

**Jewish Life in FSU: an Overview**

*monthly report*

*January 2020*

*By Vyacheslav Likhachev*

*The most important events of the month were related to the commemorative ceremonies dedicated to the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. January, 27 was the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp. Technically, the main ceremonies took place outside the post-Soviet space, in Israel and Poland. But they were extremely important for the Jewish communities of Russia and Ukraine. The main discussions about the events as well as the most strong massages in the leaders’ speeches were actually part of the specific post-Soviet political context. Despite the obvious noble task to unite leaders from all over the world arounf the memory of the victims, the events already on the stage of preparation became scandalous.*

*In addition, bilateral Russian-Israeli relations were in the focus of attention in January also. First of all, because of the wide resonance of the “case of Naama Issahar”. Israel made extraordinary efforts to satisfy all the whims of the Kremlin, and Naama Issahar, de-facto captured by Moscow as a hostage, was able to return home.*

**Holocaust Memory and Political Conflicts**

● On **January 23**, the *Remembering the Holocaust, Fighting Antisemitism* Conference, organized by the *World Holocaust Forum Foundation* in cooperation with the *Yad Vashem World Holocaust Remembrance Center,* was held in Jerusalem.

The event was held on a grand scale. It is enough to say that the Conference was visited by the larger number of heads of state than ever before for any reason gathered at the same time in Jerusalem.

([https://moshekantor.com/ru/%d1%81%d0%be%d0%b1%d1%8b%d1%82%d0%b8%d1%8f/20481/](https://moshekantor.com/ru/%D1%81%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%8B%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%8F/20481/) or <https://www.yadvashem.org/events/24-january-2020.html>)

Technically, the Conference was a memorial ceremony. But, in addition, of course, it was also an important political event. A correct interpretation of the outcome of the Conference is possible only taking into account the wide context, which was affected by a variety of factors.

For Israeli domestic affairs, the most important was the context of the elections. Strong position on the foreign arena is an important element of the image of the current Prime Minister. Benjamin Netanyahu succeeded to show that Israel enjoys an attention and a respect of the world leaders. Thereby he strengthened its own positions and the rating of his “party in power”. Another important plot for Benjamin Netanyahu in the pre-election context was an attempt to earn points as the savior of the young Israeli woman, convicted in Russia, Naama Issahar (see our November review), whose fate was in the hands of Vladimir Putin. The latter aspect made it possible to explain for the Israelis why the ceremony, formally dedicated to the memory of the victims of the Holocaust, in reality turns into a personal benefit performance of the Russian President.

As a result, Benjamin Netanyahu received this election gift from Vladimir Putin. But later. In late January, returning from the United States after discussing the *deal of the century* plan, the Israeli Prime Minister paid a fleeting visit to Moscow and took Naama Issahar home. She was pardoned by the Russian President.

(<https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-51307206>)

The press discussed different versions of the conditions under which Vladimir Putin agreed to help Benjamin Netanyahu. Basically, the assumptions concerned the Alexander Nevsky Compound in the Old City of Jerusalem. In January, it became known that the Israeli Real Estate and Land Registry Office unexpectedly transferred control of this Church building to the Kremlin Russian Orthodox Church. Previously, Israel recognized the Russian Orthodox Society of the Holy Land as the legal owner of the Alexander Compound. It owned the building of the Alexander Nevsky church for almost a hundred years. Earlier, Moscow repeatedly raised the issue of transferring a favorably located church to the Kremlin-controlled church.

(<https://www.currenttime.tv/a/issachar-and-church-property/30392332.html>)

But back to the Jerusalem *Remembering the Holocaust, Fighting Antisemitism* Forum.

The conflicts that unfolded around the Conference in the post-Soviet space and in Eastern Europe are of primary interest of our review.

The fact that Vladimir Putin became the main beneficiary of the Conference is obvious. Less obvious is that the Conference, in fact, was organized specially for him.(<http://hadashot.kiev.ua/content/putin-v-ierusalime-kak-holokost-iz-istorii-politikoy-stal>)

The President and creator of the World Holocaust Forum Foundation, which initiated the conference, is Vyacheslav Kantor. He is a Russian businessman, a billionaire and the President of the European Jewish Congress. Since 2005, the World Holocaust Forum Foundation has held five memorial conferences (the first four were called *Let My People Live!* World Forums). <https://worldholocaustforum.org/> Vyacheslav Kantor was mentioned in the sanction list of Russian oligarchs published by the US Treasury. (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-treasurys-putin-list-features-jewish-billionaires/>)

Since its inception in 2005, the Forum has been conceived as a platform for instrumentalization of the memory of the Holocaust for propaganda purposes. The Ukrainian *Orange Revolution* in late 2004 has frightened the Russian authorities. Vladimir Putin looked for new sources of ideological legitimacy. One of the most important areas of propaganda efforts on strengthening positions of Kremlin regime was the politics of memory. The ideological foundation of those efforts, in turn, was the memory of the Second World War, or the Great Patriotic War, as they continue to talk about it in Russia according to the Soviet standard. For Vyacheslav Kantor, providing Vladimir Putin with a profitable international platform has always been the main task in his “commemoriall” activities. So, in 2015, after armed aggression against Ukraine and the occupation of Ukrainian territory, the Polish authorities refused to invite the Russian President to take part in events dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. (<https://tsn.ua/ru/analitika/putin-evrei-i-yubilei-408198.html>) Moshe Kantor was forced to admonish and to organize the next conference specially for Vladimir Putin in the Czech Republic, where the authorities were more sympathetic towards the Kremlin.

This year's Jerusalem Forum was of particular importance to Putin.

It was assumed that 2020 should be the culmination of the Kremlin's instrumentalization of the memory of the war. Domestically, in Russia itself, the promotion of hysteria over the semi-anniversary year began in advance. “In order to preserve historical memory and in honor of the 75th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War”, 2020 was declared the Year of Memory and Glory in Russia (<https://xn--2020-k4dg3e.xn--p1ai/>).

Domestically, these measures were aimed at creating a common feeling of a patriotic enthusiasm. As far as one can assume, this artificial consolidation of the people was intended to provide massive support for the antidemocratic changes to the Constitution. Those changes are necessary for Vladimir Putin to be able to continue to rule the country. In turn, in order to maintain exaltation around the construction of the memory of the war, a ban on “diminishing the significance of the people's deed in protecting the fatherland” should have been added to the Constitution. Also, according to amendments to the Constitution, the “right and duty” of the state to “protect the historical truth” is established. The Kremlin, in its own version, has to defend it mainly on the foreign policy front. Those whom Russia decides to consider its adversary (Ukraine, the Baltic countries, most recently Poland also) are accused of trying to "a revision of the outcome of World War II."

In addition, in the foreign policy arena, Moscow used the theme of historical memory in order to impose to the international society the Kremlin’s perception of the Soviet Union and Russia as its successors once again (incidentally, a corresponding amendment to the Constitution was also proposed by Vladimir Putin). The Kremlin is confident that the whole world should be grateful to the USSR for the victory over Nazism. At the same time, according to Vladimir Putin, Russia would have won the Second World War even without Ukraine (<https://youtu.be/K0FJge8nDxM>). Due to this privatization of the symbolic capital of the “winner over the Nazism” by Moscow, all of its foreign policy opponents are associated in the Kremlin’s propaganda, respectively, with the Nazis, even if we are talking about Ukraine. Speculation on the subject of Holocaust victims helps to adapt Kremlin theses to Western interpretations of the lessons of World War II.

Of course, the image of Russia as the winner of Nazism helps to increase the country's prestige in the international arena. It is extremely important for Russia. The country that has been under sanctions because of the aggression against Ukraine since 2014. The memory of the WWII has become a tool for breaking the informal diplomatic blockade of Russia. True, the COVID-19 pandemic thwarted the plans to invite world leaders to the Victory Parade in Moscow in May, 9. But in January, when nothing had portended such a dramatic change yet, Vladimir Putin diligently spun the flywheel of speculation on memory issues to enhance Russia's prestige in the foreign arena.

On the eve of the new year, the *Russia in Global Affairs* journal, which close to the Kremlin, published the materials of the round table discussion *Historical memory is a space where political tasks are being tackled*. The theses that the analysts formulated for the Kremlin are quite frank in their cynicism. One of the leading Russian historians, Alexey Miller, urged to think in the categories of “memory wars.” He lamented that Russia does not know very well who its potential allies in these wars are, who are irreconcilable enemies. However, for Alexey Miller one “natural ally” of Russia was obvious – it is Israel. “In January, Putin goes to Israel – the monument to the victims of the blockade of Leningrad is open there. It is a very important step, because the blockade is placed on the same podium with the victims of the Holocaust."

(<https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/istoricheskaya-pamyat-eshhe-odno-prostranstvo-gde-reshayutsya-politicheskie-zadachi/> ) Fedor Gaida, associate professor of the History Department of Moscow State University, echoed him: "our main ally – yes, it is Israel."

Alexey Miller called the upcoming (at that time) visit of Vladimir Putin to Israel “striking”. The year of 2020 -for him was a “turning point” in the field of memory policy.

Russia's "main natural ally" played up to the Kremlin in its "memory wars" as much as possible.

The Holocaust Forum was preceded by the opening ceremony of a *Candle of Remembrance* monument in honor of the heroic residents and defenders of the besieged Leningrad in the Gan Saker Jerusalem central park (technically, on the dog’s playground, so the city residents protested against, see: https://www.vesty.co.il/ articles / 0.7340, L-5655361.00.html). The opening of such a monument in the context of the largest international Holocaust remembrance ceremony created the context most convenient for promoting the Kremlin narrative – in full accordance with the recommendations of A. Miller. Vladimir Putin in his speech equated “antisemitism” and “russophobia” in the context of the memory of the WWII (http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62642). Such a statement could be regarded as Holocaust relativism on the verge of revisionism (which is diminishing the significance and uniqueness of the tragedy of European Jewry). But, in this case, Israeli officials applauded the Russian President without a shadow of embarrassment. Benjamin Netanyahu played along with Vladimir Putin as best he could at the opening ceremony. In particular, he called the siege of Leningrad “one of the most monstrous events of recent history”, and urged never to forget “the enormous contribution of the Soviet Union, its people and Red Army soldiers to the eradication of the Nazi monster and the salvation of the world from a terrible tragedy.”

 (https://www.facebook.com/netanyahurus/photos/a.906743896012061/2923440137675750)

The monument was erected with the financial support of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress Israeli *amutah* (NGO) and its president Mikhail Mirilashvili. This organization, unjustifiably claiming continuity with respect to the continental association of the same name (but “Eurasian” in Russian, without a hyphen), has been consistently promoting the pro-Kremlin propaganda since 2017.

(https://eajc.org/%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b5%d0%b7%d0%b8%d0%b4%d0%b5%d0%bd%d1%82%d1%8b- % d1% 80% d0% be% d1% 81% d1% 81% d0% b8% d0% b8-% d0% b8-% d0% b8% d0% b7% d1% 80% d0% b0% d0% b8 % d0% bb% d1% 8f-% d0% be% d1% 82% d0% ba% d1% 80% d1% 8b% d0% bb% d0% b8-% d0% bc /)

After the opening ceremony, the monument continued standing in the middle of a littered wasteland for a long time.

 (https://www.facebook.com/groups/384312395514079/permalink/547170315894952/)

The *Remembering the Holocaust, Fighting Antisemitism* meeting, which took place on the same day, began with the screening of documentaries prepared by the *Holocaust Remembrance Forum*. A few days after the event, a scandal erupted around these films. *Yad Vashem* director Dan Mihman posted a statement on the *World Holocaust Remembrance Center’s* website (https://www.yadvashem.org/blog/clarification-regarding-the-videos-presented-during-the-fifth-world-holocaust-forum.html) and *Haaretz* newspaper also. On behalf of *Yad Vashem* he apologized for distorting the history of the WWII in favor of the Soviet Union in the video materials. (https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-yad-vashem-apologizes-for-historical-error-at-world-holocaust-forum-1.8481112)

Then, Vyacheslav Kantor spoke at the opening of the Forum. He drew attention to the significant increase in antisemitism in Western Europe. He cited Russia as a positive example, where allegedly “thanks to the uncompromising policy that has been applied for many years against antisemitism”, “the lowest level of antisemitism” is recorded. (<https://republic.ru/posts/95870>)

After this warm-up, Vladimir Putin himself addressed the world leaders gathered as extras. The emphasis in his speech was predictably placed on the role of the Red Army and the “Soviet people”, which “defended their Fatherland and brought liberation from Nazism in Europe.” The privatization of the symbolic capital of the victory over Nazism, completely unjustified from a historical point of view, was supplemented by Vladimir Putin with the development of his relativistic thesis regarding the Holocaust itself. When the Russian President finally mentioned the Holocaust (after describing the feat of soldiers and officers of the Red Army) he defined it as “targeted destruction of people”, omitting the ethnicity of the people, and added that Nazis claimed that the Russians were “subhuman” also. The Nazis, according to Vladimir Putin, allegedly prepared to the “Slaves and other nations” “the same fate” (in context, it was understood, “the same as the Jews”, but the word “Jews” was not spoken in the Russian President’s speech).

 (<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/page/13>)

It should be said noted that, despite the Putin’s completely shameless manipulation theses, the event wes extremely successful for him in general.

The Jerusalem forum was preceded by a scandal that began in December, 2019. It was related to incorrect statements by Vladimir Putin against Poland. (See our December review.) Due to the fact that the organizers of the Jerusalem event with Vladimir Putin as a main speaker, refused to give a right to speak to the President of Poland, Andrzej Duda, he chose to decline the invitation at all. The leaders of Lithuania and Estonia followed the Polish example, also rejecting the Israeli proposal. Until the last moment, there were rumors that the Ukrainian President Volodymir Zelensky would also refuse the invitation. However, the Ukrainian President chose a more complex line of behavior. He arrived in Israel on the eve of the Forum, but he did not attend the ceremony. According to the official explanation, the Ukrainian president found out that many of the Holocaust survivors who wanted to take part in the event were denied by the organizers, citing a lack of seats. Volodymir Zelensky and the entire Ukrainian delegation stated that they are handing over their invitation cards to Israelis, immigrants from Ukraine who survived the Holocaust. It should be noted that some Israeli politicians have declared their intention to hand over their invitation cards to the Holocaust survivors.

(https://jewish.org.ua/prezident-ukrainy-vladimir-zelenskij-ustupil-mesto-na-ceremonii-lyudyam-perezhivshim-xolokost)

Apparently, it was already impossible to ensure the participation of these people because of logistic reasons. The seats of the Ukrainian delegation at the ceremony were empty. But in the end, the move of Volodymir Zelensky was successful. With his humanly act, he gathered the sympathies of the liberal anti-Putin part of the Israeli and world public. At the same time held a number of important bilateral meetings with Israeli leaders and business representatives. Volodymir Zelensky managed to stand out against the background of the "crowd" from world politicians who humbly listened to Putin. And he did not look scandalous as the Polish President refused to participate in the Forum from the very beginning.

● Poland, meanwhile, held its own traditional commemorative ceremony directly on the day of the liberation of Auschwitz and International Holocaust Remembrance Day. The *World Jewish Congress* was a partner of the Polish government in organizing the event.

The ceremony was held on **January 27** in Krakow. In particular, Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky spoke at it. In his speech, he mentioned the "conspiracy of totalitarian regimes," which "led to the outbreak of WWII and allowed the Nazis to launch the deadly flywheel of the Holocaust." (https://youtu.be/rRahVeAL7Tw)

Russia reacted to the ceremony in Poland in extremely painful way. Alexander Boroda, the Chairman of the most servile Russian Jewish organization, the *Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia*, said that in general “it’s time to stop remembering the Holocaust in Auschwitz”. “The tradition of coming to Poland on the occasion of Holocaust Remembrance Day is wrong,” he said.

(<https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2020/01/24/lider-evreev-rossiipora-prekrashchat-vspominat-holokost-v-osvencime> )

A sharp criticism in the Russian media was subjected to Volodymir Zelensky particularly. It seems that Russia hoped that the new Ukrainian president would play along with the Kremlin on the field of memory politics. However, the behavior of the Ukrainian leader, among other factors, spoiled the January Russian triumphal offensive on all fronts of the "war of memory."

**Relations with Israel**

In addition to speculation around the memory of the victims of the Holocaust and the deal about the Kremlin hostage Naamu Issahar, some other notable events took place in the relations of the post-Soviet countries with Israel also.

● On **January 2**, an agreement about the new *EastMed* gas pipeline was signed by Israel, Greece and Cyprus in Athens. It is assumed that gas will be supplied to Southern Europe primarily from the *Leviathan* field, located in the Eastern Mediterranean on a shelf under Israeli jurisdiction.(<http://newsru.co.il/finance/02jan2020/energean311.html>; <https://mnenia.zahav.ru/Articles/12769/soglashenie_o_gazoprovode_ukreplyaet_otnoshenie_s_kiprom>)

Almost simultaneously, on **January 8**, an official ceremony was launched to launch the *Turkish Stream* gas pipeline. The Russian gas will be delivered to Southern Europe bypassing Ukraine through the *Turkish Stream*. (http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62553) Russian gas has already gone to Bulgaria via the *Turkish Stream* since December 31, 2019, before the official launch of the pipeline. (<https://ria.ru/20200101/1563058200.html>)

Those two gas pipelines are competing projects. It will take years to build *EastMed* and launch gas deliveries from *Leviathan*. As it is planned now, the pipeline will reach full design capacity in seven years. But it is clear already that the Israeli-Cypriot-Greek consortium poses a significant economic threat to the Russian-Turkish gas transportation union. As it is estimated, the volume of East Mediterranean deposits is sufficient to satisfy all European gas needs. Ankara has repeatedly declared that it has ambitions to defend the interests of the unrecognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which also claims to have a piece of its shelf. Pessimists fear that Turkey will not stop even before provoking an armed clash over deposits in the Mediterranean Sea.

Obviously, from the strategic perspective of an economic and infrastructure development, Israel finds itself in one geopolitical bloc, and Russia in another. A confrontation is entirely possible between them, due to a real economic interest. It is possible that this explains the numerous signals of the end of 2019, indicating the deterioration of Russian-Israeli relations.

Curious, that the improvement of Russian-Israeli relations by the end of January 2020 was followed by a serious aggravation of Russian-Turkish relations in February.

● In early January, Ukraine withdrew from the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. The Committee enjoyed a reputation as anti-Israeli. The decision was made by the Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky.

(<https://lechaim.ru/news/ukraina-vyshla-iz-antiizrailskogo-palestinskogo-komiteta-oon/> )

*In January, issues of the historical memory again became a source of problems in Ukrainian-Israeli relations. Perhaps we can say that the dispute has reached a new level.*

● On **January 2**, the Israeli Ambassador to Ukraine Joel Lion, and the Polish Ambassador to Ukraine Bartosz Cichocki issued a joint statement in which they “noted with concern and sadness that authorities at various levels, including the Lviv Regional Council and the Kyiv City State Administration, are still celebrating historical events and personalities that need to be condemned once and for all.” The Ambassadors meant the perpetuating the memory of the leaders of the Ukrainian nationalist movement of the first half of the XX century – Andrii Melnik, Ivan Lipa, Yuri Lipa and Stepan Bandera. According to the Ambassadors, they believe "that the perpetuation of the persons who actively promoted ethnic cleansing is insulting and leads to the opposite desired outcome in the fight against antisemitism."

 (<https://kijow.msz.gov.pl/uk/news/wydarz_polit/oswiadczenie_ambasadorow_u> )

Such statements (or simply posts on social networks) Joel Lion and Bartosz Cichocki allowed themselves previously, but an official joint statement they made for he first time. The Ukrainian side, in turn, for the first time did not leave such a demarche of the Ambassadors without an attention. B. Cichocki was invited to talk to the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

(<https://zn.ua/POLITICS/mid-vyzval-posla-polshi-iz-za-slov-o-bandere-341422_.html>)

Ukrainian officials haven’t called J. Lion on the carpet, but on **January 9** the Ukrainian Ambassador to Israel Hennady Nadolenko had a meeting at the Israeli Foreign Ministry. According to a press release from the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry, he “has stated to the Israeli side the position on a counterproductive public discussion held by the Israeli Ambassador to Ukraine on the internal issues of the Ukrainian politics” (<https://israel.mfa.gov.ua/news/76902-ambassador-of-ukraine-hnadolenko-brought-to-the-attention-of-the-israeli-side-the-ukrainian-position-on-the-public-debate-held-by-ambassador-of-israel-to-ukraine-on-internal-issues-of-u>).

On **January 13**, the Israeli Foreign Ministry criticized the Ukrainian memory policy for the first time. Previously, only the Ambassador Joel Lion, who has been working in Kyiv since the end of 2018, has expressed his dissatisfaction. (The most important and controversial processes have taken place in the Ukrainian official memory policy during the cadence of his predecessor, the Ambassador Eli Belotserkovsky, but he did not allow himself any kind of critisism).

The statement by the Israeli Foreign Ministry, published in Russian, stated that "those who was responsible for the murders of Jews during the Holocaust and pogroms, as well as antisemitic ideologists of the Ukrainian national movement, have recently become the object of public worship in Ukraine," and condemned "this phenomena."

(<https://mfa.gov.il/MFARUS/PressRoom/2020/Pages/MFA-condemns-public-glorification-of-individuals-responsible-for-the-murder-of-Jews-and-antisemitic-ideologists-in-Ukraine.aspx> )

The next day, **January 14**, the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry issued a statement in response.

(<https://mfa.gov.ua/news/76971-zajava-mzs-ukrajini-shhodo-bezpidstavnih-zvinuvacheny-ukrajini-v-antisemitizmi>) Its content is reflected in its title: "Statement on Ukraine's baseless allegations of antisemitism." The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry proclaimed the memory of the Holocaust and the restoration of historical justice, including with regard to those who fought for the independence of the country, as an important direction of Ukrainian state policy. Discussions on this subject, according to the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry, should be conducted by historians, not politicians.

The Israeli Ambassador to Ukraine met on the same day with the director of the Ukrainian State *Institute of National Remembrance* Anton Drobovich, but no formal result was obtained from the meeting.

(<https://jewishnews.com.ua/society/posolstvo-izrailya-budet-sotrudnichat-institutom-naczpamyati-posle-sporov-o-geroyax-ukrainyi>)

With a certain degree of certainty, we can assume that the strengthening of the public anti-Ukrainian activity of the Israeli Foreign Ministry was part of Jerusalem's efforts to satisfy Moscow’s wishes.

**Holocaust Remembrance**

● On **January 16**, a memorial ceremony was held in the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) of Ukraine in memory of the victims of the Holocaust (for the first time, according to the organizers).

(<https://www.rbc.ua/ukr/news/es-proverit-torgovuyu-sdelku-ssha-kitaya-1579193563.html>)

● On **January 26** *Yellow Stars* memorial concert was held in the Great Hall of the Belarusian State Philharmonic Hall in Minsk.

(<http://gwminsk.com/news/koncert-klassicheskoy-muzyki-zheltye-zvezdy> )

● **January 27** the traditional annual Round Table on the memory of the victims of the Holocaust was hosted in Kyiv. The event was organized by the *Ukrainian Center for the Holocaust Studies*.

(<http://vaadua.org/news/vidbulosya-vidkrittya-mizhnarodnogo-kruglogo-stolu-z-pitan-pamyati-zhertv-golokostu>)

**Antisemitism**

● On the evening of **January 11**, a false message was submitted in the media and social networks about the alleged pogrom in Uman (Cherkasy *oblast’*, Ukraine). On Friday, **January 10** the *Yeshiva World* Israeli religious web-site publish the report. According to the text, about 30 Ukrainians with knives and sticks ran around the streets in search of Jews. The witness’s report stated that four Jews who were beaten near the tomb of the rabbi Nachman were hospitalized. Police, according to this information, were present at the scene, but did nothing to stop the antisemites.

(https://www.theyeshivaworld.com/news/featured/1821774/pogrom-in-uman-over-shabbos-ukrainian-thugs-attack-jews-4-evacuated-to-hospitals.html)

The next day, the National Police denied this report. According to official information, no one sought medical help. The really conflict did occur, however, none of its participants has written a statement to the police.

(https://ch.npu.gov.ua/news/oficzijno/v-umani-praczyuje-grupa-z-czentralnogo-aparatu-naczpolicziji/)

The Uman City Council informed that a meeting between the mayor, representatives of the Jewish community and law enforcement agencies was held to discuss the conflict. In particular, it was decided to ensure compliance with the order on the grave of the Nakhman River by the forces of the State Guard Service during the talks.

(https://www.facebook.com/vykonkomumr/photos/a.552407964918910/1424101481082883/)

A Statement emphasizing the domestic nature of the conflict was also made by the local community.(https://youtu.be/I3HH89vs4Qw)

According to unofficial reports, the conflict began with a personal quarrel between one of the pilgrims and the guard of the synagogue on the tomb of the rabbi Nachman. As far as it was possible to establish, there really was a skirmish of security officers and several Hasidim. By the time the police arrived, the conflict had exhausted itself. Although antisemitic statements sounded among the locals who gathered to the noise, and verbal aggression broke out between the locals and Orthodox Jews at times, but no violence was recorded.

(https://www.facebook.com/groups/UmanUA/permalink/1508685179278635/)

Unfortunately, only a few media outlets that disseminated initial information about the pogrom posted a refutation.

(https://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/Antisemitism/Four-hospitalized-after-antisemitic-mob-rampages-through-Uman-613918)

According to the *National Minority Rights Monitoring Group*, there has not been a single case of violence motivated by antisemitism registered in Ukraine since 2016.

(http://jewseurasia.org/page443)

● On **January 13**, the *United Jewish Community of Ukraine* (UJCU) published a report on the antisemitism in the country in 2019.

(https://jew.org.ua/images/pdf/AntisemitismRUS2019.pdf)

This is the second attempt by the UJCU to make an annual report on antisemitism in the country, and the last one is more successful than the previous one.

(https://jew.org.ua/images/pdf/%D0%9E%D1%82%D1%87%D0%B5%D1%82\_%D0%BF%D0%BE\_%D0%B0%D0%BD%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%B5%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%BC%D1%83\_%D0%B2\_%D0%A3%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B5.pdf)

According to the authors of the report, there was a decrease in the number of incidents compared with 2018 by almost a third. If in 2019 the UJCU recorded, as she claims, 66 cases of what the authors call “direct antisemitism,” then in 2018 the authors of the report counted 90 of such manifestations. “The decrease in the level of antisemitism” the authors of the text associate “with a change of power, due to with which the intensity of heroization of the persons who participated in the extermination of Jews and those involved in the Jewish pogroms in Ukraine decreased ”. Note that the president of UJCU is Ihor Kolomoisky, whose relations with the new leadership of the country are clearly better than they were with the previous one. Even if we leave aside doubts about the possible explanation of the allegedly fixed decrease (which is also, in fact, completely not obvious), it should be noted that according to the authors of the report themselves, in the first quarter of the year of 2019 18 cases of “direct antisemitism” were recorded and in the fourth quarter – 24 cases. In other words, regardless of whether there was a “heroization of the persons who participated in the extermination of Jews” under the previous government, and whether it ceased after its change, and whether this “heroization” affected the number of manifestations of antisemitism in real life, it is obvious that the interpretation of the dynamics of the authors of the report is in contradiction with the collected in the same factual material report.

Unfortunately, actual and methodological errors of the report made no sense to try to assess the dynamics of the number of incidents, and the interpretations are puzzling. A closer look at the incidents recorded in the report so far makes us skeptical not only of its conclusions, but also of the quantitative indicators presented in it.

However, in general, despite the comments made, it is necessary to emphasize once again the positive dynamics of the report level compared to the previous one. There is no doubt that the very fact of the attempt to monitor antisemitism in Ukraine is positive.

(<http://jewseurasia.org/page6/news65843.html>)

● On **January 18**, in Krivoy Rog (Dnepropetrovsk region, Ukraine), a 36-year-old man desecrated a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust, located near the synagogue. He painted on the inscription on the monument with red paint.

(<https://www.npu.gov.ua/news/rozshuk/policzejski-zatrimali-cholovika-yakij-u-krivomu-rozi-poshkodiv-pam-yatnik-zhertvam-golokostu-dopovneno/> )

The crime was qualified by the police as “hooliganism” first, then re-qualified to a more serious “abuse of the grave” article of the Criminal Code (http://www.djc.com.ua/news/view/new/?id=22629&lang=en). It is noteworthy that the antisemitic motive was not taken into account in qualifying the crime.

On **January 21**, a suspect in the crime was detained.

● On **January 27**, in Ostroh (Rivne *oblast’*, Ukraine) the informational stand about the Jewish history of the city was desecrated by a neo-Nazi graffiti. The stand is located on the oldest house of the town. Shmuel Eliezer HaLevi Eidels (also known as Maharsha), a renowned rabbi famous for his commentary on the Talmud, lived in this house at the beginning of the XVII century.

The inscription on the stand briefly describes the history of the Ostroh Jewish community. The unknown vandal drew a swastika and SS sign by a black marker on the stand, and also crossed out the inscriptions in Hebrew and Yiddish.

A representative of the Jewish community reported about the crime to the police.

It seems that the attacker choose the date of January 27 (the International Holocaust Remembrance Day) to commit an antisemitic act did not accidentally.

● On **January 27** on occasion of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day the Israeli Ministry of Diaspora Affairs published its Annual report on antisemitism in the world.

(<http://antisemitism.mda.gov.il/media/1810/%D7%93%D7%95%D7%97-%D7%A1%D7%95%D7%A4%D7%99-2019.pdf>)

The head of the Ministry Tzipi Hotoveli was pessimistic in her speech at the presentation of the report. “Unfortunately, there is no good news in this area,” she said. According to Ms. Hotoveli, in 2019 "there was a sharp increase in antisemitism, especially in Western countries such as the United States, Britain, France and Germany." At the same time, the report says that "in Ukraine there has been a significant decrease in the number of antisemitic incidents in general and acts of vandalism against Jewish objects in particular." “The Ukrainian authorities continue to oppose antisemitism and fight this phenomenon at all levels,” the report says.

The previous report by the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs, published a year ago, already noted a decrease in the level of antisemitism in Ukraine in 2018 compared to 2017.

(http://jewseurasia.org/page18/news62900.html)

Thus, based on the official Jerusalem data, we can talk about a stable positive trend in Ukraine, which is especially noticeable in the context of general negative dynamics all around the world as a whole.

**Humanities, Arts and Culture**

● In the last days of December 2019, the second issue of the *Judaic-Slavic Journal*, the only currently Russian-language academic periodicals on Jewish stud ies, came out in Moscow. The journal was established by the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences and it is published by the *Sefer* Center for University Teaching of Jewish Civilization (director -- Dr. Victoria Mochalova).

(<https://www.sefer.ru/eng/education/academic_journal/> )

The issue of the Journal is dedicated to the blessed memory of the Kyiv researcher Iryna Serheeva, who died in October 2019. She was head of the Jewish studies department at the Institute of Manuscripts at the Ukrainian Vernadsky National Library.

(<https://sefer.ru/rus/publications/sefer-journal-2019.pdf>)

At the same time, in 2020, the *Sefer* Center refused to hold the annual Moscow winter international Conference on Jewish studies for the first time. Since 1994 it has been held invariably in late January – early February. The next, twenty-seventh Conference on Jewish studies will be held January 31 – February 2, 2021.

● Also, on the eve of the new year, it became known about the establishment of the *Encounter* Annual Ukrainian-Jewish literary prize. The initiative was launched by the Canadian organization *Ukrainian-Jewish Encounter* (UJE). In 2020, books published in Ukrainian are accepted for the competition. According to Natalia Fedushchak, Director of Communications at UJE, “the prize will be awarded to the authors and publishers considering the relationship between Ukrainians and Jews, two peoples, coexisting for more than a millennium on the territory of modern Ukraine.” As planned, the award ceremony will be held in autumn in Lviv as part of the largest Ukrainian Book Publishers Forum.

(<https://ukrainianjewishencounter.org/en/encounter-the-ukrainian-jewish-literary-prize/>)

In the future, it is planned to alternate the award for fiction, research and journalism. In 2021, the prize will be awarded to a book written in the non-fiction genre.