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Antisemitism and Philo-Semitism in Russia and Ukraine: From Evolution to Revolution

Analytical Report

Vladimir (Ze'ev) Khanin



המרכז לחקר התפוצות
ע"ש גולדשטיין-גורן
GOLDSTEIN-GOREN
DIASPORA RESEARCH
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Tel Aviv University
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Foreword

The present analytical report is the first in a series of monographs to be published by the Institute for Euro-Asian Jewish Studies, founded by the EAJC in partnership with the Diaspora Research Center at Tel Aviv University, in an attempt to develop a library of academic research analyzing the contemporary situation of Jewish communities in the former Soviet Union.

More than a quarter century has passed since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and during that time we have witnessed a radical restructuring of the relations between the Jewish communities and the public in the independent states. Transformations include radical change in the status of Jewish organizations in the political, economic, professional, information and other structures of their respective countries. In parallel, countries in the former Soviet Union are witnessing an ongoing process of the consolidation of organized Jewish movements with elaborate systems of community structures and institutions. It is also important to note that over the last two decades an essential change in the international status of Russian Jewry has occurred. We have managed to move from the periphery to stake claim to a central place in the Jewish world.

Indicative of that change is the creation of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress early in the year 2001. The congress has become a forum for the integration of the leading Jewish communities in the post-Soviet states, Eastern Europe and Asia, as well as the center of organizational-political interest for the peripheral Jewish communities in other countries of the continent. Of equal importance is the fact that the congress was intended as – and has actually become – an important channel of influence on the “Russian-Jewish diaspora,” which exists today in 52 countries on five continents.

Complex and intricate processes are taking place in the Euro-Asian region, which demand attentive and serious analysis. The Institute for Euro-Asian Jewish Research was been created with this in mind, and our vision is to become an initiator of research and applied projects that aim to provide scholarly support to our ongoing efforts to overcome world xenophobia.

We are well aware of the relevancy of the problem of antisemitism in the present-day world. We understand that it takes on different forms at different times. In the Middle Ages the Jews were hated because of their religion. In the 19th and early 20th century, they were hated because of their race. Today the Jews are an object of hate because of their national state, the State of Israel. To highlight just one example – since 2009, UNESCO has adopted 71 resolution condemning Israel, and only two that condemn other countries.

We know that the hate directed at the Jews never ends with the Jews. The danger of antisemitism as a threat to humankind is understood not only by the Jews. On his visit to Vilnius – the city that for centuries was called “The Jerusalem of the North” – in September 2018, the head of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Francis, warned about the danger of a rebirth of antisemitism. “In this place of remembrance, Lord, we pray that your cry may keep us alert,” the Pontiff said, “that your cry, Lord, may free us from the spiritual sickness that remains a constant temptation for us as a people: forgetfulness of the experiences and sufferings of those who have gone before us.”

Along with the recognition of the problem and preservation of the memory of the past, it is important for us to express our thanks to all the public and political leaders of the region for their uncompromising condemnation of antisemitism. Such declarations are now heard in both Russia and Ukraine. We remember that it was not always so, and we hope that no geopolitical disruptions will affect these positions.

President of EAJC **M. M. Mirilashvili**

CEO of EAJC **Haim Ben Yakov**

About the Author

Dr. Vladimir (Ze'ev) Khanin is the Academic Chairman, Institute for Euro-Asian Jewish Studies (IEAJS) in Herzliya, Israel. He is one of the leading Israeli experts on the Russian Jewish communities in Israel and the Diaspora, as well as on Israel-FSU relations and politics. He received his Ph.D. in Political Science from the Moscow Institute for African studies, the Russian Academy of Sciences in 1989, and in 1991 completed post-Doctoral studies at the Institute for Russian and Soviet Studies at the University of Oxford, U.K. He currently serves as Chief Scientist (chief scholarly expert and senior adviser on Research) of the Israeli Ministry of Aliya and Integration. He is also Associate Professor, Graduate Program in Israel and Jewish Studies at the Ariel University and also lectures Political Studies at Bar-Ilan University, Israel. He has served as visiting lecturer in Israeli and FSU Government, Politics and Society in a number of universities in Great Britain and the FSU (including London, Moscow, Kiev, Lvov, Kharkov, Riga, Minsk and Baku) and as a political commentator at Israeli Channel Nine TV, The Voice of Israel Radio, and BBC Russian Service. His interviews and articles often appear in various print and electronic media in Israel, the United States and Europe, as well as in Russia and other FSU countries.

His academic publications include 8 books, 9 edited collections, several monographs, and numerous articles on Israeli, East European, Jewish and African politics and society. Among the books are: Documents on Ukrainian Jewish Identity and Emigration (London, 2004); «Russian» Israelis at «Home» and «Abroad»: Migration, Identity and Culture (Ramat-Gan, 2011); Post-Soviet Jewish Youth (Moscow and Ramat-Gan, 2013); Political Party Systems and Electoral Trends in Israel of the Early 21st Century (Moscow, 2014); Joining the Jewish Collective: Formalizing the Jewish Status of Repatriates from the Former USSR of non-Jewish and Mixed Origin in Israel (Jerusalem, 2014), «The Third Israel»: Russian-speaking Community and Politics in the Contemporary Jewish State (Moscow, 2015).

Introduction

To understand antisemitism in its contemporary context, we must pay attention not only to antisemitic events that have taken place in Western Europe, the United States, and the Muslim world – that is, places that have been in the headlines in the recent past – but also to former communist countries. In April 2018, fifty-seven members of Congress signed a letter to the US State Department, expressing their concern over the increasing rates of antisemitism and Nazism in Poland and Ukraine.¹ Moreover, a 2017 report released by the Israeli Ministry of Jewish Diaspora Affairs, which analyzed global trends of antisemitism, also chose to highlight post-Soviet countries, notably Russia and Ukraine. According to the report, “the number of antisemitic incidents doubled [in Ukraine], exceeding the number of incidents reported in the whole region.”²

Additionally, a report released by Tel Aviv University’s Kantor Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry also placed Ukraine among a few select countries where antisemitic incidents of all types increased substantially over the last two years, adding that “the actual number of cases is higher, because Jews refrain from reporting.” According to the report, in other post-Soviet areas, “the situation is equal to that of last year: a low average of cases, yet the attempts to exonerate and glorify nationalist leaders who actively cooperated with the German anti-Jewish policies of persecutions and murder during WWII, have intensified due to the renewed nationalist aspirations in Eastern Europe.”³

These documents, which influenced the US State Department 2017 Report on International Religious Freedom,⁴ received harsh criticism in both Russia and Ukraine, where elites—for diplomatic, political, and economic reasons—are working diligently to clean up their country’s reputations as antisemitic nations. This was of particular concern to them because government policy towards local Jewish communities had been an important element in the four years-long conflict between the pro-Western Government of Ukraine and pro-Russian separatists in East Ukrainian Donbass region, with each group accusing the other of antisemitism.

Thus, while Russian commentators lightly criticized the report, they were largely pleased with the information provided by the Israeli monitoring institutions.⁵ Ukrainian journalists and officials, however, rejected this conclusion⁶ citing a 2017 study conducted by the Washington-based Pew Research Center,⁷ which found Ukrainians to be far more accepting of Jewish fellow citizens than citizens of other countries throughout the former Eastern Bloc.⁸

Rival local Jewish leaders joined these efforts. Among those who attacked the reports were Alexander Levin,⁹ Vice-President of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress and Chairman of the Jewish community of Kiev, and Josef Zisels, Chairman of the Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine, who called the report released by the Israeli Ministry of the Diaspora Affairs “unfounded.”¹⁰ Several months later a similar debate took place after the Israeli Ministry for the Jewish Diaspora Affairs published a report on the levels of antisemitism in the world in 2018.¹¹ Some chose to emphasize the document’s conclusions, which stated that in the context of the absence of any increase in the number of antisemitic incidents in the post-Soviet space, nevertheless, “such cases were more often reported in Ukraine than in other places” (though without any certainty that all of them were antisemitic in character). The report also stated that “of particular concern are the cases of glorifying the persecutors and killers of the Jews [in the years of WWII, auth.] as part of the process of de-Communization and strengthening of Ukrainian nationalism as is seen from the legislative initiatives advanced by the government.”¹²

Others, in contrast, stressed the report’s conclusions noting the reduction of the total number of acts of vandalism against the Jewish objects (synagogues, community centers, cemeteries, etc.) in 2018 as compared with the previous year. Furthermore, according to these data, it was in Ukraine that the sharpest decrease in antisemitic acts was observed, and that there were no direct violent acts against the Jews.¹³

This monograph aims to analyze these issues by focusing on the following questions:

- First, what is the true account and reality of antisemitic incidents and episodes in the post-Soviet space? This question will use Russia and Ukraine, with their large Jewish populations, as indicative cases.
- Second, is this phenomenon a manifestation of classic antisemitism or is it a new form of antisemitism?
- Third, in more general terms, what are the implications for the Jewish population with regard to contemporary Russian and Ukrainian society? Should we regard antisemitic sentiments as an “echo” of the past or are they indicative of what we may face in the foreseeable future?
- Finally, can we define Ukrainian and Russian societies as inherently antisemitic or, as some scholars insist, a-Semitic?

In this paper, I will attempt to answer at least some of these questions, based on various data sources. These sources include, but are not limited to:

- interviews and personal observations of events in Russia and Ukraine related to antisemitism and xenophobia in 2014-2018;
- the ongoing study by the Moscow-based Yuri Levada Analytical Center regarding public attitudes toward various ethnic/religious groups in the Russian Federation, 1992-2015;
- the ongoing monitoring of antisemitic incidents by the Eurasian Jewish Congress (EAJC) in the Former Soviet Union (FSU), 2010-2017;
- selected data from public opinion polls in Ukraine, 2013-2017;
- the Levada Center/Russian Jewish Congress (RJC) research on antisemitism and attitudes toward Jews in Russia, 2016 (where this author served as a member of the academic advisory committee);
- a pilot study of attitudes towards Jews and other ethnic groups of the inhabitants of the city of Dnipro (former Dnipropetrovsk) – a large industrial and cultural center in the Eastern Ukraine and informal “Jewish capital” of this country; and
- preliminary results of a large-scale opinion poll of the Jewish population of four FSU countries conducted under the supervision of this author in January 2019.

PART 2: ANTISEMITISM IN RUSSIA AND THE FSU: AN OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC ATTITUDES

Since the abolition of the USSR's state-sponsored discrimination against Jews, the post-Soviet space, including Russia and Ukraine, is believed to be a "secure island" in terms of hard-core manifestations of antisemitism in comparison with Europe and the Middle East. A comprehensive study of public attitudes toward Jews conducted by the Russian Jewish Congress and the Levada Center found that the "Jewish question" has lost its previous importance to society. According to this research, "In public opinion, Jews have ceased being a specific, ethnically, and socially marked group that was previously a convenient source for channeling political and national aggressiveness and hatred ... as well as the source for 'collective punishment and responsibility' for various events, including the failures of State policies".¹⁴

The ongoing monitoring of attitudes toward Jews and other ethnic, national, and religious groups since 1992 by the Levada Center indicates that public opinion regarding Jews has been improving over the course of the last quarter century: about 10% of the Russian population views Jews with sympathy, while more than 80% demonstrate a "positively-neutral" approach toward them. An openly negative opinion was demonstrated by 13%, 16%, and 8% of respondents in the countrywide representative samples in 1992, 1997, and 2015, respectively.¹⁵

The same is true for many other FSU states, where Jewish communities decreased dramatically in demographic terms and Jews became an "invisible object" for attacks. In the public consciousness, the Jews, who for centuries held the position of "primary enemy," have been replaced by other ethnic and religious groups. For the Russians, the Jews have been replaced by Muslim migrants from the Caucasus and post-Soviet Central Asian areas, as well as "new-old" enemies (the West) and new enemies (Georgia, Ukraine, and the Baltic states).

Analyzing the data of the polls conducted in recent years, the Levada Center experts noted that although earlier negative attitudes towards the Ukrainian leadership did not usually include a negative attitude towards its inhabitants, with the continuing conflict between the two countries, negative feelings towards Ukrainian citizens – and especially towards the labor migrants – began to be more pronounced.¹⁶ This stands in contrast with the gradual improvement of Russian attitudes towards the USA and EU (in the summer of 2018 a positive rating of 40% was reached, which hearkened back to that of more than five years before, when 12-17% were positively inclined towards the USA and 19-25%, towards the EU in 2014-2015).¹⁷

For Ukraine, the “primary enemy” has been replaced by “imperialist Russia,” and the conflict with the neighboring enemies of Azerbaijan and Armenia does not leave much time, resources or interest for negative treatment of the diminishing Jewish communities in those countries, who are presented by the authorities as a “protected minority.”¹⁸ Additionally, post-Soviet authoritarian regimes see any form of “non-authorized violence” as a threat and attempt to stop it. As a result, potential “trouble-makers” (such as radical nationalists) either remain underground or direct their energy outside the country (in the Caucasus, the Middle East, or Eastern Ukraine).

In the opposite political camps, there are almost no leftist-oriented intellectuals in the FSU who are burdened by guilt regarding Third World peoples, as there are in Europe. The Russian intelligentsia is currently not inclined to see Israel as the “last colonial power” and accordingly does not blame local Jews for “Israeli crimes against the Palestinian people.”¹⁹ Finally, in most of the FSU, traditional Muslims view their identities as ethnic-national rather than religious. As a result, anti-Israel sentiment, as part of pan-Muslim solidarity, is now an abstract concept.

The Russian Mosaic

All of the above, together with other factors, may explain the decreasing trend of antisemitic inclinations and the development of a positive view towards Jews among the Russian public in the recent years, as was indicated by the Levada Center studies.²⁰ As a result, the number of respondents in the Russian Federation who estimated that few of their fellow citizens held anti-Jewish sentiments over the course of twenty-five years (1990-2015) doubled (from 21% to 45%), while only about one-fifth or fewer of the respondents believed that this social phenomenon was still widespread in Russia.

Table 1: Estimates regarding the number of citizens in the Russian Federation with anti-Jewish sentiments

Source: Levada Center studies (1990-2015)

Estimates	Year of Research			
	1990	1992	1997	2015
Almost everybody	4%	4%	2%	2%
More than a half	15%	16%	20%	14%
Less than a half	15%	13%	25%	24%
Quite a few	21%	16%	30%	45%
Hard to estimate	45%	52%	24%	16%

In general terms, among those who declared that “there are ethnic and religious groups that cause their antipathy,” 10% mentioned Jews, thus placing them in ninth position (after Gypsies/Roma, Azerbaijanis, Tajikistanis, Americans, Ukrainians, Uzbeks, Chechens, and Armenians) in the rating of groups that are most disliked by Russians. As indicated in the table below, Gypsies (Roma) and Chechens provoke the greatest negative attitudes and antipathy among respondents, followed by Americans, the current “political enemy” of the Russian Federation. These groups were then followed by cultural and religious “strangers,” including Arabs and Azerbaijanis. The Islamic factor is stronger than racial phobias, due to the propagandistic effect of international terrorism. Additionally, there is a routine dislike of Azerbaijanis as “market speculators” and “unfair traders.” However, attitudes towards Gypsies demonstrated the widest margins of ethnic intolerance and the strongest barrier between «us» and «strangers».

Table 2: Attitudes toward various races and ethnic groups—a summary of negative views

Source: Levada Center studies (1996-2015)

Ethnic group	Year of Research									
	1996	1998	2000	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2015
Chechens	47	50	53	66	53	53	52	44	41	33
Americans	9	13	9	17	16	16	20	17	20	31
Arabs	-	-	15	28	22	24	22	18	18	25
Azerbaijanis	29	35	30	39	33	30	33	26	25	24
Gypsies (Roma)	40	48	43	52	50	53	52	49	43	47
Georgians	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	29	27	20
Africans (“Blacks”)			9	14	10	10	16	10	12	18
Estonians	12	13	14	16	14	10	14	11	18	13
Germans			6	12	9	7	9	6	8	10
Jews	12	16	15	21	14	14	16	15	5	8

This was also confirmed by the latest Levada Center research conducted as part of the monitoring of xenophobic attitudes among Russians (a series of personal interviews in a representative sample of 1,600 inhabitants of the Russian Federation aged 18 years and older, on July 19-25, 2018). Russians felt the greatest negative social distance with regard to Gypsies; in July 2018, 43% of the interviewees answered that they would not “let them enter Russia.” Second and third place was occupied by supporters of isolationist barriers against the “Blacks” (33%) and the “natives of Central Asia” (30%). Every fourth Russian “would not allow to enter” Chinese and Chechens (27% each), while every fifth, Ukrainians (22%).

Of all the groups, the one with the lowest level of support for being excluded from living in the country was the Jews, who “would not be allowed to live in the country” by a mere 15% of Russians. In tandem with that finding, inhabitants of Russia display positive attitudes regarding social distance towards Jews. They express readiness to engage in marital and neighborly relations with Jews, and the summary level of the admissibility of Jews as family members, close friends, or neighbors, was 27% and 20%, respectively in a 2018 study. While similar trends based on the same data were observed with respect to Ukrainians in the past, in more recent times the negative social distance regarding that group of the population of the former USSR has grown significantly. In August of 2010 only 13% of Russian citizens were unwilling to see them in their country; in July 2018 that had increased to 22%. In a similar manner, there was an observed increase in support for imposing restrictions on Gypsies (from 38% to 43% respectively) and natives of Africa (from 26% to 43%).²¹

If this is the case, the image of Jews as a negative identity factor is coming to an end, which proves the popular hypotheses that antisemitism, as opposed to other phobias in Russian public consciousness, is lower than ever before. However, remnants of historical enmity, both traditional antisemitism (rooted in the pre-revolutionary ideology of rural and anti-modernist populations, as the authors of the Levada Center/RJC report suggest) and Soviet state antisemitism are still highly visible. This can be seen in public support for ethnic discrimination policies and the limitation of access to positions of power for all non-ethnic Russians – including Jews – in the event that the Russian authorities decide to initiate such policies.

In the meantime, however, clear-cut antisemitism on the part of the authorities, the ruling elites and the public is believed to be almost non-existent. Still, “the most alive” form of antisemitism in Russia, as Alexey Levinson of the Levada Center explains, is growing among elite population groups,²² including the young and successful urban population. This group (quite often in political opposition to the current ruling class in the Russian Federation) became a new purveyor of antisemitism due to the intensifying competition for middle- and upper-class positions as a result of the country’s general economic crises. Yet, at the lower professional levels, Jews rarely compete with Russians, and therefore do not provoke negative reactions.²³

Levinson and Gudkov²⁴, the authors of a 2016 report on antisemitism in Russia, define a number of levels of intensity regarding antisemitic feelings among the Russian population:

1. Eight to sixteen percent of respondents compose the strong core of antisemites and “general” xenophobes (three-quarters of them normally overlap).
2. Eighteen to thirty-five percent compose a more blurred stratum of less stable

anti-Jewish attitudes, a function of a more general antipathy and prejudice (e.g., those who believe that “some ethnicities are better than others” or that “a person, who is not an ethnic Russian, cannot be a Russian patriot”).

3. Forty to sixty-five percent of respondents’ negative attitudes were not addressed specifically toward Jews but rather express psychological self-defense on a personal level and argue for preservation of collective values by the ethnic majority, guaranteed by such institutions as power and family. Generally, these needs are reflected through the demand to reserve a number of privileges for the “titular” nation, such as the notion that “ethnic Russians must enjoy priorities before other groups,” expressed by 41% of respondents in general and 59% in Moscow, or the belief that “it is undesirable for a Jew to become president of the Russian Federation,” expressed by 67% of respondents.

Thus, according to this study, antisemitism, as expressed by xenophobic attitudes of the Russian population, occupies a relatively “modest” place. Antisemitic beliefs among the population of the Russian Federation may be cautiously defined as “passive,” meaning that there is limited potential for aggressive mobilization of this population against Jews. Of course, changes in the socio-political situation may have a negative impact on this process. We cannot rule out the possibility that even today there are dangers of regression, in connection, for example, with the proclaimed reform of the pension system and other processes in the economic sphere. According to observers, the first reaction to these reforms have been dismay, fear and animosity towards the authorities.

In considering opinion polls from the summer of 2018, Denis Volkov, a Moscow sociologist, noted: “People are ready to agree with the fact that there is no money in the budget.” But, according to them, “there is no money because..., in the last years we became too much obsessed with the defense and military campaigns, because the Crimea ‘fell on us,’ ... because the money are being spent to upkeep...officials ‘tied by the same line’ with the oligarchs, mostly Jews, according to popular belief, [providing a] fertile ground for the growth of antisemitic feelings.”²⁵ However, compared with other types of xenophobia, including racial exclusion, hatred of migrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus, and distrust of Westerners, active anti-Jewish attitudes were expressed by only by a small number of Russians.

The case of Ukraine

As opposed to Russia, no comprehensive study of attitudes toward Jews in Ukraine has been performed in the last decade, aside from the aforementioned Pew Research Center report.²⁶ It is clear, however, that as in other FSU countries and elsewhere, among Ukrainians there is an essential overlap between those who hold general xenophobic sentiments and those who hold specifically antisemitic sentiments.

Table 3: Average index of xenophobia among Ukrainian respondents with favorable and unfavorable attitudes toward Jews

(where 1 indicates the lowest and 7 the highest level of hatred)²⁷

Year of Research	Anti-Semites	Favorable attitudes towards Jews	All respondents
1994	5,10	2,17	3,97
1999	5,52	2,40	4,37
2004	6,40	2,85	4,94
2009	5,67	2,70	4,86
2013	5,52	2,07	4,56
2016	5,16	2,12	4,31

Thus, from 1994-2007, the Kiev International Institute of Sociology monitored xenophobic attitudes among the Ukrainian population and showed that the level of antisemitism was consistent with gradual and substantial growth of the general level of xenophobia in society, reaching its height in 2007.²⁸ Using this method, other researchers estimated that since 2009 there has been a gradual decline in antisemitic attitudes, until a spike in such attitudes in 2015. The decline continued shortly thereafter.²⁹ This, of course, needs to be proved or dismissed by a comprehensive quantitative sample, which, as noted, remains a desideratum.

A pilot study of public opinion concerning Jews conducted in May 2018 by the Tkuma Ukrainian Institute for Holocaust Studies at the request of this author, showed that in the city of Dnipro (formerly Dnipropetrovsk), an industrial and cultural center in eastern Ukraine and the country's informal "Jewish capital," with a population of one million citizens, a fifth of respondents refer to Jews "with annoyance, distrust, or fear," while slightly more than 12% expressed "interest and sympathy" toward them (Jews appeared in fifth place, following Americans, Crimean Tatars, Georgians, and Poles on the list of nine favorable nations for Ukrainian citizens). At the same time, about 70% expressed a neutral approach toward Jews (i.e., "like any other" or "without special feelings"), and half of eastern Ukrainian urban respondents estimated that more than half of the citizens of their country did not hold negative views of Jews. However, the same study also found that almost a third of Dnipro residents were sure that more than half or more of their fellow citizens held anti-Jewish sentiments (1.5 times more than in Moscow and 2.5 more than respondents from other large cities in Russia, according to an

RJC-sponsored Levada Center study of 2015). A fifth of Ukrainian respondents (as opposed to half in Moscow and more than a third in large Russian urban areas) believed this phenomenon to be almost non-existent.

Table 4: Estimates of the percentage of citizens from large urban areas in Ukraine and Russian Federation with anti-Jewish sentiments

Opinion	Dnipro (Ukraine) Tkuma Institute (2018)	Large cities in Russia Levada Center (2016)	
		Cities with a population > 500,000	Moscow
Almost everybody	1,5%	2	3
More than a half	27%	11	20
Less than a half	50,5%	25	28
Quite a few	21%	52	36
Hard to estimate	-	11	14

Nevertheless, respondents who exhibited a positive approach toward Jews often did not want to see them in power or have a Jew as president of their country. Researchers also identified a statistically significant number of negative stereotypes among the older population, including a number who supported the conspiracy theory that, in the last days of the USSR, Michael Gorbachev formed an alliance with Jews and Americans to ruin the country.

In general, the level of intolerance among people over the age of thirty was higher than among younger generations. However, younger respondents more often believed that “ethnic Ukrainians should have priority over all others,” which coincides with the results of a 2014 study by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology, which also investigated the views of respondents on granting priority to ethnic Ukrainians and including “ethnicity” in identity documents. Research showed that more than a quarter of all respondents supported both ideas, while another third supported one of them. Currently, it is not clear how this data could be applied to the current trends in Ukraine. Two Ukrainian institutions—the Ethnic Minorities’ Rights Monitoring Group under the Congress of Ethnic Communities of Ukraine, headed by Vyacheslav Likhachev, and the Ukrainian Jewish Committee, headed by Eduard Dolinsky—simply register the number of antisemitic cases in the country. In addition, the two organizations take different positions in the dispute regarding the definition of various events as antisemitic incidents, as well as on how to interpret representative sociological survey data.

Indeed, while the Ethnic Minorities' Rights Monitoring Group stressed the data reported by the Pew Research Center, which found that the intolerance rate stood at a mere 5% in Ukraine in contrast with higher figures in other countries, the Ukrainian Jewish Committee argue that "the full picture is substantially different from what was shown in Ukrainian media."³⁰ According to Dolinsky, one must pay more attention to the attitudes of those who feel that their culture is superior (within this group, 13% of followers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and 21% of Ukrainian Catholics were not ready to accept Jews as their neighbors; 29% and 48%, respectively, were not ready to accept Jews as their family members). Considering the fact that both monitoring structures have clear political agendas (i.e., more favorable or less critical towards the current Ukrainian regime), their interpretation of the collected and published data cannot be considered seriously in the context of formal academic discussion.

Part 3: ANTISEMITISM IN ACTION

As the Kantor Center report stated, in comparison with previous years, 2017 was found to have been a very difficult time in the post-Soviet region. Various disturbing trends were observed, including more verbal antisemitism in Russia and more violence in Ukraine. Overall it appears that the same types of incidents continued into 2018: vandalism, antisemitic propaganda (blaming Jews for all of the world's problems), and the use of antisemitic content for political purposes.³¹ The 2018 report of the Israeli Ministry for Diaspora Affairs also noted that the number of antisemitic incidents in Ukraine doubled in 2017, in comparison with the previous year.

Moreover, a report commissioned by the Russian Jewish Congress and produced by the Center for Information and Analysis registered a growing number of hate declarations by politicians and public figures. The Russian Jewish Congress believes that this has led to the legitimization of antisemitism in the public domain.³² In contrast, the experts of the EMRMG and Va'ad of Ukraine argue that, at least for Ukraine, these conclusions are exaggerated, especially as far as antisemitic violence and vandalism are concerned. So, what is the truth?

Crimes motivated by antisemitic xenophobia

To evaluate the level of antisemitic xenophobia in different states, observers first pay attention to acts of physical violence against Jews, damage to synagogues, community centers, tombstones in Jewish cemeteries and memorials, as well as antisemitic or neo-Nazi graffiti. If we look at the number of incidents of antisemitic vandalism and violence in the FSU in 2010-2017, as recorded by the Eurasian Jewish Congress and other organizations, it appears that the picture is not so dramatic. The relevant numbers ranged from 9 to 24-28 cases in Ukraine and from 6 to 17 cases in Russia, with an increasing trend in the middle of the decade. Reports commissioned by the Russian Jewish Congress and produced by the "Sova" analytical center that monitors antisemitic incidents suggest that the level of antisemitic violence in 2017 and 2018 was significantly lower than in previous years. In the course of those two years they did not encounter a single attack that was deemed to have been motivated by antisemitism, as compared with 5 such incidents in 2016.³³

With regard to Ukraine, since systematic monitoring conducted by EAJC and other organizations began in 2003, antisemitic incidents peaked in 2005, and the years 2005-2007 were marked by a wave of violent street attacks. However, following 2007, "a noticeable decline is seen, and in the past ten years, the number of such

incidents remains at a stable low level,” aside from certain increases in 2012-2014 followed by another decline in 2015-2016.³⁴

Table 5: Incidents of antisemitic vandalism and violence

Years	Ukraine		Russia	
	EAJC/EMRMG	The Cantor Center	EAJC/EMRMG	The Cantor Center
2010	16	16	10	17
2011	9	16	6	15
2012	9	15	9	11
2013	9	23	10	15
2014	23	28	12	12
2015	22	23	12	8
2016	19	20	n/d	7
2017	24	22	n/d	3

According to the Monitoring Group of the Rights of Ethnic Minorities at the Ukrainian Congress of Ethnic Minorities, no cases of antisemitic violence were registered in 2017 and 2018 in Russia or in Ukraine. The same group noted a double reduction (from 24 to 12 cases) of antisemitic vandalism in 2018 in comparison to 2017, after 23 such cases were reported in 2014, 22 cases in 2015 and 19 in 2016.³⁵ They also stressed that their conclusions agreed with the findings of the 2019 Israeli Ministry for the Jewish Diaspora Report.³⁶

Still, the very existence of antisemitic graffiti and swastikas at military and Holocaust memorials, and vandalism at synagogues and Jewish educational institutions – even though such incidents have decreased in numbers – continue to be viewed by members of Jewish communities in the former Soviet states as a challenge to their personal security and to communal property.

A number of these incidents have received much publicity. One relatively recent case in Ukraine took place near the town of Nemyrov in the center-west of the country, which had a large Jewish population before WWII. Vandals regularly unearth the mass graves of victims of the fascist massacres of Jews, in search of «Jewish gold». On April 27, 2018, vandals desecrated a monument in the West Ukrainian town of Ternopil that had been erected to honor thousands of local Jews who perished during the Holocaust.³⁷ Another example took place in the Siberian city of Novokuznetsk, where vandals damaged a monument symbolizing Russian-

Armenian friendship. The monument is in the form of an open book, with the Armenian and Russian alphabets inscribed on opposing pages. Criminals drew a swastika on the pedestal of the monument, along with a message addressed to the Jews.³⁸ According to RJC President Yuri Kanner, antisemitism is always a result of ignorance: the vandals presumably confused the Armenian alphabet with the Hebrew alphabet. Without being aware of it, the unknown perpetrator expressed the universal essence of antisemitism, which is based on a hatred of strangers in which the Jews are the personification of strangers.³⁹

It is not surprising that the subjective estimates of antisemitic events as perceived by Jews in their cities, regions and countries may differ significantly from the data obtained by official monitoring. In a quantitative, representative sample study conducted by the Levada Center and sponsored by the Russian Jewish Congress and Euro-Asian Jewish Congress in 2018 more than 40% of the respondents reported that in the course of the previous five years they had been targeted at least once with threats, physical attacks and other types of aggression. Among them, 44% (about 18% of the entire sample) were certain that those verbal or physical attacks had antisemitic motivations.⁴⁰

Indicative data was also obtained through a large-scale opinion survey of the Jewish population of four FSU countries conducted under the supervision of this author in January 2019.⁴¹ In the course of the research, respondents were asked to evaluate – among other things – the dynamics of the level of antisemitism in the recent years in their cities, and in the country in general. The following picture emerged from the research data collected by February 2019. One-fifth (19.6%, to be exact) of respondents in Moscow and St. Petersburg – cities that host half of Russia's Jewish population – reported that either they themselves, or individuals with whom they were close had been targets of antisemitic outbursts in recent years. More than 6% expressed that although they had not had such an experience personally, they knew of people who did. About 21% of the respondents reported hearing about such incidents, although neither they nor their acquaintances had experienced such outbursts. 42% of the respondents in these cities neither experienced such incidents nor had they heard of them.

Similar results were obtained in of Odessa – a city with a rich Jewish past and an active Jewish life today. The attitudes of its inhabitants, both Jews and non-Jews, are often a legitimate indicator of the ongoing processes in Ukraine in general. There it was found that 16% of the interviewees said that either they or those close to them had experienced antisemitic outbursts addressed towards them, while one third (34%) of the participants had not encountered such a negative experience, but they knew the people who had. One quarter (24%) of the respondents had heard

about such cases, although neither they nor their acquaintances had had such an experience. Almost the same number (26%) neither experienced such incidents nor had they heard of them. A very different picture was found in smaller, less organized Jewish communities of the north-eastern regions of the country. Almost a half of the respondents and/or their family members reported that they were targets of antisemitic xenophobia in recent years.

Clearly, we speak here not only about the acts of direct physical violence or persecution (hate crimes), but also about verbal assaults (hate speech). It should be noted that there is heated debate among various factions of Jewish leadership as to whether it is necessary to include the latter into the official statistics of antisemitic acts. The authors of a report of the United Jewish Community of Ukraine (UJCU) – a new player in the field of monitoring antisemitic xenophobia in the country – disputed the findings of the Monitoring Group of the Rights of Ethnic Minorities at the Ukrainian Congress of Ethnic Minorities that the number of manifestations of antisemitism in everyday life had been reduced by half in 2018, arguing that on the contrary, it had increased. Guided, in their words, by the international definition of antisemitism established by the European Forum on Antisemitism, the members of UJCU registered 107 incidents of antisemitic character that occurred in 2018. Of these, 29% were registered by the calls to the Jewish hot line in Ukraine, “910,” 44% of incidents were reported by the Ukrainian mass media and bloggers, and 27% of incidents were revealed by the “Jewish public figure Eduard Dolinsky.”⁴²

The authors of the report explain the considerable difference in findings by the “absence of constant monitoring and registering of similar incident in previous years.” They made critical remarks about the Israeli government structures which, in the opinion of the authors of the report, use, without any criticism, “the incomplete and incorrect information provided by some obscure Jewish organization in Ukraine.” According to the same allegations, those organizations, lacking sufficient instruments and resources for effective monitoring of manifestations of antisemitism, were providing the State of Israel with incomplete and incorrect information concerning the actual level of antisemitism in the country.⁴³

A similar disagreement – although less prominent and less institutionally expressed – exists between the parties involved in the process of registering and analyzing antisemitic manifestations in Russia, including in the setting of the “Protecting Future” Moscow international conferences for combatting antisemitism, racism and xenophobia.⁴⁴

However, supporters of the both positions agree that antisemitism in the FSU is not limited to vandalism and physical violence. As such, other forms of hate

crimes that target Jews, including antisemitic incitement, xenophobic provocation, defamation, Holocaust denial, and antisemitism that emerges from anti-Zionism should also be seen as expressions of antisemitism, as suggested by experts in Israel and the FSU. These experts have identified the following categories of antisemitic incidents in FSU states: crimes inspired by Judeophobia, incitement to hostility against Jews, media-sponsored public antisemitism, and antisemitic stereotypes.

Incitements and defamation

It is the opinion of this author, together with prominent thought leaders and politicians, that manifestations of “practical antisemitism” in the FSU are first-and-foremost the result of incendiary statements made by public officials that are publicized in the press.

An indicative example widely discussed in the media were statements made by Pyotr Tolstoy, the deputy chairman of Russia’s State Duma, and his colleague in the ruling party faction, Vitaly Milonov. On January 23, 2017 while criticizing protesters speaking out against the transfer of St. Isaac’s Cathedral in St. Petersburg to the Russian Orthodox Church, Pyotr Tolstoy spoke of the protesters as “the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of those who destroyed our churches, [of those] who jumped out of the Pale of Settlement with revolvers in 1917. Now their grandchildren, working in various respectable places—on radio stations, in legislative assemblies—continue the work of their grandfathers and great-grandfathers.”⁴⁵ State Duma deputy Vitaly Milonov also noted the ethnic Jewish origin of the protest organizers, such as Boris Vishnevsky and Maxim Reznik, members of the St. Petersburg City Council, claiming that “their ancestors boiled Christians in cauldrons and gave them to beasts [to be] mauled.”⁴⁶ Neither Tolstoy nor Milonov were punished or disciplined in any way.

Many other deputies, party officials, and local and national journalists have voiced antisemitic declarations. Some of them participated in the controversial discussion surrounding the film *Matilda*, directed by Alexey Uchitel, who is Jewish. The antisemitic attacks made in connection with the film, which describes the love affair between Tsar Nicholas II and the ballerina Mathilde Kschessinska, reflect the fact that some in Russia have begun to refer to the execution of the Tsar and royal family in 1918 following the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 as a “ritual murder.” According to Natalia Poklonskaya, a deputy of the Russian State Duma, “They murdered the entire royal family... This is a crime, a frightening ritual murder. Many people are afraid to talk about it—but everyone understands that it happened. It is evil.”⁴⁷

The antisemitic motive in declaring the Romanov family assassination a «ritual

murder» was clear to everyone who followed this debate in conservative Russian religious orthodox circles, as was noted by RJC President Yuri Kanner and other commentators. «The Russian Orthodox Church is not just a subject, but rather an initiator of this investigation, and is not unlikely that this activity was motivated by antisemitism.»⁴⁸

According to sociologist Denis Volkov, “Antisemitism, which just recently was something indecent, is becoming legalized from upstairs... The Duma has a low level of approval, but deputies are people who have access to television screens and speak from positions of power.” Moreover, Alexander Verkhovsky, Director of the Moscow-based SOVA Centre for Information and Analysis, states that, “For many years it was a particularly taboo phobia, and professing antisemitism was a sign of marginalization. The fact that it is no longer marginalized can lead to an increase in antisemitism, as it will become more normalized.”⁴⁹

Impact of antisemitic publications in the media

Trends leading to potential “normalization” of formerly marginal antisemitic acts may be triggered by incitement to hostility against Jews through various information channels, including hundreds of antisemitic or semi-antisemitic publications that appear in both printed and electronic media every year. According to the Chairman of Russia’s Presidential Council for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights, Mikhail Fedotov, “today antisemitism in Russia and other FSU states moves to the internet where it gets new life.”⁵⁰ This point may be illustrated by the fact that, during the first half of 2015, the Russian authorities removed extremist information from 4,500 websites and blocked 800 more, including 160 opened to raise funds and recruit activists for terrorist groups. Furthermore, over a third (231 out of 688) of the items on the federal list of extremist materials show clear signs of antisemitism.⁵¹

Indeed, according to a review of antisemitism in Russia prepared by the SOVA Center for Information and Analysis on behalf of the Russian Jewish Congress, while the level of antisemitic crime in the Russian Federation decreased in 2017 as compared with 2016, antisemitism in the media increased substantially.⁵² Among participants in the opinion poll of Russian Jews concerning the level of antisemitism in the country conducted in 2018 by the Levada Center, only 5-9% believed that a substantial increase was taking place in such incidents as: desecration of Jewish cemeteries and graves, vandalism against buildings belonging to Jewish organizations, and street aggression against Jews. On the contrary, a majority of the respondents believed that such cases either had decreased in numbers or had remained the same. 17% of the respondents, however, noted a growing trend

of antisemitism in media, politics and culture, and 33% in social media and the internet.⁵³

“If one compares the data of the Russian and European polls, one gets an impression that the European Jews are experiencing antisemitism in various public forums and institutional environments far more often,” the authors of the research study conclude. “Only in the case of antisemitic expressions on the internet does the data show similarity in opinions, together with public statements of politicians and discussions in the mass media. In the first case, 70% of Russian Jews and 75% of European Jews had experienced antisemitic statements, in the second, 40% and 47% respectively.”⁵⁴

Traditional and social media have become a platform for the revival and strengthening of various kinds of societal antisemitism. A list of such xenophobic stereotypes includes, for example, allegations that Jews are “imminently hostile to other ethnic and racial groups,” “the Jews rule Russia and the world,” “the Jews are responsible for antisemitism themselves,” and “the Jews believe they are the Chosen People.” Other stereotypes include referring to Jews as “greedy and tricky” and the belief that they have “captured power and all of the good positions in the country.” Consequently, despite the decrease in violent antisemitic incidents in recent years, more than a half of Jewish respondents to the 2018 Levada poll heard statements from non-Jews such as “the Jews ought to blame themselves for antisemitism” (20% reported hearing such statements “constantly,” or “very often”).

False stereotypes, for example that “the Jews lack patriotism and are always looking for better conditions just for themselves,” are still rooted in substantial parts of the FSU population. Indeed, the Levada Center’s research shows that the number of Russian citizens who agree with the assumption that “the Jews are mostly loyal to their own interests, rather than interests of the country they live in,” grew from just over 40% in 1997 to almost 50% in 2015. Moreover, the less educated and the older the respondents were, the more often they believed this.

Table 6. Do you agree that the Jews are mostly loyal to their own interests, rather than interests of the country in which they live? (Levada Center, 2016)

Opinions	1997		2015				1997/2015
	General	General	Age				
			18-24	25-39	40-54	55+	
Agree	43%	49%	36%	47%	52%	55%	+6
Disagree	31%	32%	32%	39%	29%	29%	+1
Hard to say	26%	19%	32%	14%	19%	16%	-7

Opinions	1997		2015			
	General	General	Education			
			Higher	Post-secondary vocational	High school	Less than high school
Agree	43%	49%	45%	52%	52%	51%
Disagree	31%	32%	35%	31%	34%	26%
Hard to say	26%	19%	20%	17%	15%	23%

“As the idea spreads that there may be a need to defend, or save, Russia,” thinks Levada Center’s Director Lev Gudkov, “then the Jews may be made to appear as traitors, by means of the suggestion that they would not make sacrifices on behalf of Russia.” In his opinion, although there is no readiness at the present time to declare Jews to be a “fifth column,” there is a possibility that this may occur in the course of events, so it is an important concern in long-term, developing, antisemitic risks.”⁵⁵

Political antisemitism

All of this logically leads to diverse models of political antisemitism. Among them is playing the “Jewish card” in politics, including the use of pronounced antisemitic tropes in political propaganda as politicians strive to achieve internal, political and social goals, which bear no direct relation to the Jews. This phenomenon, according to a 2018 report of the Ministry for the Jewish Diaspora Affairs, has reached the highest level in many years.⁵⁶

Antisemitism exists both in the radical Right and radical Left movements, which manifests itself in blackmailing political enemies, “bureaucratic antisemitism,” (a prejudiced attitude towards Jews by the high-ranking officials), references to the “Jewish aspect” of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, Holocaust revisionism, denial of the right of the State of Israel to exist and defend itself, and attempts to justify anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli terrorism.

Results of the above-mentioned 2018 Levada Center research study concerning the level of antisemitism in Russia found that during the 12 months prior to the poll, 70% of the Russian Jews responding to the poll heard non-Jews say that “the Jews in Russia have too much power” (one-third heard such things “constantly” or “often”). Half of the respondents heard that “the Jews are using the Holocaust theme for their own self-serving ends,” and “the Holocaust is a myth, or that its scale has been exaggerated” (25% reported hearing this “constantly” or “often”). Finally, 40% reported hearing, with various degrees of frequency, that “the interests of the Jews in Russia differ greatly from the interests of the rest of the population,” while

one-fifth, thought that “the Jews are unable to integrate into the Russian society.” Researchers suggest that such opinions should cause particular concern in the context of the absence of significant successes of attempts to reinvent a Russian civil nation, and of certain shifts in the ideological attitudes expressed by large numbers of Russians. In recent years, ethnic Russian nationalism had practically faded from the political agenda and from party politics, and there was minimal support for slogans like “Russia for ethnic Russians.” Still, a poll taken in July 2018 showed a certain level of support for that idea. That support was attributed mainly to those who thought that “the idea should have been implemented long ago” (this support doubled from 10% in 2017 to 19% in 2018). Together with that finding, there was a parallel reduction in the number of respondents who were not interested in that theme.⁵⁷

Part of the same process is the relatively new phenomenon in the post-Soviet space – although rooted in the official antisemitic propaganda of the USSR political leadership – which denies the right of the Jewish state to exist and defend itself, as well as the justifying of the acts of terror against the Jews and Israeli citizens. In contrast to Ukraine, where, at some stage, the positive attitude towards Israel began to affect attitudes towards local Jews (to be discussed later), in Russia, in a mirror-image process, a reverse trend began to be noted, which in the past was characteristic of the far-left and Islamic circles in Western Europe. This is “the new Russian anti-Zionism,” which is being transformed into a new type of antisemitism.

This conclusion can be also made on the basis of content analysis of on-line readers’ forums (talk-backs) in the last two years. This analysis was performed on comments on the websites of “quality” publications (Novaya Gazeta, Lenta.ru, Kommersant, Vzglyad.ru, Svoboda/Liberty, Republic, Snob) and in the mass Russian press (Komsomolskaya Pravda, Life.ru, Russia Today) in the summer of 2018. It was conducted under the supervision of this author by Victoria Charochkin, then in Moscow, and now a Jerusalem journalist and media analyst. Despite the fact that “positive comments on Israel” still “numerically prevail over negative ones,” these talk-backs express statements made by the Russian non-Jews such as “the Israeli conduct themselves like the Nazis with respect to the Palestinians,” and that “the world would have been better without Israel.” In 2017-2018 these statements were observed by almost one-half, and one-third respectively, of Jewish respondents in the above-quoted research by the Levada Center.

“Zionism cannot exist without “antisemitism,” as the Jewish religion cannot exist without the ghetto,” is what appears in one talk-back post. “The concept of antisemitism itself is being used incorrectly [by the Zionists], since it is substituted for the concept of anti-Judaism, “anti-Kikeness,” (in all its manifestations), and

bears no relation to the Jews as a “nation.” It is not me who says it, but the classic Zionist thinkers – Jabotinsky and others.”⁵⁸ Apparently, here the writer speaks not so much on the attempts to hide under the veil of “unacceptance of Zionism without any relation to Jewry” – in vein of the former Soviet scheme of yesteryear – the immanent Judeophobe feelings (although on them, too), as on the reverse process of the activation, by making use of anti-Israeli slogans, of “slumbering” and, as a whole, as yet not very legitimate in the Russian public space, antisemitic patterns.

Part 4: ANTISEMITISM AND PHILOSEMITISM AS A FACTOR OF POST-SOVIET CONFLICTS

Another important indicator of the authorities' and society's attitude towards Jews is the use of Jewish themes in propaganda campaigns, which accompany inter-state conflicts in the post-Soviet space.

Use of the “instrumentalization of antisemitism,” as the phenomenon was named by Vyacheslav Likhachev (meaning use of antisemitic tropes for political purposes, e.g., for the discrediting of opponents) has become commonplace in the post-Soviet space.⁵⁹ This can be clearly seen in the psychological, diplomatic, and information war accompanying the Russian-Ukrainian conflict which began with the Russian annexation of the Crimea in 2014. According to observers, the formation of “an enemy image” in which an antisemitic component played an important role, played a key role in mobilizing grassroots support in Ukraine and Russia in the first months of the conflict, up to mid-2014. This played an even greater role in the external diplomatic and propaganda arena.

Russia's labeling adherents of Ukrainian independence as “Banderites” (radical nationalists named after Stepan Bandera) and Fascist Hitler's collaborators, permitted them to describe the overthrow of Viktor Yanukovich's corrupt, authoritarian regime as the takeover of power by an “antisemitic, Fascist Banderite regime.”

These images were meant to address both pro-Russian circles in the Russian-speaking regions in the east and the south of Ukraine, including the Crimea, and various audiences within Russia and the rest of the world (first and foremost, in Israel, the USA, and Europe). In contrast, Kiev's presentation of the present Russian powers-that-be as heir to the USSR antisemitic regime – a force trying to restore the “Soviet Empire”⁶⁰ – played an important role in Kiev's mobilization of local and world public opinion in its struggle against what they perceived as Moscow's “hybrid aggression,” an assault combining conventional, propaganda and diplomatic attacks.

The case of Russia

The primary purpose of these anti- and philosemitic messages are aimed to delegitimize the enemy, still, they also had obvious domestic political impact among nationalist radicals in Russia and marginal circles in Ukraine. As a result, completely fantastic antisemitic conspiracy theories began to form in the popular

consciousness, including, for example, how the Euromaidan protests were allegedly organized by “world Zionism.” The Russian liberal camp – “permeated by Jews” – that supported the anti-authoritarian revolution in Kiev, was accused of becoming an accomplice in the “Zionist-Banderite coup,” according to the terminology used in certain Russian circles.⁶¹ It has been noted that similar attitudes are widespread in marginal Russian circles, and that in the radical nationalist faction that opposes the official Kremlin, such beliefs coexist with the notion that the same Zionists also organized the “Russian spring” in order to “provoke a bloody fight between the Russian and Ukrainian nations.”⁶²

In any case, by the end of 2015, the need to invoke the “antisemitic” factor (in its various instrumental versions) for mobilizing the internal public opinion regarding the Ukrainian-Russian confrontation had been significantly reduced. In Russia, the antisemitic rhetoric influenced by the Ukrainian conflict – in which the country’s leadership had largely lost interest – resumed its latent form.⁶³ Its public expression remains confined to either Islamic, or marginal radical-nationalistic groups. They continue to fill the Web with sites and texts spewing delusional antisemitic and anti-Zionist content, and continue to voice conspiracy theories like: “War in Ukraine is the war of Zionists against Russia with the Russian hands.”⁶⁴

But hints that a “Jew-liberal” is a traitor and an enemy of Russia have almost disappeared from the official mass media. In the opinion of Igor Bunin, the supreme political leadership quickly understood that a revolutionary type of support of the authorities diverges from national traditions and normal governance, and became aware of the threat of potential turmoil in the future.⁶⁵ It is telling to note that Pyotr Tolstoy, who was a prime figure in an antisemitic scandal, was among the guests at the official celebration of the 70th anniversary of the State of Israel at the Israeli Embassy in Moscow. At that event, heartfelt speeches were made about the importance of friendly Russian-Israeli relations, and the significant, positive role played by Jews on present-day Russian statehood, economy and culture.⁶⁶

Another example can be seen in the incident that occurred when the Air Defense Forces of Syria – a Russian ally – shot down a Russian Il-20 reconnaissance plane, which, according to the initial version voiced by the Russian Ministry of Defense, was “put at risk from friendly fire” by Israeli air force planes which were carrying out operations against Iranian infrastructure sites in that country.⁶⁷ The publication of this version, which placed the blame on Israel (an accusation completely rejected by Israel, but which was still supported – although in a low-key manner – by Russian officials) was followed by a powerful outburst of anti-Zionist and antisemitic rhetoric in the official Russian mass media, which was

“suppressed” several hours later, obviously, by a directive from above.⁶⁸ In the eyes of many observers, that incident confirms the possibility of a comparatively easy transformation of latent “a-semitic” feelings into a clearly voiced form of open antisemitism.

But, for the time being, this does not exist, according to Alexander Verkhovsky, who heads the Sova center. Russian citizens who depend on television for their news, even if they fear other categories of the population, are not unduly worried about Jewish issues, and, “if no one mentions the Judeo-masonic conspiracy, it will not be present in the heads.”⁶⁹ If one detaches oneself from the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, then, in the opinion of the researchers, there is no real threat that these trends will somehow change for the worse.⁷⁰

The situation in Ukraine

Antisemitic campaigns in Ukraine that were launched during the Russian-Ukrainian conflict were even less successful. In an interview with this author voiced during a detailed “inside observation” on this topic, Vyacheslav Likhachev related: «The outburst from within Ukraine of pronounced philosemitic feelings was so strong that the campaign based on antisemitic accusations turned out to be extremely unsuccessful. Despite some surges [in 2015-2017], one cannot speak about [antisemitism] on the scale of 2014.»

The reality of the situation includes the trend of some Ukrainian leaders to deny any responsibility for actual manifestations of antisemitism in their country (beatings of rabbis, acts of vandalism against Jewish sites, antisemitic statements in the mass media, and rumors spread on social networks), by automatically labelling them “the Kremlin’s intrigues,” or putting the blame on “Russian agents.” Of special importance is that these versions are readily supported by the Jewish partners of the new Ukrainian political leadership.

Beginning in 2015, this approach was welcomed by Ukrainians, who demonstrated growing irritation at the perpetual accusation that their nation was antisemitic. The Jewish issue provoked a kind of defensive reaction in Ukrainian discourse. The people strongly believed that antisemitic activities were those perpetrated by their enemies and that even obviously antisemitic acts perpetrated by Ukrainians should not be defined in that way, and should be seen, at worst, as «acts of hooliganism» and «results of misunderstandings».

Attempts to redefine antisemitic incidents in that manner, while holding the Jews, themselves, responsible for them, have moved from being single incidents to

become a more noticeable trend. At the same time, there are renewed attempts by some “thought leaders” to make counterclaims against world Jewry and Israel – and against their “local representatives” – Ukrainian Jews. These claims relate, for example to the unwillingness of the Knesset to follow the example of 24 states in the world that recognize the Ukrainian Holodomor an instance of ethnocide, that is, an event identical to the Holocaust.⁷¹ Such accusations, almost unheard of in the years 2014-2015, are once again gaining in popularity. As a result, as noted by researchers, antisemitism occupies a much more important place in the Ukrainian marketplace of ideas than it did three or four years ago. Still, in truth, those ideas have not yet led to significant violence or even to calls to violence against Jews.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, one should neither underestimate nor overestimate the influence of the above-noted negative processes in post-Soviet societies on the actual situation of Ukrainian and Russian Jews. Aside from the reduction in the number of antisemitically motivated acts of vandalism or violence, one may consider as an indicator the subjective perceptions expressed by the Jews in recent years of the level of antisemitism in their city and country.

In the course of our large-scale survey of the Jewish population in Ukraine of January 2019 referred to above, respondents were asked to evaluate the dynamics of the level of antisemitism in recent years in their cities and in the country in general. In Ukraine, respondents were almost equally divided between those said that the level of antisemitism in the city and in the country as a whole had grown significantly in recent years (16%), and those who thought that it fell significantly (12%), or that it does not exist now, as it did not exist in the past (7%). The largest group – almost half of the respondents (47%) – noted that they felt no significant negative or positive trends regarding this issue. One-fifth found it difficult to assess the dynamics and spread of the process, in addition to about 20% of the respondents who were unable to estimate the dynamics of this process. These findings concur with those of the 2018 Levada Center opinion poll, which found approximately the same responses among these two subgroups, as well as those who thought that the level of antisemitism has grown considerably, or slightly (17%). The percentage of those respondents who believed that this level decreased, was twice as high (33%). In any case, the percentage of those with a pessimistic view on the situation among Jews in Russia and Ukraine turned out to be just one-fourth of the average percentage of Jews in 12 states of the EU, who, in December 2018, pointed to the considerable, or slight, increase of the antisemitic manifestations in their countries

(as reported by 63% and 26% of the interviewees, respectively).⁷²

Thus, the observed decline in antisemitism and antisemitic violence in Russia and Ukraine does not mean that antisemitism has disappeared. Sociological assessments of Russian and Ukrainian society reveal a refusal to accept open declarations of ethnic inequality and hatred or disapproval of discriminatory measures directed against “other” ethnic groups. However, this does not necessarily imply the weakening or disappearance of ethnic prejudices or phobias and does not exclude potential feelings of xenophobia and ethnic or racial superiority on the part of a substantial part of society. This, as researchers note, opens the way to relatively easy violations of the public ban on antisemitism and ethnic discrimination by various institutions in the public sphere.⁷³

It is incorrect to believe that shifting antipathy and social negativism towards external enemies, such as Russians, Ukrainians, Americans, Europeans, etc. removes the issue of internal ethnic conflicts in Russia and Ukraine entirely. Long-term political and ideological campaigns launched by the Russian government in 2004–2007 have led to an increase in Russian chauvinistic nationalism and a decrease in ethnic, national and religious tolerance, especially since 2012. Thus, the general trend toward a decline in classic antisemitic attitudes in Russia will not necessarily prevent their resurgence in the future. It seems that the unstable atmosphere perceived at the conscious or subconscious level explains why 54.4% of respondents of the quantitative research survey conducted in 2018 on the “perception of antisemitism in the eyes of the Jews in Russia” were of the opinion that in present-day Russia antisemitism is a “serious,” or “very serious” problem.⁷⁴

The departure from the state antisemitism of Soviet times and a reduction of the level of violence motivated by antisemitic views do not mean that antisemitism as a cultural phenomenon has vanished in these countries. Russian society still enjoys a “hard core” of antisemites that make up approximately 8-10% of the population and have not disappeared, despite a general decline in levels of xenophobia. In Ukraine, the number of “hard-core” antisemites might be smaller, but it is still visible. In addition, the majority of xenophobic groups in FSU society feature “latent” or “sleeping” antisemitism.

In general terms, however, the attitude of most of the population in Russia and Ukraine towards Jews may be described as a-semitism – a kind of a distancing from the “Jewish question” – de-actualized for them – with the preservation of the residual, or “suppressed” antisemitic stereotypes. Or, as this phenomenon was defined in Russia early in the last century by Vladimir Jabotinsky: “this is neither struggle, nor attack, nor harassment, it is an ethically impeccably correct wish to

be among themselves without the presence of undesirable elements.”⁷⁵ In that sense, such a type of attitude towards the Jews in the FSU countries differs from its European model, where, according to one of the definitions, the society, “no longer considers Jewish life as a Holocaust-related responsibility, but simply as one piece of an ever more pluralistic kaleidoscope.”⁷⁶

Today, however, the operative level of threats and risks to the Jewish population of Russia is relatively low. The most dangerous phenomenon may be the return of “state antisemitism,” for example in the form of antisemitic statements and actions that appear in the media, in bureaucratic institutions, and by other actors controlled by the government. Such a development is currently unlikely in the Russian Federation, and even less so in Ukraine, but if such a scenario does occur it will find an echo in public consciousness.

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