

EUROPEAN JEWISH DIGEST: LOOKING AT THE HEADLINES ACROSS JEWISH EUROPE

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2014

1 / VIOLENCE IN FRANCE

November and December saw a major deterioration in the situation of Jews in France with some very disturbing and violent events. In mid-November a firebomb was thrown at a kosher bagel and sushi bar in an up-market district of Paris. The fire was quickly extinguished. Just a few hours after this attempted arson, a young Jewish teenager was assaulted outside a school in the 3rd arrondissement. According to the National Bureau for Vigilance against Antisemitism (BNVCA), the victim was wearing a kippah when a group of about 15 youths of African descent attacked him.

In early December, three armed assailants broke into an apartment in the Paris suburb of Creteil and raped a 19 year-old Jewish woman whilst physically restraining her partner. They also robbed the couple and withdrew money from a cash machine. The victims said that the attackers told them that they should not try to pretend they do not have money because they knew they were Jewish. Police managed to arrest all three of the suspected assailants and are also linking them to an attack on a 70-year-old Jewish man who was badly beaten at his Creteil home earlier in November. Moshe Kantor, President of the European Jewish Congress said “unfortunately, it appears that it is ‘open season’ on Jews in France following so many recent violent attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions going all the way back to the brutal torture and murder of Ilan Halimi.” French Prime Minister Manuel Valls tweeted “the horror in Creteil is a vile demonstration of how the fight against antisemitism is a daily battle.”

Speaking at a rally in Creteil in the wake of this brutal assault, and to protest the general rise in antisemitism, Bernard Cazeneuve, France’s Interior Minister, vowed to make the fight against antisemitism a “national cause.” He added that “the Republic will defend you with all its force because, without you, it would no longer be the Republic.” Roger Cukierman, President of CRIF, said “Jews feel in danger. Some are already leaving France.” He called on the government to do more to address the problem saying that “we feel that something has changed: it is no longer just graffiti or minor incidents. These are death threats. It cannot go on like this.”

Attacks on Jews continued throughout December. An 8-year-old girl was verbally harassed in a school near Lyon for being Jewish by two fellow students identified as Muslim, according to the Bureau for National Vigilance Against Antisemitism. The two boys, aged 8 and 9, reportedly said that “our parents told us that Islam is at war against the Jews.” In mid-December French police arrested five men for making online threats to burn down the Grande-Motte Synagogue in Hérault in southern France. A few days before Christmas bullets were fired from an air gun through a window of the David Ben Ichay Synagogue and the Al Haeche kosher restaurant in Paris. In a third incident that week bullet holes were discovered at a Jewish owned print shop in Paris’s 19th arrondissement. BNVCA founder Sammy Gholan wrote “after the attacks upon Jewish schools and synagogues have turned them into fortresses, now Jewish businesses are targeted”.

In his New Year’s Eve television address, French President Francois Hollande said that the fight against racism and antisemitism will be his national cause for 2015.

- [France: Jewish Teen Beaten After Attack on Kosher Restaurant](#) (Arutz Sheva, 10 November, 2014)
- [Gang firebombs sushi bar](#) (Jewish Chronicle, November 12, 2014)
- [French interior minister speaks of love for Jews](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, November 21, 2014)
- [Paris Jewish Community in Shock Over Rape, Home Invasion 'Because You Are Jews'](#) (Algemeiner, December 2, 2014)
- [Minister: Rape of French Jew was antisemitic attack](#) (Times of Israel, December 4, 2014)
- [France vows 'national' fight against antisemitism after latest attack on Jews](#) (i24 news, December 7, 2014)
- [Jews rally in Paris suburb to protest rise in antisemitism](#) (Jerusalem Post, December 8, 2014)
- [French girl, 8, verbally attacked by fellow students for being Jewish](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 8, 2014)
- [Five arrested for threats to attack French synagogue](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 9, 2014)
- [Bullet fired through Paris synagogue window](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 23, 2014)
- [Days After Synagogue Attack, Assailants Open Fire at Jewish Restaurant in Paris](#) (Algemeiner, December 25, 2014)
- [Shots fired at Jewish-owned print shop in Paris](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 26, 2014)
- [French president vows to fight antisemitism, racism in 2015](#) (Times of Israel, January 1, 2015)
- [Kosher restaurant window fired on in Paris](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, January 5, 2015)
- [Fire started in synagogue near Paris](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, January 5, 2015)

2 / OTHER MANIFESTATIONS OF ANTISEMITISM

Violence

Acts of antisemitic violence were also recorded in other parts of Europe in November and December. In Germany, at the start of November, an American tourist at Cologne train station was pushed to the ground, called a “Jewish bastard” and robbed of his wallet and travel documents. The assailants were described as having shaved heads and wearing black, red and white T-shirts. This coincided with a 5,000 strong anti-Muslim march in Cologne of mainly football hooligans under the banner of “Hooligans against Salafists”. Towards the end of November an Israeli man visiting Berlin suffered a black eye and fractured fingers after being attacked by four men upon leaving a synagogue. At the end of December a Jewish man was badly beaten in Berlin by several people after he witnessed them singing antisemitic songs. Shahak Shapira had recorded the men singing the songs and asked them to stop. The assailants demanded he erase the footage and attacked him after he refused. Shapira suffered bruises and a head laceration.

In Belgium, an orthodox Jewish man was stabbed in the neck as he walked to synagogue in Antwerp. His injuries were not life-threatening. Belgium’s Forum of Jewish Organisations wrote in a statement that “there is very real chance we are dealing with an act of pure antisemitism.” In Poland, a 78 year-old man was attacked by someone shouting antisemitic abuse. The assailant was stopped by witnesses who intervened to help the man who was then taken to hospital. In Russia, a student at Torat Chaim yeshiva near Moscow was badly beaten by three men with brass knuckles. He managed to crawl to the yeshiva where an ambulance was called.

- [American tourist wearing Star of David attacked in Cologne](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, November 4, 2014)
- [Israeli man, 22, attacked in Berlin](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, November 25, 2014)
- [Jewish man beaten in Berlin train station](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, January 5, 2015)
- [Orthodox Jew stabbed in Antwerp in attack seen as anti-Semitic](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, November 16, 2014)
- [78-year-old assaulted in Warsaw anti-Semitic attack](#) (Jerusalem Post, November 9, 2014)
- [Jewish student badly beaten outside yeshiva in Russia](#) (Times of Israel, December 3, 2014)

Vandalism & Abuse

Acts of antisemitic vandalism and abuse were also prevalent throughout November and December. In Russia, the Limmud Torah Study Centre in Moscow was vandalised with antisemitic graffiti that read “This is a Zionist’s lair. Out!” Mikhail Savin, head of the Russian Jewish Congress, said that “these days, when all the synagogues in Russia are praying for the victims of the attack in Jerusalem, antisemitic incidents like these are especially painful for us. Their impunity inevitably causes new manifestations of ethnic and religious hatred.” In Greece, at the end of December, the Jewish cemetery in the town of Larissa was desecrated with a swastika sprayed on the cemetery gates and the word “Juden,” the Nazi SS symbol, and the epithet “six million more” scrawled on the walls. And in the Netherlands, two headstones were smashed at a Jewish cemetery in the southern city of Vlissingen.

In Sweden, a rabbi in Gothenburg received threatening emails which described him as a child murderer and swine and told him he would be “relegated to everlasting fire.” In Portugal, the Jewish community of Lisbon demanded extra protection after a memorial to the massacre of Portuguese Jews in 1506 was defaced with the word “ebola”.

In the United Kingdom, there were many incidents of antisemitic vandalism in this period. Nine Jewish gravestones were targeted by vandals in Hereford cemetery early in November. In the strictly Orthodox enclave of Stamford Hill a series of attacks were carried out. Early one morning over 40 cars had their tyres slashed and later in December swastikas were daubed on a house and school. In Liverpool, police raided the houses of suspected neo-Nazis who were planning a protest outside of the office of Jewish Member of Parliament Luciana Berger. In London, Ilford North MP Lee Scott revealed that he had received antisemitic abuse being called a “dirty Jew” and that he should be “stoned to death”. In November, Wigan Athletic Football Club owner Dave Whelan told *The Guardian* newspaper that Jewish people chase money more than everybody else. He also used other racial slurs towards the Chinese community. The Football Association gave him a £50,000 fine and a six-week ban from football activities. The Community Security Trust (CST), the charity that monitors antisemitism in the UK, announced that it expects the total for 2014 to be the highest since it started collating the figures in 1984.

Finally in Italy, twice in November and December, right-wing and extremists and skinheads from around Europe met in Milan. The first meeting was for Hammerfest where it was reported that many of the 300 in the crowd had “shaven heads, swastikas, and all the repertoire of the ‘Nazi look.’” The second meeting at the end of December included representatives from the British National Party and Greece’s Golden Dawn. This was intended to be the first meeting of a new pan-European party called Alliance for Peace and Freedom. As well as aiming to “protect, celebrate and promote our common Christian values,” speakers also criticised what it called “Zionist globalism” and immigration.

- [Anti-Semitic Graffiti Found at Torah Study Center in Moscow](#) (Algemeiner, November 28, 2014)
- [Larissa Jewish Cemetery Desecrated](#) (Greek Reporter, December 26, 2014)
- [Two headstones smashed at Dutch Jewish cemetery](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 28, 2014)
- [Motorists threaten Dutch chief rabbi](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, November 10, 2014)
- [Swedish rabbi, synagogue threatened](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, November 21, 2014)
- [Lisbon Jews Demand Protection After 'Ebola' Desecration](#) (Arutz Sheva, November 5, 2014)
- [Jewish headstones vandalised in Hereford Cemetery](#) (Hereford Times, November 8, 2014)
- [Pair charged after criminal damage incidents in London Jewish community](#) (The Guardian, November 18, 2014)
- [Security stepped up in north London after swastika daubings](#) (Jewish Chronicle, December 22, 2014)
- [Merseyside neo-Nazis arrested after planning anti-Semitic protest against Liverpool MP Luciana Berger](#) (Liverpool Echo, November 8, 2014)
- [Wigan Athletic chairman Dave Whelan apologises for anti-semitic comments – though risks further censure](#) (The Telegraph, December 5, 2014)
- [Ilford MP reveals anti-Semitic abuse after being called a 'dirty Jew'](#) (Ilford Recorder, December 10, 2014)
- [Fury after anti-Semitic vandals scrawl Swastikas on cars and buildings in north London Jewish community](#) (Mail Online, December 30, 2014)
- [British anti-Semitism set to hit record high](#) (The Telegraph, December 29, 2014)
- [Report: Anti-Semitic Incidents in Italy Tripled During Summer Gaza War](#) (JPUupdates.com, November 18, 2014)
- [Right-wing extremists from around Europe meet in Milan](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 21, 2014)
- [Italian police break up right-wing terror plots](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 24, 2014)

Politics

In the political sphere, there were both positive and negative events in relation to Jewish life and antisemitism. In Poland, following months of uncertainty, a Constitutional Tribunal ruled that a ban on the ritual slaughter of animals for the needs of the Jewish community was unconstitutional. A ban had been introduced in 2013 when the country's constitutional court scrapped a government regulation that exempted Jews and Muslims from a law requiring the stunning of animals prior to slaughter. On the verdict, Judge Maria Gintowt-Jankowicz said "the constitution guarantees the freedom of religion which includes the carrying out of all activities, practices, rites and rituals which have a religious character. The same constitutional protection also extends to religious activities which differ from conventional behaviour which prevails in the country – including activities that are perhaps unpopular among the majority of society." World Jewish Congress President Ronald S. Lauder welcomed the ruling saying that "Poland's Constitutional Tribunal has come down unequivocally in favour of religious freedom. It has spoken loud and clear: banning religious slaughter is unconstitutional... The decision also sends a clear signal: Jews, Jewish life and Jewish traditions are welcome in Poland."

In Belgium, Ben Weyts, Belgium's minister for animal welfare, has reassured the Jewish community that kosher slaughter will also be allowed to continue there. In a letter to Rabbi Menachem Margolin, the director general of the European Jewish Association, Weyts assured him that "prior stunning of animals is not required in the case of slaughter prescribed by religious rites. From now on this

regulation will be enforced in all its aspects.” Meanwhile in the UK, there were also assurances that there will be no moves to pass legislation banning kosher slaughter.

In Sweden, politicians voted down a bill which would have required parents to pay for non-medical circumcision of boys. The far-right Swedish Democrats introduced a bill insisting that circumcision should not be covered in the healthcare system, calling it a barbaric practice and compared it to female genital mutilation. There was strong opposition to this with Anna Ekstrom of the Liberal People’s Party arguing that circumcision was akin to Christian baptism.

There were debates in some countries about the need to introduce new measures and to strengthen laws to combat antisemitism. In the UK, writing in the *Daily Express*, Communities Secretary Eric Pickles wrote that Jewish schools will be given funding for extra security while tough punishments for online hate crime are to be brought in under a “zero-tolerance” approach. He added that new measures to stamp out antisemitism on university campuses will be introduced and promised that all schoolchildren will be taught about the Holocaust. According to Pickles, the public needs to be reassured that those who commit hate crimes will be punished with the full force of the law. He wrote that “the irrational hatred of Jews is like cancer. Once beaten it can come back. It lurks in the shadows, and in 2014 there has been a revolting relapse of this ancient evil. Sadly Britain has not been immune. We share this shame.”

In Poland, a survey conducted by the Warsaw University Centre for Research on Prejudice showed that over half of Poland’s young people access antisemitic internet sites that praise Hitler and Nazism. 21 percent of young people polled and 19 percent of Polish adult participants in the survey opposed the banning of hate speech. The results of the survey were presented to the Polish parliament renewing attention to hate speech legislation. (Note that neither the methodological approach adopted by the researchers in this survey, nor the analysis of results, has yet to be fully assessed by JPR).

In Greece, a delegation of leaders from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) met in Athens with leading politicians including the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. The delegation received very positive signals that the government is committed to fighting antisemitism and racism. According to Abraham Foxman, ADL National Director, “the Prime Minister assured us that, at every level of the government, positive and proactive steps are being taken to address racism and antisemitism. We thanked the Prime Minister for his government’s actions against extremism which included the arrest and prosecution of members of the Golden Dawn and the passage of anti-racism legislation by the Greek Parliament.”

However, not all developments in the political sphere were positive. A prominent politician, Panos Kammenos, leader of the small Independent Greeks Party, said that Jews do not pay their taxes. He was condemned by the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece who said that “it is a disgrace that a leader of a party in Parliament does not know that Greek Jews are equal citizens and subject to the all the rights and obligations of every citizen”. They called on Kammenos to apologise for this “serious antisemitic” act.

In Sweden, the party secretary of the far-right Sweden Democrats party said Jews cannot be true Swedes if they continue to identify as Jews and that they must “assimilate in order to become Swedish.” Lena Posner Körösi, President of the Official Council of Jewish Communities in Sweden, said the comments conveyed a message that Jews were untrustworthy “exactly like in 1930s Germany” from which her grandfather had fled, and that she was “appalled that Sweden’s third largest party can express itself in this way about Jews and other minorities.” She added: “We have to take them really seriously. This is not a small group of fanatics you can dismiss.”

In Germany, a far-right city councilman from the Right Party in Dortmund asked for data on how many Jews live in the city in the form a legislative questionnaire. Christian Democratic Union party MP Steffen Kanitz, said this was a “blatant threat against Jewish people in Dortmund.” He called on civil society in Dortmund to fight against the Right party, which he compared to the Nazis. Dieter Graumann, head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, said this recalled the “worst times” in Germany’s history and the inquiry is “sickening and perfidious antisemitism.”

In Spain, a representative of the ruling Popular Party, Toni Rodriguez, posed for pictures with friends dressed up as Adolf Hitler at a Halloween party. The local Jewish community demanded he apologise but have received no answer. However, Mariola Vargas, the mayor of Collado Villalba, a suburb of Madrid, did apologise to the Federation of Jewish Communities in Spain for using the term “Jewish dog” during her mayoral campaign.

In Germany, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), held the Berlin Tenth Anniversary Conference on Antisemitism in November. The Conference was meant to be a commemorative meeting acknowledging government efforts to combat antisemitism over the past decade. However, the recent rise in antisemitism changed the meeting to focus on a way forward to address current problems. The Conference was attended by some 550 participants, and featured speakers including Ambassador Samantha Power, United States Ambassador to the United Nations; Miroslav Lajcák, Slovak Republic Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs; Lynne Yelich, Minister of State of Canada; Paavo Lipponen, Former Prime Minister of Finland; and Tzachi Hanegbi, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Israel. However the conference attracted a notably lower level of attendance than a decade ago. A new declaration was adopted on combating antisemitism at its Ministerial Council Meeting, which required consensus approval of all 57 participating states. It reaffirmed the message that “international developments, including with regard to the situation in the Middle East, never justify antisemitism” and it commits governments “to investigate effectively, promptly, and impartially acts of violence motivated by antisemitism and prosecute those responsible.” It also calls on political leaders and public figures to speak out strongly when antisemitic incidents occur, and asks for increased efforts to monitor and collect data on hate crimes.

- [Polish court rules Shechitah ban unconstitutional](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 10, 2014)
- [WJC hails 'landmark decision' by Polish high court lifting kosher slaughter ban](#) (World Jewish Congress, December 10, 2014)
- [Belgian minister issues clarification backing kosher slaughter](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 24, 2014)
- [Swedish lawmakers nix bill requiring parents to pay for circumcision](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, November 26, 2014)
- [No move to ban shechita, MP promises](#) (Jewish Chronicle, November 6, 2014)
- [Tough new laws to combat the surge in anti-Semitic abuse in Britain](#) (The Exposers, December 29, 2014)
- [Poll reveals antisemitism in Poland, renews debate over hate-speech laws](#) (FoxNews.com, November 12, 2014)
- [Greece Says It Is Committed and Serious About Fighting Antisemitism](#) (Jspace News, November 26, 2014)
- [Greek Jews slam right-wing politician for saying Jews don't pay taxes](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 16, 2014)
- [Swedish far-right leader: Jews must abandon religious identity to be Swedes](#) (The Guardian, December 17, 2014)

- [Radical right-wing German politician asks to count Jews in city](#) (Jerusalem Post, November 15, 2014)
- [Spanish Jews want councilman to apologize for Hitler costume](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, November 5, 2014)
- [Spanish mayor issues apology for 'Jewish dog' slur](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, November 18, 2014)
- [Activists, government officials meeting in Berlin on combating anti-Semitism](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, November 12, 2014)
- [AJC Salutes OSCE Declaration on Anti-Semitism](#) (PR Newswire, December 8, 2014)

3 / MONITORING DEVELOPMENTS IN UKRAINE

Developments in the Ukraine continue to impact greatly on Jewish communities throughout the country. In the west of the country, Jewish life continued as normal with more than 600 Jews from around the country attending the Limmud Ukraine's annual conference in Lviv. The three-day conference included presentations on Jewish art, music, culture and history as well as Jewish-themed games, film screenings and a performance by a five-piece Klezmer ensemble.

However there were outbreaks of antisemitism with swastikas painted on the Holocaust memorial monument at Babi Yar in Kiev and antisemitic graffiti sprayed on the wall of a Jewish school in Kharkov. The graffiti included messages such as "Kill the Jews" and "Heil Happy Holocaust," along with crossed-out images of Stars of David and swastikas.

Fighting in the east of the country continues to deleteriously affect Jews still living there. In the besieged city of rebel-held Lugansk, several hundred Jews are relying on aid packages at the synagogue during the winter's sub-freezing temperatures. Shalom Gopin, Lugansk community's rabbi and Chabad emissary said that the fact that "so many came despite the cold illustrates the growing needs for assistance in a beleaguered community. Winter is only worsening the situation of people who are already finding it increasingly difficult to scrape a living in a war-ravaged place with intermittent electricity." The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), which has been delivering heating fuel, bedding and clothing to Jewish communities across the region as part of its annual Winter Relief programme, is expanding its efforts in response to the harsh winter.

In November, the Ukrainian parliament confirmed Volodymyr Groysman, a Jewish MP, as speaker. He had previously served as Mayor of Vinnytsia, Regional Development, Construction and Communal Living Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. Eduard Dolinsky, Executive Director of the Ukrainian Jewish Committee, said that whilst his ascension to parliamentary speaker does indicate that Ukraine has become a more open and multi-ethnic country in which "every person can get any position independent of his ethnic origin, for the Jewish community it's not much of a difference." Kiev's Chief Rabbi, Yaakov Dov Bleich, said his appointment was intended to "shut the mouths of those who say that the government is antisemitic."

- [Limmud conference brings Jewish life back to Lviv](#) (Jerusalem Post, November 8, 2014)
- [Swastikas painted on Babi Yar memorial, Jewish school](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, November 17, 2014)
- [Ukraine's new parliamentary speaker Volodymyr Hroysman](#) (BBC News, November 28, 2014)
- [Russians accuse Kiev of hiding crimes against Jews](#) (Jerusalem Post, November 9, 2014)
- [Hundreds of Ukrainian Jews receive aid packages at Lugansk synagogue](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 4, 2014)
- [JDC Expands Winter Relief for Ukrainian Jews](#) (Algemeiner, December 11, 2014)

- [Huddling by fire, Jews in rebel-held Ukraine keep synagogue alive](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 15, 2014)

4 / REVISITING HOLOCAUST ISSUES

A number of issues from the Holocaust surfaced during November and December including ones involving the sites of former death and concentration camps. At the beginning of November it was discovered that part of the iron gate at the entrance of Dachau in Germany had been stolen. The iconic gate with the infamous Nazi slogan “Arbeit Macht Frei” (Work Makes You Free) measured 6 feet by 3 feet. At the Majdanek death camp in Poland in mid-November it was discovered that eight shoes belonging to prisoners had been stolen from the exhibit. A museum security guard had noticed that the wire around the exhibit had been cut. However in more positive news, it was announced that more than 1.5 million people had visited the Auschwitz-Birkenau museum and memorial in 2014, the highest on record. Most visitors came from Poland (398,000) followed by the United Kingdom and the United States. Dr. Piotr Cywinski, director of the Auschwitz memorial, said “the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial has become the world’s symbol of the Holocaust and the crimes of World War II. Without the reference to the history of this place, it would be hard for new generations to understand our reality and challenges of the contemporary world.” In mid-December, a German court announced that a 93-year-old man accused of being a guard at the Auschwitz concentration camp will be tried in 2015 for being an accessory to the murder of 300,000 Jews.

- [‘Arbeit Macht Frei’ sign stolen from Dachau](#) (Deutsche Welle, November 2, 2014)
- [Shoes of Majdanek inmates stolen from concentration camp’s museum](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, November 25, 2014)
- [1.5 million visitors to Auschwitz museum in ’14 sets mark](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, January 4, 2015)
- [Former Auschwitz guard to be put on trial in Germany](#) (World Jewish Congress, December 15, 2014)
- [David Cameron remembers victims of Holocaust in first ever visit to Auschwitz](#) (The Telegraph, December 10)

November and December also saw the unearthing of some poignant possessions belonging to Holocaust victims. In Vilnius, Lithuania, construction work on the site of the former ghetto uncovered four lead dreidels, proof that the Jewish community continued to observe the Chanukah festival even in the midst of the Shoah. Not knowing what they were, the building contractor called the ‘From the Depths’ project and sent them photos. The group founder Johnny Daniels said “I explained to him, excitedly, that they were dreidels, and he decided to donate them... It was an amazing, very moving moment. It’s really our own little Hanukkah miracle.” In the Czech town of Terezin (Theresienstadt), home owners doing some refurbishment found photographs, shoes and other items of Judaica belonging to Jews living there during the war. Some of the items bore the owners’ names. The Ghetto Theresienstadt project said that “the unexpected finds such as these suggest that an abundance of precious legacies from the ghetto period are still waiting to be discovered in buildings throughout Terezin.” Also an international team of researchers have launched a study of Holocaust-era killing sites in western Ukraine. Initiated by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) and led by the Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union, the team are using geophysical imaging to delineate an area where Nazi soldiers buried thousands of Jews they had executed. Team leader, Meylakh Sheykhet, said “technology now allows us to set the historical record without disturbing the victims’ rights not to be disturbed in their final resting place.”

A number of new Holocaust memorials were announced in Austria. At the beginning of November, Ruth Kaufmann, the leader of the Jewish Cultural Association in Graz, announced that Austria's first Holocaust memorial centre will open in Graz's synagogue. Called the Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Centre, she said it "will commemorate the many victims of the Shoah, document Jewish life in the past and present and explore the sensitive subject of the Holocaust in an age appropriate way." Its main target audiences are students and young people. Just a few days later, Austria's national railway company, ÖBB, held an exhibition at the European Parliament looking at the firm's complicity in the Holocaust. The exhibition was attended by hundreds of people, including members of the European Parliament, European Jewish Congress staff and Austrian Federal Railways executives. The exhibition, called 'The Suppressed Years,' tells the story of the railway's rapid absorption into the German railway system after Nazi Germany merged with Austria in 1938, and which was used to transport tens of thousands of Austrian Jews to concentration and death camps across Europe. It was also announced that Vienna will be the home of the world's first permanent museum dedicated to the *kindertransport*. A new museum memorial called 'For the Child' was opened in mid-December on the anniversary of the departure of the first group of Jewish children on the *kindertransport*, and it is dedicated to the stories of people who helped organise the transports. Finally, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in Greece was the site of the unveiling of a new monument in memory of the old Jewish cemetery of Thessaloniki, destroyed by the Nazis in 1942.

There were some restitution issues which came to the fore at the end of 2014. In Croatia, the World Jewish Restitution Organisation (WJRO) announced that the government will give land and an office building in Zagreb worth about \$4 million to the Jewish community as restitution for a building once owned by the local Jewish burial society that was expropriated during World War Two. The income from the property will help to support the Jewish community's senior care facility and other communal programmes. Gideon Taylor, the WJRO's Chair of Operations, said that "we ask that the government build on this positive action by returning additional properties to the Jewish community and providing restitution for private and heirless Jewish-owned properties." In France, it was announced that the American and French governments have agreed a compensation package for Holocaust victims deported by SNCF, the railway company, which was owned by the French government during World War Two. The French government will pay for the £40 million compensation fund. SNCF is currently bidding on US rail contracts, and American lawmakers had previously tried to bar tenders from companies who have not settled all reparations for Holocaust survivors. As part of the deal, it will end impending lawsuits against SNCF in American courts.

In November, 26 non-Jewish Dutch citizens or their descendants were awarded the status of 'Righteous Among the Nations' by Yad Vashem. One of the recipients was the daughter of Frederika Maria Segboer, who led Jews they hid to resistance fighters who helped smuggle at least 210 Jews out of the Netherlands, as well as hundreds of non-Jews who were wanted by the Nazi occupation forces.

In an interview with Israeli newspaper *Yediot Ahronot*, Pope Francis reiterated his position to open the secret Vatican archives covering the Second World War period, to allow researchers to reassess the role played by Pope Pius XII during the Holocaust. According to the pope, there is currently an agreement between the Vatican and Italy that prevents publication, but he has stated that he is sure that this obstacle can be worked out. He believes that an examination of the official record will exonerate Pope Pius XII from accusations that he did not do all he could to save Jews.

Finally the Czech Jewish community has strongly protested as "inappropriate" an invitation to Russian President Vladimir Putin to ceremonies marking the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. In a statement emailed to news agencies, the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic said "the regime Putin established and embodies doesn't respect international treaties, is aggressive and uses its power to occupy the territory of a neighbouring state."

- [Lead dreidels discovered buried underneath Vilna Ghetto](#) (Israel Hayom, December 21, 2014)
- [Czech home owners find Jewish belongings from WWII](#) (Reuters, December 11, 2014)
- [Haunting holocaust images from beyond the grave: Chilling family photographs and treasured possessions left behind by Jewish family sent to Nazi concentration camp discovered hidden in attic 70 years later](#) (Mail Online, December 31, 2014)
- [Research team using imaging to study Holocaust killing sites in Ukraine](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 18, 2014)
- [Austria to get its first Holocaust centre](#) (The Local, November 5, 2014)
- [Austria's national railway opens exhibit about its Holocaust complicity](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, November 9, 2014)
- [Vienna to host Kindertransport museum](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 7, 2014)
- [Greek university unveils memorial on site of destroyed Jewish cemetery](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, November 10, 2014)
- [Croatia giving Zagreb Jews \\$4 million property in Holocaust restitution](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 3, 2014)
- [U.S., France secure \\$60 million for survivors of rail deportations](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 5, 2014)
- [14 recognized as righteous for saving Jews in the Netherlands](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, November 23, 2014)
- [Pope Francis willing to open Pius XII archives](#) (San Diego Jewish World, November 28, 2014)
- [Czech Jews protest invitation of Putin to Holocaust memorial](#) (Jerusalem Post, December 21, 2014)

5 / OTHER NEWS STORIES ABOUT JEWISH LIFE IN EUROPE YOU MAY HAVE MISSED

Throughout November and December there were many examples of restoration, renovation and rededication of cemeteries, synagogues and museums, as well as Jewish cultural festivals. In Poland, the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland plans to open a new Jewish museum in the Great Synagogue in Leczna in 2016, with a focus on the town's former Jewish community. The baroque synagogue was mostly destroyed during World War II and was reconstructed in the 1950s and '60s. In the central Polish town of Grodzisk Mazowiecki, the city council has agreed to reconsider a development plan that would turn a Jewish cemetery into a residential complex. Following the protests of the Jewish community of Warsaw and local activist Robert Augustyniak, Mayor Grzegorz Benedykncinski suspended action on the plan pending clarification of the cemetery's boundaries. And the town of Kutno held its annual Sholem Asch Festival, including a concert of Jewish music, performed by children from the town's schools performing Yiddish and Hebrew music. There was also a literary competition on a Jewish theme which attracted hundreds of entries from all over Poland, a local Jewish dance band, theatre performances and translations of Sholem Asch's work into Polish.

In Russia, two old synagogues confiscated by the Soviet authorities in rural Russia were rededicated as Jewish houses of worship. One of the rededications was in Voronezh, in southern Russia, at a 110-year-old synagogue that was nationalised and turned into a textile factory; the other took place in the Black Sea city of Krasnodar at a ceremony led by Rabbi Berel Lazar, Chief Rabbi of Russia, and Rabbi Avram Ilyaguyev, who is in charge of religious services for Mountain Jews at the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia.

In Vienna, over 60 volunteers participated in the annual clean-up of a neglected Jewish cemetery. Waehringer Cemetery in Vienna is one of the city's largest ancient Jewish burial sites. In a grassroots initiative that began ten years ago, predominantly non-Jewish volunteers come to the cemetery every November 2, or All Souls Day, to help clean gravestones.

In Venice, a group of philanthropists announced a \$12 million restoration project for the Jewish Museum and synagogues in the Jewish ghetto, to be completed by 2016, the 500th anniversary of the ghetto's establishment. The project aims to repair the interconnected buildings of the ghetto, and includes the restoration of gilded wooden panels with carved features inside three of its five 16th-century synagogues — the German, Canton and Italian ones.

In Belarus, during recent demolition work for a new supermarket in the town of Brest, over 450 gravestones were found inside the foundations of homes. Around fifteen hundred gravestones have been found in the town's houses, pavements, roads and gardens over the past six years. Much of this is the result of Soviet communist practice in the 1950s of recycling Jewish headstones from communities decimated by the Nazis for use as construction materials. The mayor of the city has promised to help in the preservation of the stones.

In the UK, three major Jewish cultural events took place. In November, the UK Jewish Film Festival held 159 screenings in venues all over the country, and record numbers of volunteers turned out for the Mitzvah Day charity event with an estimated 37,000 people collecting food, taking on conservation tasks and participating in a range of social action projects. Towards the end of December the Limmud annual winter conference took place at Warwick University with over 2,500 participants from 28 countries enjoying over 1200 sessions.

During the festival of Chanukah, there were many public lightings of menorahs across Europe. In one unusual and creative programme in Romania, the American Joint Distribution Committee funded a roving Chanukah caravan which travelled from town to town to light Chanukah candles, sing songs, and distribute *sufganiyot* (doughnuts). Romanian Jewry is unusual by European standards insofar as it is spread across dozens of different communities. As a result, some towns have only a handful of Jews, who often feel isolated and alone, especially during the holiday season. Israel Sabag, JDC's Director for Romania, Bosnia, and Serbia said that "the idea behind this event is to bring the spirit of the Festival of Lights to every community and to every Jew in Romania." To start a week of celebrations, a candle lighting was scheduled at Bucharest's ad historic Choral Synagogue, and was attended by both the new and the outgoing president of Romania.

In Germany, it was announced that a former church will become the country's newest synagogue and the first in the state of Brandenburg since 1938. The synagogue's dedication is planned for Holocaust Remembrance Day in January. The state of Brandenburg contributed the full purchase cost for the decommissioned church (\$730,700), and will contribute about \$62,400 per year for maintenance. The city of Cottbus oversaw the removal of the cross and church bell from the steeple. All other costs of renovation were borne by the state Jewish association. The Cottbus Jewish community has pledged to use the structure as a synagogue for at least twenty-five years. Also in Germany, Israel-born Dr. Josef Schuster was elected the new president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany. He succeeds Dieter Graumann.

In the UK in November, members of the Manchester Muslim Jewish Forum took part in a worldwide twinning event in which local mosques were twinned with local synagogues. This twinning took place between Manchester Reform Synagogue in Central Manchester and Manchester Central Mosque in Victoria Park and was organised by Forum Executive member, Cllr Rabnawaz Akbar together with Rabbi Reuven Silverman. Rabbi Silverman said "in my Shabbat address to the congregation I referred to the warm welcome we received from several of the two thousand worshippers at the Manchester Central Mosque, and to the sermon by Imam Asim Hussain, a dynamic leader who completely dissociated himself and his people from Islamist extremism, and rejected any suggestion that the so-called Islamic State was involved in a holy war. Combatting antisemitism and Islamophobia as a joint project is stronger than confronting them separately."

In Hungary, the head of Budapest's Jewish community filed a complaint with police alleging fraud and embezzlement at the historic Dohany Street Synagogue. David Schwezoff said that the community was at least \$400,000 short in ticket revenues from visitors to the synagogue. The President of the Mazsihisz Jewish federation, a Hungarian umbrella organisation with which the Budapest community is affiliated, disputed the charge. Andras Heisler, the President of Mazsihisz, in an interview a local newspaper, accused Schwezoff of "running amok and compromising the Jewish community's honour."

In Portugal, the government announced that descendants of Jews who managed to escape from the country following their forced conversion to Christianity in 1497 can now apply for citizenship. Candidates must demonstrate either a link to an organised Sephardi Portuguese community or an emotional connection to Portugal through family history or language. This programme is the result of a law approved by the Portuguese parliament in April 2013. However, according to the head of an organisation for Spanish-speaking Israelis, changes to a similar law in Spain have made the measure nothing more than symbolic. The changes were introduced in November during deliberations at a congressional committee. Leon Amiras, chairman of the Association of Olim from Latin America, Spain and Portugal, said that they would "render the bill declarative but ultimately meaningless." Under the new revisions, applicants must be tested in Spain by a government-approved notary on their knowledge of Spanish and Sephardi culture. If they pass, applicants would need to return to Spain at a later date for another procedure. Amiras believes that ordinary applicants are not going to jump through these hoops after being initially told it would not be so onerous.

Finally, also in Spain, the 23rd edition of the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE) dictionary continues to define a Jew as "a person who is avaricious or usurious". Isaac Querub, President of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Spain said "the definitions of 'judaida' only reflect antisemitic prejudices from other times. We call on the RAE to leave behind the legacy of the Inquisition and Nazism." The RAE said that the dictionary reflected the way Spanish people describe Jews.

- [Rebuilt Polish synagogue to become Jewish museum](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 29, 2014)
- [Polish town reconsidering plan to turn Jewish cemetery into apartment complex](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, November 26, 2014)
- [A Jewish festival in a town without Jews](#) (BBC News, December 9, 2014)
- [Ancient Russian synagogues rededicated](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, November 4, 2014)
- [Volunteers clean Vienna Jewish cemetery on Christian holiday](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, November 2, 2014)
- [Jewish Museum and Synagogues in Venice to Undergo \\$12 Million Restoration](#) (New York Times, November 11, 2014)
- [Belarus town built of hundreds of recycled Jewish gravestones](#) (Times of Israel, November 2, 2014)
- [UK Jewish Film Festival opens with gala on London's Southbank](#) (Jewish Chronicle, November 7, 2014)
- [Thousands turn out for Mitzvah Day](#) (Jewish Chronicle, November 17, 2014)
- [Limmud 2014: Organisers promise bigger event next year](#) (Jewish Chronicle, December 31, 2014)
- [For Romanian Jews, a Roving Chanukah Caravan](#) (American Joint Distribution Committee, December 10, 2014)
- [Church to become first synagogue in German state since Kristallnacht](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, November 4, 2014)
- [Israeli-born doctor to head Germany Jewish community](#) (Times of Israel, November 30, 2014)
- [Muslim Jewish Forum takes part in Mosque-Synagogue twinning project](#) (Asian Image, November 18, 2014)

- [Budapest Jewish head alleges shortfall in Dohany ticket sales](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, November 13, 2014)
- [Portugal releases citizenship guide](#) (Jewish Chronicle, December 23, 2014)
- [Group slams changes to Spanish bill naturalizing Sephardic Jews](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 14, 2014)
- [Spanish dictionary is definition of hate](#) (Jewish Chronicle, November 13, 2014)

/ ABOUT JPR

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