

**Jewish Life in FSU: an Overview**

*monthly report*

*July 2019*

July is a traditionally calm season in the post-Soviet space, a period of summer vacations. There were only few important events related to the Jewish life during the mounth.

**Early elections to the Ukrainian parliament**

**●** On **July 21,** early elections to the *Verkhovna Rada* (Parliament) were held in Ukraine.

In Ukraine, half of MPs are elected by party lists (the electoral barrier is 5%), another half – in territorial majoritarian districts.

As expected, the majority of the elected MPs belong to the pro-presidential party *Sluga narodu* (Servant of the People). For the first time in the Ukrainian political history the leading party even don’t have to look for a partner to form a parliamental coalition and a government.

The personal composition of the parliament is significantly updated. Some Mps, who were active members of the Jewish community, in particular, Hrygory Logvinsky, were not re-elected. Some others Jewish MPs were re-elected. For example, the president of the Ukrainian Jewish Committee, the businessman Olexander Feldman from Kharkiv, was again elected to parliament in a territorial majoritarian district.

Far Right national-radical political forces took part in the elections. Technically, a number of groups were uniting into the list of the All-Ukrainian Association *Svoboda* (Freedom) political party. Many party candidates were previously spotted in anti-Semitic rhetoric. It should be noted that anti-Semitism has ceased to be important in the ideology and propaganda of *Svoboda* and the groups united with the party during recent years. Most of the recorded anti-Semitic statements of the candidates were made 5-7 years ago. (http://jewseurasia.org/page18/news64177.html)

*Svoboda* party received 2.25% of the vote and did not overcome the electoral barrier.

Despite the merger, the Right radicals received significantly less support than at the parliamentary elections in 2014. Five years ago, 4.71% of voters had supported *Svoboda*. Another 1.8% of the vote was received by another national radical party, the *Pravyi Sector* (Right Sector) in 2014. This time *Pravyi Sector* merged with *Svoboda* to run on the same list. Today the national radicals can not even dream of the *Svoboda*’s result in 2012 (10.44% of the vote).

In 2014, six *Svoboda* candidates were elected to the parliament in single-member constituencies. Also, the *Pravyi Sector leader* Dmytro Yarosh and former Azov regiment commander Andrii Biletsky (now he is the leader of the *Nazional’nyi Corpus* (National Corps) party, got into parliament constituencies, as well as a number of others national radical candidates. This time, Dmytro Yarosh and Andrii Biletsky were not re-elected.

This year, only one candidate from *Svoboda* perty got into parliament. Oksana Savchuk was elected in a single-mandate constituency in the Ivano-Frankivsk region. Previously, she was the secretary of the Ivano-Frankivsk City Council. As far as I know, she never made any kind of xenophobic statements.

Other national-radical parties were unable to hold a single representative to the *Verkhovna Rada*.

Thus, the election results clearly demonstrated the decline of the Ukrainian Right-wing political forces.

**Israel and the post-Soviet countries**

● On **July 11**, the Ukrainian parliament ratified an agreement on Free trade zone with Israel.

(http://jewseurasia.org/page6/news64253.html)

● On **July 11–12,** Israeli Interior Minister Arie Deri visited Ukraine. He met with President Vladimir Zelensky, Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine Arsen Avakov, and visited the Jewish community center in the city of Dnieper.

(http://djc.com.ua/news/view/new/?id=21690)

The main purpose of the visit was an attempt to resolve the Israeli-Ukrainian crisis of a visa-free regime.

On **July 11**, Arie Deri and his Ukrainian counterpart Arsen Avakov signed a declaration on intensification of cooperation. It should reduce the number of refusals to cross the border and improve the treatment of those who were still not allowed to enter into the country.

(https://mvs.gov.ua/ua/news/22217\_MVS\_Ukraini\_ta\_Izrailyu\_pidpisali\_Deklaraciyu\_pro\_intensifikaciyu\_spivrobitnictva.htm)

Recently, Israel began to subject additional checks at the airport a significant number of Ukrainian citizens entering the country by the visa-free regime, which has been in effect since 2011. A lot of Ukrainians were sent back. The Israeli Ministry of Interior motivates its actions with the desire to prevent the entry of foreigners planning to violate the regime of stay, to work illegally or to stay longer than the period stipulated by a visa-free agreement. However, the actions of border officials do not look professional. Numerous complaints have been recorded of improper treatment of Ukrainian citizens, unmotivated detentions and deportations as well. It can be confidently stated that the deportations were completely arbitrary. It got to the point that the mayor of Kyiv, Vitaliy Klitschko, and the Minister of Education of Ukraine, Lily Grinevich, were subjected to additional checks at the entrance .

The number of Ukrainians who were denied from crossing the border in 2017 – 2019 constantly increasing.

At the beginning of this year, Ukraine raised the issue of breaking the visa-free regime in view of the fact that Israel has clearly ceased to comply with its conditions. In addition, checks were initiated of Israelis entering at the Kyiv airport. Some of Israelis were not allowed to enter into the country also.

Israel is clearly striving to achieve mutual understanding with the Ukrainian side on the eve of the annual autumn pilgrimage of religious Israelis to Uman on Rosh Hashanah (the new year according to the Jewish religious calendar). Since repeated early elections will be held in Israel in September, the government is clearly ready to make an effort to demonstrate to the disciplined ultra-orthodox voter that ше cares about protecting his interests (Arie Deri is a leader of the religious ultra-orthodox *Shas* political party).

● At the **end of July**, it became known that the Israeli ambassador to Russia, Harry Koren, was finishing his work (https://jewish.ru/ru/news/articles/190254/). Harry Koren has represented the Jewish State in Moscow since early 2017.

During this period, the relations between Israel and Russia were more intense than ever, although it is difficult to call those relations cloudless. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with Russian President Vladimir Putin more often than with any other world leader. The need for contacts at the highest level is caused, of course, by the mutual desire of both countries to avoid confrontation in Syria.

The Russian intervention in 2015 actually ensured the victory (or at least a significant military advantage) of the coalition of pro-Assad forces. This coalition includs the most serious and consistent enemies of Israel – the Islamic Republic of Iran and its proxy forces, like Hezbollah. Israel occasionally attacks the Iranian terrorist infrastructure in Syria. Russia has supplied the Assad regime with its most advanced air defense systems. However, as far as one can judge, Russian air defense systems are powerless against Israeli attacks. Moreover, in September last year, after one of the Israeli attacks against the Syrian forces, a Russian plane was mistakenly shot down. The incident led to a serious crisis in Russian-Israeli relations.

**Community life**

● On **July 5**, Lithuanian foreign minister Linas Linkevičius awarded a Foreign Ministry award called the Star of Lithuanian Diplomacy to Lithuanian Jewish Community chairwoman Faina Kukliansky July 5.

The Lithuanian Foreign Ministry’s highest award was bestowed on chairwoman Kukliansky in recognition of her active involvement in organizing international dialogue and important agreements, cooperation between the LJC and Foreign Ministry, her contribution to making the Goodwill Law a reality and the active involvement of the LJC under her leadership in projects at Lithuanian diplomatic offices.

(https://www.lzb.lt/ru/2019/07/06/%d0%bc%d0%b8%d0%b4-%d0%bb%d0%b8%d1%82%d0%b2%d1%8b-%d0%b2%d1%80%d1%83%d1%87%d0%b8%d0%bb-%d0%b2%d1%8b%d1%81%d0%be%d0%ba%d1%83%d1%8e-%d0%b4%d0%b8%d0%bf%d0%bb%d0%be%d0%bc%d0%b0%d1%82%d0%b8%d1%87%d0%b5/)

● On **July 31**, in Mykolaiv (Ukraine) the city council announced that the Jewish religious and cultural center would appear near the local synagogue. A new four-story Jewish center will appear on the corner of Spasskaya and Schneerson streets.

(https://jewishnews.com.ua/society/novyij-evrejskij-czentr-vozvedut-v-nikolaeve)

**Arts & Humanities**

● On **July 1–6**, the seminar *Jews in Siberia: History and Cultural Heritage* was held in Omsk. The event was organized by the *Sefer* Center, which is the leading professional organization of university teachers and researchers on Jewish Studies in the post-Soviet space.

(https://sefer.ru/rus/education/educational\_programmes/Summer/evrei\_v\_sibiri.php)

●On **July 2–7,** the annual workshop History of the Holocaust in Ukraine: study, teaching, memory was held in Lutsk.

The workshop was organized by the Ukrainian Center for the Holocaust Studies in cooperation with the Yad Vashem memorial (Jerusalem) and with the support of the Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine (Vaad of Ukraine).

(https://www.facebook.com/pg/uhcenter/photos/?tab=album&album\_id=2413971601995468)

●On **July 7–14,** Ukraine hosted the International Conference "The Hasidic Experience – Literature, Tale and Melody." Different events in frames of the conference were held in Uman, Medzhibozh and Berdichev.

The conference was initiated by the The Rabbi Levi Itzchak of Berdichev Cathedra of Hassidism Research, Bar Ilan University (Israel).

Among the organizers also were: the Ukrainian and Israel Center for Education, Science and Culture of Pavlo Tychnya Uman State Pedagogical University; the Department of Near Eastern & Judaic Studies, Brandeis University; the Rabbinical School, Hebrew College; the Taube Center for Jewish Studies of Stanford University; the International Center for Research of the History and Cultural Heritage of the Central and Eastern European Jews and the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin.

The Conference was an important scholar event.

(http://jewseurasia.org/page6/news64330.html)

● On July 14–16, *Sefer* Center for University Teaching of Jewish Civilization held the Twenty-sixth Annual International Conference on Jewish Studies in Moscow.

The conference was dedicated to the 70th birthday of Rashid Kaplanov, one of the founders of the *Sefer* Center.

The conference program includes sections reflecting the different fields of Jewish Stidies (Biblical and Talmudic studies, Jewish thought, Jewish history of various periods, Judeo-Christian relations, the Holocaust, Israel studies, languages ​​and literature, art, ethnology, demography, genealogy, museums and archives, etc.).

(https://www.sefer.ru/rus/education/international\_conferences/26conference.php)

**Kolomyia conflict**

● Throughout **July**, in Kolomyia (Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast, Ukraine), the protracted conflict between the Jewish community and the city authorities around the territory of the Jewish Memorial Cemetery lasted. The court first time sided with the Jewish community.

The conflict has a long story.

The Jewish cemetery itself has been practically destroyed since Soviet times. The land on which it is located is part of the public city garden now.

Back in 1995, the Сity Сouncil defined it as "the territory of a memorial cemetery." The Kolomyia Jewish Religious Community of the Jewish Orthodox Congregation was given the permission to improve the territory of the memorial cemetery.

Fundrising for the restoration of the cemetery took a long time. Only in 2015, the community managed to collect enough donations from private philanthropists from different countries. The project was prepared and a work began. The territory of the garden (former cemetery) was blocked. Along the paths, the installation of “memory walls” began, on which the preserved fragments of matzevot — tombstones — were placed. They were found in the city around 1300. In Soviet times, they paved courtyards and streets.

(http://jewseurasia.org/page16/news52732)

Restricting access to the park caused a wave of discontent among the townspeople. A large sign in Hebrew near the enterence was also irritating, and work in the cemetery itself also, in particular, accompanied by felling of trees. Opponents of the reconstruction project, which was initiated by the Jewish community, argue that in 1991 the territory of the cemetery was recognized as a monument of history and culture, so, for any construction work permission is required not only from the City Council, but also from the Ministry of Culture. The Jewish community did not have the last one.

(https://gluzd.org.ua/special\_projects/1619/)

The confrontation between the Jewish community and the townspeople led to the fact that Jewish objects in the territory of the cemetery several times were desecrated by the vandals. Several young people who smashed fragments of tombstones which have been prepared for the “walls of memory” in December 2015 were convicted.

The conflict escalated after in February 2017, when a group of local nationalist activists arbitrarily installed a big cross in the territory of the cemetery in memory of the Ukrainian nationalists executed by the Nazis in this place. The Jewish community demanded the dismantling of the cross, appealing for a lack of permission. (https://kurs.if.ua/news/yevreyska\_gromada\_kolomyi\_sudytsya\_z\_miskoyu\_vladoyu\_cherez\_hrest\_na\_yudeyskomu\_tsvyntari\_68801.html/)

The community leader questioned the very fact that there were any executions at the territory of the cemetery. The city authorities tried to offer compromise options for resolving the conflict (moving the cross to another place, reburial of the alleged remains of Ukraine’s independence fighters), but both sides of the conflict rejected the proposals.

Since May 2018, all work in the garden has stopped. The City Council forbade the Jewish community from even engaging in garbage collection and cutting shrubs.

On September 6, 2018, the Сity Сouncil recognized the former territory of the cemetery as a “memorial garden” and began to develop a municipal project for its improvement. In fact, the City Council took the cemetery from the Jewish community. The community tried to appeal this decision in court. On February 20, 2019, the Ivano-Frankivsk District Administrative Court dismissed the claim.

(https://versii.if.ua/novunu/memorialniy-skver-chi-kladovishhe-sud-ne-zadovolniv-pozov-yevreyskoyi-gromadi-kolomiyi-video/)

On **July 1**, the Lviv Administrative Court of Appeal upheld the claim of the Jewish community and overturned the September decision of the Kolomyia City Council on changing the status of the cemetery.

During the trial, opponents of the Jewish community made anti-Semitic statements.

(https://detaly.co.il/krest-na-evrejskom-kladbishhe/)

Some local inhabitants reacted sharply negatively to the court decision. On social networks, comments were often anti-Semitic.

(https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\_fbid=859721947717641&id=100010395308161)

Obviously, the conflict will continue.

**Manifestations of Antisemitism**

● In the early morning of **July 15**, an email arrived to the Central Kyiv Brodsky Synagogue stating that there is “a home-made mercury bomb” in the building. The notice was accompanied by anti-Semitic abuse and threats. The sender's email address was signed by the name of Dmitry Yarosh, the former leader of the Ukrainian nationalist movement *Pravyi Sector* (despite the fact that the letter was written in Russian). The bomb was not found in the building, but the synagogue had to be closed from visitors for the whole day. The synagogue headman Joseph Asman, on his Facebook page, noted that the police came to the mine-calling call in no less than an hour. (https://www.facebook.com/yosef.azman/posts/10219667783033562)

In May, a similar false message about mining was already sent via e-mail of the same synagogue. Then the letter was sent from the email address “Motorola Terorist” (“Motorola” was the nickname of one of the Russian field commanders in the Donbass who was killed in 2016).

● On the morning of **July 21**, in Krivyi Rih (Ukraine, Sicheslavskaya oblast) an unknown man threw three stones brought with him in a bag into the facade of the synagogue building. He has broke the glass on the front door. National police officers detained a 33-year-old man. As it turned out, he was suffering from a mental disorder and has been registered in a psychiatric hospital previously.

The crime was officially qualified as a “hooliganism.” (https://youtu.be/j-G\_c364688)

● On **July 27**, mass protests were held in Moscow. Activists protest the denial of the opposition parties to participate in local elections. The police used obviously disproportionate force. Thousands of participants in peaceful assemblies were brutally beaten and arrested.

From the materials published on the website of the *Zavtra* newspaper, the reader should have had the impression that the Jews stood behind the organization of the rallies. They supposedly want to arrange a *Maidan* in Russia, like in Ukraine previously.

(http://zavtra.ru/events/novaya\_popitka\_moskovskogo\_majdana\_znakomie\_syuzheti\_znakomie\_fizionomii)

The heading of one of these articles, published on the eve of the next rally, in the first days of August already, was “Before the Shabbat Dances”.

(http://zavtra.ru/events/prokuratura\_i\_politciya\_preduprezhdayut\_sledstvennij\_komitet\_trollit).

**Holocaust memory**

● On **July 2**, a monument to Holocaust victims was erected in the Belarusian city of Senno at the site of the execution of 965 local Jews. (https://vkurier.by/176426)

● On **July 8**, a memorial dedicated to the escape of Jews from the Navahrudak ghetto was opened in Navahrudak (Belarus).

Large-scale escape from the ghetto was a rare event during the war. At the same time, a significant part of the fugitives from the Navahrudak ghetto have survived, joining the Jewish partisan detachment led by the Belsky brothers.

It is noteworthy that the most of budget of the memorial was donated by son-in-law and adviser to US President Donald Trump Jared Kushner. His ancestors were among those who survived from Navahrudak.

(https://sputnik.by/society/20190708/1041946383/V-Novogrudke-otkryli-pamyatnik-dengi-na-kotoryy-vydelil-svoyak-Trampa.html)

● On **July 19**, the Synagogue Square Memorial was unveiled in Jurbarkas (Lithuania). The monument is dedicated to the Jewish community of the city, and to the Righteous, who saved Jews from imminent death during the Second World War also.

(https://www.lzb.lt/ru/2019/07/21/%d0%b2-%d1%8e%d1%80%d0%b1%d0%b0%d1%80%d0%ba%d0%b0%d1%81%d0%b5-%d0%be%d1%82%d0%ba%d1%80%d1%8b%d1%82-%d0%bc%d0%b5%d0%bc%d0%be%d1%80%d0%b8%d0%b0%d0%bb-%d1%81%d0%b8%d0%bd%d0%b0%d0%b3%d0%be%d0%b3%d0%b0/)

● On **July 25**, a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust was opened in Sadgor (outskirts of Chernivtsi). The ceremony was attended by the Israeli ambassador to Ukraine, the leadership of the Chernivtsi region, and representatives of the Jewish community.

(https://www.facebook.com/cvODA/posts/1073423002865737).

● On **July 27**, Vilnius city authorities removed a plaque dedicated to Jonas Noreika installed on one of the buildings in 2015.

At the end of World War II, Jonas Noreika was imprisoned by the Nazis in a concentration camp. In 1945 – 1947 he opposed the Soviet occupation and was shot. But J. Noreika was accused of participating in the organization of the Holocaust in Lithuania in the first year of the war also. The installation of the memorial plaque provoked protests.

(http://jewseurasia.org/page6/news64422.html; http://9tv.co.il/news/2019/07/28/273201.html)

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