

## **Post-Soviet Region in 2014 / Irena Cantorovich**

As in previous years, the region continues to be characterized by "classic" antisemitism: antisemitic propaganda together with desecration of Jewish facilities and a relatively small amount of physical violence against Jews. Unlike Western Europe, in the post-Soviet region the Israeli-Arab conflict has not triggered an increase in antisemitic incidents. An ongoing event which had some impact on antisemitism in part of this region, was the crisis between Russia and Ukraine, which led to a military conflict in eastern Ukraine.. All sides participating in the conflict made extensive use of the Jewish issue: each side accused (and in 2015 continues to accuse) the other of antisemitism and deliberately harming the Jews. The use of antisemitism triggered a phenomenon of "provocative antisemitism" – antisemitic incidents aiming to discredit the other side.

Russia

The only attack on a Jewish person in Russia took place on the night of 2 December 2014, when three assailants severely beat Shlomo Romanovskii, a Belarusian citizen studying at the Torat Haim Yeshiva near Moscow, while on his way to the Yeshiva. According to Romanovskii, the attackers beat him in the face with their fists while speaking among themselves not in Russian. According to Borukh Gorin, spokesperson of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Russia (FEOR), this was apparently the first antisemitic incident in Russia perpetrated by foreigners. However, a report published by an expert group of the Jewish community in Russia, under the guidance of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress in February 2015, claimed that this incident was a robbery. Unfortunately, we will not know the real motive behind the attack unless the perpetrators are caught. In addition to this violent incident, there were cases of desecration of Jewish facilities such as community centers, synagogues and Holocaust memorials around the country.

The growing control on the media in Russia did not prevent it from becoming a platform for antisemitic propaganda. In 2014, the channels of the state broadcasting company VGTRK, the NTV channel and state channels in English such as RT, became the main disseminators of antisemitic and anti-Israeli rhetoric. A very popular subject was the alleged Jewish nationality of those who oppose the current regime. The printed media discussed at length the loyalty of the Jews to Russia, their alleged main role in the events in Ukraine, their wealth, etc. The popular newspaper *Komsomolskaia Pravda* continued to lead this trend, which began in 2013, in addition to providing a permanent stage to the journalist Israel Shamir, who is known for his antisemitic and anti-Israeli views.

Most of the antisemitic propaganda in Russia during 2014 revolved around the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, after the pro-Russian president of Ukraine Victor Yanukovich was overthrown in February 2014. Before he was deposed, the Russian media stressed the alleged Jewish nationality of the leaders of the protest, and after a new president was elected, they stressed his alleged Jewish nationality, while calling upon world Jewry to save the Jews in Ukraine from the Ukrainian fascists. The biggest scapegoat of Russia became the Jewish governor of the Dnepropetrovsk District in Ukraine, Igor Kolomoyskii, who said in the past that Putin was a schizophrenic. The Russian media discussed Kolomoyskii's Jewish nationality and his activity in the local Jewish community at length. World Jewry was called

upon to condemn Kolomoyskii for his anti-Russian views, lest he be seen as additional proof of the disloyalty of the Jews to Russia "which was the only one that saved them from the Nazis".

The use of the Holocaust became a very common motif in the anti-Ukrainian propaganda in Russia. It is claimed that the new regime in Ukraine is based on the legacy of those who collaborated with the Nazis during World War II, and that the Jewish supporters of this new regime have apparently forgotten what the nationalist Ukrainians did to their ancestors during the Holocaust. However, at the same time, Russia maintains its refusal to recognize the uniqueness of the Holocaust and declare an official Holocaust Memorial Day. Moreover, state television provided a platform to people who blame the Jews for the Holocaust. For example, on 23 February, during a program on TV channel "Russia 24", which belongs to the above mentioned state broadcasting company VGTRK, Alexander Prokhanov, a well-known publicist with pro-Palestinian and antisemitic views, verbally attacked the European and Russian Jewish organizations for their support of the anti-Russian riots in Ukraine. Prokhanov wondered, among other things, why the Jews do not realize that by doing so they are "bringing a second Holocaust" upon themselves. The hostess Evelina Zakamskaia then added that "they had brought on themselves the first Holocaust as well".

There was no significant change in the struggle against antisemitism in Russia. The law enforcement agencies continued to concentrate on "minor" antisemitic manifestations such as talkbacks on the Internet or uploading antisemitic material on social networks (usually punished with fines, community services or suspended sentences), while more severe antisemitic incidents received almost no attention.

Ukraine

In 2014, Ukraine experienced a severe upheaval (that has not yet ended) which is very significant for its political future. The wave of protests, which began in November 2013 due to the president's refusal to sign a cooperation agreement with the EU, caused the removal of the pro-Russian president and his supporters. This resulted in a conflict with Russia, the annexation of the Crimean peninsula to Russia and violent clashes in the eastern parts of Ukraine where most of the Russian-speaking citizens live.

Several leaders of the Ukrainian nationalist organizations, and the Right Sector<sup>1</sup> in particular, denied the accusations against them and condemned the phenomenon of antisemitism. In addition, we must note in this context that the extreme right wing does not enjoy a lot of support by Ukrainians. For example, in the presidential elections (25 May 2014) the Jewish candidate Vadim Rabinovich received more votes than the two right-wing candidates combined: Dmitrii Yarosh (Right Sector) and Oleg Tiagnybok (Svoboda). During the elections to parliament in October, the Right Sector and Svoboda did not even pass the required electoral threshold. At the same time, a dozen extreme right activists were able to enter the parliament as singles.

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<sup>1</sup> Right Sector - a political party and paramilitary collective of several organizations. Many of its members are known for their extreme-right and antisemitic views. First emerged in November 2013 at the EuroMaidan protests in Kiev.

Unlike previous election campaigns, antisemitism almost did not exist during the campaigns in 2014. However, the alleged Jewish nationality of key figures such as the elected President Petro Poroshenko and Prime Minister Arsenii Yatseniuk, was discussed at length. The appointment of the Jew Vladimir Groisman as speaker of parliament in December even resulted in mass protests against the "regime of Yids and Khazars".

Despite the antisemitic and neo-Nazi image of the new regime in Ukraine (fostered mainly by Russia and pro-Russians in Ukraine), there was no significant increase in the scope of antisemitic incidents during 2014 in Ukraine. As in previous years, the main targets of antisemitic incidents were Jewish institutions and Holocaust memorials. In some cases, the same facility was desecrated several times, such as Jewish facilities in Nikolaev and the *Babi Yar* Holocaust memorial near Kiev.

A new phenomenon in Ukraine is what researchers of antisemitism in this region call "provocative antisemitism": antisemitic incidents in which the motive behind them can be either pure antisemitism or an attempt to prove that the other side in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is antisemitic or at least is not able to protect the Jews. "Provocative antisemitism" was most probably behind attacks against Jews in Kiev in January, February and March; distribution of leaflets, allegedly by pro-Russian separatists calling Donetsk Jews to register in April; desecration of Jewish institutions in Odessa in May; etc.

### **Other Countries**

A few antisemitic incidents took place in other post-Soviet countries. In Belarus, on 22 April, during his annual speech to the Belarusian people, President Alexander Lukashenko said that Belarus must use the opportunity when Russians and Ukrainians are very interested in the country's resorts, in order to enrich the state treasury, which is possible because "we have more than enough Jewish blood within us". There were also several cases of desecration of Holocaust memorials (Orsha), synagogue and Jewish center (twice in Gomel), Jewish signs (during Minorities Festival in Grodno).

In late January 2014, Vyacheslav Balakchi, a former worker at the Customs Services in Moldova, posted on his Facebook page a call to "bring Hitler back to Moldova at least for one month". Several organizations, such as the Association of Former Ghetto and Concentration Camps Inmates and the Association of Veterans of the Afghanistan War, condemned this post and demanded that Balakchi be put on trial. On 20 March, the ancient Jewish cemetery in Lipkani was set on fire. In July, it was announced that Paul Goma, a French philosopher of Romanian-Moldavian origin, who received Moldavian citizenship in 2013 and is known as a Holocaust denier, was nominated as a candidate for the National Prize of the Republic of Moldova by the Moldova Academy of Sciences.

In Latvia, on 11 October, despite numerous protests by Jewish organizations, a musical about Herbert Cukurs<sup>2</sup> was performed in Liepāja, attended by about 100 people. Outside the hall, there was a demonstration, which included throwing dolls with red stains on the pavement so that people would have to step on them if they wanted to pass by. The idea of this act was to

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<sup>2</sup> Cukurs Herbert (1900-1965) - A Latvian pilot and a national hero before World War II. During the Holocaust he collaborated with the Nazis and became known as the "executioner of the Riga ghetto". He was killed by the Israeli Mossad in 1965 and buried in Montevideo.

demonstrate Cukurs' favorite habit of throwing Jewish babies in the air and shooting them. Juris Jupe, the actor who played the part of Cukurs in the musical, said in an interview that there is no proof that Cukurs had actually done such things. The musical's producer, Juris Millers, said that Cukurs is a historical figure and wondered why a musical about the Argentinean dictator Peron was permissible, but a musical about Cukurs should be forbidden. According to him, the reason is the "Jewish issue" which is "very controversial since there is information according to which Cukurs saved four Jews". Millers also said that his job is to present facts and not be a judge.

### **Operation Protective Edge**

Operation Protective Edge in the summer of 2014 did not trigger any major violent antisemitic incidents in the area.

The coverage in the Russian media was one-sided, i.e. pro-Palestinian. For example, on 20 July *Pravda* newspaper published an article titled "Israel Began an Ethnic Cleansing on the Outskirts of Gaza" (no author) about Operation Protective Edge. The article described at length the large number of Palestinian dead and injured civilians, in comparison to the relatively small number of Israeli casualties - soldiers. On 20 July, the youth movement of the Communist Party published on its website an announcement condemning Operation Protective Edge. According to the announcement, "the large number of victims among the most vulnerable populations, including elderly, women and children, is due to the fact that the Israeli Air Force chooses as its targets only peaceful facilities". In addition, "the International Union of Communist Youth Organizations, together with the progressive and anti-imperialist youth of the world, will continue to fight for the liberation of Palestine from Israeli occupation, which is supported by global financial capital". On 23 July (English version published on 25 July), the Muftis' Council of Russia published on its website a condemnation of the "atrocities perpetrated by Israel in Gaza". The condemnation also blamed Israel of killing "year after year" women, old people and children who "want to visit al-Aqsa or other mosques and holy sites". According to the Council, Western media is helping to conceal Israel's crimes in its attempt at "blowing off steam from its deflationary economy". On 25 July, during a round table in Makhachkala (capital of the Republic of Dagestan) about the situation in Gaza, sponsored by the Mufti of Republic of Dagestan, Akhmadkhazhi Abdulayev, the participants condemned Israel's activity against Hamas during Operation Protective Edge and called to organize pickets and raise money for the people in Gaza. Abakar Abakarov, a local activist, condemned the international media for silencing the "horrors in Gaza" while blaming Russia for crimes in Ukraine. Timur Kushaev, a human rights activist from the Kabardino-Balkar Republic, said that Israel was established as a result of the biggest forgery in the history of humanity – the Holocaust.

On 1 August, the State TV channel "Russia 24" broadcast an interview with Rajab Safarov, head of the Center for Contemporary Iranian Studies in Russia, about the Operation. He accused Israel and the Jews of committing war crimes and mass murder. In addition, he said that they are also responsible for the Malaysian plane crash in Ukraine (17 July 2014) in an attempt to damage the political interests of Russia in the world. On 6 August, a demonstration of about 200 people (including children) took place in Moscow against Operation Protective Edge. Participants held posters with slogans such as "Stop the occupation, free Palestine" (with a red Star of David and blood); "Zionism is the common

enemy of Russia and Palestine"; "stop the genocide of the Palestinian people" (with a photo of a bleeding child); "be careful – enemies of humanity" (with a photo of Israel's Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, US President Barak Obama and Governor of Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, Igor Kolomoiskii – each with a swastika on his forehead); "Israeli targets" (with photos of bleeding children). The demonstration was also attended by Geydar Dzhemal, founder and chairperson of the Islamic Committee of Russia, the above mentioned Alexander Prokhanov and Israel Shamir, former vice-speaker of the State Duma, Sergeii Baburin, among others - all known for their antisemitic and anti-Israeli views.

On 21 September, during the 6th conference of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of European Russia, Mufti Sheikh Ravil Gainutdin, chairperson of the Board, condemned the activity of Israel and the IDF against the Palestinians during the Operation and compared it to the crimes of the Nazis during the Holocaust. In response, Andreii Glotser, the spokesperson of Russia's Chief Rabbi Berl Lazar, said "it is shameful that such authority in the Muslim community [...] allow themselves to be drawn into the political game of extremists".

In late July 2014, a Lithuanian company named "Vilnius Apartments" published on its Facebook page an announcement stating that it is going to stop providing real estate services to Israeli citizens "because of the crimes that Israel is perpetrating in Gaza". According to Faina Kuklianskii, head of the Jewish Community, it is possible that this was a provocation by "extremist Islamic elements". The address of the company, which appeared on the page, is of a building used by the Vilnius Ghetto Council during World War II and there is no company of that name at that address in the present. The Facebook account was later deleted.

On 4 August 2014, Tursunbay Bakir-uulu (Ar-Namys, a pro-Russian, conservative party), a member of the Kyrgyzstan Parliament held a press conference about the "genocide perpetrated by Israel in Palestine". During the press conference, he tore the flag of Israel into pieces and said he will give them to the members of the "Committee for Support of Palestine's Inhabitants" which he established, so that the members "will be able to use it comfortably in the toilets". In response, the leader of the party and former Prime Minister Felix Kulov said that he does not recommend using the pieces for this purpose because one can injure himself by the edges of the Star of David. Israel's Embassy in Kazakhstan, which is also responsible for Kyrgyzstan, sent a letter of protest to the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry. In late August, the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry answered that Bakir-uulu's personal views do not represent the country's policy.

### **Charlie Hebdo, January 2015**

The antisemitic wave in France at the beginning of 2015 had not triggered any violent antisemitic incidents in the post-Soviet region. On 7 January 2015, during an interview to the news website islamnews.ru, retired General Leonid Ivashov, president of The Academy of Geopolitical Problems in Russia, blamed Israel and the US for organizing and perpetrating the terrorist attack at the Charlie Hebdo. According to him, the attack was part of a war by the US and Israel against the Islamic culture in the Middle East and the Slavic culture in Ukraine. European countries began to move away from the alliance with the US and Israel and the latter had to do something in order to strengthen their hatred towards Islam.