Estonia."

From the Fires of Revolution, Ukraine is Reinventing Government

By Rowland Manthorpe

Wired, August 20, 2018

<https://www.wired.co.uk/article/ukraine-revolution-government-procurement>

Since the 2014 revolution, Ukrainian activists have set about using technology to prevent abuses of power – by building the world's most transparent platform for government spending.

At the gate of Mezhyhirya, the estate Viktor Yanukovich built with the money he stole from the people of Ukraine, a stall is selling rolls of toilet paper printed with the face of Vladimir Putin. Beside them are three large, flat, plastic loaves of bread, painted gold. Viktor Nestulia, director of innovation projects at Transparency International Ukraine, taps one with his finger. "When they came here after the revolution of dignity, they found a loaf made of solid gold, so this is a copy," he says. "That's what it is here. You will see."

He's not wrong. Inside Mezhyhirya, we pass a yacht pier, a shooting range, a boxing gym, an ostrich farm, a petting zoo, a man-made lake, a greenhouse complex, a helicopter pad, several fountains, at least five guest houses and a mansion where every surface drips with decorative gold (although minus the two-kilo ornamental bloomer, which was stolen in 2015). In the echoing concrete garage where Yanukovich kept his vintage cars and jeeps, I count 36.

Yet what makes the scene truly sickening is the fact that, until the former President – who rented the 140-hectare estate for 314 hryvnia, or roughly £10, an acre – fled to Russia on February 22, 2014, no-one knew any of this was here.

There were rumours, of course. Journalists interviewed staff and flew drones over the site. (To refute the claims, Yanukovich took friendly reporters into one of the guest houses and told them it was where he lived.) But nothing was ever confirmed, so when, after months of anti-corruption protests, Ukrainians finally saw Mezhyhirya for themselves, they were astonished. Crowds took the half-hour drive from Kiev to gawp at the luxuries their taxes had bought – although Yanukovich continued to deny this was what he had done. Interviewed by the BBC in 2015, he dismissed the idea as "political technology". The ostriches, he claimed, "just lived there."

Four years later, Ukraine is not cured of corruption. Bribery remains a way of life. The President, the eleventh-richest man in the country, talks regularly to Putin on the phone. But from the outburst of modernising zeal sprung a

radical reform to one of the most vital functions of the state. A multi-award-winning digital system hailed as the best of its kind in the world. "It's the gold standard," says Henri Verdier, chief technology officer of France.

Called ProZorro, after the Ukrainian word for transparency, the volunteer-built system radically restructures public procurement. Its motto? "Everyone sees everything."

Public procurement isn't big business; it's the biggest business of all. In Europe, it accounts for an average 16 per cent of GDP, according to the European Commission, dwarfing the contributions of finance (5.1 per cent), say, or agriculture (1.5 per cent). There are regional variations – the Netherlands is highest, at 20.2 per cent; Belgium lowest, at 14 per cent – but, across the board, two statements hold true. Governments spend a lot of money buying everything from pens to motorways to architectural blueprints. And, on the whole, they do it very badly.

To see this in action, you only have to look at the news, which, on any given day, will almost certainly feature the confusions and inefficiencies of public procurement. On the sunny May morning I visited Mezhyhirya, for instance, three stories were making headlines in the UK, where public procurement is 14 per cent of GDP and 32 per cent of government spending. One concerned the Home Office's decision to award the £490m contract to make the new "Brexit blue" passports to a French-Dutch firm rather than British manufacturer De La Rue. Another related to the 600 million disposable cups bought by English hospitals in the last five years, a figure roundly condemned as unacceptable. Yet no single story exposed the chronic procurement crisis as nakedly as the implosion of uber-supplier Carillion – which four months on, was still far from a resolution.

The reason for the delay, perhaps even the crisis itself? Until Carillion issued a huge profit warning in July 2017, almost no-one knew its problems existed.

The ignorance was so pervasive it resembled a form of psychological repression. In March 2017, directors boasted of Carillion's "substantial liquidity", and auditors and shareholders waved through its accounts. A parliamentary investigation found "the government was not aware of Carillion's financial distress", despite "clear and compelling problems with the business."

Even then, government departments continued to award major contracts to Carillion, which persuaded its 30,000 subcontractors – for it was effectively outsourcing the government's outsourcing, acting as a middleman for everyone from cleaners to engineers to catering staff – to continue to work with it. Suppliers, who will now get back less than 1p for £1 they are owed, could not make their own checks. The parliamentary public accounts committee described the contracts as shrouded in "great secrecy."

Yet although the scale of Carillion's collapse made the evasion extreme, it was hardly unusual. "A lot of local authorities don't know where all their contracts are," says Ian Makgill. "Same for central government. We asked DWP [Department of Work and Pensions] for lists of contracts with certain suppliers. They said, 'It's going to be too expensive to tell you, because we don't know where it is.'"

Makgill, founder of public procurement platforms Open Opps and Spend Network, has been collecting public contracts for over a decade. Altogether, he has data on six million, as well as over 100 million transactions. But in the absence of a standard database, acquiring them is a complex and unreliable process involving Freedom of Information requests, website-scraping and in-depth knowledge of the 200-plus portals the government uses for procurement. The day after Carillion collapsed, Makgill searched for its contracts on Contracts Finder, the website created in 2015 to act as a single source of information on contracts. He only found 20 out of 450, and still hasn't tracked down more than 30 per cent of the missing ones. Ministries and town halls frantically checking their exposure to Carillion encountered the same scary blankness.

In Mezhyhirya, I tell this story to Nestulia and Andriy Kucherenko, co-founder of ProZorro. We are walking past rows of steamy greenhouses to the petting zoo, 50 metres away. Up ahead, the peacocks squawk in the heat. How long would it take, I ask, to find all the information on the biggest public procurer in Ukraine?

Kucherenko, a slight, quietly-spoken 45-year-old who worked for six months without pay to build ProZorro, pauses. Whereas UK procurement exists in a confused mess of yellowing paper, PDFs and contradictory databases, the Ukrainian system has a single compulsory entry point, a standard data format, and open source code. "One hour," he says. "Fifty-five minutes to come to my computer, and five minutes to search."

"I can do it now," Nestulia pulls out his phone. "Within one minute."

“This information is all publicly available,” Kucherenko continues. “At first, we thought it was too extreme. I was afraid that business will simply not accept it, they would say we are out of the game. But it didn’t–”

“Done it!” says Nestulia. He starts quickly reading off the results: “KPIs, number of contracts, average competition, month by month, average procedure...” I glance at my phone. It has been one minute and 30 seconds.

Why doesn’t the UK, or indeed any other developed country, have a procurement system like ProZorro? The answer, as ever, is complicated – but the simplest reason is that it requires rebuilding everything from the ground up. To find the political will you almost need a revolution. Ukraine’s began on Thursday, November 21, 2013 with a furious social media summons to rally in Maidan Nezalezhnosti, Kiev’s central square.

Oleksandr Starodubtsev was in court in the western city of Lviv when he saw the anti-corruption, pro-European call. A former stockbroker who’d founded and sold two financial technology startups, he was trying to stop his company’s new owners stealing his money. “It was absolutely obvious we should do something with the country,” he says. That Sunday, he joined up to 200,000 protesters in Kiev – and then, when the rallies continued, so did he, first after work, then permanently. “I am on vacation,” he told his business partners. “I need time to defend my country.”

Starodubtsev is 188 centimetres tall, with broad shoulders and rangy limbs, but he was a businessman, not a soldier – and, in any case, defending Maidan meant occupying space rather than fighting. To pass the time productively, he found a stage and, with friends from his MBA, started a lecture series, hosting daily talks on everything from politics to personal finance. They called it “Maidan Open University” (today it is a free online course for civic education). Despite the government threats and frightening cold – down to minus 17°C – Starodubtsev remembers it as a time of anarchistic freedom: “very right, very correct, very natural.” Then, on February 20, 2014, with a barrage of water cannons, the notorious Berkut riot police made their attack.

The night before it happened, Starodubtsev was in his apartment making Molotov cocktails. The situation was so dangerous he had sent his family out of the country. “I had been very critical of the government on Facebook,” he says. “I was afraid for them. Not so much myself. I was going to stay.”

At 8.30 the next morning, Starodubtsev entered the square, and saw protesters sprinting through burning tyre smoke. The Berkut had broken through their barricade. Amid the fug and panic, it was hard to understand what was happening. When he finally grasped the situation, Starodubtsev raced towards the barricade, piled metres high from tyres, bricks and debris. Wounded protestors were being carried back. In total, 21 were killed that day, some by snipers firing from the roofs of nearby buildings. Speaking from Stanford, where he is one of three “Ukrainian emerging leaders” studying under Francis Fukuyama, Starodubtsev recalls how he joined the human chain passing material to reinforce the barricade: first tyres, then, later, Molotov cocktails. “I saw bad things, things I’ve never seen before,” says Starodubtsev. “Dead bodies. But that gave me a personal commitment to carry on after it was done.”

After Yanukovich fled, two days later, a “kamikaze” interim government took office, and the new Minister for Economic Development and Trade, economist Pavlo Sheremeta, announced his priorities. Two of them – deregulation and healthcare reform – didn’t interest Starodubtsev, but the third, public procurement, intrigued him. Not only was it central to corruption, but it reminded him of his career in finance. “I knew you just had to create some kind of exchange,” he says. He put out a call for help on Facebook. And that was how he met Andriy Kucherenko.

Unlike Starodubtsev, Kucherenko steered clear of the Maidan protests. In 2004, he had been actively involved in the Orange Revolution, which forced a rerun of the rigged presidential election. But even though Viktor Yushchenko recovered from disfiguring dioxin poisoning to win on a liberal platform, the protesters went home, and the reform movement dissipated. Disillusioned, Kucherenko didn’t believe a second revolution could succeed. Now, he felt, “not guilty, but responsible”. He says: “I just wanted to contribute somehow to this effort.”

A senior manager at accountancy firm EY, Kucherenko didn’t have any experience with government policy, but he had managed software systems for private procurement – and, this time, he was determined not to let that experience go to waste. When he met Starodubtsev, they agreed on one principle: “you can’t trust politicians to fix the country.” If you wanted change, you had to make it yourself.

At first, the pair focused on reforming Ukraine’s procurement law, which had been hollowed out to facilitate corrupt deals. Rather than making firms go through a tender process, Yanukovich created 43 legal exemptions that allowed contracts to be awarded directly to a single supplier. All the contracts for Euro 2012, for instance, which Ukraine

hosted jointly with Poland, were doled out in this way. Opposition politicians estimated that between 30 and 40 per cent of the funds for the tournament were stolen by officials, a sum of £3 billion.

Yet even when a new law was passed in April 2014 to eliminate most of the exemptions, it was clear to Kucherenko and Starodubtsev that procurement was far from fixed. "When you change the law, you are playing on civil servants' field, with their game, their rules," says Starodubtsev. "Our idea was we should create something absolutely different." The question was: what?

They may have been two volunteers pushing one idea at a time when thousands sprouted, but already Starodubtsev and Kucherenko were facing the fundamental dilemma of procurement: what to buy, and what to make yourself? In political debate, this choice is almost always reduced to private or public. In reality, the range of options is far wider.

One option was to buy a procurement system from a large IT supplier. But from his time at EY, Kucherenko knew such systems came with limited functionality and even more limited control. So the pair looked at other countries for inspiration. "To our surprise, we didn't find any best practice," says Starodubtsev. That was until a student volunteer introduced them to David Marghania and Tato Urjumelashvili, two Georgian activists who had just finished transforming their own country's procurement system.

The four men met in Kucherenko's office at EY. Whereas other companies showed PowerPoint presentations, Marghania demonstrated the Georgian system on his laptop. As soon as he began, Kucherenko and Starodubtsev knew they had their model. Not only was Georgian procurement now completely electronic, its data was also open; a weapon against corruption. It wasn't perfect: it committed the government to either making the interface, or relying on a single monopoly supplier to provide it. But it was something they could work with. Then, just as they were preparing a draft law for parliament, their political support evaporated.

On August 21, 2014, Pavlo Sheremeta resigned, saying he could no longer fight "yesterday's people". With elections approaching, the entire project was in limbo.

On the verge of giving up, Starodubtsev sought advice from a revolutionary colleague. One day, during the protests, he noticed a man quietly sweeping up around the Open University. Recognising Dmytro Shymkiv, general manager of Microsoft Ukraine, he invited him to speak – now as recently-appointed deputy head of the Presidential Administration, Shymkiv gave Starodubtsev three suggestions. First, don't wait for politicians; if you can't do this without them, it won't happen. Second, trial the system on low-value goods, which don't come under Ukrainian procurement law. Third, work with commercial marketplaces, such as internet grocer EVO.

The first two pieces of advice pushed Starodubtsev forward. The third changed the nature of his project. With the involvement of the marketplaces, he realised, he could create a centrally-controlled database, but leave the interface to be managed by competing private companies – just like the brokers on the stock market. ("We had a joke in our team," he says. "That whatever I'm trying to build, at the end we receive a stock exchange.") He persuaded EVO to come on board, along with five other marketplaces, (there are now 23), and secured \$35,000 (£26,281) from them in seed funding. The name wouldn't come until after a crowdsourced competition in February 2015. But ProZorro was now in its final form.

A country which had experienced the very worst of Soviet suppression and oligarchic exploitation was moving towards a private-public hybrid, in which commercial companies were incentivised with a fee (between £5,000 and 57 pence, depending on the size of the contract) per tender to take responsibility for marketing and consumer innovation, while the state set the rules and, by keeping control of the data, retained ultimate ownership.

The need was growing desperate, because a new, deadlier threat had been added to the turmoil of the revolution. As the fall of Yanukovich was playing out in Kiev,

Russia took the first steps to annex the southern Crimean peninsula and then supported separatist uprisings in the eastern Donbas region. By September, its forces had crossed the border in the east and were pushing the Ukrainian army back from the frontline. Over a million people fled the annexation and the fighting, according to the United Nations. But for those in government, the crisis wasn't just political, but also logistical. With its antiquated procurement system, the Ukrainians simply couldn't buy the equipment they needed.

The head of procurement at the Ministry of Defence was Nelly Stelmakh. A cheerful 55-year-old with a dark bob and a taste for colourful dresses, Stelmakh was responsible for getting the army everything from uniforms to food to petrol to medical supplies. During the whole of 2014, she only took six days off work. “We had a war, therefore we needed to work,” she shrugs.

On December 30, Kucherenko, who had been working on an EY project at the Ministry of Defence, showed Stelmakh his half-finished ProZorro prototype. As soon as she saw it, she says, she went, “Oooh, I want to use it, I want, I want.” Two months later, when the minimum viable product launched to a small set of central government departments, she had it – and very quickly, began to put it to the test. By June, it was the ministry’s main procurement system. Instantly, it reduced costs by 25 per cent.

Through an interpreter, Stelmakh explains how she persuaded the military to go along with the idea. Then, in halting English, she speaks to me directly: “We understood some resistance, but we still worked. And I can say that ProZorro helped to save our country.”

Today, more than three years since its launch, ProZorro holds more than 1,500 online auctions a day. In 2017, it completed 870,060 with an estimated value of £11.4 billion. Given the state of Ukrainian procurement before 2015, assessments of its impact aren’t exact, but comparisons between old and new contracts suggest that it has saved the government £1.2 billion, or 1.4 per cent of GDP. According to a 2017 survey, 29 per cent of businesses believe the system is corrupt. In 2016, 59 per cent did.

At a time when promises of technological “democratisation” feel very hollow, it’s easy to overlook the sheer novelty of this achievement. Without digital data, it would simply be impossible. “Usually efficiency and transparency are opposite directions in public procurement,” says Starodubtsev. “The steps which are directed to efficiency, they are against transparency, and vice versa. An electronic system was the only way to do both at the same time.”

Not just any data will do. ProZorro was built using the internationally-recognised open data standard designed by US non-profit Open Contracting Partnership: this gives each new contracting process a unique identifier, making it simple to organise, even across proliferating government databases. One result is that it’s easier to build tools using ProZorro’s data, in the same way that, for instance, Citymapper was built using Transport for London’s. (ProZorro’s apps include corruption monitoring and risk management tools; one large supplier has a programme that lists every tender according to likelihood of winning.) Another, more radical outcome, is that it makes it possible for the government to automate procurement.

Each contract in ProZorro is decided by an anonymous online auction conducted in four rounds. First, suppliers submit their initial price, based on their assessment of the contract. Then the prices and the number of bidders is revealed, and the suppliers can bid again, with the highest bidder starting first (a game theory tweak to discourage conservative pricing). This happens three times, until the lowest price wins. It’s eBay, only in reverse – and, just like sellers on eBay, buyers on ProZorro find the whole negotiation happens automatically.

“As an introvert, it’s rather interesting that a person like me could efficiently work as a chief procurement officer, because I almost have no negotiations with some deals,” says Oleksandr Nakhod, head of procurement at national postal service Ukrpost. “My job is to create transparent conditions for all economic agents, and then just watch the auctions.”

The principle has been extended into sales of government assets. ProZorro Sale was initially used to sell off the assets of the 90 banks – more than 40 per cent of the banking sector – which went bankrupt after the revolution, but before long it expanded to other areas, from scrap metal to hotels. In June 2017, the team showed the system to economist Roger Myerson, who won the Nobel prize in 2007 for his work on auction design. “I was very impressed,” Myerson tells me over email. “It was good to see a major public institution in Ukraine taking the right steps to make sure that its auctions should be designed so as to serve the interests of the public, rather than just a few well-connected individuals.”

ProZorro is far from perfect. It struggles with complex, subjective decisions: insurance contracts, for instance, or legal services. “It’s like a ready-made suit. There may be guys for whom it fits, but there will definitely be guys for whom it is wrong,” says Maxim Nefyodov, the charismatic first deputy minister for Economic Development and Trade, who is ProZorro’s chief political defender. Although tenders can be listed with criteria other than price, according to Kyiv School of Economics, less than one per cent do so.

The reason for this omission? Ukraine simply doesn't have professional procurement officers capable of formulating complex contracts. Of 1,900 contracting authorities surveyed by Kyiv School of Economics, over 80 per cent said procurement was a "non-paid off-hour job". "What is difference between ProZorro and UK?" Nefyodov says. "UK has a manual system. You employ relatively skilled, relatively professional and relatively motivated people, and they do their job. Ukraine is the absolute opposite. Public procurement is not even a job. You have to employ idiots or crooks."

Still, in its range, power and simplicity, ProZorro hints at a future in which citizens can access the most basic information about their country, and decisions are based on evidence rather than habit and supposition. In Moldova and Belarus, reformers are exploring the idea of adopting ProZorro. Could the UK do the same? Nefyodov sighs. Given the problems he faces, the difficulties of rich nations seem trivial. "No," he says. "For the same reason you can't just borrow laws from other countries. You have to make it yourself, to fit your situation." Then he brightens:

"I read an article on the Guardian about NHS procurement, which showed that prices of some items fluctuate up to 35 times, and overspending is over £1 billion. This specific problem can be solved by technology. What you need for this is a finite register of all medical supplies and all data of procurement in the same format... It's not that easy, but it can be done."

Will it be? In 2016, the UK adopted the Open Contracting data standard for Contracts Finder, its central registry of contracts. "Alas," says Gavin Hayman, executive director of the Open Contracting Partnership, "it's not compulsory for the many different UK authorities to file data with it, so many government agencies don't. Our hope is that the Carillion disaster is a wake-up call for more systematic reforms and finally helps it make the jump from documents to digital. But, at the moment, the UK is only timidly, cautiously, taking little mouse-steps."

ProZorro may be futuristic, but its immediate future is far from secure. As public frustration at the slow pace of post-Maidan reforms grows, its political opponents see a chance to take down its greatest achievement. In February 2017, populist politicians hid ProZorro-killing amendments in a services bill; in May, they did the same thing to a bill on cybersecurity. "There is a footnote in small script on page 48, on a bill unrelated to ProZorro," says Nefyodov. "We routinely have to search hundreds of draft laws to scrap it out."

Behind this subterfuge lies a vision of society in total opposition to the pro-market Maidan revolution: a vision that could be summed up, simply, as "Ukraine First". In December 2017, Viktor Halasiuk, another populist, called for ProZorro to "buy Ukrainian, pay Ukrainians," presenting a bill that allowed domestic manufacturers to win bids if their price was less than 43 per cent higher than foreign competitors. The government fought it off, but the idea is gaining momentum – not just in Ukraine, but across Europe, and beyond.

This is the trouble with data: staying loyal to it is hard. In the UK, both parties favour a form of preferential procurement: the Conservatives want contracts to go to SMEs; Labour to local businesses. "Politically people always go for protectionism," says Nefyodov. "But then you create disturbances in the system. 'Why did you overpay? But I favoured the SME!' And then how can you compare?" His theory, he explains, is that a more open system benefits smaller businesses, or underrepresented groups – and on ProZorro, 80 per cent of suppliers are SMEs (compared to 24 per cent in the UK in 2015-16).

Then there is the question of political will. "I treat myself not as a revolutionary, I treat myself as a manager," says Nefyodov. "But we had this window of opportunity. Plus our system was so shitty, we had the luxury to build from scratch." Yet although the Carillion crisis might seem to provide that in the UK, in many ways it is simply the latest, most drastic manifestation of a crisis that has been going on for decades, running through the railways, the Olympics, on to nuclear clean-up and disabled benefits claimants. A recent book by a group of University of Manchester academics painted a picture of state and outsourcers locked together in a relationship of blame-avoiding co-dependence: "[this] explains why it is so difficult to stop the advance of outsourcing on the grounds that things are going wrong, because things going wrong for somebody else is part of the design."

Yet, for ProZorro, perhaps the greatest threat is not political, but cultural: the endemic corruption that lurks behind every corner, so that even the simplest transaction can become an opportunity for a bribe. The day before I go to Mezhyhirya, I visit the team responsible for the day-to-day operation of ProZorro works out of the old Public Procurement Office, a 1960s Soviet block in downtown Kiev. In his bright, whitewashed, first floor office, CEO Vasyl Zadvorny – an energetic 35-year-old with a thick black beard – runs briskly through its current priorities. For 50 years, this building's heavy manual presses printed the official journal used to announce news of government contracts. Now, Zadvorny explains, its 53-person staff maintains an API to deliver "backend as a service."

Whereas ProZorro's founders emphasise its reformist potential, Zadvornii, a former project manager at offshore development firm Luxoft, speaks the language of business and operations. "My position looks much more like the CEO of a product development company," he says, adding that "the golden idea is to make public procurement as easy as private." His 2018 targets include predictive analytics for suppliers and an Amazon-style catalogue for procuring basic goods and services. Only a looming mural of a figure in an Anonymous mask and the slogan, "People shouldn't be afraid of their government. Governments should be afraid of their people," gives any indication of the high political stakes.

Before showing me out, Zadvorny takes me on a tour. A few doors down the corridor, past a Post-It sprinkled whiteboard, is the office of the old Public Procurement Office's CEO. Unlike the other rooms, it has been kept in its original state: heavy pink and brown curtains; upholstered wooden chairs, diamond patterned beige carpet. Next to a laminated map of Ukraine and its neighbours, the wall is lined with dark teak cabinets.

Zadvorny opens the middle one. "But it's not the only interesting thing. Here you also have a secret room."

Behind the cabinet door, there is a small, dim chamber, decorated in the same fashion. "It looks a lot better than it did before," says Zadvornii, wryly. "I'm not sure what they really used to do here, but they used to call this, 'rest room'. And here" – he opens another door to a cupboard-like, beige-tiled bathroom – there is a real restroom."

The space is clean and empty of personality or possessions, yet it is so seedy I find myself shuddering. "It was like this in Yanukovich times. The man can just hide himself here," Zadvorny says. The only furniture, he explains, was a big, white leather sofa. "Specific secret room, I would say."

In the staff kitchen next door, two young women are eating their packed lunch. The contrast between this everyday activity and the cave-like secret room is gross and jarring. "We call that room a corruption museum," Zadvorny says, as he leads me through. The next day, I hear Mezhvirya described the same way. As if the corruption they represent is now only a memory, safely confined to the glass cabinet of national history.

Ukraine is a long way from that future. As we walk around Yanukovich's manicured grounds, I ask Nestulia how far he thinks ProZorro has come. "It is just a start," he says. "We have shone a light in a dirty room. My boss at Transparency International always says, 'We have the most transparent corruption in the world.'"

Meet the Catholic-Born Polish Orthodox Jew Who's Reviving Yiddish Tango

By Larry Luxner

JTA, August 20, 2018

<https://www.jta.org/2018/08/20/news-opinion/meet-catholic-born-polish-orthodox-jew-whos-reviving-yiddish-tango>

She's a Catholic-born Polish woman now living as a Modern Orthodox Jew in Israel.

As if that weren't unusual enough, Olga Avigail Mielezczuk's life's work is reviving the musical genre of Yiddish tango — two words rarely uttered in the same breath.

Mielezczuk, known simply as Olga in her native Poland and Avigail in her adopted Israel, began piano lessons at the age of 6, when she was plucked from kindergarten to pursue a career in classical music.

Raised as a devout Catholic, Olga set out on a journey of Jewish transformation during an interfaith visit to Auschwitz, a five-day retreat where she and other Poles met American and Israeli Jews as well as some German grandchildren of Nazi officers.

"When I started to sing in Yiddish, I had no idea about Jewish culture at all," she said, recalling the emotional visit. "This world suddenly opened up to me in Auschwitz. I was there for five days doing meditation and tikkun olam [repairing the world]. A Hasidic rabbi sang in Hebrew and Yiddish, and I felt deeply connected with the place."

Olga enrolled in a course on Yiddish music organized by Warsaw's Shalom Foundation, eventually deciding it would be her mission to bring Yiddish back to the Jewish people — especially young Ashkenazim unfamiliar with the mamaloshen, or mother tongue, of their ancestors.

Six years ago, Olga underwent an Orthodox conversion to Judaism and moved to Jerusalem.

Later this month, the 40-year-old vocalist will sing at Canada's two leading Jewish music events: KlezKanada, set for Aug. 20-26 at a Laurentian mountain retreat near Montreal, and the 2018 Ashkenaz Festival, which takes place Aug. 28-Sept. 3 at Toronto's Harbourfront Centre.

Co-presenting Olga's performances in Canada is the Polish Cultural Institute New York, a diplomatic division of the Polish Foreign Ministry that promotes Poland's cultural heritage in North America.

Her repertoire includes Jewish cabaret numbers popular in the period between World War I and II, like the 1936 song "Letstikn shabes," as well as haunting European tango pieces like "Rivkele" and "Shpil z emir a lidele in yiddish" that were inspired by faraway Argentina, the birthplace of tango, and klezmer music.

"In the 1930s, Warsaw was the capital of European tango, and most of the songwriters and composers of tango were Jewish," Olga said in an interview at a Tel Aviv cafe. "Jews continued to write tango during the Holocaust. It helped them express their sorrow."

The genre was kept alive by Polish Jews who immigrated to Palestine during and after the war, writing Hebrew lyrics to their original pieces.

"Here, they composed love tangos, not for women but for the land — even before Israel was established," Olga said. "In the Warsaw Ghetto, there were lots of famous cafes where people used to perform. Some poets were writing cabaret and tango pieces. In the concentration camps, there was also the story of the Gold brothers, who had their own orchestra. One ran away to the East and arrived to Palestine. The other didn't survive."

In the prewar years, a Warsaw tavern run by Josef Ladowski — nicknamed "Fat Josl" — became a popular hangout for Jews both rich and poor. The lounge, which came alive at around 2 a.m., became the subject of a ballad, "Bal u starego Joska" (A Ball at Fat Josl's). The popular Canadian jazz pianist Ron Davis will be onstage when Olga belts out that song in Toronto later this month in memory of the grandfather Davis never met.

Joining them will be Polish band members Hadrian Tabecki on piano, Grzegorz Bożewicz on bandoneon and Piotr Malicki on guitar. None are Jewish.

The second concert, Jewish Polesye, is dedicated to the Jewish folksinger Mariam Nirenberg, who was born in Poland's borderlands and immigrated to Toronto in the early 1930s. Nirenberg's grandson and other family members will be present.

Olga, the mother of two small children, has performed in Vancouver, at New York's Lincoln Center and in Berkeley, California.

"My most moving concert was for Shoah survivors in Berkeley," she said. "They were crying. They didn't want to leave."

In perhaps a sad irony, Poland's most famous Yiddish tango singer no longer performs Jewish music in Israel — mainly because so few Israelis are interested.

"My mission to spread Yiddish around Israel failed completely," Olga said. "For most Israelis, Yiddish music is connected to the Shoah and with the haredi Orthodox world."

Even her own husband, Shlomi, who is of Kurdish descent, can't stand Yiddish, she said, noting that many Sephardim, or Jews of North African and Middle Eastern descent, associate Yiddish with European shtetl dwellers.

"For Sephardim, Yiddish is the essence of the Diaspora," she said laughing. "It's like an illness."

On the other hand, Olga said, Americans Jews appreciate klezmer even if they can't always follow the lyrics.

"When I was in America, I felt like a star," she said.

Olga has also performed in the Czech Republic, Germany, Russia and Slovakia.

Next year, Olga would like to begin offering musical tours of Israel, pairing biblical sites such as Qumran with traditional Jewish songs that reference those places. She'd also like to visit Buenos Aires and immerse herself in the world of traditional Argentine tango.

But for now, the queen of Yiddish tango spends most of her time performing in Poland, especially at World War II-related commemorations for various towns and cities. And her devout Catholic family — while celebrating Easter and putting up a Christmas tree every year — has welcomed Olga's new Jewish identity.

"They accept me," she said. "When I visit Warsaw, my mother even buys chicken from the kosher market."

OSCE Expresses Concern over Russian Forces Actions in Transdniestria
Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, August 16, 2018

<https://www.rferl.org/a/osce-expresses-concerns-russian-forces-transdniestria/29437831.html>

The Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE) has expressed concern about Russian forces' "river-crossing military exercise" in Moldova's breakaway region of Transdniestria and said its team was blocked from monitoring the maneuvers.

The OSCE said in a statement on August 15 that in accordance with a 1992 agreement designed to seek a settlement to the longstanding dispute, military exercises in the zone must be authorized by the Joint Control Commission (JCC) and the OSCE Mission, "which was not done in this instance."

"The OSCE Mission urges all parties involved in the fulfillment of the 1992 Agreement on Principles of a Peaceful Settlement to fully respect its provisions and the regime of the Security Zone, as well as the relevant JCC decisions and regulations," the OSCE statement said.

As part of the military maneuvers, armored personnel carriers and armored reconnaissance vehicles of the Operational Group of Russian Forces practiced crossing the Dniester River, Russian news agency Interfax reported.

The report said the forces "practiced U-turns, evading various obstacles such as sunken trees, reaching designated points on the opposite bank, and other maneuvers."

The Moldovan delegation to the JCC called the drills in the demilitarized Security Zone as "provocative actions."

The JCC, signed in 1992 by officials from Moldova, Russia, and Transdniestria, is a multistate mission tasked with ensuring cease-fires and security arrangements in the security zone along the Dniester River.

In June, Moldova also expressed concern over what it called unauthorized movements by Russian military forces in the breakaway region. It said it notified the OSCE.

At the time, Moldovan authorities filmed some 40 trucks and other military vehicles with Russian symbols and license plates moving along a main road linking the northern and southern parts of Transdniestria, a sliver of land along the Ukrainian border in eastern Moldova.

Transdniestria is considered one of the many "frozen conflicts" in the former Soviet Union.

The mainly Russian-speaking region declared independence from Moldova in 1990 over fears that Chisinau would seek reunification with neighboring Romania.

Most of Moldova was part of Romania in the period between World War I and World War II.

Moldovan forces and Moscow-backed Transdniestria fighters fought a short but bloody war in 1992.

The conflict ended with a cease-fire agreement after Russian troops in the region intervened on the side of the separatists.

Some 1,400 Russian troops remain in Transdniestria guarding Soviet-era arms depots, and Moscow has resisted numerous calls over the years to withdraw its troops.

Transdniestria's independence is recognized by no country, and the United Nations and OSCE, among others, have attempted to forge a resolution to the dispute.

Ukraine's Political Season is about to Begin. Here's What You Need to Know.

By Taras Berezovets

Atlantic Council, August 20, 2018

<http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/ukraine-s-political-season-is-about-to-begin-here-s-what-you-need-to-know>

The hot summer of 2018 has been unusually calm in Ukraine, where in the absence of other news, a scandal or a crisis catches the media spotlight. This is a stark contrast to 2009, when the Ukrainian presidential campaign was in full swing, which on February 7, 2010, ended in victory for Viktor Yanukovich. In March 2019, exactly nine years later, Ukrainians will choose their sixth president.

Today, numerous billboards and TV ads remind us of the beginning of the election campaign, or to be more precise, of presidential candidate and former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko. The word "new" is abundant in all of her advertising: "The New Deal," "New People's Constitution," and even "New Peace Plan." The word "new" seeks to evoke the most positive associations in voters and make them forget that she is far from a novice. Tymoshenko was first elected from the Kirovohrad district to the parliament in 1997 with a fantastic 92.3 percent of votes.

Tymoshenko's idea to play on novelty is not bad, given that her main opponent in the 2014 elections was Petro Poroshenko, who won using the campaign slogan "Live in a new way!" In politics, Poroshenko is only one year younger than Tymoshenko; he first became a member of the Verkhovna Rada in 1998.

Tymoshenko's main rival, President Poroshenko, is focused on fulfilling his obligations. He devoted most of the summer to foreign policy issues and to obtaining a Tomos from the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople to create the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. There are no signs of the launch of his election campaign, although it could happen as early as September. For now, the impression is that his campaign advisers are closely watching the race and waiting for the right moment.

The ratings show a narrow margin among leading candidates, and none of the leaders (Yulia Tymoshenko, Anatoliy Gritsenko, Yuriy Boyko, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, Petro Poroshenko, Oleh Lyashko, and Svyatoslav Varkarchuk) has 20 percent. With such an electoral menu, when the choice is limited to the best of the worst, a candidate who advances into the second round will take no more than 25 percent. This is a striking contrast to previous elections, when the two leaders of the race were clear from the outset.

No one wants to predict who will make the second round, although Tymoshenko looks likely. Her relatively strong stance at the start is provided by her loyal electorate and by the absence of other contenders. When the political seas are calm like this, the former prime minister's ads are heard from every TV and YouTube playlist.

Nevertheless, the beginning of the political season is expected to be very hot, promising many scandals. The Ukrainian oligarchs haven't wasted any time either. Several political alliances have already been formed and have been visible since the spring. According to trusted information, Tymoshenko has essentially secured support from one of the country's largest businessmen and the owner of 1+1 TV channel, Ihor Kolomoisky. Drawing on the time-honored tradition of putting eggs in more than one basket, Kolomoisky will also support the unknown political party "Servant of the People." The party has gained notice because its presidential candidate is likely to be the famous comedian, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, who has old business ties to Kolomoisky. Some see a worrying parallel between Zelenskiy's unexpectedly high approval rating of 8.5 percent and the career of Giuseppe Piero "Beppe" Grillo, an Italian comedian and cofounder of the Five Star Movement.

In addition to Kolomoisky, Rinat Akhmetov has also placed his bets. He is expected to promote his old political protégé, the leader of the Radical Party, Oleh Lyashko. In the 2014 elections, Lyashko came in third, but it will be incredibly hard for him to replicate that success. The country's subsequent political trajectory broke apart alliances within the Opposition Bloc; hence, Akhmetov decided not to back his old associate Yuriy Boyko, giving preference to another proven fighter, former Vice Prime Minister Oleksandr Vilkul.

Ukraine's former Defense Minister, Anatoliy Gritsenko, has been mostly quiet; there is no information on whether he was able to secure financial support from the oligarchs. Nevertheless, the Verkhovna Rada has already established

a special commission to investigate the activities of former defense ministers. Probing Gritsenko is clearly the objective. Ivan Vinnyk, an MP from Bloc of Petro Poroshenko fraction, is heading the commission. The results of this investigation, focusing on the defense ministry's property sale amounts under Gritsenko, could greatly undermine the former defense minister.

Another unanswered question is the participation of Svyatoslav Vakarchuk, the lead singer of the Okean Elzy rock band. According to the July Rating Group poll, he has a 6.6 percent approval rating. A rumor is still circulating that Vakarchuk may launch his presidential campaign on Ukraine's Independence Day on August 24 during his concert at the NSC Olympiyskiy Stadium. This, however, looks too artificial to be true. If he runs, a large coalition of non-governmental organizations and young politicians will back him. The term homo novus (a new man) best applies to Vakarchuk. Romans used this title to name citizens who were elected as senators or consuls for the first time. However, even if he refuses to participate in the presidential race, his not-yet formed political party would have good chances in the October 2019 parliamentary elections.

If these new political forces want to win the presidential election, they would need to take a difficult and painful step—hold a primary and pick a candidate. For now, they have a low chance of being able to agree on a unified candidate. If they cannot agree, it would be nearly impossible for these new faces to weigh in on the battle of the old guard heavyweights in the second round.

Taras Berezovets is a cofounder of Ukrainian Institute for the Future and the TV host on Pryamyy channel. He tweets @TarasBerezovets. This article was translated from Russian to English by Vera Zimmerman.

Anonymous Entrepreneur Restores Jewish Cemetery in Poland JTA, August 20, 2018

<https://www.jta.org/2018/08/20/top-headlines/anonymous-entrepreneur-restores-jewish-cemetery-in-poland>

An anonymous Polish entrepreneur has spent hundreds of thousands of zlotys to restore the Jewish cemetery of Żywiec, a town of 32,000 residents in southern Poland near the Czech and Slovak borders.

The cemetery had fallen into ruin following World War II and was among several under the care of the Jewish community of Bielsko-Biała, which has only several dozen members, Wyborcza.pl reported.

The community, which maintains responsibility for a dozen such cemeteries, was unable to pay for the upkeep of the 19th-century graveyard, which was overgrown with weeds.

The philanthropist, who asked to remain anonymous, expects the the work to be completed by September. He hired 10 workers to repair the fence and restore tombstones, many of which had toppled. Some weigh several hundred pounds.

"This man is a great Pole. To say 'thank you' is not enough," said Dorota Wiewióra, chairman of the Bielsko-Biała Jewish community.

Eastern and Central Europe are dotted with crumbling Jewish cemeteries and untended mass graves. Last month a memorial to the Holocaust victims in the central Polish town of [Plock](#) was found vandalized, and swastikas were painted on the fence of its Jewish cemetery. The following day, Plock residents gathered to clean up the cemetery, which also was filled with garbage and overgrowth, and paint over the anti-Semitic graffiti.

The Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland has said that many cemeteries are neglected, "without any marking, without fences and even without gravestones," [Haaretz](#) reported.

Last [December](#), Jewish corpses were dug up and discarded by Polish workers building an electrical substation in what the country's chief rabbi called "a full-out scandal."

More [recently](#), a rabbi from Washington, D.C., said he and his children encountered trash and bone fragments scattered around the grounds of two former mass graves of Jews in Ukraine.

Nazi guards weren't the only ones killing Jews during the Holocaust. Some — but not all — communities did it themselves first. Why?

By Jeffrey Kopstein & Jason Wittenberg

Washington Post, August 22, 2018

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/08/22/nazi-guards-werent-the-only-ones-killing-jews-during-the-holocaust-some-but-not-all-communities-did-it-themselves-first-why/?utm_term=.e96cceb0834

As the United States [deports a former Nazi concentration camp guard](#) to Germany, the world has been reminded again of the popular image of the Holocaust as one of impersonal mass slaughter. In the death camps, Jews and other victims died at the hands of murderers who didn't know their victims but were [filled with anti-Semitic hate](#).

But by the time that the death camps' gas chambers became operational, approximately half of the Jews who would perish in the Holocaust were already dead. Many of these Jews were tortured or killed by "ordinary" non-Jews at close quarters: in apartments, in streets, in the woods and anywhere else Jews could be found. The perpetrators often knew or knew of their victims, and the means were often primitive: guns, axes, crowbars, bricks, fire, beating and drowning.

Jews did not face this kind of personalized anti-Semitic violence in every community. Our recently published [book](#), "[Intimate Violence: Anti-Jewish Pogroms on the Eve of the Holocaust](#)," identifies the factors that put Jews at risk in some places but not others. And these factors involve more than just anti-Semitism.

Targeting Jews in Poland and Ukraine

Our book examines a particularly brutal wave of anti-Jewish violence that occurred across hundreds of predominantly Polish and Ukrainian communities on the eastern front in the aftermath of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. We document 219 communities of local non-Jews attacking their Jewish neighbors, nearly 10 percent of the 2,304 localities where Jews and non-Jews lived together. Ethnic Poles were the primary perpetrators in approximately 25 percent of these pogroms; in the remaining instances, ethnic Ukrainians predominated.

These attacks were often gruesome. In Wasosz, a small town in northeastern Poland, Szymon Datner's testimony describes the events of early July 1941:

... women were raped, their breasts cut off, little children were smashed on the walls, the fingers of the dead were cut off along with their gold rings, gold teeth were torn out of mouths; when in a house children were found with their parents, they would torture the children first, and then the parents.

In the Ukrainian city Drohobycz, Jakub Gerstenfeld's account notes that on July 1, 1941, "a few dozen people were killed in the most brutal possible way, hit with hammers or axes in the head." The archival record is packed with similar accounts.

Why did some communities have anti-Jewish pogroms?

What made these 219 communities so toxic for Jews, while leaving the vast majority of other localities untouched by pogroms? Our answer is more complicated than "anti-Semitism." Of course, some form of anti-Semitism was prevalent in most Polish and Ukrainian communities, whether they experienced a pogrom or not. Although in some ways Jews prospered in interwar Poland, they still faced persistent discrimination, [boycotts](#) of Jewish businesses, and even the bombing of synagogues, stores and apartments. The National Democrats, an anti-Semitic party, remained one of the most popular parties in Poland. And the Roman Catholic Church, while opposing anti-Jewish violence, still depicted Jews as Christ-killers and corrupters.

But paradoxically, anti-Semitism's prevalence diminishes it as the primary driver of pogroms. If anti-Semitism were the key, then there would have been far more pogroms than there were.

So what made a community succumb to pogrom violence? The answer lies in Jewish aspirations for equality, and the threat this posed to Polish and Ukrainian nationalists. Pogroms were more likely to occur in communities where

Jews, through their support of “Zionist” political parties, signaled their demand to be recognized as a nation rather than just a religion. For them, Zionism meant refusal to accept anything less than the same rights accorded to other nations.

For example, Zionist politicians in interwar Poland called for publicly funded schools in Hebrew and Yiddish, an end to discriminatory Sunday closing laws, curtailing restrictions on employment of Jews in the public sector, fairness in taxation and public goods provision for Jewish majority settlements, and representation in government commensurate with Jewish demographic weight. As taxpaying citizens of Poland, Jews had every right to advocate for these things.

But Poles and Ukrainians from across the political spectrum did not see Jews as national equals. Polish and Ukrainian nationalists had a stronger reaction: They considered Zionists a mortal threat to their goal of building homogeneous national communities. And so, in communities with a Zionist presence, Poles and Ukrainians seized the opportunity provided by the German invasion and local indifference to get rid of “foreigners” who would never accept their political dominance.

What spared the Jews in communities that did not experience pogroms?

It was not the absence of anti-Semitic Polish and Ukrainian nationalists. They were certainly present in these communities, too. Instead, the key was how the broader community reacted to opportunity for anti-Jewish violence in the first chaotic weeks of the war. Poles and Ukrainians who dwelled alongside non-nationalist Jews were less likely to view those Jews with indifference, less willing to condone violence against their Jewish neighbors and more likely to feel solidarity with them as members of the community who deserved protection.

Preventing pogroms depended more on the protection of such “friends” from other groups than on the absence of “enemies” who were never very far away.