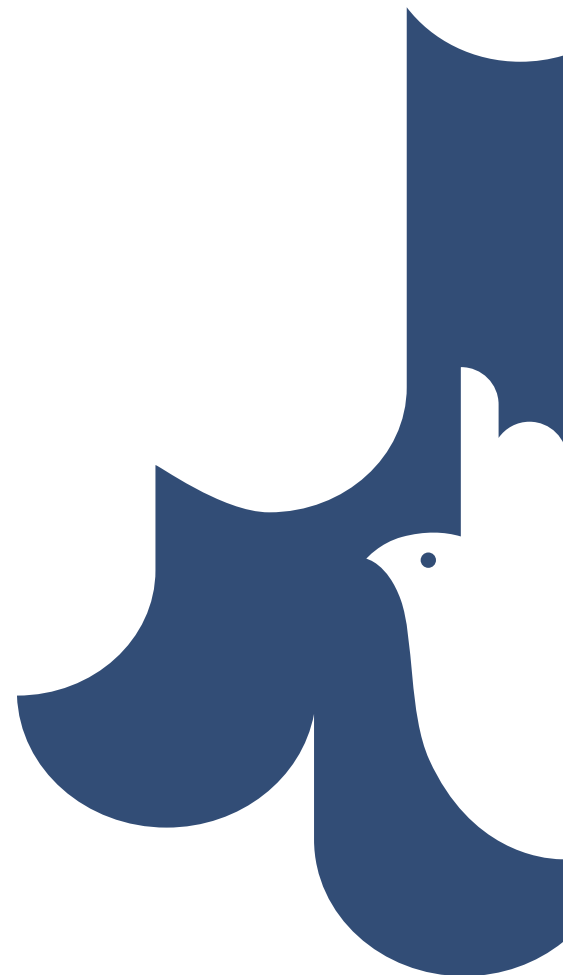


REPORT

ON ANTI-SEMITISM IN RUSSIA

2018



MANIFESTATIONS OF ANTISEMITISM IN 2018

In the year 2018, a higher level of antisemitic vandalism was observed. The level of antisemitism in mass media remained stable. However, there is slightly more response from authorities and the community to public manifestations of antisemitism. Attempts of security agencies to place pressure upon Jewish organisations became apparent.

MOST EXTREME MANIFESTATIONS OF ANTISEMITISM

In 2018, as in the previous year, no antisemitic attacks were reported. However, the attack against Mikhail Skoblionok, an entrepreneur and the President of Tatarstan's Jewish National and Cultural Autonomy, might have been caused by the anti-Jew bias. Skoblionok and his assistant were injured as a result of an explosion in his office in Kazan in October. Most probably, the attack was linked to Skoblionok's business, but the fact that the Jewish community of Naberezhnye Chelny had received a threatening letter from nationalists shortly before the incident cannot be ignored.

The level of antisemitic vandalism grew compared to the previous year: at least 4 incidents were reported (vs 1 incident in 2017).

In January, vandals scrawled on a wall of Ksenia Sobchak's presidency campaign headquarters: "Jew is not president". The same day, the man who identified himself as the author of the graffiti, brought to the headquarters a package that contained Pelevin's and Castaneda's books and a note saying "Kill. Eat. Repeat".

In February, vandals in Novokuznetsk defaced a memorial to Russian-Armenian friendship, having mistaken the Armenian alphabet for Hebrew. They painted a swastika and scrawled "To the Jews" on the memorial.

Vandals also attacked two cemeteries. In June, several headstones burnt at the Voronezh Jewish cemetery, and neither Emergencies Ministry nor the local Jewish community excluded the possibility of arson. In August, in the village of Lyubavichi of Rudnyansky district of the Smolensk Oblast, the historical centre of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement in Russia, where its founders were buried, vandals scrawled "Jews, get out of Russia!" and "This is our land" and a swastika on a wall of the Jewish cemetery.

Below we also recap two attacks against property with a possible antisemitic background. In January, the fire was set twice to the car owned by Ilya Raskin, the head of the Jewish community in Murmansk. The first incident happened in the early hours of 7th January, when the Russian Orthodox Church is celebrating Christmas. This made Raskin assume that the arson was committed by religious extremists. He said neither him nor other members ever received personal threats. However, it is unlikely that two arsons in a relatively short period could have been ordinary hooliganism.

There were other manifestations of antisemitism. Apart from the above the Jewish community in Naberezhnye Chelny, the Jewish community in Tomsk received a threatening letter in September. The letter was signed by the BZhSR nationalist organisation, the name in Russian is the acronym of "Strike at the Jews and Save Russia", a popular nationalistic slogan.

Last summer, the FIFA World Cup was marked by several antisemitic incidents involving, however, foreign fans. In Vologda, three fans from England sang Nazi songs that mentioned Auschwitz and performed the Nazi salute. In Moscow, a group of Tunisian fans insulted a fan with an Israeli flag. In both cases, no violence was used.

Antisemitic slogans traditionally could be heard at nationalists' events, in particular, at the Russian March on 4th November.

ANTISEMITISM IN PUBLIC LIFE

The most high-profile of those was the incident in September where Vladimir Zhirinovskiy initiated a heated exchange with Alexander Khinshtein on the TV show called Evening with Vladimir Solovyov. In the heat of the debate, Zhirinovskiy said to Khinshtein: **“You are a Jew, so go to Israel, and we are Russians!”**

To illustrate the standoff attitude of Russian media, one can cite their response to the statement made by Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov in September, who laid the blame for the crash of the Russian Il-20 aircraft with the Israeli Air Force. Although this statement triggered a wave of strong anti-Israeli statements, most media, including nationalist ones, managed to remain within anti-Israel rhetoric and abstain from direct accusations against Jews.

Still, antisemitic statements were occasionally observed in both federal and regional media, and the method of “disclosing identities” that had been actively used in the previous years, was, sadly, still common. For example, in January, the issue of the ethnicity of Petro Poroshenko, the Ukrainian President, was discussed in a “Sunday Evening with Vladimir Solovyov” talk show on Russia-1 TV channel. One of the guests, the deputy Konstantin Zatulin, said ironically: “Valtsman, of course, he is Russian.”

In the same month, the Vashi Novosti [Your News] Novgorod newspaper, reported the “fiercely anti-Putin” poet Dmitry Bykov’s visit to Novgorod and mentioned his “real” surname Zilbertrud.

Most antisemitic statements were produced by Echo of Moscow radio thanks to journalist Maxim Shevchenko, known for his antisemitic and anti-Israeli opinions. In January, on the 65th anniversary of the Doctors’ plot, which became the topic of the Grani Nedeli [Edges of the Week] TV talk show, he questioned the antisemitic campaign in the late Stalinist USSR, calling it “fiction”: **“This is fiction. There was no antisemitic campaign. At least, it was no more visible than the campaigns against Banderists, Baltic nationalists, or Volga bourgeois nationalists. <...> All in all, this is definitely not the top story of the Stalin era.”**¹ In May, in Osoboe Mnenie [Special Opinion] TV show, he blamed Israel for the genocide of Palestinians, and in less than a week compared this nation with Nazi Germany. In August, Shevchenko in his in Echo of Moscow blog actually accused Israel of killing Russian reporters in the Central African Republic and called it a nation **“that habitually kill its enemies anywhere around the globe and consider it normal.”**² And in September, in the Osoboe Mnenie [Special Opinion] TV show, he accused the Ukrainian authorities in the murder of Alexander Zakharchenko, the leader of the People’s Republic of Donetsk, saying that they had

¹ Grani Nedeli [Edges of the Week] // Echo of Moscow. 13 January, 2018. [<https://echo.msk.ru/sounds/2127980.html>]

² Orhan’s Death, Version 4, Conspiratorial. M. Shevchenko’s blog on Echo of Moscow. 3 August, 2018. [<https://echo.msk.ru/blog/shevchenko-max/2252266-echo/>]

used “Israeli tactics”. In December, Shevchenko was marked by an antisemitic posting on Facebook. Responding to what the radio host Anna Shafran said about censorship at the Non/fiction book fair, he pointed out that she cooperated with “one of the leaders of the Russian Jewish Congress” and quoted the 19th-century Austrian philosopher Otto Weininger’s remark that **“there is no Jewish nobility”**.

Unsurprisingly, antisemitic statements were found in *Zavtra* [Tomorrow] newspaper. For example, in July, it published a detailed rendering of a blog post about Holocaust by Igor Strelkov (Girkin), a former Minister of Defense of the People’s Republic of Donetsk and head of the Novorossiia movement. In the story, *Zavtra* focused on ideas they tend to believe about the overstated number of Holocaust victims and blaming Jews themselves in the Holocaust.

On the other hand, plenty of antisemitic clichés in an editorial in Russia Insider news website could not be anticipated. Charles Bausman, the editor of Russia Insider, said this article was an attempt to resist the major foreign media’s **“biased and distorted narrative”** about Russia.

It should be noted that antisemitic statements more often than before entailed a reaction on the part of the authorities.

The antisemitic statement by Vadim Abdurakhmanov, the First Secretary of the Khanty-Mansiysk District Committee of the Communists of Russia party, made during election debates in March and broadcasted by the local TV and radio company Ugra, when he encouraged to vote for the Communist candidate Maxim Surayikin since he was ethnic Russian and had no Jewish descend, led to an inquiry by the Investigation Committee.

Andrey Nikitin, the governor of the Novgorod Oblast, after the above article was published in *Vashi Novosti* [Your news] Novgorod newspaper, deplored antisemitism and urged the editorship to publish an apology. The apology was soon published indeed. However, its tone only confirmed that the editorial board saw nothing wrong about that article.

However, in most cases, such statements are still not only made with impunity but do not even receive public disapproval.

Alexander Khinshtein made a complaint about Zhirinovskiy’s insults to the Duma Commission for mandated Affairs and Parliamentary Ethics. Otari Arshba, Head of this commission, having recognised the LDPR leader’s behaviour unacceptable, redirected the complainant to law enforcement agencies for the commission did not have “the instruments or the opportunity” to influence Zhirinovskiy”. Khinshtein considered that response trolling and appealed to the Tverskoy District Court of Moscow to defend his honour and dignity.

The levels of antisemitism remain high in social media. At least two events in 2018 triggered a wave of antisemitic comments: the above incident with the Russian military aircraft and the official anti-Israeli rhetoric related to the incident, and the fire of 25th March in Kemerovo's Winter Cherry shopping centre, which caused a large number of casualties. Immediately after the tragic fire, comments were posted about its ceremonial nature in connection with Pesach holiday. However, such comments were mostly found on nationalist and extreme Orthodox resources.

At the same time, the antisemitic post on Twitter by the singer Dmitry Malikov (to succeed in show business "you need faggotry or Jewry, and faggotic Jewry is the best of all"), caused indignation among the followers, and he had to remove the post and apologise to readers for the bad joke.

Antisemitism was not manifested only in the media scene. In January, an antisemitic scandal was reported at the geography department of Moscow State University, where professor Vyacheslav Baburin refused to administer the examination to the student Lev Boroda who was wearing a kippah, citing the internal rules about head coverings. The student had to apply to the dean's office and set the exam with another professor. It must be admitted that the department management condemned V. Baburin's behaviour.

A company in Krasnoyarsk called Slavitsa, infamous with a tendency to name its products provocative xenophobic names, introduced a Poor Jew ice cream to the market. Having received a warning about the inadmissibility of extremist activity from the prosecutor's office of Naberezhnye Chelny, the company attempted to recognise the proceedings of the Prosecutor's Office illegal, with very little success. However, despite the Prosecutor's warning, the ice cream was not withdrawn from sale.

The law enforcement action towards Jewish organisations could be categorized as a manifestation of antisemitism more often than in 2017. Two rabbis were sent out from Russia upon court orders. Josef Marozof, the Chief Rabbi of the Ulyanovsk Region, was expelled in January. His residence permit was revoked in 2017 on the initiative of the Federal Security Service. In March, the residence permit was also revoked for Osher Krichevsky, the Chief Rabbi of Sochi, and the rabbi failed to challenge this decision in court. In both cases, the grounds for revoking residence permits were not announced even in court.

In March, the "anti-missionary" amendments to the Yarovaya-Ozerov legislation project were first applied to a Jewish organisation. The Moscow's Meshchansky District Court fined six Israeli nationals — employees of The Kabbalah Centre — under Article 5.26 Part 5 of the Administrative Offences Code (violation of the requirements of legislation on freedom of conscience, freedom of religion and religious associations), considering the lighting of candles in the missionary office on the occa-

sion of Hanukkah illegal. Expulsion from the country was avoided thanks to a lawyer. Yuri Kanner, President of the Russian Jewish Congress, pointed out the ignorance of the court: the penalty was imposed while “missionary work in Judaism is strictly prohibited.”³

Apart from that, two cases were reported of the police showing interest in Moscow Jewish organisations including the Centre for Countering Extremism.

In August, as part of the inspection under Article 282 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (incitement of hatred), security officers searched the premises of the Moscow Choral Synagogue. The search was carried out in relation to social media postings by Alexander Kargin, the head of the “Shahar” organisation. The law enforcement agencies reported to have seized certain nationalist and antisemitic literature, which, according to Kargin, had been planted. The criminal proceedings against Kargin were not initiated because the inspection did not find any signs of extremism in his activities.

In September, the Jewish Campus, a Moscow local religious organisation of Orthodox Judaism, was visited by the police who intended to seize certain literature, but the organisation’s lawyer did not let them inspect the premises.

We consider all those actions attempts to exert pressure on the Jewish organisations.

Unacceptable behaviour of Nikolai Trukhan, a judge of the Lazarevskiy District Court of Sochi, is also worth mentioning. While hearing the case of Alexander Valov, the editor-in-chief of BlogSochi, charged with extortion, the defendant requested full access to the case file. The judge asked Valov whether he was a Jew. Having received the affirmative answer, he said: “Well, say no more”. The defence motion to recuse the judge because of his nationalist statement was not granted.

³ The judge does not have the right to stupidity. Yu. Kanner’s page on Facebook. 30 March, 2018. [https://www.facebook.com/yurykanner/posts/1635287313225853?__tn__=K-R]

LAW ENFORCEMENT

The number of known verdicts appropriately imposed in 2018 for the propaganda of hatred was substantially lower than in the previous year: 212 vs 275 in 2017 (tentative data of the Supreme Court show that there was indeed such a reduction). Of these, at least 17 people were convicted for the propaganda of antisemitism, mostly in combination with other types of xenophobia, which was also fewer than a year earlier (at least 24 in 2017). However, it should be noted that there can have been more sentences for the propaganda of antisemitism: as we have repeatedly pointed out in previous reports when publishing information about such sentences, law enforcement agencies usually do not specify for what they were imposed.

As before, most sentences were imposed for propaganda on the Internet. The share of sentences with actual jail terms for propaganda of antisemitism has grown from 5 in 2017 to at least 7. The longest sentence, 4 years in a general regime colony and deprivation of the right to drive vehicles for 2 years, was imposed by the Ezhvinsky District Court of Syktyvkar on a 40-year-old local resident in August. He had declared himself “the Chairman of the KGB of Komi Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic” and published videos calling for violence against Jews and government officials on VK. He was found guilty under Article 282 Part 1 of the Criminal Code (incitement of national hatred) and Article 280 Part 2 of the Criminal Code (public calls for extremism on the Internet).

Famous nationalist Yury Yekishev was sentenced to two years in jail: he had published an antisemitic an early 20th-century cartoon with the caption “Russian twig for the Jewish animals — so that this beast does not shit here anymore”. In September, the Timiryazevsky District Court of Moscow found Yekishev guilty under Article 282 of the Criminal Code. He was released in the courtroom having spent his term in pre-trial custody.

The maximum suspended sentence of 2.5 years for antisemitic publications was imposed on Kirill Sulyarov, a sympathiser of Russian National Unity in Novgorod, and R. Khamidullov, a supporter of the “Union of Slavic Forces of Russia” in Inta. Sulyarov was convicted to 3-years’ probation in May under Article 282, and Khamidullov was convicted in December, given probation and deprivation of the right to administer websites for two years under Article 282 and Article 280 Part 2 of the Criminal Code.

The largest possible penalty of 300 thousand rubles was imposed on St. Petersburg resident Ivan Barbakov in November for xenophobic (including antisemitic) publications. He was found guilty under the same Article 282. However, in January 2019, his sentence was revoked due to the partial decriminalisation of this Article (all earlier sentences under Article 282 Part 1 are subject to revocation, although it is going to take some time).

We cannot ignore the acquittal of Roman Yushkov, a nationalist in Perm, known for xenophobic publications. He had already been prosecuted for some of those. For posting a link on Facebook to the article titled “Jews! Return money to the Germans for the fraud of ‘Holocaust six million Jews!’”, he was charged under Article 282 Part 1 and Article 354.1 Part 1 of the Russian Criminal Code (denial of the facts established by the verdict of the International Military Tribunal). In September, a jury acquitted him, having considered the arguments provided by the defence about Yushkov’s intentions only to stimulate a public debate about the number of the Holocaust victims by his publications. In November, the Supreme Court upheld this decision.

Yushkov deleted the Facebook account where the above posting was made. However, the number of his antisemitic postings on VK suggests that that article on Facebook was not an accident and its purpose was far from initiating a public debate. His acquittal by the court only encouraged Yushkov to continue distributing anti-Semitic propaganda.