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# Anti-Semitism in the Propaganda and Public Discourse in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus during the Russia-Ukraine War (February – August 2022) – ACTA

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**Abstract:** This paper explores and analyses aspects of Antisemitism and the Jewish theme in the Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian propaganda during the first seven months of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

**Keywords:** Antisemitism, Jewish theme, propaganda, Russian-Ukrainian war

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Background

The 24 February 2022 marked the beginning of a large-scale military invasion of the armed forces of the Russian Federation (RF) into Ukrainian territory. In a speech broadcast that morning, at the beginning of the invasion, on the Russian Channel 24, the President of the RF, Vladimir Putin, declared that one of the goals of the “special military operation” (as the military invasion to Ukraine is called in the official Russian discourse<sup>1</sup>) was the “de-Nazification” of Ukraine.<sup>2</sup> In framing the aggression

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1 On the issue of terminological narratives related to the Russia-Ukraine war, see K. Gorobetz, ‘Russian “Special Military Operation” and the Language of Empire’, *OpinioJuris*. Accessed 24 May 2022. <http://opiniojuris.org/2022/05/24/russian-special-military-operation-and-the-language-of-empire/>. The official Ukrainian terminology as adopted by the Ukrainian Rada (Parliament) is “Armed aggression of the Russian Federation against the state sovereignty of Ukraine”. Accessed 7 March 2023. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2114-20#Text>. In this research I will mostly use the term “war”.

2 Accessed 24 February, 2022. <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/24/02/2022/6216f1dc9a79474b7aa1d455>, the recording also appears on the Kremlin website - <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>. The terminology of “de-Nazification” (alongside the terminology of “demilitarization”) is based on the claim that the Ukrainian government advocates a neo-Nazi worldview and commits ongoing

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in these terms, the rationale for the attack and the ensuing fighting was subsumed within the historical struggle of the Allies (USSR, USA, and Great Britain) with Nazi Germany and its Axis collaborators during the Second World War. Chief among the catastrophic events which still scar the collective memory of WWII was the extermination of about 6 million Jews as part of the Nazi execution of the “final solution of the Jewish question”, a systematic genocide which has been established in Jewish historiography and memory, and is universally recognized, as the Holocaust of the Jewish people (in short – the Holocaust). Admittedly, there are different approaches to evaluating the Holocaust and reconstructing it in research and social-public discourse whether as a uniquely Jewish tragedy or as a universal event.<sup>3</sup> However, whatever approach is adopted, it is difficult to separate the historical event of mass murder (the Holocaust) from the historical terminology in which it is reconstructed and from its unique place in Jewish history. As a result, Putin’s decision to use terminology which alludes to the Great Patriotic War against the Third Reich and to the role of Jews in the enemy’s campaign to repel the invaders, whether consciously or implicitly, has linked the discourse about the Russian-Ukrainian war with a semantic field which intersects with issues of Jewishness and anti-Semitism.

The issue of the complex relations between the Jewish and the non-Jewish population (Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Polish, Tatar, etc.) in the Russian and Ukrainian regions traces its historical roots to the Middle Ages, and they have been constantly reconfigured by historical processes and events for hundreds of years. In modern times they were affected most by the fact that most of the Ukrainian territory was part of the “Jewish Pale of Settlement” (1791–1917) under which the Jewish population was allowed to live within the Russian Empire, as well as being able to settle in western regions of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In the twentieth century relations between the two communities were impacted by a series of major disruptions: WWI and its aftermath, the revolutions of 1917, the civil war in the former Russian Empire, the existence of an Ukrainian entity that rapidly changed its forms, the Sovietization enforced during the second and third decades of the twentieth century, the division of territory between the USSR and Poland until the outbreak of

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genocide against the residents of the separatist regions—the “Donetsk People’s Republic” and “People’s Republic of Luhansk”. To a certain extent, the war was initially presented as an operation to protect the residents of the separatist regions. As another reason for the outbreak of hostilities, Putin mentioned what he called NATO’s eastward expansion.

<sup>3</sup> Below are several references to research that discusses this issue: M. Berenbaum, ‘The Uniqueness and Universality of the Holocaust’, *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy*, 2 No. 3 (1981): 85–96; D. Seymour, ‘Holocaust Memory: Between Universal and Particular’, in D. Seymour, M. Camino (eds.), *The Holocaust in the twenty-first century: contesting/contested memories*, (New York, 2017), pp. 15–31. I adopt the approach according to which the term “Holocaust” includes both a particular and a universal aspect.

WWII, the imposition of Soviet control over Western Ukraine between the fall of 1939 and the summer of 1941, the German Nazi occupation during 1941–1944, post WWII Soviet rule until its disintegration, and the establishment of an independent Ukrainian state starting from 1991. Since then, relations between Jews and non-Jews have been further influenced by internal political, geopolitical, and cultural processes, as well as by shifts in generational attitudes to and perceptions of contemporary history occurring in both Ukraine and Russia. All these have left their mark.<sup>4</sup>

The Russia-Ukraine war stems from and is affected by a cluster of political, geo-strategic, cultural and even meta-historical factors and variables, including the political system and societal values of the state conducting the fighting, which in turn influence each other.<sup>5</sup> The war does not explicitly revolve around the Jewish question. Jews live as citizens with equal rights (at least according to the law) both in Ukraine and in the RF, they serve in the armies of both countries, and are found within their economic and cultural elites. In both countries, anti-Semitism is prohibited and punished by law.<sup>6</sup> Still, it seems that the Jewish question, as well as anti-Semitic elements (albeit in their latent form), are present, if not as the motives of the war, then in the discourse in which it is framed, both implicitly at the level of propaganda as well as on the more explicit level of public attitudes and perceptions. In the present study I want to focus on this neglected aspect of the conflict.

Another country involved in the Russian-Ukrainian war is Belarus, an independent state that maintains close political and economic ties to Russia.<sup>7</sup> Belarus also

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4 On the history of the Jews of Ukraine in a historical context, see: P. Magocsi, I. Petrovskii-Shtern, *Jews and Ukrainians: a millennium of co-existence*, (Toronto, 2018). See also the entry “Ukraine” in the YIVO encyclopedia. Accessed 18 July, 2022. <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/ukraine>.

5 Below are some examples of analysis of those aspects: H. Hagman, ‘Geostrategic aspects of the Ukraine War’. Accessed 20 April, 2022. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/geostrategic-aspects-of-the-ukraine-war/>; J. Mankoff, ‘Russia’s War in Ukraine: Identity, History and Conflict’, Accessed 2 April, 2022. [https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/220422\\_Mankoff\\_RussiaWar\\_Ukraine.pdf?tGhbft.eyo9DdEsYZPaTWbTZUtGz9o](https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/220422_Mankoff_RussiaWar_Ukraine.pdf?tGhbft.eyo9DdEsYZPaTWbTZUtGz9o); R. Millen, ‘Stability Challenges and Opportunities Regarding the Russo-Ukrainian War’, Accessed 30 March, 2022. <https://www.marshallcenter.org/en/publications/perspectives/stability-challenges-and-opportunities-regarding-russo-ukrainian-war-0>.

6 About Russian Jews, see—A. Levinson, ‘Jews in Contemporary Russia: Assimilation and Dissimilation’, *Social Sciences* 2, 51 (2020), pp. 46–67; About Ukrainian Jews, see—V. Khanin, ‘The Postcommunist Order, Public Opinion, and the Jewish Community in Independent Ukraine’, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 23, 1/2 (1999), pp. 85–108. This article reflects a reality of more than twenty years ago, but in relation to the trends it describes, and especially to the legal status of Jewish citizens of Ukraine, the information it contains is relevant to a large extent.

7 On the relationship of Belarus with Russia see—T. Ambrosio, ‘The Political Success of Russia-Belarus Relations: Insulting Minsk from a Color Revolution’, *Demokratyzatsiya The Journal of Post-Soviet*

has a deep historical connection to the Jewish population and to the Jewish history.<sup>8</sup> In the context of the Russia-Ukraine war, the territory of Belarus has been used a training ground for new Russian recruits, a territory for Russian military maneuvers, and for road access for military vehicles and supplies to the Ukrainian road system. The country played a critical role in Putin's ability to launch the original surprise offensive in February 2022. From time to time the possibility is raised that Belarusian army will participate directly in the offensive campaign in Ukraine, although as of the time of writing this has not happened.<sup>9</sup> In the media circles in Belarus that produce pro-Putin war propaganda, there is a perceptibly different narrative of the fighting in Ukraine compared to the Russian one, influenced, it seems, both by the Soviet propaganda tradition in its satellite states and by the struggle against democratic opposition following the presidential elections of August 2020. In this context, there is also a unique element in the use of anti-Semitic tropes as part of the anti-West propaganda effort. Therefore, it is important to examine the Belorussian contribution to the pro-Putin war effort as an influential and relevant element.

## 1.2 The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the place occupied by anti-Semitism and the Jewish question in the propaganda activities of the parties involved in the conflict both at the official state level (as reflected in the state and private media both conventional and new) and at the level of the broader public discourse as expressed in social media that can be monitored (mainly social networks).

The thesis of the research is that the Jewish question is a component of the propaganda effort of both the Russian and Ukrainian states involved in the conflict. Both assume an anti-Semitic stance when they invoke negative stereotypes about the Jewish collective whether constructed generically as "Jews" or the state of Israel, and when they contest the reliability and facticity of Jewish historical memory, especially with respect to its claims concerning the uniqueness of the Holocaust as a historical event, claims which play a central role in Israel's foundation myth. However, there

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*Democratization* 14, 3 (2006), pp. 407–434; D. Trenin, 'Moscow's relations with Belarus: An awkward ally', D. Lynch (ed.), *Changing Belarus*, 2005, pp. 67–78.

<sup>8</sup> On the Jewish history in the Belarus region, see "Belarus" entry in the YIVO encyclopedia. Accessed 28 March 2022. <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Belarus>.

<sup>9</sup> On the place of Belarus in the Russia-Ukraine war, see—A. Leukavetz, 'The Role of Belarus in the Ukrainian Crisis', Accessed 4 April, 2022 - <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/role-belarus-ukrainian-crisis>; 'Belarus Review by iSANS', Accessed 1 August, 2022. <https://isans.org/analysis-en/belarus-review-daily/belarus-review-by-isans-august-1-2022.html>.

is no symmetry between the parties on this issue. Whereas on the Russian and Belarusian side this denigration of the Jewish experience in Nazi-occupied Europe echoes, or is encapsulated, in the propaganda efforts in the mainstream media (either in state-owned channels or those close to the state), and echoes its views, on the Ukrainian side anti-Semitic tropes are associated with radical-nationalist figures on the margins of the conflict. This research hypothesis and the analysis it informs obviously requires a sound empirical and methodological foundation.

### 1.3 Methodology

Nowadays, when the power and influence of so called “traditional” media, i.e. – printed press, television and radio – have lost significant ground to social networks and alternative media channels,<sup>10</sup> the way to locate and monitor relevant information is through the study of official and private websites that represent state and non-state bodies, as well as social networks. In practice, this means keeping abreast of information and propaganda channels, both private and state-run, as well as popular social networks in the post-Soviet countries such as V Kontakte, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Tik-Tok and in recent years especially Telegram.<sup>11</sup> This is because, after the blocking of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter services in Russia at the beginning of March 2022,<sup>12</sup> and the threat of blocking, or at the very least restricting, YouTube, it seems that Telegram remains the only social network, and the sole information and messaging medium whose access was not restricted by the Russian Internet Control and Enforcement Authority (*Roskomnadzor*).<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Telegram is an information platform used by all parties involved in the war.<sup>14</sup> There are those who subscribe to groups of those who are seen as rivals or even enemies, sometimes out of intellectual curiosity, but usually to understand the moods and central messages of the opposing party. Along with Telegram, there

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**10** The claim itself is subject to controversy and is found in the academic, public, and media-professional discourse. Below are some references to studies dealing with this—L. Rajendran and P. Thesinghraj, ‘The Impact of New Media on Traditional Media’, *Middle East Journal of Scientific Research*, 22 No. 4 (2014): 609–616.

**11** In this regard, see—M. Wijermars, T. Lokot, ‘Is Telegram a “harbinger of freedom”? The performance, practices, and perception of platforms as political actors in authoritarian states’, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 38 No. 1–2 (2022): 125–145.

**12** D. Milmo, ‘Russia blocks access to Facebook and Twitter’, *The Guardian*. Accessed 4 March, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/04/russia-completely-blocks-access-to-facebook-and-twitter>.

**13** The authority’s website (in Russian) <https://rkn.gov.ru>.

**14** V. Bergengruen, ‘How Telegram Became the Digital Battlefield in the Russia-Ukraine War’, Accessed 21 March, 2022. <https://time.com/6158437/telegram-russia-ukraine-information-war/>.

is also a significant propaganda effort being maintained in other social networks, alongside the traditional means of communication. Therefore, the monitoring of these means of communication must also be an integral part of the research.

It is worth noting that there are private individuals and entities engaged in information monitoring, which the present study also covers. In this context, it is worth noting the Israel-based Telegram channel “*Ne-Kedmi*” which operates in the Russian language,<sup>15</sup> and the website of the Center for Monitoring Anti-Semitism in the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs, which operates in English.<sup>16</sup> These efforts to monitor anti-Semitic expressions, as well the inclusion of Jewish-related issues in the propaganda, and to share results with the public interested in being exposed to this information contribute greatly to the current research. However, as far as the public impact of their work is concerned, it is necessary to point out there is relatively limited exposure to this content, especially among the Hebrew-speaking Israeli population largely because of language limitations (even though, due to the connectivity that exists between media and various social networks, the exposure is greater than it is to direct subscribers of the relevant channels).

As a result of the constraints mentioned above, the methodology adopted for locating and monitoring information relevant to research is to undertake a systematic examination of the information appearing in the relevant media, websites, and channels, based on a chronological approach from the oldest to the newest. To make the research more accurate, an artificial chronological limit was set, namely until the end of August 2022. The information monitoring focuses on the following aspects:

- (i) Direct expressions of anti-Semitism.
- (ii) Allusions to the Jewish origin of personalities who are factors of influence in the military and/or political campaign between Russia and Ukraine.
- (iii) The highlighting of Israel’s stance in favor of one or another side in its constitution as a Jewish state, both through its self-definition and in the way it is perceived by the parties involved in the war.
- (iv) The attention drawn to Jewish symbols and concepts by the parties involved in the war.
- (v) The reinforcement of negative stereotypes attributed to Jews.
- (vi) An instrumental approach to the Holocaust and Nazism which separates the terms from their original connection to the Jewish collective while giving a different, alternative meaning to these terms. This aspect does not necessary reflect anti-Semitic attitudes. Rather it can result from mistakes made through a

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15 Accessed 21 March, 202. <https://t.me/nekedmi>.

16 Accessed 21 March, 202. <https://anti-Semitism.org.il>.

lack of historical knowledge, misinterpretation, or miscalculation, and the rhetorical need to demonize the policies and actions of the enemy.

The relevant data inferred from this process underwent a systematic and critical examination, both from the need to evaluate the purpose of its distribution, and from an intellectual effort to understand it in context. This analysis leads to the proposal of a new model of conceptualization to be applied to the presence of anti-Semitic tropes and allusions to Jewish questions in the propaganda and discourse deployed in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

## 2 Anti-Semitism in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus – the Historical Background

Anti-Semitism in its many shades and forms was far from rare in the region of Eastern Europe relevant to this study. It has deep and long history originating in the Middle Ages with the medieval Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland, then continued within the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth under the rule of the Russian Empire of early modern times and was subsequently perpetuated in the modern nation-states that emerged from them right up to the modern Soviet period (including chronologically also the period of the Nazi occupation and the Holocaust). The early kingdoms were formative in creating anti-Semitic stereotypes and establishing patterns of thought and attitudes which shaped modern perceptions of the Jewish question and its exploitation as part of Soviet propaganda, the traces of which continue to have an impact, and perhaps now more than ever.<sup>17</sup>

During the Soviet period, generic anti-Semitic tropes were established that were routinely deployed during most of the Soviet period, especially after the end of the Second World War, in all the territories of the USSR. However, both by virtue of the pre-Soviet historical circumstances and of the unique circumstances of the post-Soviet period after the dissolution of the USSR, more unique patterns in both anti-Semitic expressions and ways of dealing with them by the authorities, the public and the Jewish population had developed. Below I will focus on the permutations of anti-Semitism which emerged within each geopolitical region relevant to the current study.

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17 On the characteristics of Soviet anti-Semitism, see: W. Korey, 'The Origins and Development of Soviet Anti-Semitism: An Analysis', *Slavic Review*, 31 No. 1 (1972): 111–135; J. Frankel, *The Soviet Regime and Anti-Zionism: An Analysis*, (Jerusalem 1984); T. Friedgut, 'Soviet anti-Zionism and Antisemitism—another cycle', *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 1 No. 1 (1984): 3–22.

## 2.1 Russia

At the end of the Soviet period and during the years after the breakup of the USSR, different ideological outlooks and political ideals had surfaced in Russia, some of which incorporated anti-Semitic concepts.<sup>18</sup> Subtle and latent anti-Semitism was always present in Soviet society,<sup>19</sup> but at the end of the Soviet period, it became openly expressed and visible. For example, an organization was formed with the name “Remembrance” (*Pamyat*), which soon adopted explicitly anti-Semitic stereotypes and arguments, and among other things formulated demands for what they saw as the excessive Jewish presence to be eliminated from Soviet public, professional, social, and political spaces (and after the collapse of the USSR – from Russia).<sup>20</sup> During the 1990s, anti-Semitic materials began to be openly published.

Public expressions of hostility towards Jews have decreased greatly over the last two decades and are now mainly of an abstract and latent nature. Nevertheless, in recent years it is possible to identify a tendency for people who hold influential positions, those who have a more significant status than the average Russian citizen, to allow themselves to express themselves in ways that contain overt or thinly veiled anti-Semitic sentiments and tropes, so that they have begun to move from the periphery into the main discourse in the Russian public and political sphere.<sup>21</sup> In addition, in recent years there is noticeable a trend towards reviving in the guise of anti-Zionism earlier anti-Semitic prejudices which were a staple part of Soviet propaganda.<sup>22</sup> In recent years it is also possible to identify the tendency to contest the uniqueness of the Holocaust, recycling a revisionist narrative that was common during the Soviet period.<sup>23</sup>

An important innovation in post-Soviet anti-Semitic discourse is the growing influence of ultra-conservative ideas derived from applying to Russia the euphemized neo-fascist arguments of the European New Right (ENR) which insists on the

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18 V. Rossman, *Russian Intellectual Anti-Semitism in the Post-Communist Era*, Lincoln 2002.

19 Examples from the field of visual art can be found a collection of illustrations from different periods of an anti-Semitic nature in the humorous magazine *Krokodil*: Accessed 27 August, 2022. <https://t.me/pellivert/225>, 27.8.2022.

20 On the organization “Pamyat” see—W. Korey, *Russian antisemitism, Pamyat, and the demonology of Zionism*, (Chur, 1995); T. Spence, *The Development of Russian nationalism under Gorbachev (1985–91)*, PhD Thesis, University of London 1998. Accessed 21 March, 2022. <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1317922/>.

21 В. Ханин, *Антисемитизм и филосемитизм в России и Украине: от эволюции к революции – аналитический доклад*, Тель-Авив 2019, с. 26.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

23 On the Soviet attitude to the Holocaust as a historical phenomenon see: O. Baranova, ‘Conceptualizations of the Holocaust in Soviet and Post-Soviet Ukraine and Belarus: Public Debates and Historiography’, *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, 34, No. 1 (2020): 241–260.



need to preserve unique cultures from the threat of multiculturalism, globalization, and “loss of difference” so as to intensify the experience of cultural identity, belonging and homogeneity. The resulting “neo-Eurasianism” has been reinforced by arguments drawn from geo-strategic theories that portray Russia as existing in constant state of conflict with Western countries and especially the USA. This conflict is presented not just as a struggle for influence designed to achieve a maximum of the interests of each of the parties. It is also understood as an ideological, ethical, civilizational conflict between the allegedly decadent, “degenerative” West on one hand, and a Russia which serves as the custodian of “eternal” conservative values and a fortress of societal and moral health. The most influential exponent of this ideological school, which has been influenced by the extreme racist and anti-Semitic ideologue of Italian Fascism and neo-Fascism, Julius Evola, is Alexander Dugin.<sup>24</sup> Dugin’s vision of a Russia restored to geopolitical and cultural greatness as a bulwark against globalization and Americanization has had a direct impact on Vladimir Putin.

Despite its marginality in public discourse, the anti-Semitic trend in Russia has begun to strengthen in recent years and has begun to move out of its marginalization into a more central discursive space. It manifests itself mainly in the endorsement of negative Jewish stereotypes (mainly by emphasizing the Jewish heritage of prominent individuals – particularly those identified as opposition to the regime), as well as in a partial revival of the discourse that was normalized during the Soviet period in which the uniqueness of the Holocaust was qualified by presenting it as part of the Nazis’ crimes against “all Soviet citizens”, as well as levelling disproportionate criticism of the human rights record of the State of Israel, a critique based on double standards given the crimes against humanity of the Stalin era.

## 2.2 Belarus

After the dissolution of the USSR and the establishment of independent Belarus, the immigration and repatriation of Jews to Israel, that began even before the dissolution of the USSR in the late 1980s continued. At the same time, the possibilities for the renewal of a diverse Jewish community life in Belarus itself have multiplied. Nevertheless, popular anti-Semitism has continued to be a factor in the lives of Jews on one level or another. In the first years of independence, the Belarusian political leadership tried to distance itself from anti-Semitism, create ties with the State of

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<sup>24</sup> On Dugin’s views, see: V. Shnirelman, ‘Alexander Dugin: Between Eschatology, Esotericism, and Conspiracy Theory’, in A. Dyrendal, D. Robertson, and E. Aspren (eds.), *Handbook of Conspiracy Theory and Contemporary Religion*, (Leiden 2018), pp. 443–460.

Israel, and allow the free activity of Jewish and Israeli institutions and organizations. Things began to take a certain turn for the worse after Alexander Lukashenko was elected president in 1994.<sup>25</sup>

The president of Belarus since 1994, Alexander Lukashenko, has a long history of making statements with an anti-Semitic tone. Thus on 12 October, 2007, during a press conference for the Russian media, Lukashenko said in reference to Babruysk, “*In the past it was scary to enter there, it was a pigsty. It was a predominantly Jewish city; you know how Jews treat the place where they live in ...*”. This statement by Lukashenko drew sharp criticism from Israel.<sup>26</sup> In 2015 Lukashenko spoke of the need to control all the Jews in Belarus,<sup>27</sup> and in 2021 he compared the Holocaust to what he called the “Holocaust of Belarusians”.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, there is a clear tendency to accuse those who do not align themselves with the official stance of the Belarusian regime as promoting narratives which draw their inspiration from the Nazi regime. For example, the Belarusian ambassador to Israel, Yevgeny Vorobyov, spoke in an article in “*Ha'aretz*” in his reference to the criticism of Dr. Leonid Smilovitsky, an Israeli historian specializing in the history of the Jews of Belarus, about the “Belarusian Genocide Law” which called for the Jewish identity of the victims of the Nazi regime in Belarus to be kept secret, while at the same time trying to present a narrative which implied that the Jews who lost their lives under the Nazi occupation were not killed as part of a planned genocide but simply shared the fate of all Belarusian victims of World War II.<sup>29</sup> In his article, Vorobyov accused Smilovitsky of adopting the narrative of Nazi propaganda.<sup>30</sup> Thus, he instrumentalized terminology related to Nazism in order to

25 On the history of the Jews of Belarus see - <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Belarus>, and - C. Le Foll, ‘The Jews of Belorussia in Western and Russian Historiography’, *Bulletin du Centre de recherche français à Jérusalem*, 11 (2002): 64–82; А. Шуман, ‘Ашкеназскія габрэі як адзін з карэнных народаў Беларусі’, *ARCHE* 11–12 (86–87, 2009), с. 313–328.

26 В. Цыганков, ‘Лукашенко пожаловался российским журналистам на евреев’, Accessed 19 October 2007. <https://www.svoboda.org/a/417359.html>.

27 ‘Лукашэнка пра Зіэра’, Accessed 29 April 2015. [https://youtu.be/E9OgNR\\_e5VA](https://youtu.be/E9OgNR_e5VA).

28 ‘Курган славы. Полная версия’, Accessed 3 July, 2021. <https://youtu.be/eYxySt3Yc1Q?t=922>.

29 The law was vigorously criticized, among other things by Holocaust researchers in general and those specializing on the Holocaust in the USSR. See: L. Smilovitsky, ‘The Real Reason Belarus’ Dictatorial Regime Is Downplaying the Holocaust’, *Haaretz*, Accessed 12 January, 2022. <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/2022-01-12/ty-article-opinion/premium/the-real-reason-belarus-dictatorial-regime-downplays-the-holocaust/0000017f-e9f7-dc91-a17f-fdff62590000>; A. Zeltser, ‘Blurring of Holocaust in Belarus mirrors Soviet treatment’, *Jerusalem Post*, Accessed 11 January, 2022. <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-692119>.

30 E. Vorobyev, ‘We Will Never Separate Jewish Victims from the Nazi Genocide Against the Entire People of Belarus’, *Haaretz*, Accessed 22 December, 2021. <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/2021-12-22/ty-article-opinion/premium/we-will-never-separate-jewish-victims-from-the-nazi-genocide-against-belarus/0000017f-dc84-db5a-a57f-dceec14c0000>.

“prevail” in argument with Israeli Jewish historian assumably knowing how sensitive the usage of Nazi related terminology for the Israeli Jews is.

Although anti-Semitism is prohibited by Belarusian law, it appears that from time to time the Belarusian President Lukashenko, as well as propagandists in the service of the regime, have allowed themselves to express themselves in a way that appeals to anti-Semitic sentiment in their listeners, whether they do so deliberately, or such racial stereotyping simply reflects their unconscious values and convictions. The question of the effect of these things on the public is unknown and to the best of my knowledge has never been examined.

## 2.3 Ukraine

The Jews of Ukraine have a long and profound history.<sup>31</sup> Due to the many acts of violence and destruction carried out against the Jewish population in Ukraine over the generations, in popular collective memory this area became a symbol of the Jewish experience of anti-Semitic violence during the pre-Holocaust period. The subsequent massacre in September 1941 of over 33,000 Jewish civilians at Babyn Yar a short distance from the capital Kiev then became one of the iconic events of the Holocaust in general and of the mass murder of Jews in firing pits in the USSR area in particular. The traumatizing historical memory of these events is so strong that on the outbreak of the war between Russia and Ukraine, a part of the Jewish-Israeli population, and to a lesser extent among the Jews of the Diaspora, was reluctant to give its full support to Ukraine and the determined resistance of Ukrainians to invasion.<sup>32</sup>

Anti-Semitic tendencies in Ukrainian society are in constant flux, vary between different areas within Ukraine, and underwent dynamic transformations during the post-Soviet period.<sup>33</sup> It seems that two major trends can be identified in the transformations of the relationship between the non-Jewish and the Jewish population in Ukraine: on the one hand, persistent misgivings about accepting Jews in senior leadership positions of symbolic significance, such as the position of president, harbored even by Ukrainians who declare their positive attitude towards the Jews, and on the other hand the opening up of a generational gap on this issue

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31 For an overview of the history of Ukrainian Jews see - <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/ukraine>.

32 ‘A Majority of Israelis support Ukraine in the War with Russia – survey’, *Jerusalem Post*. Accessed 5 March, 2022 <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/politics-and-diplomacy/article-699374>.

33 В. Паниютто, ‘Динамика ксенофобии и антисемитизма в Украине, 1994–2007’, *Социология: теория, методы, маркетинг* 1 (2008), с. 197–214.

leading to the attitude of young people becoming more sympathetic towards Jews.<sup>34</sup> Evidence for the first trend is provided by the latest research into social attitudes, though its findings could well be outdated, given that after the 2014 revolution (Euromaidan) Jews (at least in terms of their cultural background or ethnicity) have occupied senior positions in the Ukrainian leadership. Examples are the Prime Minister in the years 2016–2019, who also served in practice in 2014, Volodymyr Groysman; the current Minister of Defense Oleksiy Reznikov; and most prominently of all, the incumbent President Volodymyr Zelensky who gained the support of 73.22% of the voters during the 2019 presidential elections.<sup>35</sup> According one current of popular opinion, Ukrainian society is finally in the process of purging itself of a long history of xenophobic tendencies and coming to terms with its dark past in relation to the treatment of Jewish communities.<sup>36</sup> Some would argue that this means completing a process which started with the foundation of the independent Ukrainian state about a hundred years ago, when there was an official attempt as well as a genuine trend towards integrating Jews fully into the state apparatus and its political leadership.<sup>37</sup>

The attitude to the Holocaust in Ukraine underwent a transformation after gaining its independence in 1991 from a Soviet narrative that denied the exceptionalness of the Holocaust as a unique Jewish event and asserted that the Jews were murdered by the Nazis as part of an amorphous collective called “Soviet citizens”, to accepting the uniqueness of the Holocaust, while emphasizing the heroism of Ukrainians deemed by the State of Israel as “Righteous of the Nations”, namely non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews from extermination. This has led to an exaggeration of the effectiveness of the efforts made by ethnic Ukrainians to resist the Nazi campaign of genocide, while underestimating the significant part played by Ukrainian collaborators in the destruction of the Jewish population.<sup>38</sup> On the practical side, during the 31 years of Ukraine’s independence, commemorative

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34 В. Ханин, *Антисемитизм и филосемитизм в России и Украине: от эволюции к революции – аналитический доклад*, Тель-Авив 2019, с. 17–19.

35 Accessed 21 March, 202. [https://cvk.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/vpu\\_2019\\_protokol\\_cvk\\_30042019.pdf](https://cvk.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/vpu_2019_protokol_cvk_30042019.pdf).

36 D. Lepeska, ‘Ukraine Embraces its Jewish Minority, and Reckons with its Traumatic History: In embracing its Jewish minority, Ukraine exhumes long-buried secrets’, *New Lines Magazine*, Accessed 13 October, 2021. <https://newlinesmag.com/essays/ukraine-embraces-its-jewish-minority-and-reckons-with-its-traumatic-history/>.

37 On the place of the Jews in the political leadership of the Ukrainian state about a century ago, see: H. Abramson, ‘Jewish Representation in the Independent Ukrainian Governments of 1917–1920’, *Slavic Review*, 50 No. 3 (1991): 542–550.

38 J. Himka, ‘The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Ukraine’, J. Himka, J. Michlic (eds.), *Bringing the Dark Past to Light: The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe* (Lincoln and London, 2013), pp. 626–661.

monuments were erected at the sites of the murder of the Jewish population by the Nazis and their collaborators, a renewed memorial center was inaugurated in Babyn Yar near Kyiv in 2021,<sup>39</sup> and a center for the study of the Holocaust in Ukraine was also established in Kyiv.<sup>40</sup>

As Ukrainian society opened to the West and sought to a large extent to adopt ideas, values and patterns of political, social, cultural, and economic activity established in Western countries, the rejection of anti-Semitism in the public discourse intensified, although it failed in completely eliminating anti-Semitic tendencies in popular discourse, as well as in preventing acts of vandalism and in rarer cases physical violence against Jews with an anti-Semitic motivation. At the same time, over the years political actors and organizations who expressed nationalist and anti-Semitic sentiments were relegated to the periphery of the Ukrainian political spectrum. It can be said that anti-Semitism has been largely marginalized from Ukrainian society, but has not completely disappeared, and continues to be manifested in sporadic acts of violence against Jewish individuals, institutions, and property.

### 3 The Attitude towards the Jewish Question in the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict since 2014

At the end of 2013, a series of events took place in Ukraine that was nicknamed Euro-Maidan (Europe Square) or “Revolution of Honor”. Following these events, the Ukrainian opposition came to power, while President Yanukovich fled to Russia. Russia took over the Crimean Peninsula and annexed it, and with its encouragement (and some believe even with its active intervention), armed separatist groups in the regions of southeastern Ukraine began fighting against the central Ukrainian government. The active phase of the fighting ended with the signing of the Minsk agreements in the summer-autumn of 2014 and in the winter of 2015, but the mutual hostility between the separatist factions and Russia on the one hand and Ukraine on the other did not stop, but grew stronger,<sup>41</sup> while fighting continued between the

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39 Accessed 6 October, 2021. <https://babynyar.org/en>; <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/b1klfqo4k>.

40 <http://holocaust.kiev.ua/en/home/about>.

41 On the Euromaidan and political changes in Ukraine in 2014, see: N. Diuk, ‘EUROMAIDAN Ukraine’s Self-Organizing Revolution’, *World Affairs*, 176, No. 6 (2014): 9–16; K. Bachmann, I. Lyubashenko, *The Maidan Uprising, separatism, and foreign intervention: Ukraine’s complex transition*, (Frankfurt 2014). On a retrospective evaluation of the Minsk agreements (2014–2015) see: L. Powirska, ‘Through the Ashes of the Minsk Agreements’. Accessed 18 May, 2022. <https://epicenter.wcfia.harvard.edu/blog/through-ashes-minsk-agreements>.

Ukrainian military and pro-Russian separatists with the unacknowledged help of the Russian military.

Since 2014, Russia has been engaged in a propaganda war, including an intensive disinformation campaign, directed against Ukraine. This propaganda includes imaginary, unfounded or exaggerated accusations of anti-Semitism, aimed at different audiences—ethnic Russians in Ukraine, supporters of Ukraine in Western countries as well as citizens of the RF. For example, Putin stated that he was concerned about what he described as “the rampage of reactionary, nationalist and anti-Semitic forces” in Ukraine.<sup>42</sup> After Russian forces occupied and annexed the Crimean Peninsula, Putin again raised the issue of anti-Semitism, claiming that Ukraine is under the control of “nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes<sup>43</sup> and anti-Semites”.<sup>44</sup> Russian propaganda highlights selected historical facts such as the role of Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) in the collaboration with Nazi Germany and its genocidal politics during Operation Barbarossa,<sup>45</sup> as well as contemporary issues, such as the alleged neo-Nazism of the Azov regiment.<sup>46</sup>

Starting in 2014, a significant effort was made by Russian propaganda and discourse in the Russian public to instrumentalize anti-Semitism and the Jewish question in the new context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. The main goal of this trend was to delegitimize and denigrate the new Ukrainian government that came to power following Euromaidan in the eyes of Russian citizens, in the eyes of the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine, mainly in its eastern and southern regions, encouraging nostalgia for the area’s Soviet past and the ethos of the “Great

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<sup>42</sup> Accessed 4 March, 2014. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20366>.

<sup>43</sup> The term “Russophobia” connotes hatred of Russians and of what is identified as the culture, language, and mentality of the Russian people. The accusation of Russophobia is often used to invalidate the arguments of critics of Russian policy and is intended to move the discourse from the semantic space of rational arguments based on facts and data, to a semantic space of supposedly irrational opposition to the Russian people and their culture. For more on the term Russophobia and its place in Russian discourse, see—О. Федорова (сост.), *Курс противодействие ксенофобии и этнической дискриминации*, Москва 2006, с. 169–181.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Putin signs treaty for Crimea to join Russia’, Accessed 18 March, 2014. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/putin-signs-treaty-for-crimea-to-join-russia>.

<sup>45</sup> А. Варнер, ‘Не в угоду России: Споры об ОУН, УПА и их участии в Холокосте’, Accessed 30 June, 2021 <https://www.svoboda.org/a/ne-v-ugodu-rossii-spory-ob-oun-upa-i-ih-uchastii-v-holokoste/31332288.html>; as part of this effort Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) had published archival documents about the collaboration of Ukrainian nationalists with special services of Nazi Germany: [http://www.fsb.ru/fsb/history/archival\\_material/OUN.htm](http://www.fsb.ru/fsb/history/archival_material/OUN.htm).

<sup>46</sup> A. McCallum, ‘Much Azov about nothing: How the ‘Ukrainian Neo-Nazis’ canard fooled the world’, Accessed 19 August, 2022. <https://lens.monash.edu/@politics-society/2022/08/19/1384992?slug=much-azov-about-nothing-how-the-ukrainian-neo-nazis-canard-fooled-the-world>.

Patriotic War”, as well as in the opinion of the European, American, and Israeli audience.<sup>47</sup>

## 4 The Attitude towards the Jewish Question during the Russia-Ukraine War from the Outbreak of Active Hostilities (February 24, 2022) Until the End of August 2022

### 4.1 Russia

#### 4.1.1 Propaganda as Part of the System of Institutional Influence in Russia

The propaganda system in Russia has gone through an evolutionary process from largely free media in the nineties of the 20th century and most of the first decade of the 21st century to a media largely instrumentalized to promote the views of the regime, while emphasizing the status of Russian President Putin as a heroic and charismatic national leader. Thus in 2008, Lev Gudkov, who was the head of the Levada Center for the study of public opinion, claimed that the media, in their writing and broadcasts, shifted from echoing the public opinion to echoing the propaganda of the regime.<sup>48</sup> Shortly after the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war, the last independent media still operating in Russia (such as the independent TV channel “Rain” (*Dozhd*), radio “Echo of Moscow” (*Ekho Moskvy*), and the “new newspaper” (*Novaya Gazeta*) edited by Nobel laureate Dmitry Muratov) ceased operation, and as a result the situation as of now is that all the media in Russia are aligned to and disseminators of the regime’s narrative regarding the Russia-Ukraine war. Even before that, the RF took draconian action against civil society organizations, especially organizations such as “Memorial” (*Pamyat*) that deal with historical memory related to Russia and the USSR, and especially the dark and unpleasant sides of this historical memory, notably the Stalinist period of mass

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47 В. Ханин, *Антисемитизм и филосемитизм в России и Украине: от эволюции к революции – аналитический доклад*, Тель-Авив 2019, с. 32.

48 Л. Гудков, ‘Новогодний баланс: после стабильности’, *Ведомости* 248 (2270, 2008), Accessed 30 December, 2008. <https://web.archive.org/web/20081231074540/http://www.vedomosti.ru/newspaper/article.shtml?2008%2F12%2F30%2F176062>.

persecutions, imprisonment, and executions on political and social grounds in the second half of the 1930s.<sup>49</sup>

Russia operates hybrid propaganda through various means of communication—television, radio, printed press, social networks and social media platforms. It uses tools of psychological warfare to convey its message and achieve maximum psychological influence in a way that will serve its goals and interests,<sup>50</sup> including the permanent threat to dissidents and critics of the regime of imprisonment and the possibility of their clandestine execution at home and abroad.

## 4.2 The Treatment of Jews in Russian Propaganda

Russian propaganda rarely refers to Jewish affairs or addresses the Jewish question as a domestic issue. Television broadcasts in Russia seldom echo anti-Semitic stereotypes. Occasionally an anti-Semitic remark does slip out, however, as it did in the program “Emergency Case” on the NTV channel (18.7.2022) in the segment of the program that dealt with non-payment of alimony to Yelena Zhukova, the ex-wife, and mother of the six children of the singer Roman Zhukov. Interviewed about her divorce, Zhukova said - “... *it feels as if I lived all the time with a little Jew: he avoids shelling out for anything whenever he can: he’s a real miser*”.<sup>51</sup> However, this is an exception. As a rule, Jews are able to engage fully in diverse activities that relate to their own community, religious, cultural and social. Until recently, global Jewish bodies and those directly related to the State of Israel operated in Russia without hindrance. During July 2022, rumors began to surface about the termination of the activities of the Jewish Agency in Israel in the territories of the RF.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, the rumors later became reality, and a trial began which may result in the cessation of its activities.<sup>53</sup> There may be some truth in the claim that the background to these decisions is a desire to “punish” the State of Israel or the Israeli government for its

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49 A. Roth, ‘Russian court orders closure of country’s oldest human rights group’, Accessed 28 December, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/28/russian-court-memorial-human-rights-group-closure>.

50 On models in which Russian propaganda works, see—K. Giles, *Handbook of Russian Information Warfare: Fellowship Monograph*, (Rome, 2016); C. Paul and M. Matthews, ‘The Russian “Firehose of Falsehood” Propaganda Model—Why It Might Work and Options to Counter It’. Accessed 18 July, 2022. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE198.html>.

51 Accessed 18 July, 2022. <https://www.ntv.ru/video/2127011>.

52 L. Harkov, Z. Klein, ‘Russia request closure of Jewish Agency for Israel’, Accessed 21 July, 2022. <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-712718>.

53 ‘Дело о ликвидации Сохнута в РФ’, Accessed 19 August, 2022. <https://www.vesty.co.il/main/article/j8gdeyd5r>.



neutral stance on the Russia's war against Ukraine<sup>54</sup> which has not prevented it from providing humanitarian aid to Ukrainian civil society. This move may signal the Russian regime growing intolerance of the Jewish population in Russia as a distinct community, or at the very least the introduction of restrictions to expressions of Jewish identity and identification. It could even herald the imposition of limits to the free immigration and repatriation of Jews into and out of Russia, or their eventual suspension altogether.

### 4.3 Propaganda as Part of a Psychological Warfare Effort

There is no doubt that all parties involved in combat attach great importance to the psychological dimension of the military combat, both the need for mental preparedness to be able to fight effectively and the emotional toll inflicted on the soldiers in active engagement with the enemy. Psychological warfare and mental effort are an integral part of modern warfare, but in the present conflict the two sides deploy them to different ends. Ukraine seeks in its propaganda to echo democratic principles, partly in order to mobilize sympathetic public opinion for their struggle in the West among their citizens as well as within their military leadership and of course their governments and other democratic institutions capable of increasing the support and aid made available to Ukraine. In contrast, Russia attaches great importance to propaganda whose central goal is to use the power of media manipulation and psychological warfare to help it achieve its military and political goals. The roots of the Russian tradition of using propaganda as a tool in psychological warfare lie in the Soviet period, and Putin's government has no scruples about exploiting every any technique of psychological trickery to mould public opinion in such a way that it supports the realization of its goals, and avails itself of every possible means of disseminating information—printed, traditional electronic (radio and television), online and social networks, while suppressing inconvenient factual truths while presenting half-truths, false claims and invented facts, which has the cumulative effect of distorting the reality of the war while forcing the public to see the unfolding of events through a narrative prism that serves its purposes.<sup>55</sup>

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54 <https://www.timesofisrael.com/lapid-explicitly-accuses-russia-of-war-crimes-in-first-for-top-israeli-official/>. It was reported in the media that Russia sent messages to Israel that it is not satisfied with PM Lapid's approach regarding the Russia-Ukraine war—information that was denied by Russian officials - <https://www.israelhayom.com/2022/07/21/israel-russia-deny-report-of-kremlins-concern-over-pm-lapid/>.

55 For an analysis of the effort to influence Russian consciousness through propaganda, see: V. Saran, 'Media Manipulation and Psychological War in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova', *CES*

Below I examine the Russian propaganda narratives that deal with or touch on the Jewish question, while making an assessment of how far narratives are to be seen as evidence of anti-Semitic prejudice.

#### 4.4 A Narrative Presenting Ukraine as a Nazi State and Russia's War Against Ukraine as a Direct Parallel to the USSR's War Against Nazi Germany

Vladimir Putin has more than once used the phrase “a gang of drug addicts and neo-Nazis” to describe the current government of Ukraine, and repeatedly defined the Ukrainian forces fighting the Russian army as “Bandera’s followers and neo-Nazis”.<sup>56</sup> Leaders of public opinion also express themselves in a similar way (publicists and/or propagandists: in the current reality in Russia, it is difficult to make a clear distinction between the holders of these two functions).<sup>57</sup> By superimposing the familiar narrative of Nazism and the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust over the events of the war, the Kremlin seeks to undermine the legitimacy of Zelensky’s administration and demonize Ukraine both in the eyes of the Russian public and in global public opinion about the legitimacy of the invasion.

A related strategy is to try to manipulate international assessments of the war by equating Russia’s fight against Ukraine with the USSR’s fight against Nazi Germany, a campaign costing millions of lives and whose successful outcome is still a source of pride and identification for many citizens of the post-Soviet countries, including those of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, and for many of those who immigrated from post-Soviet states to Western countries (including those who repatriated to Israel) whose ancestors sacrificed so much during World War II. The Ukrainians, as a response to Russian rhetoric, also accuse Russia of Nazism, and use terminology related to the period of Nazi occupation (for example, many call the

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*Working Papers*, 8 No. 4 (2016): 738–752; For the analysis of the use of psychological warfare tools in the war between Russia and Ukraine, see—Z. Abrams, ‘The role of psychological warfare in the battle for Ukraine’, *Monitor on Psychology* 53, 4 (2022), pp. 18–21; Accessed 22 July, 2022. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/06/news-psychological-warfare>.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Meeting with Security Council Permanent Members’, Accessed 25 February, 2022. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67851>.

<sup>57</sup> Т. Сергейцев, ‘Что Россия должна сделать с Украиной’, Accessed 3 April, 2022 <https://ria.ru/20220403/ukraina-1781469605.html>; see a collection of propaganda pieces broadcast on Russian television channels emphasizing the identification of the current Ukrainian government, and in fact the Ukrainian state, with Nazism, while emphasizing the need to carry out what they call de-Nazification, and in fact the separation, of the Ukrainian territories from expressions of Ukrainian identity - <https://twitter.com/JuliaDavisNews/status/1513331072007909379>.

local rulers appointed by the Russians in those settlements that are under Russian control “*Gauleiter*”, a term for a local governor during the Nazi occupation), and frequently refer to the ideology driving the invasion as “*Russcism*” which literally means a mixture of Russian nationalism with elements of fascism.<sup>58</sup> They use another significant historical reference point to characterize the inhumanity of the Russian campaign: Orki (or Orda), which alludes to another dark period in the historical memory of both Russia and Ukraine, namely the period of Mongol and Tatar rule in Eastern Europe.<sup>59</sup>

It is worth noting that a Russian narrative that tries to draw direct parallels between Ukraine and Nazi Germany is condemned by many historians who are experts in the realities of the Second World War and the Holocaust,<sup>60</sup> and even institutions that usually avoid meddling in current affairs, such as the Holocaust Museum in the USA and the Yad Vashem Institution in Jerusalem, have issued statements of condemnation of the comparisons made by the Russian propaganda of the Ukrainian government and its army with the Nazis.<sup>61</sup>

## 4.5 A Narrative that Presents Russians as the Jews of Contemporary History

Even before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, between 2014 and February 2022, the instrumentalization of anti-Semitism by Russian propaganda also included appeals to conspiratorial anti-Semitic stereotypes. Thus, Russian television broadcast programs in which prominent Ukrainian politicians were accused of being secretly Jewish,<sup>62</sup> Russian officials created a fake Ukrainian website with similar

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58 J. Bilyk, V. Marayev, ‘Rashism or why Russians are new Nazi’, Accessed 30 March, 2022. <https://voxukraine.org/en/rashism-or-why-russians-are-the-new-nazi>.

59 M. Mirovalev, ‘Orcs’ ans ‘Rashists’: Ukraine’s new language of war’, Accessed 3 May, 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/3/orcs-and-rashists-ukraines-new-language-of-war>.

60 I. Tabarovsky, E. Finkel, ‘Statement on the War in Ukraine by Scholars of Genocide, Nazism and World War II’, Accessed 27 February, 2022. <https://jewishjournal.com/news/worldwide/345515/statement-on-the-war-in-ukraine-by-scholars-of-genocide-nazism-and-world-war-ii/>.

61 Condemnation of the Holocaust Museum in the USA, ‘Museum Condemns Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine’, Accessed 24 February, 2022. [https://www.ushmm.org/information/press/press-releases/museum-condemns-russias-invasion-of-ukraine?utm\\_medium=socialmedia&utm\\_source=twitter&utm\\_campaign=museumstatement&utm\\_content=ukrainestatement20220224](https://www.ushmm.org/information/press/press-releases/museum-condemns-russias-invasion-of-ukraine?utm_medium=socialmedia&utm_source=twitter&utm_campaign=museumstatement&utm_content=ukrainestatement20220224); ‘Yad Vashem Statement Regarding the Russian Invasion of Ukraine’, Accessed 27 February, 2022. <https://www.yadvashem.org/press-release/27-february-2022-14-25.html>.

62 D. E. Fishman, ‘The Real Truth About Those Ant-Semitic Flyers in Donetsk’, Accessed 23 April, 2014. <https://forward.com/opinion/196864/the-real-truth-about-those-anti-semitic-flyers-in/>.

claims,<sup>63</sup> and the leaders of the so-called People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk issued public statements claiming that Jews were behind the Maidan events and took over the Ukrainian government in early 2014.<sup>64</sup>

Since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, several prominent Russian propagandists, including those known to have anti-Semitic tendencies and who habitually use offensive epithets when referring to Jews, have rushed to declare themselves as modern Jews. This is how Sergey Shnurov (known as “Shnur”), the leader of the popular Russian rock band “Leningrad”, who served as general producer at the RTVi TV channel (until 10 March, 2022), created and published a music video called “No Entry” dealing with what he calls the “genocide” of the Russians in Ukraine. In the clip, two men stand behind the singers dressed in a traditional Russian shirt, and on their shirts are large blue Stars of David, a reminder of the yellow patch in the shape of the Star of David that the Nazis usually required Jews to wear. Shnurov sings: “*A Russian now is like a Jew in Berlin in 1940*”, and the singer sings in a chorus about “genocide”. Shnurov sings: “*European, you, as you are, say, don't be silent: a Russian for you is a new Jew [You would like to] burn us all in the oven!*”.<sup>65</sup> The song ends with the insulting nickname of the Jews – *Zhyd* attributed to the other side – “*for them we are Zhyds*”. In such a song what Orwell called in 1984 “doublethink” is at work. On one hand the song contains no overt anti-Semitic references, on the contrary, the audience is encouraged to sympathize with the Jews as symbols of victimhood. On other hand it is a clear act of political manipulation which instrumentalizes anti-Semitism in pursuit of a Russian agenda. It also can be said that the author's choice to use the insulting word “*Zhyd*”<sup>66</sup> in the song reflects a negative attitude towards the group whose identity he is trying to steal in order to direct sympathy Russians. Moreover, this song expresses a deliberate distortion of the Holocaust and its memory.

Another example of this narrative is worth citing. In March 2022, Alexander Brod, a member of the Presidential Council for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights, an ethnic Jew<sup>67</sup> with an impressive record of activity for the

63 L. Alexander, ‘Pro-Russian Web Network Digs Up the Dirt on Kremlin Critics’, Accessed 10 August, 2015. <https://globalvoices.org/2015/08/10/pro-russian-web-network-digs-up-the-dirt-on-kremlin-critics/>.

64 S. Sokol, ‘Top rebel leader accuses Jews of masterminding Ukrainian revolution’, Accessed 22 June, 2015. <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/top-rebel-leader-accuses-jews-of-masterminding-ukrainian-revolution-406729>.

65 ‘Ленинград – Входа Нет’, Accessed 10 March, 2022. <https://youtu.be/FeljDxbAZeM>.

66 Regarding the negative attitude of the term *Zhyd* see – J. Klier, ‘Zhid: Biography of a Russian Epithet’, *The Slavonic and East European Review* 60, 1 (1982), pp. 1–15.

67 A source of biographical background: [http://www.president-sovet.ru/members/biography/brod\\_aleksandr\\_semenovich](http://www.president-sovet.ru/members/biography/brod_aleksandr_semenovich).

promotion of Jewish culture in Russia, wrote a position paper, which may have been invited or dictated, in which he compared what he called a wave of Russophobia in the West and the negative attitude towards the Russian population (having Russian citizenship or people who identify or are identified as Russians) in Western countries with the persecution of the Jews in Nazi Germany. At the end of the paper, Ukraine was described unambiguously as a Nazi country.<sup>68</sup> The fact that the article was written by a person who identifies himself as a Jew is supposed to give his claims greater moral validity, as does his role on the Presidential Human Rights Council. Closer examination shows that the article contains a combination of factual data with extreme claims and a final assertion that utterly distorts reality by ignoring the origins of the war in a unilateral and unwarranted attack by an authoritarian sham democracy on a peaceful and authentic parliamentary democracy, and by presenting sporadic instances of Russophobia as symptoms of comprehensive, state-endorsed policy of anti-Russian aggression. Three days after the publication of the article, its main claim was repeated during a meeting of the Russian government chaired by President Putin.<sup>69</sup>

#### **4.6 Emphasizing the Jewish Origin of the President of Ukraine Zelensky and the Senior Officials of the Ukrainian Government**

Alongside the narrative which identifies contemporary Ukraine with Nazism, a narrative widely ignored in world opinion, attempts are made simultaneously to emphasize Zelensky's Jewish origin, while at the same time questioning the authenticity of his Jewish origin. Thus, former Russian President Medvedev raised the issue of Zelensky's origin (calling him "a person with certain ethnic roots") in an article published before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, in which he alluded to the lack of authentic Ukrainian identity and roots of the country's political leadership. This formed part of the rationale for his claim that Zelensky government was flirting with the forces of radical nationalism within Ukrainian society and politics, and that as a result there was no point in having a dialogue with the Ukrainian leadership till it was replaced.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, Vladimir Solovyov, one of the regime's

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<sup>68</sup> А. Брод, 'Спираль Истории', Accessed 11 March, 2022. <https://iz.ru/1303418/aleksandr-brod/spiral-istorii>.

<sup>69</sup> 'Путин сравнил травлю россиян на Западе с еврейскими погромами', Accessed 16 March, 2022. <https://theins.ru/news/249340>.

<sup>70</sup> 'Почему бессмысленны контакты с нынешним украинским руководством', Accessed 10 November, 2021. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5028300>.

senior propagandists broadcasting on Channel 1 on Russian television, doubted Zelensky's Jewish origin and his claim to a Jewish identity, emphasizing that he, Solovyov, was "truly Jewish".<sup>71</sup> In this spirit, Russian propaganda seeks to present Zelensky as a man who has lost his Jewish identity, and who finds a substitute, *ersatz* one by connecting it to a Ukrainian identity in its nationalist, Bandera-style, and even neo-Nazi version.<sup>72</sup> One of the figures responsible for this line of propaganda which aims to delegitimize Zelensky on the basis of his Jewish origins is Yaakov Kedmi, the former head of "Nativ". In September 2021 he asserted that: *"Such people should not be allowed into any Jewish home. He should be ostracized . . . , more than others, because he is dancing on the blood of his ancestors, trying to justify and whitewash the murderers of his people who rule Ukraine today . . . . And at the same time, he shouts: "I am a Jew". He is a source of ignominy for the Jewish people"*.<sup>73</sup>

In an interview with the Italian TV channel "Mediaset" on 1 May, 2022, the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, made a claim that the Jews believe that the worst anti-Semites were Jews themselves, thereby downplaying the role of anti-Semitism in Nazi ideology, and even claimed that Hitler had Jewish roots (in his own words - "Jewish blood").<sup>74</sup> These statements were condemned by the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, Yair Lapid. However, in the Russian Foreign Ministry's response to Lapid's condemnation,<sup>75</sup> there was a repetition of Lavrov's claims. Lapid's statement that Lavrov's words were "outrageous" and constituted a "serious historical error" was presented as an *"anti-historical claim, which largely explains the tendency of the current Israeli government to support the neo-Nazi regime of Kyiv"*. It went on to emphasize the claim that there is no contradiction between being ethnically Jewish and being a collaborator with Nazism.<sup>76</sup> In this statement, by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, two examples of Jewish cooperation with the Nazis during the Holocaust were cited, while completely ignoring the historical context of this marginal phenomenon.

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71 'Соловьев посоветовал Зеленскому не жаловаться и не ныть', Accessed 24 September, 2020. <https://vz.ru/news/2020/9/24/1062029.html>; Accessed 29 January, 2020. video recording on Soloviov's Telegram channel - <https://t.me/SolovievLive/15487>.

72 'Зеленский и евреи: Почему президент Украины не получает ожидаемую им поддержку от Израйля', Accessed 13 April, 2022. <https://antifashist.com/item/zelenskij-i-evrei-pochemu-prezident-ukrainy-ne-poluchaet-ozhidaemuyu-im-podderzhku-ot-izrailya.html>.

73 Accessed 2 September, 2021. [https://m.vk.com/wall-24136539\\_5704487](https://m.vk.com/wall-24136539_5704487).

74 Accessed 4 May, 2022. <https://rus.rusemb.org.uk/article/663>.

75 Accessed 2 May, 2022 [https://t.me/logikamarkova/2181https://twitter.com/yairlapid/status/152102441129765888?ref\\_src=twsrc^tfw|twcamp^tweetembed|twterm^152102441129765888|twgr^|twcon^s1\\_&ref\\_url=https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-61296682](https://t.me/logikamarkova/2181https://twitter.com/yairlapid/status/152102441129765888?ref_src=twsrc^tfw|twcamp^tweetembed|twterm^152102441129765888|twgr^|twcon^s1_&ref_url=https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-61296682).

76 'Об антисемитизме', Accessed 3 May, 2022. <https://telega.ph/Ob-antisemitizme-05-03>.

This episode of Russian propaganda put forward the absurd argument that anti-Semitism was not necessarily a component of Nazi ideology, and can be converted for example, to anti-Slavism or Russophobia.<sup>77</sup> This is suggested alongside marginal attempts to establish the conspiratorial claim regarding Hitler's Jewish origin.<sup>78</sup> In the moderate version of this claim, it is argued that Zelensky is nothing more than an acceptable cover for the Western countries to disguise and divert attention from the process of Nazification that is supposedly taking place in Ukraine. In this spirit, an article written by the pro-rector of the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prof. Oleg Karpovich, claimed that the Western position condemning Russian aggression is to be seen as an Orwellian piece of misdirection to camouflage an essentially Nazi worldview, and accused Ukraine itself of adopting a Nazi worldview. Moreover, the article explicitly and implicitly states the rationale for Russia's war in Ukraine as a war against neo-Nazism.<sup>79</sup>

This claim, which recurs as the second thread in Russian propaganda before the outbreak of the war and even more so after it, is particularly interesting in view of the Russian regime's ties to nationalist parties and movements classified as "extreme right" in European countries, at least according to journalistic investigations.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, the allusion to Zelensky's Jewishness expresses an implicit claim that by virtue of being a Jew, Zelensky is taking advantage of his connections with Jews in other parts of the world, for example the Jews of the USA, to supply weapons and ammunition to the Ukrainian army. Thus, on June 13 and 14, the headlines of Russian newspapers and websites stated that Zelensky asked for money/aid from American Jews,<sup>81</sup> and even more blatantly, "*Zelensky asked for money from Jews for the followers of Bandera*".<sup>82</sup> Such allusions to a supranational network of well-connected Jews pulling the strings of democratic state governments and economic systems are reminiscent of the surge of anti-Semitic conspiracy theory

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77 Accessed 6 May, 2022. <https://twitter.com/JuliaDavisNews/status/1522403876040855554>.

78 Accessed 3 May, 2022.

79 О. Карпович, 'Зеленский как ширма для реабилитации нацизма', Accessed 18 March, 2022. [https://aif.ru/politics/opinion/zelenskiy\\_kak\\_shirma\\_dlya\\_reabilitacii\\_nacizma\\_2](https://aif.ru/politics/opinion/zelenskiy_kak_shirma_dlya_reabilitacii_nacizma_2).

80 'Нацификация Часть Вторая: Ультраправый интернационал', Accessed 24 March, 2022. <https://dossier.center/ultraright>.

81 'Зеленский попросил денег у американских евреев', Accessed 13 June, 2022. <https://nsn.fm/ukraine/zelenskii-poprosil-pomoschi-u-amerikanskih-evreev>, 'Зеленский попросил помощи у американских евреев', Accessed 13 June, 2022. <https://news.ru/europe/zelenskij-vystupil-s-obrasheniem-k-amerikanskim-evreyam>.

82 А. Гришин, 'Зеленский попросил денег для бандеровцев у евреев', Accessed 14 June, 2022. <https://www.kp.ru/daily/27405/4602012>.

that produced the famous forgery of the Russian secret police, *The Protocols of Zion*, alleged minutes of a Jewish plan to rule the world from behind the scenes.<sup>83</sup>

Russian propaganda is aware of the criticism of Russia's arguments in Western countries and tries to produce counterarguments. During the TV program "Evening with Vladimir Solovyov" broadcast on April 21, 2022, on the state channel "Russia 1", Margarita Simonyan, the editor-in-chief of the state channel RT, addressed the issue of "accusing Russia of anti-Semitism". According to her, this is a false claim designed to damage Russia's image. She supported her argument by delving into the historical context of the word "pogrom". In her opinion, this term does indeed originate in Russia, but it is a distortion of reality, since in the territory of Russia proper, according to Simonian, there have never been riots or negative attitudes towards Jews. According to her, the "Pale of Settlement" was invented by Catherine the Great, who was ethnically German, while riots against Jews generally took place in the territories of Ukraine and the present-day Baltic states (i.e. in the Pale of Settlement). Simonian also said that the last pogrom in the territory of the USSR took place in 1945, in Kiev,<sup>84</sup> and alluded to the latent anti-Semitism in the mindset of all Ukrainians.<sup>85</sup>

These two lines of propaganda coexist with another narrative which depicts Zelensky as exploiting his position as president of Ukraine to pursue policies that favor Jews or, alternatively, to enable the Jewish population to play a predominant role in the realization of Ukraine's alleged nationalistic goals. Thus, Sergei Glaziev, formerly Putin's adviser on economic issues, accused Zelensky in 2019 of trying to organize a mass transfer of Jews from Israel, who were allegedly tired of the endless war in the Middle East to settle in the lands of southeastern Ukraine that had been "cleansed" from ethnic Russians, an allusion to the programme of ethnic cleansing that Ukraine has been supposedly carrying out among Russian-speaking residents.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> W. Eisner, U. Eco, *The plot: the secret story of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, New-York 2005; S. Katz and R. Landes (eds.), *Paranoid Apocalypse: A Hundred-Year Retrospective on 'The Protocols of the Elders of Zion'*, New-York 2012.

<sup>84</sup> For the reference to the pogrom in Kiev in September 1945 in the historical research, see: J. Tokarska-Bakir, 'Post-War violence against Jews in Central and Eastern Europe', K. Bohus and others (eds.), *Our Courage: Jews in Europe 1945–48*, Berlin-Munich-Boston 2020, pp. 64–81; P. Apor, T. Kende, M. Lónčíková, V. Sándulescu, 'Post-World War II anti-Semitic pogroms in East and East Central Europe: collective violence and popular culture', *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire* 26, 6 (2019), pp. 913–927.

<sup>85</sup> Accessed 21 April, 2022. <https://yapolitic.ru/35663-vecher-s-vladimirom-solovevym-210422>; Accessed 24 April, 2022. [https://vk.com/wall561960677\\_333239](https://vk.com/wall561960677_333239).

<sup>86</sup> С. Глазьев, 'Оккупация', Accessed 6 May, 2022 [https://zavtra.ru/blogs/glaz\\_ev\\_raskol](https://zavtra.ru/blogs/glaz_ev_raskol); discussions on this issue in the Russian media are earlier, at least from 2017 – 'Новый Израиль на Украине?', Accessed 10 February, 2017. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bvmt7XjInFE&ab\\_channel=%D0%9A%D0%A2%D0%92%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B5%D0%B6](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bvmt7XjInFE&ab_channel=%D0%9A%D0%A2%D0%92%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B5%D0%B6).



Russian propaganda effort also invests resources in the crude Nazification of Zelensky. Thus, after Zelensky and his wife Olena took a series of photographs for an article about Olena Zelensky for Vogue magazine,<sup>87</sup> the report on the Russian news website RIA gave an excoriating account of the photoshoot under the title “Hitler and Eva Braun—a series of fashionable photographs which annoyed the Americans”.<sup>88</sup> The comparison to Hitler and Braun was presented as a quote from Americans who responded to the article, but it is clear that the choice of these responses for the title of the publication on the website was dictated by the aim of inciting a negative emotional reaction in readers towards the Zelensky couple.

#### 4.7 The Delegitimization of Israel’s Critical Stance towards Russia’s War in Ukraine

After the outbreak of the war, the State of Israel officially condemned the invasion, but maintained diplomatic, economic, and business relations with Russia, refused to join the sanctions imposed on Russia by Western countries, and even tried to act as a mediator between Russia and Ukraine. Nevertheless, in relation to Israel’s position regarding the Russia-Ukraine war, Russian propaganda adopted a line that accused Israel and the Western countries of double standards. This propaganda line has developing two contrasting variants. In the first version, the blame is directed towards Israel’s actions in the Middle East arena in general and the Palestinian arena in particular, while pointing out that while Russia is condemned by the West due to the “special military operation” in Ukraine, Israel is not apparently condemned by the Western countries for more or less the same actions (in a slightly different variation, Israel is accused of allowing itself to follow policies which it condemns in relation to Russia’s actions in Ukraine). In the second version, there is a kind of justification for Israel’s military activity, while complaining that Russia is being criticized for actions similar or identical to Israeli actions.

A special emphasis was placed by this propaganda line on the events of Operation “Dawn” (August 2022). This operation was a pretext for a large-scale propaganda attack against Israel perhaps unprecedented in the history of post-Soviet Russia, and was also directed against celebrities with Russian citizenship who emigrated from Russia or left it for the time being and settled in Israel. Pro-

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87 R. Donadio, ‘Portrait of Bravery: Ukraine’s First Lady, Olena Zelenska’, Accessed 26 July, 2022. <https://www.vogue.com/article/portrait-of-bravery-ukraines-first-lady-olena-zelenska>.

88 “Титлер и Ева Браун” Модная фотосессия Зеленских разозлила американцев’, Accessed 27 July, 2022. <https://ria.ru/20220727/zelenskiy-1805438352.html>.

government media started talking about “Israeli militarism” and “hypocritical immigrants”. The publication of the *Tsargrad* website (a Russian website with a distinctly Russian nationalist form and content that is identified with Dugin and his Eurasianist views) claimed in the title: “Israel achieved the goals of the special military operation by killing 15 children and 4 women”, thereby suggesting a comparison between the Israeli operation against the Islamic Jihad in Gaza and the so-called “special military operation” of Russia in Ukraine. Unsurprisingly, the tone of the publication is negative towards Israel, and ends with words of condemnation towards the Russian cultural figures who criticized Russia’s war in Ukraine: “... *It is interesting that none of the Russian artists who fled to Israel even started to condemn Lapid ... They ... blamed Russia because of the special operation, but here they remain silent*”.<sup>89</sup>

A presenter on Radio KP (*Komsomolskaya Pravda*), Sergey Mardan, dedicated the central part of his radio program to the condemnation of Israel and of the artists who moved there, especially the Jewish singer and composer Andrey Makarevich. He asked a rhetorical question: “*Is this a spark in Makarevich’s head? The elderly Makarevich, who has been out of business for a long time, laments his “people”. How does he feel in his new homeland?*”.<sup>90</sup> “Israeli Militarism” was also condemned in the TV show of the propagandist Vladimir Solovyov, who from time to time does out of his way to emphasize that he is Jewish: “*Dozens of peaceful Palestinians perished, including children. Not even a word of condemnation from those who so fanatically criticize the special Russian military operation*”.<sup>91</sup> In the same vein, criticism was also heard on Channel 1 of Russian TV: Ruslan Ustashkin, host of the program “Time Will Show” (*Vremya Pokazhet*), compared the reaction of Western leaders to the Russian war and the Israeli operation, and accused the West of hypocrisy: “*Joseph Burrell loves condemning us for everything we did or didn’t do, but regarding the Israeli attacks Borrell remains silent*”.<sup>92</sup>

Russian propaganda pushes a line according to which Israel’s actions deserve condemnation but are not condemned by the Western countries, while similar actions by Russia that deserve support are condemned by the Western countries (and by Israel). This is presented as a blatant example of double standards on the part of Western countries and can plausibly be explained by the latent Russophobia of the West.

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<sup>89</sup> ‘Израиль достиг целей спецоперации, убив 15 детей и четырех женщин’, Accessed 7 August, 2022. [https://tsargrad.tv/news/izrail-dostig-celej-specoperacii-ubiv-15-detej-i-chetyrjoh-zhenshhin\\_600308](https://tsargrad.tv/news/izrail-dostig-celej-specoperacii-ubiv-15-detej-i-chetyrjoh-zhenshhin_600308).

<sup>90</sup> Accessed 8 August, 2022. <https://youtu.be/CWINjyIqzss>.

<sup>91</sup> Accessed 7 August, 2022. <https://smotrim.ru/video/2456296>.

<sup>92</sup> Accessed 7 August, 2022. <https://www.1tv.ru/shows/vremya-pokazhet>.

## 4.8 Anti-jewish Violence Against the Background of the War in Ukraine

On the margins, there is also evidence of actual harm being inflicted on individuals where their Jewishness contributed to the motivation for the attack. Some Jewish institutions have also come in for criticism.

An example of such an incident occurred at the entrance to the apartment of Alexei Venediktov, who served until the outbreak of the war as the editor-in-chief of the liberal radio station “*Ekho Moskvy*” well known for its political opposition to Putin’s Russian regime (The station was closed by order of the authorities after the outbreak of the war because its anti-war positions). A severed pig’s head was placed in front of the building bearing the symbol of Ukraine and daubed with the words “Pig Jews” (Judensau).<sup>93</sup> In another case, on August 16, 2022, a window was smashed in the Choral Synagogue in Moscow, and a graffiti inscription was written on the wall which, although not anti-Semitic in content, was linked to a letter containing offensive comments on Jewish culture which had been left on one of the tables in the building around the time the inscription was left.<sup>94</sup>

For the sake of fairness, it should be noted that these are isolated incidents, and not symptoms of a wave of popular anti-Semitism. At the same time, there is a risk that against the background of the official depiction of the Jews as a community opposed to the war (see below) such events may become more common. The future will show how real this risk is.

## 4.9 Identifying the Jews as a Collective Opposed to the War in Ukraine

On the margins of the main propaganda discourse, a narrative is developing that identifies the Jews as an ethnic community opposed to the war in Ukraine. This is a narrative that ascribes a collective interpretation of current events to a certain group of people in a way that bears the hallmark of conspiratorial thinking. Neither the conspiracy theories that identify the collective “West” with its characteristic

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<sup>93</sup> ‘Главреду Эха Москвы Алексею Венедиктову подбросили свиную голову под дверь с гербом Украины и антисемитской надписью’, Accessed 24 March, 2022. <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2022/03/24/glavredu-ekha-moskvy-alekseiu-venediktovu-podbrsili-svinuiu-golovu-pod-dver-i-nakleili-gerb-ukrainy-s-nadpisiu-judensau-news>.

<sup>94</sup> ‘В Московской синагоге разбили окно и оставили послание на стене’, Accessed 17 August, 2022. <https://ren.tv/news/v-rossii/1013052-v-moskovskoi-sinagoge-razbili-okno-i-ostavili-poslanie-na-stene>.

culture and trends as an archenemy of the “Russian world”, nor specifically anti-Semitic conspiracy theories are foreign to Russia.<sup>95</sup> They existed throughout the pre-Soviet period, continued to exist in one way or another in the Soviet period, and continue to exist in the post-Soviet period as well. However, it seems that against the background of Russia’s war in Ukraine, such conspiratorial concepts are beginning to be heard more prominently in the public discourse and in the propaganda effort.

Thus, at the end of August 2022, an article was published on the “Strategic Culture Foundation” website entitled “*Why do ‘important Jews’ believe in Russophobia?*”. In it the author, Pavel Karpov, interprets the survey data published in Israel that indicate significant support of the Israeli population for the Ukrainian side in the war. The basic thesis of the article can be summed up with a few quotes from it: “... *The Russian soldier extinguished the ovens of Auschwitz with his blood. It seems that every Jew, when he thinks of Russians, should put before his eyes the silhouette of the Russian Ivan, who ripped the locks from the gates of the German concentration camp. After all, the Russian Ivan put an end to the very possibility of making lampshades from people’s skin and made it impossible for a Europe united by Hitler to “finally solve the Jewish question”. However, Russophobia flourishes under the sky of Israel, like an intoxicating weed in poisonous swamps ...*”.<sup>96</sup> In other words, the Jews, with an emphasis on Russian-speaking Jews from the former USSR, are ungrateful if they do not remember their rescue by the Soviet army during World War II and give their support instead to the Ukrainians (in Russian propaganda) the successors of the Nazis.

In the above article, Karpov confronts what he presents as the views of Sharansky, and not only Sharansky as an individual, but as he puts it “the collective Sharansky”, with those of Leonid Nevzlin, and others besides. To establish where he stands in the polemic, Karpov cites a Jew named Israel Shamir who takes up radical anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist positions,<sup>97</sup> and writes the following: “... *in every word of the “Collective Sharansky” one can hear an unhealthy interest in the prospect that as many Russians and Ukrainians as possible, especially Orthodox*

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95 For the analysis of the conspiratorial concept in the Russian political-public discourse, see the following doctoral thesis: I. Yablokov, *Conspiracy Discourse in post-Soviet Russia: Political Strategies of Capture of the Public Sphere (1991–2014): A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities*, Manchester 2014; for the analysis of the anti-Semitic conspiratorial concepts in the Russian political-public discourse, see—I. Yablokov, ‘Anti-Jewish conspiracy theories in Putin’s Russia’, *Antisemitism Studies*, 3 No. 2 (2019): 291–316.

96 ‘Почему важные евреи исповедуют русофобию’, Accessed 22 August, 2022. [https://www.fondsk.ru/news/2022/08/22/pochemu-vazhnye-evrei-ispovedyut-rusofobiu-57008.html?fbclid=IwAR0ngloySkDycuBb-fZQ\\_EbN2hyRbixZmAOS-sM1GQ36VvTPK5XBh-T\\_TXo](https://www.fondsk.ru/news/2022/08/22/pochemu-vazhnye-evrei-ispovedyut-rusofobiu-57008.html?fbclid=IwAR0ngloySkDycuBb-fZQ_EbN2hyRbixZmAOS-sM1GQ36VvTPK5XBh-T_TXo).

97 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel\\_Shamir](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel_Shamir).

*Christians, will die in the civil war in Ukraine. Israel Shamir once clarified this: “Historically, the Jews have always been against Jesus and the Church. Not always with the same fervor, not always with the same degree of fanaticism, but always against them. Judaism is anti-Church, and Jesus Messiah is its main enemy. When a Jew was baptized [into Christianity], his relatives mourned him as if he had died. The most beloved and popular Jewish manuscript of the early Middle Ages is the story of Judah’s stunning victory over Jesus”.<sup>98</sup>*

Prof. Yevgeny Satanovsky, an ethnic Jew, who in the past held senior positions in Russian Jewish organizations and wrote about the State of Israel in a generally sympathetic manner, developed a thesis that he calls “*Zhidobanderovshchina*”. Its main point is that Israel is in the hands of the Western countries, under the direct leadership of the American State Department, and that the CIA is making a forced connection that defies historical logic linking Ukrainian nationalists with Jewish elements. Satanovsky goes on to identify the Ukrainian state with neo-Nazism and advocates maximalist goals for Russia’s war in Ukraine, i.e. Russian occupation of all Ukrainian territories and their so-called “de-Nazification”, as well as the removal of the American military presence from the entire European area.<sup>99</sup> Satanovsky also attacked Israel’s criticism of Lavrov’s remarks in which he claimed that the greatest anti-Semites were Jews and that Hitler had “Jewish blood.” Among his other pronouncements, Satanovsky referred to a broadcast in which Israelis who came to fight on the side of Ukraine were interviewed and said this - “*If we go back to the First World War, when Jews who fought in the ranks of the various armies shot each other without the slightest hesitation, then so be it. The time when the rule according to which “a Jew does not kill a Jew” was valid is over. It ended now in Ukraine ... It would be better if Lapid thought about this, instead of harassing Lavrov ... A Jewish president of Ukraine at the head of a regime based on a Nazi past and replicating Nazism is worse than any unsuccessful statements by ministers. Much worse*”.<sup>100</sup>

The current trends in Russian propaganda can be summarized as follows. While in the first decade after the breakup of the USSR, anti-Semitic sentiments had a significant presence in the political-public discourse while anti-Western sentiments were few and latent, in the last two decades the trend has changed markedly. Now expressions of anti-Semitic sentiments in the political-public discourse space have decreased, while anti-Western sentiments play a dominant role in political-public discourse and in establishment and quasi-establishment propaganda.

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<sup>98</sup> See note 96 above.

<sup>99</sup> М. Перевозкина, ““Жидобандеровщина” Евгений Сатановский раскрыл подноготную украинского кризиса”, *МК в Израиле*, 25.8.2022, с. 5.

<sup>100</sup> ‘Сатановский разнес претензии Израиля к Лаврову из-за слов про Гитлера и евреев’, Accessed 4 May, 2022. [https://politexpert.net/23164709-satanovskii\\_raznes\\_pretenzii\\_izrailya\\_k\\_lavrovu\\_iz\\_zh\\_slov\\_pro\\_gitlera\\_i\\_evreev\\_2](https://politexpert.net/23164709-satanovskii_raznes_pretenzii_izrailya_k_lavrovu_iz_zh_slov_pro_gitlera_i_evreev_2).

However, these two propaganda narratives cannot be completely separated and there is a certain overlap between them, especially because Jewish individuals (ethnically or based on self-identity) are identified in the Russian public as promoters of the western-liberal-pluralist-democratic agenda, which is perceived as hostile to the values and principles of the “Russian world”. From this point of view, it is no wonder that anti-Semitic undertones surfaced in the Russian discourse and propaganda effort, during the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022.

Russian propaganda uses the historical memory of the USSR’s struggle against Nazi Germany to create a pretext and justification for the war against Ukraine, by equating the Soviet struggle against Nazi Germany with the Russian struggle against Ukraine, and a continuation of the Great Patriotic War against incursion from the West. The Kremlin thereby cynically exploits the suffering and sacrifice of those who fought and survived World War II and the Holocaust. It can be said that in its actions, Russia is undermining the global effort to fight anti-Semitism by spreading one of the worst forms which it can take: the distortion of the history of the Holocaust by using it as a metaphor for any campaign of mass murder, thereby denying its uniqueness and officially promoting a variant of Holocaust negationism.

#### 4.10 Belarus

In Belarus propaganda is an integral part of the system of state directed social engineering shaping public opinion, and is ubiquitous in, among other things, the printed, broadcast, and electronic media, in the education system, in the security forces, and more. Propaganda in the media is disseminated through speeches by political leaders, in the way media journalists present events, and in the dominant anti-Western discourse and agenda of discussion programmes, newspaper reporting, and commentaries on current events, including the war on Ukraine.<sup>101</sup>

#### 4.11 The Jewish Aspect of Propaganda in Belarus

The Jewish aspect is not an integral and consistent focus of the propaganda in Belarus in general. The main motives of the propaganda in Belarus are the justification of Russia’s war in Ukraine, while repeating the basic claims familiar from Russian propaganda, such as allegation about the so-called “Nazi” nature of the Ukrainian regime, claims about Ukraine’s intentions to attack Russia, its production of

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<sup>101</sup> On shaping the authoritarian character of the current regime in Belarus and the place of propaganda in this process, see: A. Wilson, *Belarus: The Last Dictatorship*, (London 2021), pp. 168–308.

biological weapons under the auspices of the “West”, etc. Other motifs are the emphasis on friendship with Russia and the role of Belarus as a protector of the northern front of the Russian invasion, the aggression of the West and its structural decline as a civilization, the ineffectiveness of the Western sanctions against Russia and Belarus, defamation of the leaders and activists of the Belarusian opposition operating in Western countries, and presentation of Poland’s policy as a form of imperialism.<sup>102</sup> However, the Jewish aspect appears only sporadically, often implicitly, but one that may still reinforce anti-Semitic stereotypes and the “othering” of Jews through the semantic field deployed in Belarusian propaganda.

Before the outbreak of the war between Russia and Ukraine, and even before the anti-government mass protests of the summer and autumn 2020 in Belarus, Belarusian propaganda occasionally contained elements that appealed to the anti-Semitic prejudices of readers on social networks. Thus, in May 2020 the *Zmahar* channel of the VK social platform posted a joke based on a distinct anti-Semitic trope suggesting a typically “Jewish” way of speaking, and in June 2020, a poster of an opposition candidate for the presidency of Belarus was distributed where the slogan “Land of Life” (*Strana dla Zhizni*) was distorted into “Land of Jews” (*Strana dla Zhidni*).<sup>103</sup> In February 2020, anti-Semitism was openly used by government supporters on social media to substantiate the claim that Belarusians are in fact an integral part of the Russian people - “*Is it conceivable that a Pole who hated Jews would shout “Strike the Jews, save Russia”? After all, the Pole is not Russian, while Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians are part of the same national entity*”.<sup>104</sup> In the run-up to New Year 2022, that was defined in Belarus as the “Year of Historical Memory”, Gregori Azaryonok<sup>105</sup> implicitly accused the Jews of dominating power in the USSR in its final phase when he stated that after Stalin’s death: “*The cosmopolitans [a euphemism for Jew] took over the USSR*”.<sup>106</sup> In early June 2022, Azryonok

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**102** For a review of propaganda expressions on the television channels in Belarus (Belarus 1, ONT, CTV) in the months of January-June 2022 according to various criteria, see—*Сюжетные линии белорусских государственных телеканалов, январь-март 2022* <https://isans.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/tv-ru-1kvart-2022.pdf> О. Алешко-Лесселс, *Сюжетные линии белорусских государственных телеканалов, апрель — июнь 2022* <https://isans.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/monitoring.pdf>.

**103** А. Елисеев, *Анти-белорусская Пропаганда и Язык Вражды: Результаты мониторинга токсичных пабликов сети “ВКонтакте”*, 2020, с. 10–11 [https://isans.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/vkontakte\\_research.pdf](https://isans.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/vkontakte_research.pdf).

**104** Accessed 12 February, 2020. [https://vk.com/wall-46503890\\_171477](https://vk.com/wall-46503890_171477).

**105** One can get an impression of Azryonok’s propaganda enterprise here: <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/disinformation-fuels-hate-on-belarusian-tv/>.

**106** Accessed 1 January, 2022. [https://t.me/Azarenok\\_TV/15390?fbclid=IwAR3zX05fKznRPkPgRKL-00IsHHEXOnUoAkO4PGAM8DFvAbOssV2J2IRW8r4](https://t.me/Azarenok_TV/15390?fbclid=IwAR3zX05fKznRPkPgRKL-00IsHHEXOnUoAkO4PGAM8DFvAbOssV2J2IRW8r4). The term “cosmopolitans” (sometimes with the addition - “the rootless”) in Soviet discourse, especially during Stalin’s rule, clearly referred to Jews.



hosted the propagandist Gigin on his show on the CTV channel, who raised the issue of Zelensky's Jewish identity, while trying psychologically to analyze how it is possible that Zelensky supposedly allows anti-Semitic groups to operate openly in Ukraine.<sup>107</sup>

Propaganda narratives originating in Russian influence not only Belarusian propaganda, but also those who are influential among the more popular elites, notably the members of the Christian Orthodox clergy. Thus, on August 8, 2022, Archimandrite<sup>108</sup> Sava (Mazhuko) of Gomel published a video on his YouTube channel,<sup>109</sup> in which he echoed Russian propaganda messages broadcast as justification for the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This is how the pastor describes what he calls "Nazism": "*Nazism appears when there are Ukrainians who are less concerned about the death of a Donbas child than the death of a Kharkiv child. Such a person is a Nazi as far as I'm concerned*". He even referred to the fact that Ukrainian President Zelensky is ethnically Jewish: "*Are there no Jews who are Nazis? Is Nazism not possible among Israelis? Of course, it's possible! And we see it now in Israel, where people from Russia, Russian Jews, are being persecuted. They are not pure enough Jews*".<sup>110</sup>

The president of Belarus, Lukashenko, who has a record of making statements with anti-Semitic connotations, has referred to the Jewish question in his speeches. On February 27, 2022, after a vote in the referendum for changes to the Belarusian constitution, Lukashenko addressed the issue of the Russia-Ukraine war and attacked the President of Ukraine Zelensky while emphasizing his Jewish origin. He also raised the subject of the Holocaust and genocide in World War II: "*... He mentions the year 1941. It would have been better if he had kept his mouth shut and remained silent. A Jew by nationality. How many Jews were burned here and in Ukraine? How many Belarusians were killed when they protected the Jews here, Jewish children, what does he think we have forgotten? ... So, there is no place to talk about 1941 ... he reminds me of 1941 when the people of Bandera, together with the*

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On the phrase "rootless cosmopolitans" in its historical context, see—K. Azadovskii, B. Egorov, 'From Anti-Westernism to Anti-Semitism: Stalin and the Impact of the Anti-Cosmopolitan Campaigns on Soviet Culture', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4, 1 (2002), pp. 66–80.

<sup>107</sup> Accessed 2 June, 2022. [https://t.me/Azarenok\\_TV/25727](https://t.me/Azarenok_TV/25727).

<sup>108</sup> An explanation of the ecclesiastical rank below—P. Plank, "Archimandrite", E. Fahlbusch (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, vol. 1, Leiden 1999, pp. 118 [https://archive.org/details/encyclopediaofch0001unse\\_t6f2/page/118/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/encyclopediaofch0001unse_t6f2/page/118/mode/2up).

<sup>109</sup> 'Архимандрит Савва (Мажуко) О Важном', Accessed 8 August, 2022. <https://youtu.be/i62bV-pnbQ8>.

<sup>110</sup> 'Скандальный Гомельский архимандрит Савва заявил, что Украинцы и Евреи Нацисты', Accessed 9 August, 2022. <https://dig17rnu70zwhv.cloudfront.net/by/vybary-2020/gomelski-arhimandrist-savva-ukraincy-i-evrei-nacisty.html>.



*fascists, burned our cities and villages ...*".<sup>111</sup> On other occasions as well, Lukashenko continued to implicitly link Zelensky's Jewish origins to what he called Ukraine's distancing [from Russia and Belarus] because of "*the adoption of a non-Slavic identity by its [Ukraine's] politicians*".<sup>112</sup>

The negationist tendency in state propaganda to deny the uniqueness of the Holocaust is as present in Belarus as it is in Russia. As an example of this, we can point to a cartoon published on April 18, 2022, on the local website of the capital city of Minsk. Entitled "The Truth of Minsk" (*Minskaya Prawdа*), it makes the comparison between the attitude of Germans to Jews in 1938 (probably an allusion to *Kristallnacht*) and the attitude of Germans to Russians in 2022.<sup>113</sup> This is a blatant distortion of the memory of the Holocaust, since Jews in Germany were a social group utterly unable to defend themselves against Nazi aggression, while Russia is a powerful military, political and economic power, which conducts a generally aggressive foreign policy in general and launched the war against Ukraine in particular. This issue of distorting the historical facts relating to the Holocaust and the way it is remembered is reflected not only in the propaganda spread by Belarusian media channels, but also in symbolic actions taken by the state.

For example, in May 2022, the remains of Jews murdered during the Holocaust were reburied in the town of Luninets in southern Belarus. According to the organizers, the purpose of the event, was to provide the murder victims with an honorable burial. The event was attended by representatives of the Jewish community, as well as the ambassador of Israel and his entourage. However, the official account of the event issued by the "investigative committee" (actually, the prosecutor's office) made no mention of the fact that the victims were Jews, instead describing them as "peaceful residents who perished during the Great

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111 'Лукашенко: про Украину, неадекватность Зеленского', Accessed 27 February, 2022. <https://youtu.be/aJs962sWу4c>.

112 'Лукашенко: расширение НАТО на восток раскидало славян по разные стороны баррикад', Accessed 14 July, 2022. <https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-rasshirenie-nato-navostok-raskidalo-slavjan-po-raznye-storony-barrikad-513691-2022/>. This is certainly one possible interpretation, even if alternative interpretations can be imagined, for example that Lukashenko meant that the Ukrainian political leadership preferred to distance itself from Russia and turn its face to the West and adopt some of its values and normative in various fields. It is also possible that Lukashenko's statement as formulated is intentionally ambiguous, and that it contains both a clear assertion of fact, and an implicit allusion to the matter of Zelensky's Jewish origin to create a negative context for his listeners. It is also possible that this is an authentic expression of Lukashenko's view.

113 А. Островский, 'История, увы, повторяется', Accessed 18 April, 2022. <https://mlyn.by/18042022/istoriya-uvy-povtoryaetsya>.

Patriotic War”.<sup>114</sup> This statement flew in the face of the fact that there was no doubt that the victims were Jews given the place and context of their murder, and the decision of the representatives of the Jewish community and the Israeli embassy to attend. Moreover, empirical evidence that this was episode in the Jewish genocide was found at the site, including Herzl’s<sup>115</sup> photo, that clearly points on the Jewishness of the victims. Instead, the fact that the victims were Jews was ignored even in the report in the Israeli media<sup>116</sup> is a revealing example of how bit by bit negationists can succeed in erasing the Holocaust from collective memory.

Belarusian propaganda relating to the war in Ukraine subsumes and duplicates the narrative distortions and mythic tropes established in Russian propaganda in general and with respect to the Jewish question, but it also contains unique characteristics and nuances. It is careful to avoid criticizing Israeli policy concerning the Russia-Ukraine war. It is also characterized by a particular national sensitivity to the issue of genocide since it promotes its own narrative regarding the Belarusian genocide during the Nazi occupation, which has the effect of contesting the uniqueness of the Holocaust, although it seems that there is more than one sub-narrative on this issue. There is, for example, an approach that treats the murder of the Jews as part of what is called the “Belarusian genocide”, and there is another which presents the two events – the Holocaust of the Jewish people and the Belarusian genocide – as contemporary but distinct. This issue is not directly related to the Russia-Ukraine war but demonstrates the presence of negationist tendencies within Belarus collective memory of the Nazi occupation.

## 4.12 Ukraine

Since the outbreak of hostilities, incidents of an anti-Semitic nature, including on a popular level mainly acts of vandalism, have greatly decreased (although it is possible that what has decreased is not the incidents but their reporting and registration). Anti-Semitism and news relating to Jews as individuals or as a special community are completely absent from official discourse (and as a result also from

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<sup>114</sup> ‘В Лунинце состоялась церемония перезахоронения останков мирных жителей погибших во времена Великой Отечественной войны’, Accessed 8 May, 2022. <https://sk.gov.by/ru/news-usk-brest-ru/view/v-lunintse-sostojalas-tseremonija-perezaxoronenija-ostankov-mirnyx-zhitelej-pogibshix-vo-vremena-velikoj-11280/>.

<sup>115</sup> Theodor Herzl is the founder of modern Zionism. S. Avineri, *Herzl: Theodor Hertzl and the Foundation of the Jewish State*, London 2013.

<sup>116</sup> I. Aykhner, ‘80 years since the murder in mass grave – 800 Jews were buried in Belarus’. Accessed 12 June, 2022. <https://www.ynet.co.il/judaism/article/hkxeqt7tc>.

official Ukrainian propaganda). It can be assumed that this partly has an instrumental reason from a propaganda point of view, namely to refute the Russian accusation that Ukraine is a Nazi state while also distinguishing itself from Russia and Belarus, whose propaganda contains allegations and tropes that can be understood as anti-Semitic. But it also has a practical reason, namely to mobilize support from the countries of the West, from Israel the Jews the world over, a support that is essential if Ukraine is to secure both civil and military assistance. It is also a matter of political pragmatism: Ukraine's aspiration to be essentially part of the Western democratic sphere is incompatible with tolerating popular expressions of anti-Semitism.

This is not to say that there are no statements directed against the Jewish population. One case in point is the example of Mykhailo Kovalchuk, a former member of the Kyiv city council from the *Batkivshchyna* party, who was removed from his position by his party after the Russian invasion of Ukraine due to "strange statements about military recruitment on social networks". Comments he wrote on a Facebook page in July 2022 include bizarre accusations against Jews which echo classic anti-Semitic motifs, such as the idea that Jews are helped by demons to carry out their plots, as well as the charge that they carry out the ritual murder of non-Jewish children by some Orthodox Jews. The Jewish community in Ukraine reacted strongly to these remarks and even filed a complaint about them with the authorities.<sup>117</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear that this is a marginal event and a marginal person.

A more complex event was the comparison made by President Zelensky between Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the Holocaust. This comparison was made on several occasions, among others in Zelensky's speech to members of the Knesset that was carried out via video on March 20, 2022.<sup>118</sup> His words drew widespread public and political criticism in Israel,<sup>119</sup> and were even used by Russian propaganda to attack him. For example, the spokeswoman for the Russian Foreign Ministry, Maria Zakharova, accused Zelensky of exploiting the Holocaust to strengthen his political position in the fight against Russia.<sup>120</sup> His comparison of the Holocaust to Putin's attack was cited as evidence for Sam Sokol's observation that

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117 'Иудеи убивают детей: экс депутат Михаил Ковальчук попал в антисемитский скандал', Accessed 26 July, 2022. <https://focus.ua/politics/523427-iudei-ubivayut-detey-eks-deputat-mihail-kovalchuk-popal-v-antisemitskiy-skandal>.

118 'Indifference kills full address to the Knesset by Volodymyr Zelenski', Accessed 20 March, 2022. <https://youtu.be/iLTVnOzq7xU>.

119 L. Harkov, 'Zelensky strikes the wrong note to bring Knesset to his side—analysis', Accessed 20 March, 2022. <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/politics-and-diplomacy/article-701850>.

120 'Захарова обвинила Зеленского в попытках сыграть на трагедии холокоста', Accessed 23 March, 2022. <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/23/03/2022/623a35f09a79470242636d65>.

the Russians lied about the present while the Ukrainians lied about the past.<sup>121</sup> In other words, Sokol argues that Russian officials are knowingly lying when they compare contemporary Ukraine to Nazi Germany, while Ukrainian officials are knowingly lying when they compare the Russia-Ukraine war to the Holocaust. They are also deliberately distorting Holocaust history by exaggerating the role of Ukrainians in saving Jews from the genocide while at the same time downplaying the role of Ukrainian collaborators in carrying out the extermination of the Jewish population in the first place. It can be assumed that Zelensky sought to mobilize the support of Israeli public opinion with his comparison between Putin's military forces and the Nazis, but in practice he achieved the opposite result. However, it seems that the President's office understood the error and tried to soften the negative impression it made in Israeli public opinion, and it was even said by one of the officials that the comparison to the Holocaust was practically and fundamentally wrong.<sup>122</sup>

In short: since the outbreak of hostilities, Ukraine has made a considerable effort to distance itself from anti-Semitism, at least in its official propaganda, and to woo support from Israel, but in doing so has unwittingly reinforced negationist tropes.

## 5 Summary and Conclusions

In the period preceding the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, there was a trend according to which expressions of anti-Semitism in Russia (and similarly in Belarus) were mainly restricted to verbal expressions (in the use of negative stereotypes regarding Jews in propaganda and discourse, often introduced in an indirect way that arouses subliminal anti-Semitic sentiments). By contrast, in Ukraine anti-Semitism was mainly enacted physically (e.g. in acts of vandalism in synagogues, Jewish community centers, schools, cemeteries as well as memorial sites, in writing graffiti with an anti-Semitic or neo-Nazi content, and sometimes actual physical violence against Jews).<sup>123</sup>

121 S. Sokol, *Putin's Hybrid War and the Jews: Antisemitism, Propaganda, and the Displacement of Ukrainian Jewry – Revised and Expanded Edition*, New-York 2022.

122 'Киев понял что пережал с давлением на Иерусалим?', Accessed 21 March, 2022. <https://www.9tv.co.il/item/42181>; in a conversation between the former adviser to the Office of the President of Ukraine, Olexiy Arestovich, and Israel's Ambassador to Ukraine, Michael Brodsky, it was said that the comparison to the Holocaust is wrong, and as far as there is room for comparison, it is to wars in which Israel achieved victory, such as the War of Independence and the *Yom Kippur* War. 'Алексей Арестович и посол Израиля в Украине Михаэль Бродский: Как Украине построить Израиль Восточной Европы', Accessed 24 July, 2022. <https://www.openforest.org.ua/210243>.

123 В. Ханин, *Антисемитизм и филосемитизм в России и Украине: от эволюции к революции – аналитический доклад*, Тель-Авив 2019, с. 21.

After the outbreak of the war, the verbal trend in anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism grew stronger and took on more concrete forms in Russian and Belarusian propaganda, while in Ukraine the war situation did not lead to an increase in anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist discourse in propaganda, and according to the available data, it seems that the physical acts of anti-Semitism that had occurred sporadically before the outbreak of the war, gradually diminished.

Anti-Semitism is a dynamic phenomenon that varies in intensity and historical consequences according to the different cultural, religious, political, ideological, national and international contexts in which it takes root. In ancient and medieval times, the “othering” of Jews was justified using arguments based on a blend of theology and conspiracy theory. In modern times it assumed an ethnic-racial and ultranationalist character focused on the allegedly disruptive, degenerative impact of the Jewish diaspora on society. The new anti-Semitism retains many stereotypes and tropes from the millennial traditions of Judeophobia, but now mainly focuses on Jews as a national community with their state and homeland in Israel.<sup>124</sup> Throughout its history, anti-Semitism has been manipulated by diverse elite and popular interest groups to justify different types of policies or persecutions. In the light of our case study, we can observe several tendencies in the type of anti-Semitism involved and its manipulations, as well as the way the Jewish question has been instrumentalized in war-related propaganda:

- First tendency: accusing the Ukrainian side of anti-Semitism (directly or implied by the accusation of Nazism or neo-Nazism) to justify military and political aggression, combined with the delegitimization of the Ukrainian state by Russia and by its ally, Belarus, which has become the main ally of Russia, though not necessarily voluntarily. This means a reversal of a historical trend in the development of anti-Semitism. Whereas in the past various types of explanations (which are nothing more than pretexts) were used to justify policies and actions expressing anti-Jewish prejudice without being considered anti-Semitism, now the accusation of anti-Semitism is instrumentalized to justify political and military aggression that has deeper reasons which have nothing to do with anti-Jewish sentiment, the Holocaust, or Israel’s foreign policy, first and foremost a meta-historical conception of imperial Russian greatness.
- Second tendency: the Russian propaganda effort also includes disparaging, delegitimizing allusions (and not only allusions) to the Jewish origin of the

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<sup>124</sup> See an up-to-date overview regarding the definitions of the term anti-Semitism and controversies related to these definitions—A. Kantor, *An Overview of Contemporary Antisemitism – INSS Special Publication*, 27.1.2022. Accessed 9 July, 2022. <https://www.inss.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/special-publication-28012022-1.pdf>.

President of Ukraine and other officials in the Ukrainian government. It is likely that the reason for this may be the assumption that this aspect of the enemy's leadership may resonate with the latent anti-Semitism of the Russian and Belarusian publics, and intensify negative sentiments towards the President of Ukraine and the Ukrainian government and enthusiasm for the war.

- Third tendency: an attempt to denigrate and arouse hostility on an emotive and ideological level against Israeli support for Ukraine (which is mainly limited to aspects of civilian aid while clearly avoiding significant military aid) by illegitimately making it seem to involve the Jewish question and welding the label “Nazism” to the Ukrainian side in the public's perception of the conflict. All of this is occurring while the general publics of the two states are encouraged to remain oblivious of Russia's ever deepening cooperation with countries, forces and factions that express a worldview that also includes distinct anti-Semitic (and even destructive anti-Semitic) elements such as the Palestinian Authority, Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah.
- Fourth tendency: negation through obfuscation of the uniqueness of the Holocaust, distortion of the history of the genocide, and especially of the exterminatory actions taken during the Operation Barbarossa, misinformation about the nature of Nazism and fascism, instrumentalization of the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, and Nazi ideology in rationalizing the conflict. It should be noted that while the first three aspects are mainly typical of the Russian side (and to a certain extent the Belarusian side as well), this aspect is typical of all the parties involved in the conflict. The Russians are at pains to suppress public awareness of genuine parallels between Nazi atrocities committed against civilians in Eastern Europe and Russia in the Second World War and those being inflicted by Putin's military machine, and the Ukrainians are similarly in denial about the proactive collaboration of some Ukrainian nationalist paramilitaries and civilians with the genocide of Jews in Ukraine.

During the Soviet period Russian Jews had a conspicuous public presence, and in practice served as the main (but unofficial and undeclared) inner enemy of Soviet society for most of its existence, especially in the period after World War II until the period of *perestroika*. After the breakup of the USSR and the departure of the majority of the Jewish population, who either repatriated to Israel or emigrated to the USA and other Western countries, the Jews became a secondary and even marginal factor in public relations and in the societies that took shape and developed in the independent states that arose on the ruins of the USSR. At the same time, the anti-Semitic sentiment and the anti-Semitic stereotypes did not disappear completely, but were preserved in the collective memory, even though the Jews as an influential socio-political body or cohesive interest group or “lobby” are hardly present in their

new societies. Even before the outbreak of the war, and even more so after it, the propaganda, mainly the Russian and Belarusian one, has continued to exploit the emotive power of these sentiments, sometimes in a calculated way and sometimes less so. In any case, the anti-Semitic sentiment is not consigned to the past, but is sufficiently present in the collective memory of some nations to be harnessed to the enormous propaganda effort made of Putin and his Belarusian ally.

The **conclusion of this study**, apart from the observations already made about its local manifestations in the Russia-Ukraine war, is that anti-Semitism and the Jewish question live on and that they demand to be studied as a historical phenomenon but also as dynamic contemporary phenomena which play a role in the unfolding of contemporary conflicts not just in the Middle East, but in the tensions between Russia and the West. They thus deserve constant monitoring and demand that sustained scholarly attention is given to their changing nature and unique characteristics at any given time, also taking into account the different political, military and social developments and discourses in which they are invoked or instrumentalized. This task demands a constant refining of heuristic devices, keeping taxonomies up to date, and the application of interdisciplinary approaches in order to respond to the adaption of anti-Semitism to rapidly changing situations, and to expose and counteract it effectively in academic, political, religious, social, informational, and educational contexts.

One of the dangerous consequences of the war between Russia and Ukraine is intense propaganda that uses the Jewish question, anti-Semitic motifs, appeals to anti-Semitic and xenophobic sentiments, accuses opponents of anti-Semitic ideology, and instrumentalizes terminology related to Jews, anti-Semitism, Nazi ideology, and the Holocaust for the purpose of delegitimizing the other side (mainly on the Russian side towards the Ukrainian side). The Jewish question and anti-Semitism remain an issue that could potentially turn from a theoretical latent danger, into a potentially destructive factor.

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