



NCSEJ WEEKLY TOP 10
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**An Effort Is Being Made to Preserve Europe's Jewish Cemeteries to Combat Holocaust Denial
By Karel Janicek and Associated Press**

Time, February 27, 2019

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/pm-speaks-with-putin-agrees-to-hold-postponed-moscow-meeting-in-near-future/>

A private organization that wants to preserve thousands of old Jewish cemeteries in Europe is using aerial drones to map burial sites in countries where the Holocaust decimated Jewish populations that existed before World War II.

The European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative said Tuesday that teams of drone operators plan to survey 1,500 endangered Jewish cemeteries in Slovakia, Greece, Moldova, Lithuania and Ukraine this year. Once the boundaries are recorded, the sites will be enclosed and cleaned, the Germany-based organization said.

The European Union is funding the effort with an 800,000-euro grant (\$911,100) at a time of rising alarm over anti-Semitic acts in some countries. This month, swastikas were painted on about 80 gravestones at a Jewish cemetery in France, and vandals damaged windows, sinks and a prominent headstone at a Jewish cemetery in northwestern England.

The chief executive of the initiative, Philip Carmel, said walls fitted with locking gates will be erected around the graveyards covered by the EU-funded project both to protect them and to re-establish a physical presence, "so people know there's a Jewish cemetery."

The group also wants to recruit volunteers in the five countries to help maintain and safeguard the cemeteries.

"Fencing doesn't protect. It's the people who protect the cemeteries," Carmel said, noting that a fence didn't protect a cemetery near the French city of Strasbourg where 37 gravestones and a monument to Holocaust victims were tagged with anti-Semitic graffiti in December.

There are about 10,000 known Jewish burial sites in 46 European countries, according to the European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative. About three-quarters are located in central and eastern Europe.

In some parts of the east, the organization is on what Carmel called a last-minute "rescuing mission." Germany funded the nonprofit group's previous projects, involving 123 cemeteries in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

"It is vital, especially, that the next generation of Europeans learns about Jewish existence to combat rising anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial," Carmel said. "The cemeteries are so often the last physical proof of centuries of Jewish life in the towns and villages of Europe, which were wiped out in the Shoah. There is no better proof to deny Holocaust denial."

Many of the cemeteries to be surveyed and enclosed this year had to be found before they could be protected. Local residents helped the organization's researchers find some, abandoned and grown over since World War II. Pre-1918 maps and aerial photos that Germany's Luftwaffe used to pinpoint targets for aerial bombing missions helped reveal more.

Now, drones are collecting topographic data that experts based in Kiev can use to design plans preservation plans for the sites.

As part of the project, workers erected a fence Tuesday around a neglected Jewish cemetery in Slovakia that dates from the 18th century and sits like an island in the middle of vast farmlands east of the capital, Bratislava.

“Preserving our Jewish history creates a vital link to our past, which in turn makes us more aware of the present and shapes our future,” Rabbi Isaac Schapira, the initiative’s founder, said. “We owe our ancestors this duty and mark of respect by ensuring their final resting places are restored and preserved.”

Netanyahu in Moscow Tells Putin Israel Will Continue Hitting Iran in Syria

By Raphael Ahren and Times of Israel Staff

Times of Israel, February 27, 2019

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-tells-putin-israel-will-continue-to-take-action-against-iran-in-syria/>

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told Russian President Vladimir Putin that Israel will continue to take action against Iran in Syria, in the first significant meeting between the two since a major spat developed over a downed spy plane last year.

“The greatest threat to stability and security in the region comes from Iran and its proxies,” Netanyahu said. “We are determined to continue our aggressive activity against Iran, which calls for our destruction, and against its attempts to establish itself militarily in Syria.”

Israel and Russia have been at odds since September, when Syrian air defenses shot down a Russian reconnaissance plane while aiming at an Israeli jet that was targeting an alleged Iranian installation. The incident, which Moscow blamed Israel for, threatened to hamper Israel’s air campaign against Iranian entrenchment in Syria.

Netanyahu had credited his close ties with Putin for the success of a system allowing Israel to carry out strikes in Syria without becoming entangled with Russia, which is allied with Syria’s President Bashar Assad, but those ties reportedly took a hit in the wake of the spy plane incident

On Wednesday, Netanyahu again credited the system in place between Israel and Russia.

“I have counted 11 meetings between us since September 2016,” Netanyahu told Putin at the start of the meeting. “The direct link between us is the deconfliction mechanism that prevented conflict between our armies and contributed to security and stability in the region.”

Putin welcomed his Israeli guest, but did not specifically mention Iran or Syria in his remarks. “It is very important that we continue to cooperate. Russia was a supporter of the establishment of Israel. We are happy to talk about the situation in the region and the security issue,” Putin said.

After the spy plane incident, Russia dispatched advanced S-300 air defense batteries to Syria, raising concerns they could be used against Israeli planes. They have yet to be deployed, according to intelligence assessments.

Israel has carried out hundreds of airstrikes over the last several years to keep Iran from gaining a foothold in Syria and thwart the transfer of advanced weapons to Tehran-backed Hezbollah. Moscow has said it will keep Iran from the Israeli border, but has said it cannot push Iranian forces out of the country.

At the beginning of their brief statements, Netanyahu invited Putin to come to Jerusalem to attend the unveiling of a monument in honor of Soviet soldiers who died during the siege of Leningrad in World War II.

“We will never forget the role Russia and the Red Army played in the victory over the Nazis,” Netanyahu said.

Putin immediately accepted the invitation, noting that the memory of the soldiers who died at Leningrad was “sacred.”

The Leningrad memorial is set to be erected in the capital’s Armon Hanatziv promenade, overlooking Jerusalem’s Old City. There is no date for the event yet.

Netanyahu also said his government had recently decided to fund a new museum dedicated to the half million Jewish World War II veterans who fought in the Red Army.

Earlier this year, the world marked the 75th anniversary of the end of the Leningrad siege, which lasted from September 1941 to January 1944. Hundreds of thousands of Russians died during the blockade by Nazi Germany, most of them from starvation.

Wednesday’s meeting in the Kremlin was also attended by Environmental Protection Minister Ze’ev Elkin, a former Soviet refusenik who translated Netanyahu’s remarks from Hebrew to Russian, National Security Adviser Meir Ben-Shabbat and head of Military Intelligence Tamir Hayman.

Netanyahu was set to fly back to Israel shortly after the meeting, cutting his trip short and canceling a planned event with Moscow’s Jewish community, reportedly to prepare for an expected indictment announcement against him in the coming days.

Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit is expected late this week or early next week to publish conclusions on three corruption cases against Netanyahu. Police have recommended bribery charges in all three, but the prime minister denies any wrongdoing.

Before taking off after midnight Wednesday, Netanyahu said he hoped deepen the “important, close and even intimate dialogue with the president of Russia, which is so important for the security of Israel.”

Netanyahu has spoken with Putin by phone and met with him on the sidelines of World War II commemorations in Paris in November, but the two have not held a formal sit-down since last July.

Their meeting was also their first since US President Donald Trump announced in December he would withdraw all American soldiers from Syria, in a move that was welcomed by Putin but raised concerns in Israel.

Netanyahu to Moscow Jewish Leaders: More Than One Million Russian-Speaking Jews Have Changed Israel

By Hana Levi Julian

Jewish Press, February 27, 2019

<https://www.jewishpress.com/news/global/russia/netanyahu-to-moscow-jewish-leaders-more-than-one-million-russian-speaking-jews-have-changed-israel/2019/02/27/>

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his wife Sara met Wednesday night with Jewish community leaders in Moscow, telling them that Israel’s huge Russian-speaking population has changed the country.

The event followed his meeting at the Kremlin with President Vladimir Putin. As with his earlier visit Netanyahu spoke briefly about his leadership credentials, this being an electoral period and one in which he faces possible indictment at home to boot.

“As part of my visit here today, we are very happy to meet with you. I am very happy and proud that I have been able to lead the State of Israel and – of course – to represent many among the people of Israel vis-à-vis a new network of relations such as this,” he said.

“The Russian-speaking public, over one million people, has changed the country and, together with the Jewish community here in Russia and Moscow, constitutes a living bridge between these two peoples.

“It is no small thing that the State of Israel has such good ties with one of the strongest powers in the world. But we are not concerned just for ourselves. We are concerned for Jews everywhere,” Netanyahu said.

“We know, of course, that we need to struggle together against displays of antisemitism,” he said — but was careful not to offer even a hint of a suggestion that anti-Semitism exists in Russia. “Yesterday I spoke with the Chief Rabbi of Buenos Aires. We see what is happening in parts of Europe and in North America as well. There is one answer to anti-Semitism – first of all, a strong State of Israel.”

Among those attending the event were Russian Jewish Congress Chairman Yuri Kanner, Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia and Director of the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center Alexander Boroda, plus Moscow Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt.

Slovak Chairmanship Convenes Conference on Anti-Semitism: Special Representative Cardin Urges Leaders, Parliamentarians to Step Up

By Dr. Mischa Thompson and Erika Schlager

CSCE, February 22, 2019

<https://www.csce.gov/international-impact/slovak-chairmanship-convenes-conference-anti-semitism>

From February 5-6, 2019, Slovakia, the 2019 OSCE Chair-in-Office, convened government officials and civil society representatives in Bratislava to discuss best practices to combat anti-Semitism in the OSCE region. The event followed the 2018 Italian Chairmanship’s conference in Rome and took place shortly after International Holocaust Remembrance Day (January 27).

The OSCE Chair-in-Office, Slovak Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajcik, opened the meeting, which was Slovakia’s first event of the year. Senator Ben Cardin, who serves as the OSCE Special Representative on Anti-Semitism, Racism, and Intolerance, participated by video and shared his most recent report prepared for the OSCE PA. U.S. Ambassador to Slovakia Adam Sterling represented the United States at the conference opening.

On the opening day of the conference, the White House announced the appointment of Elan S. Carr as the United States Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism. Many members of the Helsinki Commission, including Chairman Alcee L. Hastings, had urged the president to fill this Congressionally mandated position.

As part of his first official trip, Carr participated in the Bratislava conference, where he met with representatives of civil society in his new capacity and held consultations with OSCE officials.

Government Officials Pledge to Continue OSCE Efforts

The first day of the conference featured OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) Director Ingiborg Gisladottir, World Jewish Congress CEO Robert Singer, and President of the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Slovakia Igor Rintel. Rabbi Andrew Baker, the Chair-in-Office’s Personal Representative on Combating Anti-Semitism, reviewed progress that had been made in combating anti-Semitism over the past 15 years. Nevertheless, he observed that recent surveys indicate “[s]ignificant numbers of Jews have witnessed or experienced anti-Semitic attacks. Over a third are reluctant to wear anything in public that would identify them as being Jewish. A similar percentage will even avoid attending Jewish events for fear of an anti-Semitic encounter.”

While asserting that, “[w]e can claim credit that through these years the OSCE has been in the forefront of the struggle,” he also observed that the “general climate has worsened, with growing racist and populist movements, a coarsening of public discourse in the easy ability of social media to amplify anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance.”

Government representatives reflected on the problem of anti-Semitism in their own countries, with some presenting rather favorable pictures. Many speakers during the conference noted the importance the definition of anti-Semitism by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (adopted in May 2016); several government officials reported how their countries are implementing the definition in practice.

Four other panels focused on security of Jewish communities and individuals; the role of education in addressing anti-Semitism and promoting Holocaust remembrance initiatives; the role of media and social media; and the role of civil society and coalition building to address anti-Semitism and all forms of intolerance and discrimination.

Christina Finch, the head of ODIHR's Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department, reported on the completion of ODIHR's unprecedented multi-year project, "Turning Words into Action to Address Anti-Semitism." Grounded in the 2014 Basel Ministerial Declaration and funded by the German government, the project focused on security, education, and coalition building. She outlined additional steps ODIHR is taking to help participating States implement the Security Guide developed as part of the "Words Into Action" project and the upcoming roll-out of an on-line Hate Incident Reporting Platform.

Hungary in Focus

During the conference, remarks by Austrian Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl and Hungarian State Secretary Szabolcs Takacs were notable for their broad negative portrayals of Muslims, refugees, and migrants as a source of anti-Semitism.

One civil society speaker subsequently noted, "It gave me great unease that at a conference on anti-Semitism, far-right backed politicians are able to have a stage, to have a platform, to put forward highly Islamophobic content. It gave me great unease that speakers from countries that have a terrible record with their Jewish communities, where Jewish communities face some of the most complicated struggles today, are able to say 'everything is okay in my country.' I was very happy that . . . our panel called out Hungary as a place where we have seen recently a lot of conspiracy theories, a lot of this very tactical rhetoric that without being blatantly anti-Semitic still manages to put anti-Semitic messages out there."

State Secretary Takacs also warned of the threat from extremist parties such as Jobbik, Hungary's own far-right party. In fact, Hungary's ruling party, Fidesz, generally has remained silent in the face of anti-Semitic and anti-Roma messages from Jobbik, implemented parts of Jobbik's political program (including the adoption of the 2017 anti-NGO law), and amplified Fidesz's own most notorious anti-Semitic and anti-Roma propagandist.

Conference Follows Deadliest Anti-Semitic Attack in U.S. History

For a second year in a row, an OSCE conference on anti-Semitism convened in the months following a deadly attack, fueled by anti-Semitism and extremism, in the United States. Just as the August 2017 events in Charlottesville were present in the minds of those gathering in Rome in January 2018, the memory of Jewish worshippers massacred at the Tree of Life Synagogue on October 27, 2018, where 11 people were murdered and several others wounded, underpinned every moment of the Bratislava conference.

A January 29, 2019, indictment of the alleged shooter specifically asserts that he "willfully caused bodily injury to 11 deceased and 2 surviving victims because of their actual and perceived religion." The charges illustrate the relationship between "ordinary" criminal acts such as murder, targeting individuals because of their identity, and other criminal violations of civil rights (in this case, obstruction of the free exercise of religious beliefs).

Remains of Hundreds of Bodies Discovered at Former Jewish Ghetto of Brest, Belarus

By Cnaan Liphshiz

JTA, February 21, 2019

<https://www.jta.org/quick-reads/hundreds-of-bodies-discovered-at-former-jewish-ghetto-of-brest-belarus>

A mass grave containing bones from hundreds of bodies was discovered during construction atop what used to be the ghetto of Brest in present-day Belarus.

Human remains belonging to adults and children as well as clothes, shoes and other personal items, were uncovered last month on the construction site managed by the contractor Pribuzhsky Kwartia, according to a report Wednesday on the Virtual Brest news site.

Since then, the remains of dozens of additional bodies have been discovered every day, the report said.

Mayor Alexander Rogachuk said the bones belonged to “victims of ghettos,” meaning Jews imprisoned there by the Nazis during the Holocaust.

The Nazis killed 3 million civilians in Belarus, of whom 800,000 were Jewish.

Rogachuk told the Brest news site that he is in contact with local and international Jewish groups about arranging burial for the bones at local Jewish cemeteries.

Construction has been suspended on the immediate site of the grave but is going on around it, the Onliner news site reported Thursday.

Jewish religious laws require human remains not be disturbed.

Belarusian authorities and contractors have been criticized in the past — including as recently as 2017 in Gomel — for building atop Jewish cemeteries.

Yakov Goodman, a Jewish-American activist for the preservation of Jewish heritage sites in his native Belarus, has called out the government for allegedly destroying three synagogues — two in Minsk and one in Luban — and at least three Jewish cemeteries in addition to a former burial ground threatened in Gomel.

Neo-Nazis and the Far Right Are on the March in Ukraine

By Lev Golinkin

The Nation, February 22, 2019

<https://www.thenation.com/article/neo-nazis-far-right-ukraine/>

Five years ago, Ukraine’s Maidan uprising ousted President Viktor Yanukovich, to the cheers and support of the West. Politicians and analysts in the United States and Europe not only celebrated the uprising as a triumph of democracy, but denied reports of Maidan’s ultranationalism, smearing those who warned about the dark side of the uprising as Moscow puppets and useful idiots. Freedom was on the march in Ukraine.

Today, increasing reports of far-right violence, ultranationalism, and erosion of basic freedoms are giving the lie to the West’s initial euphoria. There are neo-Nazi pogroms against the Roma, rampant attacks on feminists and LGBT groups, book bans, and state-sponsored glorification of Nazi collaborators.

These stories of Ukraine’s dark nationalism aren’t coming out of Moscow; they’re being filed by Western media, including US-funded Radio Free Europe (RFE); Jewish organizations such as the World Jewish Congress and the Simon Wiesenthal Center; and watchdogs like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Freedom House, which issued a joint report warning that Kiev is losing the monopoly on the use of force in the country as far-right gangs operate with impunity.

Five years after Maidan, the beacon of democracy is looking more like a torchlight march.

A NEO-NAZI BATTALION IN THE HEART OF EUROPE

“Volunteer Ukrainian Unit Includes Nazis.”—USA Today, March 10, 2015

The DC establishment’s standard defense of Kiev is to point out that Ukraine’s far right has a smaller percentage of seats in the parliament than their counterparts in places like France. That’s a spurious argument: What Ukraine’s far right lacks in polls numbers, it makes up for with things Marine Le Pen could only dream of—paramilitary units and free rein on the streets.

Post-Maidan Ukraine is the world’s only nation to have a neo-Nazi formation in its armed forces. The Azov Battalion was initially formed out of the neo-Nazi gang Patriot of Ukraine. Andriy Biletsky, the gang’s leader

who became Azov's commander, once wrote that Ukraine's mission is to "lead the White Races of the world in a final crusade...against the Semite-led Untermenschen." Biletsky is now a deputy in Ukraine's parliament.

In the fall of 2014, Azov—which is accused of human-rights abuses, including torture, by Human Rights Watch and the United Nations—was incorporated into Ukraine's National Guard.

While the group officially denies any neo-Nazi connections, Azov's nature has been confirmed by multiple Western outlets: *The New York Times* called the battalion "openly neo-Nazi," while *USA Today*, *The Daily Beast*, *The Telegraph*, and *Haaretz* documented group members' proclivity for swastikas, salutes, and other Nazi symbols, and individual fighters have also acknowledged being neo-Nazis.

In January 2018, Azov rolled out its National Druzhina street patrol unit whose members swore personal fealty to Biletsky and pledged to "restore Ukrainian order" to the streets. The Druzhina quickly distinguished itself by carrying out pogroms against the Roma and LGBT organizations and storming a municipal council. Earlier this year, Kiev announced the neo-Nazi unit will be monitoring polls in next month's presidential election.

In 2017, Congressman Ro Khanna led the effort to ban Azov from receiving U.S. arms and training. But the damage has already been done: The research group Bellingcat proved that Azov had already received access to American grenade launchers, while a Daily Beast investigation showed that US trainers are unable to prevent aid from reaching white supremacists. And Azov itself had proudly posted a video of the unit welcoming NATO representatives.

(Azov isn't the only far-right formation to get Western affirmation. In December 2014, Amnesty International accused the Dnipro-1 battalion of potential war crimes, including "using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare." Six months later, Senator John McCain visited and praised the battalion.)

Particularly concerning is Azov's campaign to transform Ukraine into a hub for transnational white supremacy. The unit has recruited neo-Nazis from Germany, the UK, Brazil, Sweden, and America; last October, the FBI arrested four California white supremacists who had allegedly received training from Azov. This is a classic example of blowback: US support of radicals abroad ricocheting to hit America.

FAR RIGHT TIES TO GOVERNMENT

"Ukrainian police declare admiration for Nazi collaborators"—RFE, February 13, 2019

Speaker of Parliament Andriy Parubiy cofounded and led two neo-Nazi organizations: the Social-National Party of Ukraine (later renamed Svoboda), and Patriot of Ukraine, whose members would eventually form the core of Azov.

Although Parubiy left the far right in the early 2000's, he hasn't rejected his past. When asked about it in a 2016 interview, Parubiy replied that his "values" haven't changed. Parubiy, whose autobiography shows him marching with the neo-Nazi Wolfsangel symbol used by Aryan Nations, regularly meets with Washington think tanks and politicians; his neo-Nazi background is ignored or outright denied.

Even more disturbing is the far right's penetration of law enforcement. Shortly after Maidan, the US equipped and trained the newly founded National Police, in what was intended to be a hallmark program buttressing Ukrainian democracy.

The deputy minister of the Interior—which controls the National Police—is Vadim Troyan, a veteran of Azov and Patriot of Ukraine. In 2014, when Troyan was being considered for police chief of Kiev, Ukrainian Jewish leaders were appalled by his neo-Nazi background. Today, he's deputy of the department running US-trained law enforcement in the entire nation.

Earlier this month, RFE reported on National Police leadership admiring Stepan Bandera—a Nazi collaborator and Fascist whose troops participated in the Holocaust—on social media.

The fact that Ukraine's police is peppered with far-right supporters explains why neo-Nazis operate with impunity on the streets.

STATE-SPONSORED GLORIFICATION OF NAZI COLLABORATORS

"Ukrainian extremists celebrate Ukrainian Nazi SS divisions...in the middle of a major Ukrainian city"—Anti-Defamation League Director of European Affairs, April 28, 2018

It's not just the military and street gangs: Ukraine's far right has successfully hijacked the post-Maidan government to impose an intolerant and ultranationalist culture over the land.

In 2015, the Ukrainian parliament passed legislation making two WWII paramilitaries—the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA)—heroes of Ukraine, and made it a criminal offense to deny their heroism. The OUN had collaborated with the Nazis and participated in the Holocaust, while the UPA slaughtered thousands of Jews and 70,000-100,000 Poles on their own volition.

The government-funded Ukrainian Institute of National Memory is institutionalizing the whitewashing of Nazi collaborators. Last summer, the Ukrainian parliament featured an exhibit commemorating the OUN's 1941 proclamation of cooperation with the Third Reich (imagine the French government installing an exhibit celebrating the Vichy state!).

Torchlight marches in honor of OUN/UPA leaders like Roman Shukhevych (a commander in a Third Reich auxiliary battalion) are a regular feature of the new Ukraine. The recuperation even extends to SS Galichina, a Ukrainian division of the Waffen-SS; the director of the Institute of National Memory proclaimed that the SS fighters were "war victims." The government's embrace of Bandera is not only deplorable, but also extremely divisive, considering the OUN/UPA are reviled in eastern Ukraine.

Predictably, the celebration of Nazi collaborators has accompanied a rise in outright anti-Semitism.

"Jews Out!" chanted thousands during a January 2017 march honoring OUN leader Bandera. (The next day the police denied hearing anything anti-Semitic.) That summer, a three-day festival celebrating the Nazi collaborator Shukhevych capped off with the firebombing of a synagogue. In November 2017, RFE reported Nazi salutes as 20,000 marched in honor of the UPA. And last April, hundreds marched in L'viv with coordinated Nazi salutes honoring SS Galichina; the march was promoted by the L'viv regional government.

The Holocaust revisionism is a multi-pronged effort, ranging from government-funded seminars, brochures, and board games, to the proliferation of plaques, statues, and streets renamed after butchers of Jews, to far-right children camps, where youth are inculcated with ultranationalist ideology.

Within several years, an entire generation will be indoctrinated to worship Holocaust perpetrators as national heroes.

BOOK BANS

"No state should be allowed to interfere in the writing of history."—British historian Antony Beevor, after his award-winning book was banned in Ukraine, The Telegraph, January 23, 2018

Ukraine's State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting is enforcing the glorification of Ukraine's new heroes by banning "anti-Ukrainian" literature that goes against the government narrative. This ideological censorship includes acclaimed books by Western authors.

In January 2018, Ukraine made international headlines by banning *Stalingrad* by award-winning British historian Antony Beevor because of a single paragraph about a Ukrainian unit massacring 90 Jewish children during World War II. In December, Kiev banned *The Book Thieves* by Swedish author Anders Rydell (which,

ironically, is about the Nazis' suppression of literature) because he mentioned troops loyal to Symon Petliura (an early 20th-century nationalist leader) had slaughtered Jews.

This month, the Ukrainian embassy in Washington exported this intolerance to America by brazenly demanding the United States ban a Russian movie from American theaters. Apparently, the billions Washington invested in promoting democracy in Ukraine have failed to teach Kiev basic concepts of free speech.

ANTI-SEMITISM

"I'm telling you one more time—go to hell, kikes. The Ukrainian people have had it to here with you."—Security services reserve general Vasily Vovk, May 11, 2017

Unsurprisingly, government-led glorification of Holocaust perpetrators was a green light for other forms of anti-Semitism. The past three years saw an explosion of swastikas and SS runes on city streets, death threats, and vandalism of Holocaust memorials, Jewish centers, cemeteries, tombs, and places of worship, all of which led Israel to take the unusual step of publicly urging Kiev to address the epidemic.

Public officials make anti-Semitic threats with no repercussions. These include: a security services general promising to eliminate the *zhidi* (a slur equivalent to 'kikes'); a parliament deputy going off on an anti-Semitic rant on television; a far-right politician lamenting Hitler didn't finish off the Jews; and an ultranationalist leader vowing to cleanse Odessa of *zhidi*.

For the first few years after Maidan, Jewish organizations largely refrained from criticizing Ukraine, perhaps in the hope Kiev would address the issue on its own. But by 2018, the increasing frequency of anti-Semitic incidents led Jewish groups to break their silence.

Last year, the Israeli government's annual report on anti-Semitism heavily featured Ukraine, which had more incidents than all post-Soviet states combined. The World Jewish Congress, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, and 57 members of the US Congress all vociferously condemned Kiev's Nazi glorification and the concomitant anti-Semitism.

Ukrainian Jewish leaders are also speaking out. In 2017, the director of one of Ukraine's largest Jewish organizations published a *New York Times* op-ed urging the West to address Kiev's whitewashing. Last year, 41 Ukrainian Jewish leaders denounced the growth of anti-Semitism. That's especially telling, given that many Ukrainian Jewish leaders supported the Maidan uprising.

None of these concerns have been addressed in any meaningful way.

ROMA POGROMS

"They wanted to kill us': masked neo-fascists strike fear into Ukraine's Roma."—The Guardian, August 27, 2018

Ukraine's far right has resisted carrying out outright attacks on Jews; other vulnerable groups haven't been so lucky.

Last spring, a lethal wave of anti-Roma pogroms swept through Ukraine, with at least six attacks in two months. Footage from the pogroms evokes the 1930s: Armed thugs attack women and children while razing their camps. At least one man was killed, while others, including a child, were stabbed.

Two gangs behind the attacks—C14 and the National Druzhina—felt comfortable enough to proudly post pogrom videos on social media. That's not surprising, considering that the National Druzhina is part of Azov, while the neo-Nazi C14 receives government funding for "educational" programs. Last October, C14 leader Serhiy Bondar was welcomed at America House Kyiv, a center run by the US government.

Appeals from international organizations and the US embassy fell on deaf ears: Months after the United Nations demanded Kiev end “systematic persecution” of the Roma, a human-rights group reported C14 were allegedly intimidating Roma in a joint patrol with the Kiev police.

LGBT AND WOMEN’S-RIGHTS GROUPS

“It’s even worse than before’: How the ‘Revolution of Dignity’ Failed LGBT Ukrainians.”—RFE, November 21, 2018

In 2016, after pressure from the US Congress, the Kiev government began providing security for the annual Kiev Pride parade. However, this increasingly looks like a Potemkin affair: two hours of protection, with widespread attacks on LGBT individuals and gatherings during the rest of the year. Nationalist groups have targeted LGBT meetings with impunity, going so far as to shut down an event hosted by Amnesty International as well as assault a Western journalist at a transgender rights rally. Women’s-rights marches have also been targeted, including brazen attacks in March.

ATTACKS ON PRESS

“The Committee to Protect Journalists condemns a Ukrainian law enforcement raid at the Kiev offices of Media Holding Vesti...more than a dozen masked officers ripped open doors with crowbars, seized property, and fired tear gas in the offices.”—The Committee to Protect Journalists, February 9, 2018

In May 2016, Myrotvorets, an ultranationalist website with links to the government, published the personal data of thousands of journalists who had obtained accreditation from Russia-backed rebels in eastern Ukraine. Myrotvorets labeled the journalists “terrorist collaborators.”

A government-tied website declaring open season on journalists would be dangerous anywhere, but it is especially so in Ukraine, which has a disturbing track record of journalist assassinations. This includes Oles Buzina, gunned down in 2015, and Pavel Sheremet, assassinated by car bomb a year later.

The Myrotvorets doxing was denounced by Western reporters, the Committee to Protect Journalists, and ambassadors from the G7 nations. In response, Kiev officials, including Interior Minister Arsen Avakov, praised the site: “This is your choice to cooperate with occupying forces,” Avakov told journalists, while posting “I Support Myrotvorets” on Facebook. Myrotvorets remains operational today.

Last fall brought another attack on the media, this time using the courts. The Prosecutor General’s office was granted a warrant to seize records of RFE anti-corruption reporter Natalie Sedletska. An RFE spokeswoman warned that Kiev’s actions created “a chilling atmosphere for journalists,” while parliament deputy Mustafa Nayyem called it “an example of creeping dictatorship.”

LANGUAGE LAWS

“[Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk] also made a personal appeal to Russian-speaking Ukrainians, pledging to support...a special status to the Russian language.”—US Secretary of State John Kerry, April 24, 2014

Ukraine is extraordinarily multilingual: In addition to the millions of Russian-speaking eastern Ukrainians, there are areas where Hungarian, Romanian, and other tongues are prevalent. These languages were protected by a 2012 regional-language law.

The post-Maidan government alarmed Russian-speaking Ukrainians by attempting to annul that law. The US State Department and Secretary of State John Kerry sought to assuage fears in 2014 by pledging that Kiev would protect the status of Russian. Those promises came to naught.

A 2017 law mandated that secondary education be conducted strictly in Ukrainian, which infuriated Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece. Several regions passed legislation banning the use of Russian in public life.

Quotas enforce Ukrainian usage on TV and radio. (This would be akin to Washington forcing Spanish-language media to broadcast mostly in English.)

And in February 2018, Ukraine's supreme court struck down the 2012 regional language law—the one Kerry promised eastern Ukrainians would stay in effect.

Currently, Kiev is preparing to pass a draconian law that would mandate the use of Ukrainian in most aspects of public life. It's another example of Kiev alienating millions of its own citizens, while claiming to embrace Western values.

THE PRICE OF WILLFUL BLINDNESS

These examples are only a tiny fraction of Ukraine's slide toward intolerance, but they should be enough to point out the obvious: Washington's decision to ignore the proliferation of armed neo-Nazi groups in a highly unstable nation only led to them gaining more power.

This easily predictable outcome is in marked contrast to Washington's enthusiasm over the "Revolution of Dignity." "Nationalism is exactly what Ukraine needs," proclaimed a *New Republic* article by historian Anne Applebaum, whose celebration of nationalism came out right around the time that Ukraine green-lighted the formation of white-supremacist paramilitaries. A mere four months after Applebaum's essay, *Newsweek* ran an article titled "Ukrainian nationalist volunteers committing 'ISIS-style' war crimes."

In essay after essay, DC foreign-policy heads have denied or celebrated the influence of Ukraine's far right. (Curiously, the same analysts vociferously denounce rising nationalism in Hungary, Poland, and Italy as highly dangerous.) Perhaps think-tankers deluded themselves into thinking Kiev's far-right phase would tucker itself out. More likely, they simply embraced DC's go-to strategy of "my enemy's enemy is my friend." Either way, the ramifications stretch far beyond Ukraine.

America's backing of the Maidan uprising, along with the billions DC sinks into post-Maidan Kiev, make it clear: Starting February 2014, Ukraine became Washington's latest democracy-spreading project. What we permit in Ukraine sends a green light to others.

By tolerating neo-Nazi gangs and battalions, state-led Holocaust distortion, and attacks on LGBT and the Roma, the United States is telling the rest of Europe: "We're fine with this." The implications—especially at a time of a global far-right revival—are profoundly disturbing.

40 Miles from Auschwitz, Poland's Jewish Community is Beginning to Thrive

By Yardena Schwartz

Time, February 27, 2019

<http://time.com/5534494/poland-jews-rebirth-anti-semitism/>

Until she was 13, Marcjanna Kubala thought she was Christian, like nearly every Polish citizen. Then one day after school, she searched her name on Google and found her family tree. Her great-grandmother's family name didn't sound Polish, she thought. "Were they German?" Kubala asked her mother. "No," she replied. "They were Jewish."

Surprised and fascinated, Kubala, who lives in Krakow, began a journey of rediscovering her identity. Her great-grandmother had lived in Krakow during the Holocaust, and survived because she'd married a Christian—and was therefore able to pass as one. Kubala's grandmother and mother did the same—both aware of their Jewish heritage and both hiding it. Kubala, on the other hand, had no idea. While her mother had dropped hints over the years, she chose only to tell her daughter directly when she asked that day.

Unlike the generations before her who had to hide their Jewish roots, first during the Holocaust and then under Communism, Kubala could embrace her newfound heritage. She joined Krakow's Jewish Community

Center (JCC), where she met others on the same journey. After college, she became director of Krakow's Hillel, an organization of young Jews with chapters around the world.

"This sounds unusual, but I'm just one of many hundreds of people with a similar experience," says Kubala, now 27. Hillel membership in Krakow has doubled in the last year. "Most members are like me, people who discovered only later in life that they're Jewish," Kubala says. "For many years they had no idea where their family roots came from. Then they discovered a document or a picture and everything changed."

Amid a resurgence of anti-Semitism throughout Europe, and despite a nationalist government that has sought to silence criticism of Polish complicity in the Holocaust, Poland's Jewish community is being reborn. It's a trend being led not just by people who have recently discovered their Jewish ancestry, but also those without Jewish roots who wish to give back. Now Poland, where 1,000 years of Jewish history went up in flames over seven decades ago, is home to one of the fastest-growing Jewish communities in the world.

In 1939, Poland was home to 3.5 million Jews, Europe's largest Jewish population. On the eve of the Holocaust, 10% of Poles were Jewish. (For comparison, less than 2% of the U.S. population is Jewish.)

Being the capital of European Jewry made Poland the prime target for Nazi brutalities. Adolf Hitler's regime built its deadliest concentration camps here, and more Jews were murdered in Poland than anywhere else by far. Just 10% of Poland's Jewish population survived.

After the camps were liberated, most Jews left Poland, mainly for Israel and the U.S. As a result, nearly 80% of American Jews have Polish roots, says Poland's Chief Rabbi Michael Schudrich, a native New Yorker whose grandparents fled Poland before the war.

Those who stayed in Poland continued to suffer. Dozens of Jewish Holocaust survivors were murdered by their neighbors upon returning to their homes. Some Poles joined a "gold rush," digging for valuables in mass graves of Jewish bodies. As Communist rule quickly replaced Nazi rule, Polish Jews were forced to choose between their faith and their country. Those who left could remain Jewish; those who stayed had to hide their Jewish identity.

That process accelerated with the 1968 purge, when more than 15,000 Jews—half of Poland's Jewish population—were stripped of citizenship and forced to leave. As a result, less than a tenth of the 10% of Polish Jews who managed to survive the Holocaust remained, says historian Stanislaw Krajewski.

In 1939, the city of Krakow was home to 70,000 Jews, a quarter of the city's population. Today around 100 Jews live there—or at least that's what the guidebooks say. According to Jonathan Ornstein, executive director of JCC Krakow, that figure is actually closer to 2,000 and steadily rising. High-ranking members of the Jewish community estimate there are now 30,000 Jews among Poland's 38 million citizens, up from 10,000 in 2007—and say there could be many more still unaware of their ancestry. "Thousands of people are walking around Poland with Jewish roots they still don't know they have," Ornstein says, estimating there may be as many as 100,000.

Among its events and workshops, JCC Krakow now offers genealogy services to help people trace their Jewish roots, and Shabbat dinners where gentile visitors can learn more about the community. In 2017, the center opened Krakow's first new Jewish community preschool since the Holocaust.

Kasia Leonardi was 25 when she discovered Jewish ancestry on both sides of her family. Given Poland's history, she was hesitant to embrace those roots. But encouraged by her sister, Leonardi eventually attended a Hanukkah party at the JCC and became more involved. Two years later, she and Ornstein began dating, and in 2017 they married in a ceremony conducted by Rabbi Schudrich outside the JCC in Krakow's old Jewish quarter.

The fact that this community hub lies just 40 miles from Auschwitz, the most notorious of the Nazi death camps, should send a message to the international Jewish community, Ornstein says: Poland isn't just a graveyard of Jewish tragedy, but also a living monument to Jewish resilience. "Of course we must visit the

Holocaust sites, but we must understand that we as a people are more than that. Maybe Auschwitz is a little piece of who I am, but I refuse to be defined by what others have done to my family,” says Ornstein, whose grandmother lost her parents and all her siblings at the camp.

He and others see this rebirth of Poland’s Jewish community as a way of healing, 70 years on. “We can’t bring back the 6 million victims, but we can do something else that I don’t think we realized we could do,” he says. “We can bring back Jewish lives.”

Poland’s broader relationship with Jewish people remains complicated. Anti-Semitism still exists on the fringes of society; far-right groups have accused President Andrzej Duda, whose wife has Jewish lineage and relatives in Israel, of being beholden to Jews.

But Duda’s nationalist government has also been at the center of a feud with the Israeli government over the treatment of the historical record surrounding the Holocaust. Last year, it angered the Israelis, as well as the U.S. and other Western governments, by pushing a bill that outlaws blaming Poland for any crimes committed during the Holocaust. The so-called Holocaust bill, which has since been watered down, faced international criticism for censoring discussions of Polish complicity.

Relations had appeared to be warming until February, when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Feb. 14 during a summit in Warsaw that “Poles cooperated with the Nazis” during the Holocaust. The Polish Prime Minister pulled out of a planned trip to Israel for a summit of Eastern European nations, which was then canceled.

In a sign of the complexity of this issue, Poland’s Jewish community sided with Poland in the diplomatic scuffle—especially after a senior Israeli minister accused Poles of “[suckling] anti-Semitism with their mother’s milk.” Ornstein echoes sentiments expressed by many Polish Jews, who say the country’s views aren’t reflected by a single piece of legislation. “When you hear about anti-Semitism in Poland, it’s a little more complicated than we realize,” he says.

Against this geopolitical backdrop, the JCC in Krakow offers a powerful symbol of reconciliation—especially given the role played by non-Jews, or gentiles, in its revival. The JCC’s permanent staff includes many Jews, but all of the 55 volunteers are gentiles. These non-Jewish volunteers are crucial for helping out on Shabbat, when Jews are not supposed to work.

Among them is Agnieszka Gis, who has volunteered at the JCC since she was 16. She was raised in the city’s old Jewish quarter, which had been a Jewish ghetto during the war. Learning about the Holocaust and visiting a concentration camp is mandatory in Polish schools. After visiting Auschwitz in high school, the 24-year-old recalls, “I couldn’t help but feel something of a void, because my country is missing something, my city is missing something, the streets where I grew up are missing a big part of their identity.” When she heard about the JCC, she was shocked to find there was indeed a thriving Jewish community in the area. “I thought the Holocaust was the end,” she says.

Giś began volunteering regularly, spending time with Holocaust survivors, their children and grandchildren. “I felt it was important to show them that they are welcome here in Poland,” she says.

She is one of thousands of non-Jewish Poles supporting Jewish renewal throughout the country. “I’m not alone in this feeling that Jews are a part of Poland and we should welcome back this community,” Giś says. It’s hard to overstate how crucial non-Jews have been to Poland’s Jewish revival. The Krakow JCC was founded in 2008 by Prince Charles, together with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and World Jewish Relief, the British organization behind the Kindertransport, which rescued thousands of Jewish children during the Holocaust.

As Ornstein puts it, “In our history, when non-Jews have taken a tremendous interest in us, it hasn’t worked out very well.” But in Poland’s case, that interest breathed new life into a community facing extinction.

In 1988, non-Jewish Poles created what is now the world's largest Jewish culture festival, held in Krakow's old Jewish quarter each summer. Attracting some 30,000 mostly non-Jewish Poles, the festival played a key role in boosting Jewish life here, says Krajewski, who co-chairs the Polish Council of Christians and Jews. Many people with Jewish ancestry were initially hesitant to embrace those roots, he says. But "the festival was such a success, they realized that if non-Jews could be so attracted to Jewish culture, maybe Jews could be too."

In the same week as the Jewish Cultural Festival, the JCC today stages a "Ride for the Living"—a kind of homage to "March of the Living," the annual event in which thousands of people from around the world march from Auschwitz to Birkenau in memory of the 6 million Jews murdered during the Holocaust.

Instead of marching through concentration camps, Ride for the Living takes several hundred participants on a 60-mile bicycle ride from Auschwitz to the Krakow JCC, from the death of Jewish life in Poland to the site of its renewal. For Ornstein, there is no better way to show the world how far Polish Jews have come. "This symbolizes in a very strong way what we're doing in this community," he says. "People are tracing our history from darkness to light."

From Trotsky to Soros: 'A Specter Haunting Europe'

By James J. Sheehan

Commonweal, February 27, 2019

<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/trotsky-soros>

In December 2018, *Inside Higher Ed*, a news service that monitors events at colleges and universities, reported seven recent anti-Semitic incidents on campuses from New York to California. Unlike the murder of eleven Jewish men and women at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, no one was injured in these acts of vandalism, but they remind us that anti-Semitism has an extraordinary capacity to survive. "The Longest Hatred," part of the title of a Public Television series and a companion volume by Robert S. Wistrich, accurately describes both the deep historical roots and remarkable longevity of animosity toward Jews.

This animosity appeared in the ancient world and was institutionalized in medieval Europe when Jews were an isolated minority, physically separated from their neighbors by ghetto walls and restrained by a web of laws and customs that barred them from many occupations and activities. For centuries, Jews lived with the possibility that they would be blamed for some misfortune—an outbreak of plague, a missing child, a dry well—which might trigger one of those violent attacks on their persons and property that punctuated the long, unhappy history of Christian-Jewish relations. In extreme situations, entire Jewish communities could be expelled, as happened in Spain in 1492. Such major catastrophes may have been rare, but they left a sense of vulnerability that shadowed Jewish life throughout the old regime and beyond.

In the eighteenth century, some Europeans believed that hatred of Jews, like other irrational prejudices, would gradually give way to the forces of progress and enlightenment. Jews, like serfs, slaves, and women, were supposed to be among the beneficiaries of emancipation, the great modern project that promised to liberate oppressed groups from the burdens of the past. In fact, many European states did dismantle the physical and legal barriers that had inhibited Jews from living where they wished and participating in social and economic life. There were good reasons to view the nineteenth century as a great success story for Jews, who began to play a prominent role in cultural and political life, as well as in many professions, especially banking, law, and medicine. Despite—or perhaps because of—these accomplishments, hostility to Jews, like some highly opportunistic virus, adapted to fit the modern world. Anti-Semites now regarded race rather than religion as a source of Jewish identity. They organized political parties to limit Jewish influence, and began to associate Jews with everything they feared and hated about modernity: big cities, international finance, progressive politics. To their enemies, emancipation made Jews all the more dangerous; now they could pursue their sinister goals with clandestine manipulations and underground conspiracies. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, fabricated in Russia in 1903, became a central text for such conspiratorial fantasies. Once required reading in Nazi Germany, actively promoted by anti-Semites like Henry Ford, *The Protocols* describes a Jewish plot to take over the world. It was translated into many languages and is still in print.

As with so many other aspects of European life, the First World War marked a watershed in the complex history of European Jews. Throughout the continent, from the Atlantic to the Urals, ethnic and religious conflicts were ignited by the war and its devastating impact on society. Among these conflicts, anti-Semitism played an increasingly important part, particularly in Eastern Europe where hundreds of thousands of Jews were displaced and tens of thousands were killed by a lethal mix of state-sponsored and communal violence. The Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917 and its violent aftermath engendered a new and toxic version of anti-Semitism in which Jews were regarded as the vanguard of Bolshevism's assault on property, religion, and political order.

As Paul Hanebrink shows in this thoughtful and informative book, the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism was created during the turbulent years between 1917 and 1923, when Europe was the scene of entangled international, social, and ethnic conflicts. By linking Bolshevism to familiar images of Jewish conspiracies, counterrevolutionaries gave their efforts emotional energy and historical depth. "War and revolution made Judeo-Bolshevism seem an utterly new danger," Hanebrink points out. "But the fear and loathing it excited derived from a particular set of much older anti-Jewish prejudices." Projecting from the fact that some of the revolutionary leaders—Leon Trotsky in Russia, Béla Kun in Hungary, Kurt Eisner in Germany—could be identified as Jews, the makers of the myth imagined a vast international enterprise that aspired to take away people's property, destroy religion, and create a new world order dominated by Jews. Appalled by the Bolsheviks' vicious attacks on religious institutions, many prominent Catholics, some with ties to the Vatican, accepted a version of the myth that regarded Jews, Communists, and Freemasons as the most recent (and in many ways, the most dangerous) representatives of a centuries-old assault on the church.

"Judeo-Bolshevism," Hanebrink argues, "made Adolf Hitler." Hitler entered political life in postwar Munich, where a brief Communist regime had opened the way for prolonged civil violence. This was fertile soil for the idea of a Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy. By 1920, it had become a persistent feature in Hitler's speeches, a useful way of bringing together the Nazi movement's hatred of Jews and its opposition to Communism, both at home and abroad. After the Nazis came to power in 1933, attacks on Jews and Communists intensified and took on an international dimension, swiftly merging with Hitler's efforts to find support for his expansionist foreign policy. Briefly interrupted by the Nazi-Soviet alliance between 1939 and 1941, the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism was revitalized during Germany's ideologically and racially charged war against Russia. During the war's final months, as Soviet troops slowly fought their way toward Berlin, Nazi propaganda, in a desperate effort to inspire popular support during the regime's long and painful death throes, summoned images of Jewish-led Asiatic hordes threatening the European heartland.

Hanebrink recognizes that, although Judeo-Bolshevism found supporters among right-wing parties throughout Europe, the myth was not robust enough to provide an international foundation for Hitler's foreign political ambitions. Poland, where the myth had found eager advocates, was Germany's first victim and most obdurate opponent. In Spain, Franco had deployed the myth in his struggle against his left-wing enemies, but had not allowed himself to be drawn into an alliance with Germany. And even those Eastern European regimes that did support the German war effort seemed to have acted more out of conventional national interest than shared ideological conviction. Only when it fused with Germany's administrative efficiency and military capacity did the myth achieve truly transformative power, helping to motivate and sustain a Europe-wide campaign of mass murder.

In addition to examining the origins and influence of the Judeo-Bolshevik myth in the period from 1917 to 1945, Hanebrink attempts to show that it is still an important element in anti-Semitism, both in Europe and beyond. His book begins with a reference to the radical right-wing violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017 and ends with the claim that European nationalists' protests against "the Islamization of the West" recall earlier campaigns against Judeo-Bolshevism. While traces of the Judeo-Bolshevik myth certainly do remain, it seems to me that Hanebrink overstates the case for its contemporary relevance. Germany's defeat in 1945 removed the myth's most powerful source of support, while the imposition of Communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe took away much of its political and cultural appeal. Hanebrink's attempt to link Judeo-Bolshevism with Cold War ideologies in Western Europe is not convincing. His chapter titled "From Judeo-Bolshevism to Judeo-Christian Civilization" makes some interesting points about the efforts of postwar Christian Democracy to find a

new foundation for European public life, but in the process he quickly loses sight of the Judeo-Bolshevik myth. Nor am I entirely persuaded that, as Hanebrink suggests, the idea of Judeo-Bolshevism is central to the debates about the historical memory of the Holocaust.

The anti-Semitic virus seems to have mutated once again. Its specter continues to haunt us, but the myths that nourished it in the past have been displaced by other fears and frustrations. Contemporary hostility to Jews emphasizes globalization, not Communism. It is George Soros rather than Leon Trotsky who now best personifies what anti-Semites regard as the Jewish plot to undermine everything they hold dear. But while Judeo-Bolshevism may have lost its resonance, Paul Hanebrink is right to insist that its history still matters, both as a key to understanding the tragic fate of Europe's Jews in the first half of the twentieth century and as a reminder of how myths can open the way to political and moral catastrophe.

Cautious Optimism in Belarus's Growing Geopolitical Leverage

By Grigory Ioffe

Jamestown Foundation, February 20, 2019

<https://jamestown.org/program/cautious-optimism-in-belaruss-growing-geopolitical-leverage/>

In a February 20 interview for a Ukrainian media outlet, former secretary general of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Anders Fogh Rasmussen predicted that unless Belarus launches "reforms leading to democracy and freedom" it will fall victim to war and annexation by Russia. Rasmussen declared that Lukashenka should choose "either reforms or life under the Russian yoke" (Liga.net, February 20). Belarusian Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei responded sharply to Rasmussen's pronouncement saying, "No comment. How can you comment on the delirium of some retired officials who have not been working for a long time and who have lost touch with reality!" (Belta.by, February 21).

Delirium or not, there is no shortage of alarmist pronouncements regarding Belarus. In his interview with the Romanian service of *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)*, George Friedman, the founder of the Austin-based, private intelligence firm Stratfor, said he now sees Belarus as "the most fragile country" in the region. He continued, "We know Russia will not encroach on the Baltic States. But an unexpected change of power in Minsk may cause an unacceptable situation. The West will not be at peace with the presence of Russia on the western border of Belarus. Whereas, Russia cannot put up with the presence of the [United States] near Smolensk" (Svaboda.org, February 20).

In a separate article, Yury Drakakhrust of *RFE/RL* asks, "Do the likes of Rasmussen and Friedman act like the sacred geese that valiantly saved the Republic during the first sacking of Rome (390 BCE) by the Gallic hordes?" His own response is negative. In part, he argues, such alarmist predictions are analogous to the ebullient prophecies on the Russian side, such as by the radical nationalist politician Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and anonymous authors posting on Telegram channels. Both Western alarmists and Russian jingoists proceed from the same assumption. Namely, that Belarus is dependent on Russia and will not resist Russian aggression; therefore, all depends on Vladimir Putin's whim (Svaboda.org, February 21).

The situation, however, is more complicated, Drakakhrust believes. First, there is no correlation between internal reforms and being subject to Russian aggression. For instance, Georgia and Ukraine were invaded but Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan were not. Second, if Belarusians agree on anything, it is the value of their statehood. And that unity certainly pertains to Belarusian elites. Third, Belarus has its own trump cards in the resolution of its current predicament with Russia. "As a journalist, I realize that headlines like 'Belarus Under Threat of Annexation' elicit interest and lead many people to click respective hyperlinks," observes Drakakhrust. "But if the sacred geese had been quacking and honking frivolously, and not only for good reason, they would have never saved Rome [because the Romans who have learned to ignore their non-stop clamor]" (Svaboda.org, February 21).

During his presentation at the Moscow Carnegie Center (Carnegie.ru, February 22), Artyom Shraibman of *Tut.by* actually outlined five trump cards or levers that Belarus might use to resolve its current stalemate with Russia regarding the so-called oil tax maneuver (see EDM, January 14, 15). Two of them should only be used as a last resort and pertain to a) two Russian military objects in Belarus (an early missile-detection station in

Gantsevichi and a submarine-monitoring station in Vileika), for which Belarus can demand annual fees; and b) significant price hikes for oil and natural gas transit. The potential of the third lever, flirting with the West, has already been largely exhausted. The fourth one, cautiously sabotaging various aspects of Eurasian integration, has been and can still be used in the future. According to Russian Minister of Economic Development Maksim Oreshkin, this sabotage is currently underway (Vzglyad, February 1). The fifth lever, in the form of selling Russia a few exceptional Belarusian enterprises—like refineries or a military wheel tractor plant—still has potential, though it is definitely not supported by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

Shraibman believes that, in the near future, overt tensions between Belarus and Russia will calm down. Yet, in the medium run, he predicts Belarus will likely distance itself from Russia as well as resume negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and undergo the structural reforms demanded by the IMF in exchange for low-interest loans.

Such distancing from Russia might be given a boost as early as this autumn, when Belarus's three-year purchase contract for Russian gas is set to expire. And chances are that Russia will resort to unacceptable price hikes, much like it recently did on oil. During the meeting, Shraibman repeatedly downplayed parallels with Ukraine insinuated by the members of the audience; be that on ethnic nationalism or on would-be Russian aggression (Carnegie.ru, February 22).

In light of these parallels, a significant article by Fyodor Lukyanov, one of Russia's most highly regarded political commentators, comes to mind. Lukyanov claims that the 2014 EuroMaidan in Kyiv brought Europe's "liberal revolution" to its end. Presented by some Western thinkers, most notably Timothy Snyder of Yale University, as a "battle between democratic rule of law and authoritarian arbitrary rule, this dichotomy impeccably reproduced Cold War thinking, with only one qualification: the ideological conflict was no longer formalized and barricades have shifted 1,000 kilometers to the east," Lukyanov writes (Globalaffairs.ru, February 22).

The Ukrainian crisis, Lukyanov believes, was significant on several counts. First of all, it turned out that neither Europe nor the US were ready to risk war for the sake of achieving their geopolitical goals. For Russia, the EuroMaidan victory and what followed also became a turning point: it meant the collapse of its policy vis-à-vis Ukraine, conducted since 1992. Moreover, it also resulted in a sharp confrontation with the West and, ultimately, the rejection of a common future with it. That this future would never occur was long clear to some people; but after 2014, it stopped even being considered a possibility in Moscow. Finally, the Kremlin's Russian World concept emerged but quickly proved to be a failure as a political instrument (Globalaffairs.ru, February 22).

If these observations spell mutual exhaustion in the zero-sum game being played by external actors in both Ukraine and Belarus, then the geese that saved Rome may relax. As Artyom Shraibman revealed in his remarks at the Moscow Carnegie Center, Brussels Eurocrats had confessed to him in private conversations that Europe does not need another Ukraine (Carnegie.ru, February 22). It is, then, not entirely unreasonable to expect that Kremlin bureaucrats do not need it either. And if so, Belarus may be lucky, although it is working hard to earn that luck.

Moldova Urged to Probe Election Abuse Allegations

By Madalin Necsutu

Balkan Insight, February 28, 2019

<https://balkaninsight.com/2019/02/28/moldova-urged-to-probe-election-abuse-allegations/>

The US State Department on Wednesday said parliamentary elections held last Sunday in Moldova, in which pro-Russian Socialists did best, were "competitive and generally respected fundamental rights".

But it also agreed with the OSCE preliminary report, which noted many allegations of bribery and the use of administrative resources to aid the campaign of the ruling Democratic Party, PDM.

The US has urged the Moldovan authorities to investigate the allegations and form a new government as soon as possible.

“The United States urges Moldova’s leaders to move quickly to form a new government that respects the will of Moldovan voters and serves the Moldovan people by fighting corruption, promoting judiciary reforms, and securing Moldova’s progress on its democratic trajectory,” the US said in a press release.

An OSCE report released one day after the elections on February 25 stressed that generally the elections were held in a correct framework, but noted allegations of pressure on public employees, strong indications of vote buying and the misuse of state resources.

The main issue concerned the multiple votes of 38,000 Moldovan citizens living in the breakaway Russian-controlled region of Transnistria.

Many were brought to polling stations by bus and some told independent media in Moldova that they were promised up to 20 US dollars for their votes.

The results showed they voted mainly for the left-wing parties, two out of three of which have political programmes that favour close ties to Moscow.

Rebecca Harms, head of the European Parliament’s delegation of election observers, said on Monday that changes to the electoral system and the simultaneous conduct of a referendum had also “clearly led to confusion among voters”.

ENEMO the International Election Observation Mission concluded also in its preliminary report released on Tuesday that sporadic procedural mistakes and ambiguities had marred the vote, such as campaigning on election day, the use of video cameras, and the holding of a referendum on the same day as the election.

Romania, in line with the OSCE preliminary report, called for the election results to be carried out in a responsible manner, “to ensure the stability and preservation of the European perspective of Moldova”.

On Wednesday night the chief of monitoring mission of the NGO Promo-Lex, Pavel Postica, told a TV show that the reports of abuses must not be ignored.

“The role of these reports is to provide both the public and interested persons, especially electoral bodies, public authorities, in particular, parliament and government, suggestions to take measures so that such negative situations [like bribery allegations] are no longer admitted,” he said.