



**6th Global Forum for Combating Antisemitism
Jerusalem, Israel
March 21, 2018**

Revisionism and the Politics of Holocaust Remembrance: Antisemitism in the Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe

Before I begin, I would like to thank the organizers of this year's Global Forum for inviting me to chair this critically important panel. In addition, I extend my thanks to our panelists for taking the time to discuss these issues and for everyone here joining us today.

My name is Mark Levin and some of you may know me from my work within the Soviet Jewry movement. However, more than twenty-five years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, I find myself in my current role, as head of the National Coalition Supporting Eurasian Jewry, facing many of the same forms of anti-Semitism we worked so hard to combat in the communist bloc.

Under communism, the state repressed and othered Jews not only for their religious practices, but also erased Jewish history. The scars of the Holocaust, including the passivity and active participation of locals in the extermination of European Jewry, proved all too threatening to the foundations of the socialist, authoritarian state. Acknowledging that the Nazis specifically targeted the Jews – and that the Nazis had help in doing so - would set the Jews apart in a world where difference was not supposed to exist. Today, the forms of government in Europe have changed but the core tenets of state and identity building have not. Ethno-nationalist conceptions of identity in Europe continue to marginalize Jewish communities.

Let there be no doubt that former communist bloc states have made tremendous progress in embracing democracy, pluralism, and interethnic and interreligious tolerance. However, events of the last several years indicate a significant backslide. The refugee crisis, economic insecurity, and threats to territorial integrity across Europe have contributed to a great upsurge in ultra-nationalism. Far-right and ultra-nationalist groups are not only gaining a measure of legitimacy, but also winning seats in elections. Most alarmingly, they are bringing xenophobia and anti-Semitism in from the margins.

As many European states are turning to nationalism as a guide for governance, we bear witness to a striking rise in institutionalized Holocaust revisionism, unwillingness to confront ingrained anti-Semitism, and whitewashing of history. Nationalist fighters who battled for their countries' independence in the face of Nazi and Soviet occupation are remembered as heroes while their connections to the murders of Jews in the Holocaust are brushed under the rug. Vicious stereotypes of Jews dominate mainstream media and conspiracy theories about Jewish chokeholds on power abound. Even in Poland, a state that has tried admirably to embrace its Jewish history and reconcile with its darkest chapters, recent passage of the Anti-Defamation Law could stifle open discussion of Polish collaborators in the Holocaust. This is but one example of how a state in this region is unable to confront fully its history at the expense of Jewish communities and democracy itself.

When the Global Forum first convened, we spoke about the emergence of a new anti-Semitism, an anti-Semitism rooted in antipathy to Israel and the ideals of Zionism. Concerns about traditional manifestations of anti-Semitism and Holocaust revisionism remained at the sidelines. However, it is clear today that traditional anti-Semitism is alive and well in Europe. We must not let the progress of the last two decades overshadow the persistence of anti-Semitism in this part of the world and the urgency to confront it.

I am grateful that we can convene here today at such a critical time. While there are numerous examples of anti-Semitism and Holocaust revisionism that we can discuss in depth, it is paramount that we devote a significant portion of our time on what we can do to combat these phenomena. We must discuss how we can use education, train and strengthen law enforcement, advocate for establishment of effective hate crimes and anti-bias legislation, implement anti-Semitism monitoring strategies, and other results-driven plans to resist anti-Semitism wherever it appears. That will be the focus of our panel this morning.

Here with me to discuss this are Anna Borshitskaya, Director of the Russian Jewish Congress, Andras Heisler, President of the Hungarian Jewish Community, Efraim Zuroff, Director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Jerusalem, Rafal Pankowski, Co-Founder of the Never Again Association of Poland, and Sophie Kotzer, Department Director for Education and Culture, Nativ. Please join me in welcoming them.